



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Tuesday, 12 September 2017

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Standing orders—question time

Statement by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call the Leader of the Opposition to ask the first question without notice, I would like to make a brief comment. Members will be aware that there are several standing orders that govern the operations of question time. I have noticed that some of the original questions being asked by members over recent weeks have been preceded by a somewhat lengthy preamble. I would like to remind members of standing order 117(a), which states that “questions shall be brief and relate to a single issue”. I have also observed that some supplementary questions have several facets to the question, and I remind members that standing order 113B stipulates that “immediately following the answer to a question, one supplementary question may be asked”. I would ask that members bear these standing orders in mind when they are framing their questions.

Questions without notice

Taxation—reform

MR COE: My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said in a recent piece:

Canberrans believed at the time that the tax reform began that they had a deal with the government. Many people, having recently received their latest rates bill, are legitimately asking whether the government has kept its end of the bargain.

Why has your government not kept its end of the bargain on tax reform?

MR BARR: We certainly have kept our end of the bargain, with a particular emphasis on reducing those inefficient and unfair taxes that were part of the ACT tax system throughout the era of self-government, including the Stanhope government, I note. Our commitment was to abolish insurance taxes, which we have done. Our commitment was to reduce payroll taxes, which we have done by increasing the payroll tax-free threshold to the nation’s highest amount, \$2 million. And our commitment was to reduce stamp duty over a 20-year period. The rate of stamp duty has fallen both in the commercial stamp duty area and in residential stamp duty. The counterfactual position would be that we would have just left all of the tax rates unchanged. In that case, stamp duty would have gone up by between 20 per cent and 30 per cent, which would be consistent with what has happened in New South Wales and Victoria, and rates would have gone up as well.

MR COE: Chief Minister, are the increases in rates and land tax simply going to be passed on to renters and drive up the cost of living even more in the ACT?

MR BARR: The various costs associated with renting out a property are tax deductible in the federal tax system. The costs can be claimed back in relation to the income earned on the property under the Australian taxation system.

MRS DUNNE: Treasurer, why has your tax reform process resulted in housing

becoming more unaffordable due to significant increases in rates?

MR BARR: The measures of housing affordability as put out by the Real Estate Institute of Australia show that the ACT is the most affordable jurisdiction, that the percentage of income required for rent and mortgages is lower—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MR BARR: When people borrow for the stamp duty, they have to pay for that. They pay that amount back over the 20 to 30-year duration of their mortgage. So a lower up-front cost less stamp duty means less pain in mortgage payments over the longer term.

Again, the question that those opposite need to answer is: what is their policy alternative? Are they going to jack stamp duty back up again to make housing even more unaffordable for first home buyers, second home buyers, third home buyers and fourth home buyers, in fact anyone who needs to move at any point in their life: those who need to move because they have a baby and they need a bigger house or because they are downsizing. Any time you move, Alistair Coe and the Liberal Party want to gouge tens of thousands of dollars of stamp duty out of your pocket.

We, in contrast, are cutting stamp duty. I can say that not only is the rate of stamp duty lower now—

Mr Coe: You are bringing in more now than in 2012.

MR BARR: Because of commercial stamp duty, not residential. Residential stamp duty has fallen in rate and in quantum in real terms.

Seniors—rates impact

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Treasurer and it relates to the fairness of the rates concession and deferment system.

Members interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: Treasurer, the aged assistance deferment scheme applies only to people whose homes are in the highest 20 per cent bracket based on the unimproved value of their home. Why is the scheme not available to older people struggling to pay their rates who live in the other 80 per cent of blocks which are worth less? Surely these people would be more likely to need support than the arguably well-off in the 20 per cent?

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Treasurer, did you hear the question, because there were a lot of interjections. Do you want it repeated?

MR BARR: No, but I note that it was a very long question. In response to Ms Le Couteur, there is a range of different programs and concessions available. Duty

deferral is but one of the programs—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Just a minute, Treasