



**QUESTION TIME**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**HANSARD**

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**Wednesday, 7 June 2017**

Questions without notice.....	1
Budget—rates .....	1
Budget—justice and community safety portfolio .....	2
Budget—women .....	3
Budget—transport and city services portfolio .....	4
Budget—election promises .....	5
Visitors.....	7
Questions without notice.....	7
Budget—election promises .....	7
Budget—health funding .....	8
Clubs—assistance package .....	10
Schools—student wellbeing.....	12
Budget—health funding .....	14
Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability—estimates availability .....	16
Standing orders—suspension.....	17
Dissent from Speaker’s ruling .....	19
Questions without notice.....	23
Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability—estimates availability .....	23
Electricity—blackouts.....	23
Light rail—utilities disruption .....	24
Canberra Hospital—dermatology services .....	25
Public housing—community consultation .....	26
Unparliamentary language .....	27
Budget—policing .....	27

## **Questions without notice**

### **Budget—rates**

**MR COE:** My question is for the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the budget released yesterday included a 12 per cent increase in 2017-18 in revenue from residential general rates, after which the increases are 10.5 and nine per cent. Chief Minister, do the forward estimates for residential rates include increases to the marginal rating factors for each year or do the projections assume that the current marginal rating factor applies across the forward estimates?

**MR BARR:** Yes, there are a number of factors that are impacting on the revenue increase for rates in the city, the first of which is tax reform, a transition away from stamp duty to the rates base. The marginal rating factors are determined on a year-by-year basis to ensure principles of equity within the rates system so that higher valued land attracts a higher charge as there is a very close correlation between the value of land people live on and their wealth and income. Unsurprisingly, there is a close correlation. It is not a perfect correlation, but there is a close correlation, particularly with wealth. But also there is a very strong correlation with income.

What the Leader of the Opposition neglected to mention in his question is, of course, that the total number of properties in the territory continues to grow each year; hence revenue grows in advance of the percentage rate of increase of rates each year because there are more rate-paying properties.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, would you please advise what assumption there is in the forward years for the number of dwellings and also what assumption there is for the forward estimates regarding the amount of the increase or the total that comprises the transition from stamp duty?

**MR BARR:** The rate of increase that is assumed is very closely linked to the population growth rate increase in the territory. The exact number I would need to take on notice, but there is a factor of increase. We are anticipating the equivalent of eight additional suburbs in Canberra over the next four years. That is the equivalent of adding Weston Creek to our city's population. So it will go from 400,000 people as we are now to around 425,000 to 430,000 people over the next four years.

Our revenue projections are updated in the mid-year update and in the budget each year. So they are updated every six months. The Leader of the Opposition can wait till the next budget update for the answers to his question.

**MRS JONES:** Chief Minister, do the forward estimates include annual increases in the average unimproved value of properties? If so, what are those increases?

**MR BARR:** Yes, the average unimproved value of properties is undertaken for rating purposes on a rolling three-year cycle. Significant fluctuations year to year are smoothed out by the fact that there is a rolling three-year cycle. But the way the system works is that a level of revenue is determined, all properties in the city then

have their average unimproved value, and that is shared amongst all of the properties. So if values go up in one part of the city over another, and we have certainly seen that in the context of land values associated with a significant transport project, that part of the city pays a greater share of the overall rates burden. That is what is happening in Canberra at the moment. Those who have looked at the detail of the impact of rate increases in recent times would note that land values have increased significantly in the inner north and in central Canberra in particular. So the greatest burden of increase has fallen on those highest value pieces of land.

**Mr Coe:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order.

**Mr Coe:** On relevance: the supplementary that Mrs Jones put forward was, in effect, what are the assumptions for the outyears in the budget with regard to the average unimproved value. I ask the Chief Minister to be directly relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Coe. There is no point of order. I think the Chief Minister made the points about unimproved value. Chief Minister, your time has expired.

### **Budget—justice and community safety portfolio**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, yesterday's budget has a cut of \$4.9 million over four years to your directorate to be achieved through portfolio efficiencies and administrative improvements. This is at time of increasing concern over terrorism, organised crime and cyber security. Attorney, what are the portfolio efficiencies and administrative improvements that will cover this cut?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Lee for the question. There are a number of ways in which the directorate will continue to work to improve the efficiencies. Those are often still being negotiated through and planned through. That is a matter of ongoing work with the directorate. But one of the important things to note is the significant improvements that have been made in relation to—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms Berry:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Stop the clock.

**Ms Berry:** Madam Speaker I just heard a member of the opposition refer to the Attorney-General in an unparliamentary manner. He should apologise and withdraw.

**Mr Hanson:** In response to the point of order, it was I who interjected. What I said was “the Ramsay razor gang”. I am not sure if that is unparliamentary or not. I seek your ruling, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order but I will remind Mr Hanson of the number of times he interjects through question time and, I think, collectively patience

is running very thin on his interjections. Attorney-General.

**MR RAMSAY:** I would like to point out that in relation to the work that is going on in the directorate and within my portfolio there are some very significant investments as part of the budget. We are pleased to have the work going on in relation to the community legal centres, the increased funding in relation to legal aid and the increased funding in relation to the Director of Public Prosecutions, as well as the ongoing funding of the Eastman trial. There is a range of ways in which the community can continue to remain sure that what we have is a safe and protected community.

**MS LEE:** Attorney, with a directorate that is already stressed, how can the people of Canberra be assured that front-line services for safety, security and law enforcement will not be cut?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Lee for the supplementary. I note that in a number of areas work within this directorate is also within the area of responsibility of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I would also like to point out that as part of the budget there has been increased funding for additional police in relation to the liquor reform package that we have announced.

One of the things going on is that we have continued to work to develop the ongoing safety, the ongoing enjoyment of this city. There is a range of ways that the increased funding for the Director of Public Prosecutions is occurring. We are very confident that the people of Canberra can continue to enjoy a safe, secure and vibrant city.

**MR HANSON:** In light of increasing contemporary threats, why is your directorate facing any cuts at all?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Mr Hanson for the question. All directorates are able to continue to increase their efficiencies, and the directorate within my portfolio is one of those. There are a number of ways: with increased efforts and energies around technology, increased efficiencies, new ways of cooperating across this directorate and others. It is no different from any others, and we continue to improve and to also work for the safety of Canberra.

### **Budget—women**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Treasurer and relates to the budget. Treasurer, did any of your budget considerations include specific modelling to gauge its impacts on women?

**MR BARR:** The government, through the budget process, assesses a wide range of expenditure and capital works bids through an exhaustive process of deliberation. Some of those bids will involve the commissioning of some additional work, either at the beginning of the business case development process or during cabinet's deliberations. It depends a little on what you mean by modelling. That can have many different interpretations or applications depending on the nature of a particular budget bid.

Certainly the cabinet considers each business case on its merits and various ministers, whether it be from a portfolio perspective or a whole-of-government perspective, ensure that the views of women and the benefits of particular projects for women are taken into account in their assessment.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** What, if any, initiatives focus on reducing the gender pay gap and improving female participation in the workforce?

**MR BARR:** There are a number of specific initiatives contained within the budget. I refer the member to budget paper 3 for the details. These include programs in emergency services and in non-traditional trades. Within the ACT public sector we continue our work, which has been very successful over the past 10 years or so, to reduce the gender pay gap.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what measures does the budget have to improve safety of women in Woden and other town centres? Are there any measures to improve access for women to portaloos if working on fires? And do we have any funding for locks on breastfeeding room doors?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mrs Jones for the question. The details to all of those are found in the budget papers or in the answers my colleagues have given to the same questions that have been asked previously.

### **Budget—transport and city services portfolio**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, yesterday's budget has a \$5.3 million cap to your directorate over four years to be achieved through portfolio efficiencies, including adjusting service levels. The *Canberra Times* reports that the directorate will use customer feedback to determine the cuts to service levels. Minister, could you elaborate on the process of using customer feedback to determine cuts to service levels?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Doszpot for the question and note that his reading of the budget papers is correct but I would not always be informed on how the *Canberra Times* may interpret that. That was a question asked in the media lock-up yesterday.

There is a range of ways that we will deliver some efficiencies within the Transport Canberra and City Services portfolio. But, most importantly, we are actually significantly increasing services levels. We are increasing mowing; we are increasing weeding; and we are investing in our town centres, in particular Tuggeranong and Gungahlin, and also the Kambah Village. We are about to start work at Gartside Street in Erindale. There is work underway with the Belconnen bikeway. In addition we will be increasing our graffiti removal; not to mention, of course, introducing stage one of light rail. Two new rapids are proposed in this calendar year to add to the already extensive bus services that we provide right across the territory.

We use customer feedback on an ongoing basis. We are actively working within the initiatives that were outlined in the budget yesterday to significantly improve how we engage more thoroughly and deeply with a broad range of people in our community. We will continue to be informed by community feedback. As members know,

Transport Canberra and City Services get possibly the highest volume of customer and community feedback of all directorates on a very regular basis, because it is so important to Canberrans. We will also be looking at improving the way we specifically talk with our customers and with the community about more innovative ways that we can deliver public services and city services right across the territory.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, is customer feedback a reliable basis for indicating where to cut service levels?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** At no point did I say that we would be cutting any services. So, yes, it is a very important part of the feedback that we receive, and I know that we work closely not only with individual community members but with a very wide and extensive range of community groups, including specific advocacy groups for various and particular industries and areas, as well as, of course, community councils and residents groups, who have very extensive dealings with TCCS staff members on a daily basis.

The range of activities on which TCCS staff are involved with local community members on an individual and collective basis is extensive. Of course, the community provides incredibly valuable information to the directorate and to me, as do members in this place from their discussions with the community. As members know, I get frequent correspondence from many members in this place about suggested improvements to our service levels and better ways of doing things. I think TCCS are incredibly responsive, and they will continue to be responsive to the community.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, are any services exempt from the proposed cuts to service levels?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** There are no proposed cuts to service levels.

### **Budget—election promises**

**MS CHEYNE:** My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer: how will the 2017 budget handed down yesterday help deliver a better Canberra?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Cheyne for her question.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** I thank the opposition for their interest in the budget, and I reiterate that the government went to the last election—that we won comprehensively—with a positive plan for right across our city and Canberra suburbs. Our budget gets on with the job of delivering exactly what we said we would do when we won the popular vote in last year's election. We are making Canberra's schools better by delivering classroom upgrades right across the city, including in the growth areas of Gungahlin. We are modernising Belconnen High School. We have work underway on schools in Molonglo Valley and in east Gungahlin.

There is a significant program of investment in health as part of the 10-year health plan including: the delivery and planning of new walk-in centres in Gungahlin,

Weston Creek and the inner north; the new SPIRE centre in Woden at the Canberra Hospital; the expansion of the Centenary women's and children's hospital and more bulk billing services in Canberra's south as part of the government's 10-year health plan that was so strongly endorsed by Canberrans just seven or eight months ago.

We are overhauling the city's transportation system and bringing light rail to Canberra, something that was bitterly opposed by those opposite but strongly endorsed by the people of Canberra. We are delighted to be able to bring—

**Mr Hanson:** I wouldn't say "strongly".

**MR BARR:** We will keep on saying that. We are delighted to bring this important project for the people of Canberra to invest in a viable public transport system for Canberrans. We are investing more in our roads and public transportation.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Before we go to the supplementary questions, I remind members of the opposition of not only my thoughts on interjections but also the standing orders. Can we please have the questions and answers in some level of silence.

**MS CHEYNE:** What does the 2017 budget show about the state of the territory's finances and the government's planned return to budget balance?

**MR BARR:** It shows very strong progress on the government's fiscal plan. We continue to improve the territory's bottom line and we will be back in a balanced budget and in surplus years ahead of the commonwealth. I am pleased to be able to report to the public gallery over here—

**Ms Cheyne:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Stop the clock.

**Ms Cheyne:** Madam Speaker, could I please hear the Chief Minister's answer? I am really interested in it.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think you have the right to hear the Chief Minister in silence. There is a point of order in that the opposition continue to interject. The Chief Minister is less than 30 seconds or thereabouts into his answer and there has been a point of order. I think all but a couple were interjecting. Can we please have regard to visitors in the gallery? I do not think you are putting your best performance on show here. Chief Minister.

**MR BARR:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Yes, the budget position has improved in every year—in the current year, next year and across the three forward estimate years—and this demonstrates the government's commitment to not only invest in the future of this city to meet the needs of a growing population and to deliver our election commitments but also, at the same time, to continue on the path of budget repair. That task continues.

I see that the Leader of the Opposition is setting a new standard now for how the

headline net operating balance should be reported. He will have to demonstrate tomorrow where he will find the \$500 million in cuts that will be necessary to achieve his new benchmark. It is a change from three decades because he has now set a new benchmark. The Leader of the Opposition has now set a new benchmark, in that he does not believe that the superannuation provision account adjustment should be included in the headline net operating balance. That is his new standard. We look forward to seeing how he will deliver that.

## Visitors

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Before I call Mr Steel on a supplementary, members I will take a quiet moment—

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

*Mr Barr interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Minister, please. Members, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of members of the Gunghalin Probus Club. I would also acknowledge the presence in the gallery of three staff from our twin parliament, the parliament of Kirabiti. Welcome. On behalf of all members, welcome to question time.

## Questions without notice Budget—election promises

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I call Mr Steel on a supplementary.

**MR STEEL:** Chief Minister, how is the ACT government delivering on its election commitments to Canberrans through the 2017 budget?

**MR BARR:** Our city continues to grow rapidly, and we are putting in place the service and infrastructure investments to ensure that Canberra remains the most livable city in this country and in the world. We are investing in our health system, in our education system, in transportation, in community services and in municipal and local government services, not only to ensure that our city can meet our objectives on livability and getting great health and education outcomes for a growing city, but also to ensure that we are investing in new industries with job creation so that our unemployment rate continues to be the lowest in the nation.

Our economy has been amongst the fastest growing in the country and our service exports have now risen to \$1.7 billion annually, an increase faster than that of any other state or territory over this decade. Our higher education system continues to grow rapidly. We are experiencing all-time record levels of tourism in our city, both domestic and international. Our economy is growing strongly. We will be powered 100 per cent by renewable energy by 2020.

The government remains focused on delivering the core commitments that we took to the people of Canberra in October of last year, and we were resoundingly returned against the negative and carping opposition that we see on display yet again today.

### **Budget—health funding**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the budget shows that we will not see construction and completion of the surgical procedures, interventional radiology and emergency centre, or SPIRE, at the Canberra Hospital for five or six years, well into the next term of the Assembly. The city's population is expected to grow by about 30,000 people in that time. What is your plan over the next five or six years to ease the pressure on facilities that are already over capacity and causing excessive waiting times and treatment delays?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mrs Dunne for the question and an opportunity to talk about the significant investments this Labor government is making in our health system. I note, of course, that we made a significant commitment to build the SPIRE centre at the Canberra Hospital. Of course, such a significant commitment requires significant and extensive planning. Our commitment was—

**Mrs Dunne:** It was already planned and you changed your mind.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Well, the opposition may have chosen to take an outdated model to expand the Canberra Hospital as their own election commitment to last year's election. They were unsuccessful in that, as they were unsuccessful in their model of mini non-hospitals in our regions, which were resoundingly questioned—

*Members interjecting—*

**Mrs Dunne:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, can you resume your seat? Stop the clock. Mrs Dunne on a point of order.

**Mrs Dunne:** The question was about how the minister is going to ease the pressure on facilities at the hospital over the next five or six years, not a riff on election commitments but looking forward over the next five or six years. The question was specifically, "What is your plan over the next five or six years to ease the pressure on facilities which are already over capacity?"

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs Dunne. The minister has a minute to go, but I do not think there is a point of order that—

**Mrs Dunne:** The answer should be directly relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** She is talking about investment, as you are well aware—

**Mrs Dunne:** On the point of order, I did not ask a question about investment. I asked a question about easing capacity. The minister is required under—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** If I may finish what I was about to say, Mrs Dunne, before you were very quick to your feet, the minister has spoken about investment around health services broadly. She has a minute left and she will get to her feet and she will

be allowed to conclude her answer. I do not believe there is a point of order, Mrs Dunne.

**Mrs Dunne:** There is a point of order. On the point of order, Madam Speaker, the standing orders require the minister to be directly relevant to the question. The question was about easing capacity. It was not about investment; it was not about what they have promised to do but what they will do in the future. The minister is required to be directly relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** As I have said, I do not believe there is a point of order. If you want to challenge that, feel free, Mrs Dunne. The minister has a minute left and she will continue.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. In what world easing capacity is not done by investing, I do not know. But if the Canberra Liberals cannot understand that very simple, basic premise, and if they had listened and allowed me to finish, to talk about the investments that we have made in the health system, \$900 million over the last decade—

**Mrs Jones:** It is not about money in; outcomes!

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It is not about money; it is not about investment, but what are we going to do to fix capacity? I reject the assumption in Mrs Dunne's question that she makes about our health system. I remind members that our plan involves primary care, prevention, community-based care, acute care and specialist care. We will next year open the University of Canberra public hospital, a dedicated rehabilitation hospital that will take significant pressure off the Canberra Hospital. It will allow people to have dedicated rehabilitation services in a dedicated purpose-built facility in your own electorate, Mrs Dunne. This significant new investment in health services will be in your own electorate.

In yesterday's budget we also announced \$17 million for upgrading—*(Time expired.)*

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, what forecasting has the government done to factor in population growth and its impact on waiting time trends for patients accessing SPIRE treatment over the next five or six years?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** One thing I can tell you is that waiting times are coming down significantly, at the Canberra Hospital emergency department in particular. That is because this government made a \$23 million investment in upgrading the emergency department, which opened in December last year, which now has a dedicated fast-track unit, a dedicated paediatric unit, dedicated specific areas and expanded capacity for ambulances coming into the ambulance bay at Canberra Hospital. We are seeing the benefits of that investment by consistently decreased waiting times in the emergency department, which I am very pleased about.

Of course, the opposition would be the first party to criticise us if we did not plan properly for this significant investment in the SPIRE centre at the Canberra Hospital. Work is underway at the moment around the territory-wide health services planning process. This is a very important point. We know that our city is growing. We won an

election last year based on our plans to invest in the services that a growing community needs. As the Chief Minister has said, and as is clear to all members, that plan was overwhelmingly endorsed by the Canberra community, in health, education, transport and community services.

What we will do over the next year is continue the very important work around territory-wide planning of our health services. That will align very closely with the opening of the University of Canberra public hospital, because that significant new rehabilitation hospital will mean we can dedicate services at a rehabilitation hospital to specifically treating people for their rehabilitation needs. That will take some pressure off Canberra Hospital and Calvary hospital, as well as our community health centres. As we roll out that planning, we are doing that work as we speak. Madam Speaker, as the opposition knows, Canberra Hospital—(*Time expired.*)

**MS LEE:** Minister, is this government so cash strapped that it cannot bring construction of SPIRE, a high-priority infrastructure project, forward?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It just goes to show, really, the ignorance of the opposition in understanding what it will take to plan, design and build such a significant piece of infrastructure. We are getting planning underway—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Again, Madam Speaker, it just goes to show that they have been so far removed from the important job of actually delivering major projects. A major project of this scale—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** The planning for the SPIRE centre, which is a significant improvement on a proposal that the Canberra Liberals took from goodness knows where: there was no planning in any of the proposals that they took to the election last year whatsoever—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** They say they stole one from the government that was seven or eight years old. If that is the best you can do, it obviously did not work. We will do the very important work. If anyone in the opposition can deliver a major infrastructure project like a substantial improvement to the Canberra Hospital campus through the delivery of a SPIRE centre, I would welcome their specialist engineering, planning and construction advice on how exactly they would go about doing that. The work needs to be done with stakeholders; it needs to go through all the processes that you would rightly expect us to do in terms of design, planning, procurement, integrating service delivery, discussion with stakeholders and discussion with the community. If the opposition does not wish us to go through a proper planning, procurement and design phase, that would be a surprise to all of us.

### **Clubs—assistance package**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, can you please detail which clubs will be beneficiaries of the clubs assistance package announced by the Treasurer in yesterday's budget?

**MR RAMSAY:** The clubs that will be beneficiaries of that will be the small to medium clubs.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how will you guarantee that this funding assistance will be spent on genuine diversification measures and not just on padding the coffers of Labor-friendly clubs?

**MR RAMSAY:** Thank you—

**Mr Hanson:** It is an outrage—dodgy.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, that interjection was unparliamentary and you will withdraw it.

**Mr Hanson:** The word 'dodgy', Madam Speaker, is unparliamentary? Is that a ruling?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** In that context I believe it is. You will withdraw it.

**Mr Hanson:** While I am happy to withdraw it—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You will just withdraw it without comment, Mr Hanson.

**MR RAMSAY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The government is firmly committed to helping clubs to diversify their income. It is part of our ongoing work to help remove the issues of problem gambling and to help clubs move away from their heavy reliance on electronic gaming machines. That is all part of the work that we have done in relation to the reduction of the number of gaming machines from 5,000 to 4,000 over this time.

In relation to the particular package, yes, there will certainly be a significant tax rebate for those small to medium clubs. We have already been working with clubs across the breadth of the sector, and I have met with a number of those individual clubs within the past couple of weeks. I am pleased to be able to do that. What we will be doing is helping those clubs in the area of financial assistance, in easing regulatory and administrative burdens and in providing administrative assistance.

We think it is important to recognise the social contribution that clubs make. I can guarantee the Assembly and I can guarantee the opposition that that will be done right across the breadth; that there will be no discrimination based on the clubs that we have.

**MR WALL:** Minister, what benefits will the Woden Tradies club receive from yesterday's budget package?

**MR RAMSAY:** The Woden Tradies is not one of the small to medium clubs.

**Mrs Dunne:** Madam Speaker, a point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order.

**Mrs Dunne:** Could I seek your guidance, please, Madam Speaker. A few moments ago you asked Mr Hanson to withdraw the word “dodgy” because you said it was unparliamentary. But Mr Hanson was referring to, I think, a dodgy deal with the clubs. He was not saying that any member of this place was dodgy; therefore I am asking for your guidance on how that is unparliamentary.

**Mr Barr:** Madam Speaker, on the point of order, the word was used multiple times and directed at members on this side of the chamber. In that context, undoubtedly, it was casting aspersions on members on this side of the chamber. Mr Hanson knew exactly what he was doing; and he is a serial offender.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Chief Minister.

**Mrs Dunne:** On the point of order, there have been rulings in the past that a reference to groups at large is not a reference to an individual member; therefore it is not unparliamentary.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I have made a ruling, Mrs Dunne. I will go to something that you may choose to read when you assume this chair as deputy. In 1990 “dodgy” was withdrawn. “Dodgy” was withdrawn in 2010. “Dodgy” was withdrawn in 2013, and you asked for it to be withdrawn; and “process is dodgy” in 2015. I have made a ruling. I thought that it was targeted to calls, as the Chief Minister has said, to impugn the character of those opposite. Therefore it is withdrawn.

### **Schools—student wellbeing**

**MR STEEL:** My question is to the Minister Education and Early Childhood Development: what initiatives has this government established to support student wellbeing in the ACT’s diverse and inclusive public schools?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Steel for the question. All public schools are there for all children in our city. As I have said before, our schools are diverse and inclusive. They embrace difference. Nobody should be excluded because of their background, culture, gender, class, religion, sexuality, ability or wealth. Everybody in our community is a little bit different. Diversity is beautiful, and the government is committed to supporting it.

We are committed to enabling children to be themselves without prejudice. We are committed to including all children as they are and ensuring that children grow up with respect for diversity amongst their peers. Alongside academic skills, schools support young people with vital social and emotional learning. All of our public schools strive to be safe, respectful and supporting environments, and there are a number of initiatives in place to help schools to achieve this goal.

In 2016 the government established the safe and supportive schools policy. This

policy reflects the national safe schools framework with the goal of assisting school communities to develop sound student safety and wellbeing practices. Schools must provide an environment free from bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence. I am happy to advise members that in the budget presented yesterday the government has committed \$400,000 to the continuation of the safe and inclusive schools program in ACT public schools.

Alongside this important announcement, the government is focused on getting in early to ensure that student health and wellbeing are prioritised and that intervention is available to address, for example, the mental health needs of ACT children and young people. The budget commits nearly \$2.5 million for the first five of 20 additional school psychologists to support student wellbeing and mental health outcomes for students and the wider school community.

There are so many factors that influence the opportunity that a child has to learn during their time spent at school. Addressing these factors is an important part of promoting educational equity. *(Time expired.)*

**MR STEEL:** Minister, how is the government ensuring that ACT schools are safe, inclusive environments for students?

**MS BERRY:** Our students present to schools with a range of personal characteristics including diversity and gender identity and presentation, sexual orientation and intersex status. There is, in fact, no binary. The government is committed to respecting, welcoming and celebrating diversity. We will not accept prejudice, discrimination, harassment or violence in our schools. A vital part of ensuring this includes ensuring that school communities have access to resources and support to provide a safe and inclusive environment.

The government's commitment to fund the ACT safe and inclusive schools program will provide schools with the support and resources that they need through the program. On an opt-in basis, schools will be able to seek out guidance for good practice. They will have access to relevant, high quality and inclusive teaching and learning resources and they will be able to connect with other school communities to share and improve practice.

The federal government's changes to the safe schools program unacceptably weakened it. The ACT government responded by committing during the election to directly fund a new program that meets the needs of our students and school communities. Yesterday we delivered on that commitment.

Over the past few months the Education Directorate has been working with Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT to develop a new program, including a service model providing guidelines, evaluation frameworks and a communications strategy. I look forward to seeing this program being rolled out with the support of school communities and in our public schools.

I also note, for the interest of members, recent media highlighting that the Catholic system has also recognised the prevalence of sexual and gender diversity among their own young people. They are working to establish a program to support safe and

inclusive schools within that system.

**MS CODY:** Minister, how is the government investing in initiatives to support student mental health and wellbeing?

**MS BERRY:** Students from many different walks of life learn alongside each other in ACT schools, and along the way any student could experience challenges that interrupt or create barriers to their education. Just as in adult life, our students face mental health challenges and need support for their general wellbeing.

I have raised in the Assembly a number of times my focus on equity in our system, particularly as the community discusses the future of education in the ACT. As the strategy forms, I hope the key part of it is how we can better enable students by addressing mental health and wellbeing.

But it is also clear that there are things we can do now. During the election, the government committed to providing 20 new school psychologists to provide students with access to professional assistance when they need it. Nationally, the percentage of students across Australia with a diagnosed mental health disorder who accessed school-based mental health support has risen over the past 15 years. In the ACT, the government is committed to providing support for these children. This is why we are funding more psychologists in our schools.

Yesterday's budget provides nearly \$2.5 million for the first five of the additional school psychologists, which will be allocated to the areas of greatest need and will respond to our growing awareness of the need for a proactive approach to mental health and student wellbeing in our schools. Over the coming year, the Education Directorate will be taking a look at how the government can better integrate school psychologists with other available mental health support for young people.

My colleagues have made some important related announcements in this budget, such as the nurse-led year 7 health checks and the expansion of the child and adolescent mental health service primary school intervention program. I am keen to see these efforts across the government working together to make a positive, lasting impact for our young people.

### **Budget—health funding**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, following on from recent announcements on the expansion to healthcare services that this government will provide, how does this budget improve access to health care in the community?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank the not-so-well Ms Cody for her question. As I have previously mentioned, and as the Chief Minister mentioned yesterday, this budget is focused on providing Canberrans with easy access to affordable, accessible health care in our community. As a Labor government, we know it is important to make sure Canberrans have better access to health care where and when they need it, whether it is prevention, primary care, community care or acute and specialist care. That is why we have a range of initiatives to strengthen our health services and keep Canberrans healthy and well.

We know that we cannot rely on the commonwealth government to increase bulk-billing, although we welcome their lifting of the Medicare rebate freeze. It will not come soon enough for GPs in our community. For our part, this government will improve access to affordable health care by providing \$1.05 million over three years in an incentive grant program for general practice groups to provide more bulk-billed health care. This will include bulk-billed general practice as well as allied healthcare services, particularly on Canberra's south side.

This will not only improve access to bulk-billed services but provide better coordinated care for patients, as they will be able to access a range of health services in the one place, and communication between collocated service providers will be improved.

Our election commitment of delivering more of our successful nurse-led walk-in centres is also key to improving access to health care in our community. We are providing \$14 million over the next few years to deliver a new walk-in centre for Gungahlin and to develop the design for another walk-in centre in the Weston Creek region, as well as scoping work for a new walk-in centre in the inner north.

The budget will also provide funding for ACT Health to expand the highly regarded hospital in the home program, which provides high quality access to health care for some of the territory's unwell residents, so that they can receive that care in their own home and not in a hospital setting. We really look forward to doing the planning work for significantly rolling out this service over the coming years.

**MS CODY:** Can the Minister for Health outline how expanding the ACT government's groundbreaking initiative of establishing walk-in centres will deliver more care in the community?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Cody for drawing attention to our nurse walk-in centres. This is a model unique in Australia but which has been taken up by other jurisdictions. Our budget announcement of expanding the walk-in centres will provide more Canberrans with a fast and free alternative to health care for less serious conditions. Walk-in centres help to ease the pressure on primary healthcare services by providing alternatives. Conveniently located in the community, the centres will offer fast, free one-off care for minor injuries and illnesses on a no-appointment basis. They are open 365 days of the year, from 7.30 in the morning till 10 o'clock every night, every day of the year.

Walk-in centres can help keep people out of hospitals. They will deliver additional community healthcare services to Canberrans and provide better care both when and where people need it. That is why we are rolling them out in our regions.

In mid-2014, two new walk-in centres were opened in Belconnen and Tuggeranong, collocated with the community health centres. They have met increasing demand for conveniently located health services while helping to reduce pressures in other parts of the system.

Following on from our election commitments, the budget commits to new centres in

Gungahlin and Weston Creek and planning for a new centre in the inner north. Members for Yerrabi will also be excited to learn that the construction of the Gungahlin health centre will start and that the walk-in centre will open its doors in 2018. The reason we can proceed with this one first is its potential to be collocated with the existing community health centre in Gungahlin.

A comprehensive site and service options assessment will be undertaken for the walk-in centre in the Weston Creek region, providing healthcare services to the growing community of Weston Creek to Molonglo and of course the Woden Valley. We will continue to talk with the community on the location of the new Weston Creek region walk-in centre and we look forward to those conversations. *(Time expired.)*

**MS ORR:** Minister, how will you be supplementing the care that is available in the community through additional support for bulk-billing?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As we have seen right across the country, an incredibly important issue for the community is affordability of health care and a commitment to the premise of Medicare, which underpins an affordable and accessible healthcare system for all Australians. Our work with general practitioners and allied health professionals means that we know that they often offer the first point of contact for health care.

As we know, the ACT has one of the lowest rates of bulk-billing for general practitioners in the country, with our rates historically hovering around 50 per cent. This has been slowly improving. We are close to 58 per cent in the most recent quarter but are still well below the national average of 84 per cent.

These are disappointing results for bulk-billed services in the recent commonwealth budget, noting of course again that GPs are facing enormous pressure because of that co-payment freeze that they have been under pressure on for a number of years. Although the commonwealth will lift that, it will not come soon enough.

Bulk-billing rates for our private allied health services in the ACT are also low. This results in a significant number of Canberrans not seeking health care from private allied health workers due to the cost or using outpatient allied health services in public hospitals instead. To improve bulk-billing rates, I am pleased that the ACT government is delivering on this election promise to provide \$1.05 million over three years as an incentive for general practices to provide more bulk-billed health care, including access to GPs and importantly allied healthcare providers.

In particular, this will provide greater access to bulk-billing for people in the Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Molonglo region because we know that that is where there is a current gap. This will not only make primary health care more affordable but also facilitate better coordinated care for the wellbeing of patients. They will be able to access a wider variety of health services. Of course, this forms part of our 10-year health plan. *(Time expired.)*

### **Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability—estimates availability**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability.

Minister, will you be available to appear before the estimates committee this year to answer questions about the budget areas for which your portfolios are responsible? If not, why?

**MR RATTENBURY:** As Mr Wall well knows, I will not be available to attend on the days the committee has asked me to attend. I wrote to Mr Wall probably three months ago—I would have to check the date exactly—indicating that I am going to be overseas during the estimates period. I offered to the estimates committee many months ago to appear on a different day. The estimates committee has declined my offer. Therefore, I have asked that acting ministers attend in my stead.

**MR WALL:** Minister, will your representative at the estimates committee hearings be able to fully answer the questions as you would be able to as the minister responsible?

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Gentleman will be the acting minister during the period of my absence. I have great confidence that Mr Gentleman will answer the questions with great aplomb. As members will know, the officials will also be available. The officials have a lot of the knowledge as well, and I have instructed my officials to be as helpful as they can be to the estimates committee when they appear before it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, how do you reconcile your failure to appear during the advertised estimates process with your claimed commitment to openness and transparency?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I find this an extraordinarily grubby line of questioning from the opposition, given that some months ago I identified this issue and offered to the committee, to Mr Wall as the chair of the committee, a number of—

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, resume your seat.

**Mr Hanson:** Earlier you said that “dodgy” was not okay, but the minister has used the word “grubby”. You gave a ruling directed at us, but—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order, Mr Hanson. You can resume your seat. There is no point of order.

**Mrs Dunne:** I seek leave to move dissent from your ruling.

Leave not granted.

## **Standing orders—suspension**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (3.24): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as will allow me to move dissent from Madam Speaker’s ruling.

Madam Speaker, the question of how this place is to be managed has become an

important one. We have here today a hypocritical act on your part, which can only be addressed by a motion of dissent. The fact that members of the government would decline to have that matter aired shows that they do not have confidence in your capacity to deal with this place.

When there is a motion of dissent from a ruling, the matter needs to be cleared up, once and for all. I know how difficult it is to sit in that place and to be fair, and I have resisted the temptation to do this in the past. But the clear inconsistency of your rulings here today makes it impossible for us to ignore it any longer. That is why the standing orders should be suspended so that this matter is cleared up once and for all.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (3.26): Those of us who sat through the last parliament find that performance from the Deputy Speaker quite extraordinary. That is a very poor reflection on the Deputy Speaker. I acknowledge that she in her remarks at least raised the difficulty there is for the person who sits in that chair.

We are in the middle of question time and we are attempting to work our way through one of the most significant elements of the daily sitting pattern.

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, please allow the Chief Minister to speak.

**MR BARR:** Through this process of question time, non-executive members get to ask questions of members. That Mr Hanson is hurting and embarrassed by the fact that his comments were called to order, that he has been a serial offender in this place and that what we are witnessing right now is the demonstration of—

**Mr Steel:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, under standing order 61: because of the constant interruptions from those opposite I cannot hear the Chief Minister speak. It is very clear—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I ask members to remain silent while the Chief Minister is on his feet.

**MR BARR:** What we are witnessing is a very deliberate act and a consistent pattern of behaviour to make this place and question time unable to operate smoothly. People cannot even speak in this debate without constant interjections from serial offenders who have been on warnings nearly every day in this place and who, in any other parliament, would have been ejected because of their repeated poor behaviour.

Madam Speaker, you show a level of tolerance that I think goes above and beyond that of almost anyone else who has sat in that chair, and we resent the fact that in trying to control this place and get through question time in an orderly way—and you are conducting your duties in an appropriate manner—we need to indulge a bitter former Speaker on a personal crusade, as we have seen today.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (3.28): As much as it pains me, Madam Speaker,

the Greens will be supporting the suspension of standing orders to allow Mrs Dunne to move a dissent motion. I think the motion is poor; we will not be supporting the dissent. It is within the Speaker's purview to make these judgements on the day, but we believe the process allows Mrs Dunne to move the dissension if she wishes.

Question resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

## **Dissent from Speaker's ruling**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (3.29): Madam Speaker, I move:

That the opposition dissents from Madam Speaker's ruling in relation to the comments made by Mr Rattenbury in relation to the opposition and the fact that they are inconsistent.

Madam Speaker, it pains me to have to do this but the performance today in this chamber is one of such inconsistency that it is now important that we raise these issues. Earlier today you asked that Mr Hanson withdraw the word—I think “grubby” was the word.

**Mr Hanson:** It was “dodgy”.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, the word was “dodgy”—which he did. I raised the question as to whether it was necessarily appropriate to do that, because I did not think that he was referring to a member of this place; he was referring to other things but not to a member of this place. But you made a ruling and I eventually agreed to that ruling.

That would have been unremarkable except for the fact that, under pressure, Mr Rattenbury then called every one of the members of the opposition “grubby”. It was quite clear. There was no ambiguity about whom he was referring to. He actually said that members of the opposition were grubby and this was a grubby display. There was no ambiguity. I thought that, to be fair, on this occasion you should have required the withdrawal of those comments. The fact that you did not require the withdrawal of those comments shows that this ruling was a partial ruling; that you were not exercising your powers in the chair in an impartial manner, in a way that shows that you have significant regard for all members in this place and that all members in this place are treated equally.

We have had this discussion privately on a number of occasions. I know that it is a difficult thing to do to keep order in question time. I also know, recognise and appreciate that your approach to this is different from what mine was when I was the Speaker. Everyone is entitled to do this in their own way. But, when it comes to the things that were said here today and the way that you treated Mr Hanson as compared to the way that you treated Mr Rattenbury, it is quite clear for any unbiased observer to see that you have a different set of rules.

Mr Hanson may be an irritant. He was an irritant when I was the Speaker and he is clearly an irritant to you in this place. But Mr Rattenbury can equally be an irritant—he was an irritant for me when I was the Speaker—because he knows how to use the rules, because he himself has been the Speaker. Mr Rattenbury, I am sure, if you had

required him to withdraw would have withdrawn, because he would have known that what he had said was overstepping the mark. But the fact that you did not ask him to withdraw shows that you have less regard for the opposition than you do for members of the government and members of the crossbench; and this is not how you conduct yourself as Speaker.

We have had discussions about things that we have disagreed about on the approach that you take. I am sure that when you were Deputy Speaker and I was Speaker you disagreed with some of the approaches I took, and we have had those discussions as well.

It is actually an interesting point to make that you picked up on Mr Hanson's supposed unparliamentary language but when you did not pick up on Mr Rattenbury—even when it was brought to your attention—you still did not see it as sufficient to take the appropriate steps.

It is with great regret that I have to move dissent from your ruling, but if it was good enough for Mr Hanson to withdraw the word “dodgy” it is good enough that you require Mr Rattenbury to withdraw the word “grubby” when the word “grubby” was clearly directed at all the members of the opposition. I had just finished asking a question, so I could have taken exception in that it was directed more to me than to anybody else. On that basis you should have acted in an impartial way and you did not. Therefore reluctantly I have to move dissent from your ruling.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (3.34): Madam Speaker, I did not expect that we would find agreement on one element of Mrs Dunne's contribution. Yes, it is true that Mr Hanson is a serial irritant to anyone who sits in that chair. It is true, Madam Speaker, that the comments that he was asked to withdraw were repeated and were very clearly directed at members on this side of the chamber, and went to suggestions of improper behaviour and conduct. That, Madam Speaker, together with your identification of at least four other occasions previously where that word was required to be withdrawn, and the clear intent that Mr Hanson had in making those statements—not once but repeating them ad nauseam—demonstrates why they should have been withdrawn. Even then, when asked to withdraw, there is always the song and dance and theatrics that come with that. That is a pattern of behaviour that those of us who have been in this place over the past nine years with Mr Hanson have witnessed.

You were perfectly entitled to do that, in spite of the position taken by those opposite who took multiple points of order against that ruling. In this instance, Madam Speaker, you are entitled to make a ruling as chair, and you have the support of the majority of Assembly members, it would appear, from the statements that have already been made. It is regrettable that question time has been delayed now by nearly half an hour, interrupted by nearly half an hour, purely on the basis of a stunt; a stunt from an individual who, in spite of feigning reluctance, has been all too eager to pursue this path. We all remember the four years we lived through the Dunne speakership and the exact issues that we lived through, and this question of having a particular view of one set of members as opposed to another. The irony is not lost on those of us were in this place over the past four years, Madam Speaker, and we will be supporting your ruling.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (3.37): We will not be supporting the dissent motion. I think that you, Madam Speaker, Mrs Dunne, I and other members who have sat in that chair have an appreciation of the difficulty, particularly in question time. Given the unruly nature of a number of members of this chamber, it is very difficult to make those judgements on the spot. I think that some degree of maturity could have been exercised here and a private conversation later may well have sufficed to resolve this matter, as has been done on occasion.

I certainly know that there were times in the last term where I felt that Mrs Dunne had got it wrong. There are decisions in my own time as Speaker that I think, on reflection, I would have made differently. From my time in this chamber, I know that the nature of being in the Speaker's chair in particular is a challenging one, certainly in what can only be described as the theatre of question time, as the opposition so frequently seeks to make it. It is a difficult call and I think that a more suitable pathway on this matter would have been to have a discussion later.

We all know that there is an extensive history of the withdrawal of certain words in this chamber. If one looks at the little book that sits in the first drawer of the Speaker's desk, one can see that over the past 26 or 27 years of self-government a range of words have been withdrawn and permitted at different times, often in different contexts. I am not sure that this is a reasonable way to proceed today, and we will not be supporting the motion.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.38): I will be supporting Mrs Dunne's motion because it is quite clear that your rulings are grossly inconsistent. I used the term "dodgy" in relation to a deal. You ruled that unparliamentary even though I think it is questionable: if you are talking about an inanimate thing or something not representing individuals in this place, there is a question as to whether that is unparliamentary. Regardless of that, I did so, and you used your discretion. Mrs Dunne pursued that. That position was then put forward.

Mr Rattenbury then, in speaking, described me and my colleagues as grubby. That is clearly unparliamentary. I am going to go now to about seven examples where, in this place, that has been found to be unparliamentary, including statements from you, from Mr Rattenbury and from Mr Barr.

It is just hypocritical that you would on the one hand describe what we say as unparliamentary, even though it did not refer to anybody in this place, but at the same time excuse Mr Rattenbury from his quite unparliamentary language directed at members of the opposition. I will just go to one example. This is Mr Rattenbury in *Hansard* of 2013. Mr Rattenbury said:

No, it's just that you're grubby.

He is a repeat offender. I then asked that he withdraw. Madam Speaker said:

Sit down. Mr Rattenbury, you will withdraw the word "grubby".

Mr Rattenbury said:

I withdraw the reference to Mr Hanson being grubby, as I understand it is unparliamentary, if not accurate.

So you have Mr Rattenbury, a former Speaker in this place, withdrawing, acknowledging that his statement was unparliamentary.

In another example, in 2015, I said:

It's a grubby government.

Madam Assistant Speaker then referred to a point of order from Ms Burch. Ms Burch asked that that be ruled as unparliamentary. So you then asked whether it was unparliamentary or not.

We have other examples, going to 2011, when there were points of order. Mr Barr said:

... I will withdraw the word "grubby".

Mr Barr at that stage understood and acknowledged a ruling that "grubby" was unparliamentary. There are more examples. This one involves Mr Rattenbury with regard to "grubby", in 2016. Madam Assistant Speaker—I am not sure which Madam Assistant Speaker it was—said:

I ask you to withdraw your word "grubby", Mr Rattenbury, in keeping with previous rulings by the Speaker, including you on several occasions.

Mr Rattenbury has, on a number of occasions, as with all speakers, assistant speakers and deputy speakers in this place, considered referring to other members as grubby to be unparliamentary. Mr Rattenbury then withdrew.

Madam Speaker, I do not understand how it is that, when the opposition says something that arguably is or is not—we stand up in this place; I accepted your ruling and withdrew. We moved on with Mr Rattenbury despite the fact that just in the brief research I have been able to do in the last five minutes I have found numerous examples, including an Assistant Speaker saying that Mr Rattenbury had ruled on this on a number of occasions, including examples where you have called it unparliamentary and including examples where Mr Barr has withdrawn because it is unparliamentary. Because in this case it is the opposition—now you sit there as Speaker—that asks that it be withdrawn, you let it go.

It is massively inconsistent. It is hypocritical. Mrs Dunne is right to dissent from your ruling.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal) (3.43): I will be supporting your ruling in this matter, Madam Speaker. I want to put a few facts on the table. Firstly in regard to the direction of comments from Mr Hanson across the chamber, they were directed at Minister Ramsay. Madam Speaker, when you made your ruling on that word—

“dodgy” was the word—and you asked Mr Hanson to withdraw, he did withdraw and then he sat down and yelled out across the chamber, “Dodgy Ramsay razor gang”.

I also want to talk about your consistency in ruling, Madam Speaker, in that you chose not to rule against Mr Rattenbury’s terminology in the same way that you chose not to rule against Mr Hanson not more than 10 minutes ago when he said seven times, “grubby”. You did not pull him up.

**Mr Coe:** Seven times?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Yes, I counted them. It is my view that your ruling is consistent, and we stand by that.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.44): Madam Speaker, the Canberra Liberals obviously believe that there is a very clear inconsistency between the ruling that you gave regarding the word “dodgy” and your ruling on the word “grubby”. It is, I think, quite straightforward, especially when you consider the historical context that Mr Hanson gave with regard to the word “grubby”, and especially in the context in which it was given, that your ruling is not only inconsistent with your earlier ruling on “dodgy”, but also inconsistent with past rulings on the word “grubby”. In light of that, the opposition would be more than happy to entertain the notion of your reflecting on these decisions and coming back to the Assembly, perhaps at a later hour today, or tomorrow, with some analysis of the two rulings today, in the context of past decisions.

Question resolved in the negative.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability—estimates availability**

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, how do you reconcile your failure to appear during published estimates times with your claimed commitment to openness and transparency?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I think this is a very unfortunate line of questioning, given that I actually went to some lengths many months ago in recognition of the fact that is not an optimal time but one where I had a set of dates on which I sought to be away; I recognised that many months ago and, shortly after the estimates committee was formed, I sought to work with the estimates committee to resolve this matter. I provided them with a number of possible solutions. They chose the one that saw the acting ministers appear on my behalf. I would prefer that this had not been the case. I offered to the estimates committee some dates on which I would appear in person immediately upon my return from being away but the estimates committee has chosen not to take that pathway.

I was not in the estimates committee meeting. I do not know why they chose that path but I reject the line of Mrs Dunne’s questioning that I have not sought to make myself available to the estimates committee.

### **Electricity—blackouts**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the minister for energy. On Friday 2 June the *Canberra Times* reported on the increasing number of blackouts in Gungahlin, Jacka, Bonner, Amaroo, Harrison, Mitchell and Forde. Minister, why are residents in Gungahlin having to endure regular and prolonged blackouts, and will residents be compensated?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Milligan, to clarify, I do not think there is a minister for energy; the Chief Minister is taking the question.

**MR BARR:** The question relates to ActewAGL, so I will take the question. The answer is, as I am advised by ActewAGL, that there are three specific issues: cable faults; system-protection tripping measures that shut down the system when a certain significant event occurs; and in one instance I am advised that a cable was cut by accident by a third party. Those are the explanations for each of the incidents.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Chief Minister, are any of the blackouts caused by light rail construction? Will the network have sufficient capacity to power the trams whilst maintaining reliable residential and commercial power supply?

**MR BARR:** I have been advised that they relate, as I said, to cable faults, a system shutdown mechanism where a certain issue occurs and the system goes into a protective mode and one incident where a third party cut a cable by accident. I do not believe that the assertion made by the member is accurate but I will seek further advice from ActewAGL.

**MR COE:** Treasurer, who is actually responsible for investigating the cause or causes of these power outages, and will the ACT government pay for it, either directly or indirectly?

**MR BARR:** ActewAGL are the network provider. They are a private entity that is owned 50 per cent by China State Grid and Singapore Power, through Jemena, and 50 per cent by the ACT government through Icon Water.

### **Light rail—utilities disruption**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, what notice are residents and businesses given if they are going to experience a planned interruption of either electricity or telecommunications supply due to work on the light rail?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Certainly in respect of the construction activities along the stage 1 light rail route being managed by Canberra Metro, in close consultation with Transport Canberra and City Services, they engage in a number of different ways of talking both broadly to the community about the construction activities and very specifically about construction activities as well.

I do not believe at this point that there has been specific reference to planned outages for telecommunications or electricity. Certainly, if there is a nearby impact on the road network, local residents will both receive a letter and likely be doorknocked by

the Canberra Metro team as well.

In addition, anybody can sign up to receive the weekly updates from the Canberra Metro team regarding stage 1 construction activities as well as be on an SMS list to receive more urgent updates.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, has the construction of light rail ever led to unexpected interruptions to the electricity or telecommunications supply to residents of Canberra?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As I know the opposition are aware, there was an outage to an NBN cable recently, regarding electricity supply. I am not aware of any at this point.

**MS LEE:** Minister, how many times has construction work along the light rail corridor, either directly for the tram's construction or for the associated relocation of services along the route, led to interruption of the electricity or telecommunication supply to houses and businesses in Canberra?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** In terms of unplanned outages, there was the one I referred to regarding NBN. I do not believe that any unplanned electricity outages were as the result of the construction of light rail.

### **Canberra Hospital—dermatology services**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Why are skin cancer and other patients forced to seek treatment interstate due to long waits to see a dermatologist in Canberra?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** They are not forced to. Many Canberrans seek treatment from local dermatologists. If Mrs Kikkert could provide more specific examples I would be happy to answer that question.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What is the average waiting time to see a dermatologist in Canberra, and by how much have waiting times increased over the past five years?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** To clarify for the opposition, access to specialist services are provided through both the public system and the private system. So if Mrs Kikkert could be a little bit clearer in her questions, I may be able to provide a clearer answer.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, how long has ACT Health known that there is a shortage or predicted shortage of dermatologists in Canberra and what specific action, if any, has been taken to address the issue?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I am assuming the opposition are referring to comments made by the royal college of dermatologists in a recent story. Certainly I have become aware more recently that, with the age profile of the current dermatology workforce in the public health system, a number of dermatologists will be retiring in the next few years. I have previously spoken with Dr Miller about his concerns about his own impending retirement and how he really wishes to make sure his profession is able to practise here in Canberra.

As we know, right across the country in a number of specialist services there are shortages. We have a number of specific measures that we will take in order to address some of those shortages. I will take the specifics of dermatology on notice and provide a further answer to the Assembly.

### **Public housing—community consultation**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Chief Minister, in his capacity as Minister for Economic Development with responsibility for capital works and procurement. Chief Minister, in regard to public housing construction in Chapman, Holder, Wright, Mawson and Monash, why was industry notified of these procurement opportunities before the conclusion of community consultations?

**MR BARR:** I think there is a routine process for early advice to industry through what I understand to be a regular standing meeting of forward government programs and projects. It is not a commitment that a project will go ahead, but it is an opportunity to give industry advance notice of an intention, without necessarily confirming that a procurement will go ahead. So one can imagine an alternative circumstance where Mrs Jones would get up and ask a question about why industry was not consulted earlier in the process. You're damned if you do and damned if you don't, in the eyes of the opposition. In this instance the government seeks to engage and that engagement is at an early level. It does not always mean that a procurement will go ahead in exactly the manner that is first anticipated, when that engagement begins, or that it will be to exactly the same time frame. But I think there is value in early engagement with industry when it comes to government procurement.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, were such notifications and/or meetings held or detailed prior to the consultation process commencing with local residents?

**MR BARR:** I will need to take that level of detail on notice and look at the two dates but I do not think it is particularly relevant.

**Mrs Jones:** It is relevant.

**MR BARR:** I do not think it is at all, because the government's intention has been very clear: we are going to build more public housing and that involves engagement with industry. Whilst the individual blocks of land are of great interest, building public housing is something the government is committed to and will continue to do. Engagement with industry on the construction of new public housing, generally as well as specifically, I think, has value.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, why, contrary to your own platitudes, does your government continue to pay little more than lip service to community consultation?

**MR BARR:** I fundamentally reject the premise of the member's question. The government has been very clear over a number of years that we will be building more public housing. We have identified and will continue to identify opportunities to expand the city's public housing stock. That is not a question that is up for debate. I heard that Mr Parton may have quoted me earlier.

This is one of the issues, that apparently there is tripartisan support that we should be building more public housing in the city. There is a very lively debate about the location, the design and the density of that housing, and about construction materials, environmental performance and how new housing fits into individual neighbourhoods. That is all a very important debate to be had. But no community can put their hand up and say, “We veto public housing in our area.” There is public housing in all areas of Canberra, and that is an important policy principle.

### **Unparliamentary language**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to you, Madam Speaker. Is the use of the word “grubby” in describing members of this place unparliamentary or not?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am aware that it has been asked to be withdrawn before.

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order, to be directly relevant, is it parliamentary or not?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think I have answered your question, Mr Hanson. But if it has been asked to be withdrawn at that moment by that Speaker, they have deemed it unparliamentary.

**MR HANSON:** Madam Speaker, why in that case, given the numerous previous rulings, did you not ask Mr Rattenbury to withdraw?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Because I made the call at that time and that moment. If you go through *Hansard*, Mr Hanson, over the past 20-plus years of this place, there will have been different decisions made on different days in different discussions.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is “grubby” on the list that you referred to previously, and will you circulate that list as it currently stands, for the information of members, before close of business today?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The answer is yes, and I do not have a problem with this being available to all members.

### **Budget—policing**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, please! Ms Orr is trying to ask the final question for the day.

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Could the minister please advise the Assembly of what additional support for front-line policing is included in the 2017-18 ACT budget?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her question and her interest in safety for all Canberrans. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the 2017-18 ACT budget will

have a direct and positive impact on front-line policing for Canberra. Of particular note, the ACT government's \$5.3 million nightlife package includes \$4.9 million over four years for six additional police officers to patrol nightlife precincts, providing a stronger and more visible presence to boost public safety.

This budget also delivers on our election commitment to equip more ACT police with conducted energy weapons, commonly known as tasers. These additional resources for ACT Policing in terms of both staff and equipment recognise the importance of ensuring that our police officers have the support they need to protect our community.

I am also pleased to inform the Assembly that the 2017-18 ACT budget includes funding for increased protective security measures for ACT Policing, funding to plan for future operating models and accommodation for ACT Policing in the ACT and it has provisioned funding for an upgrade of ACT Policing's water policing facilities.

These initiatives are a result of extensive discussions with ACT Policing on what resources our police members need to continue to provide their high quality support and service to the Canberra community.

**MS ORR:** Could the minister please provide further information about how the budget funding to equip more police with tasers will contribute to community safety?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question.

Providing more police with tasers further equips our police officers with the resources they need to keep the ACT community and police safe. The use of tasers has resulted in the successful de-escalation of potentially lethal incidents and gives police a less lethal use-of-force option to deal with life-threatening situations. Tasers can be deployed from a safe distance and inflict less pain for a shorter period of time than other police use-of-force options such as capsicum spray and batons.

However, primary emphasis continues to be on the use of negotiation, communication, of course, and de-escalation techniques, prior to using physical force. Governance and oversight arrangements are in place to assure the community that any use of force is appropriate and reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

The tasers used by ACT Policing will be fitted with cameras and the existing governance and specialist training will continue to ensure that there is accountability around the use of tasers. I am pleased the ACT government has delivered this commitment to increasing the safety of our front-line police.

**MS CHEYNE:** Can the minister provide further information about how the budget funding to provide additional police resources to combat alcohol fuelled violence will contribute to community safety?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Cheyne for her question. Alcohol-related crime is an ongoing priority for ACT Policing, as it continues to place a significant financial, social and health burden on our community. The additional officers announced as part of the ACT government's nightlife package will enhance and strengthen the platform already established by ACT Policing's regional targeting team, or RTT, in patrolling

entertainment precincts across the territory.

The role of the RTT is to ensure the responsible sale and supply of alcohol through engagement, education and enforcement. The overall aim of the team's work is to reduce alcohol-related violence.

ACT Policing members work closely with Access Canberra to educate licensees and venue staff on the requirements of the Liquor Act 2010 and Liquor Regulation 2010. The additional police resources will provide greater coverage of the broader ACT, focusing upon regional centres and entertainment precincts.

As a result of the increased resources we can expect to see increased proactive liquor licensing enforcement activities and programs, including increased collaboration with Access Canberra's liquor enforcement teams.

Police will continue to work closely with licensees to make sure that the ACT's nightlife precincts are safe for the whole community. Planning regarding the integration of the six officers is now underway.

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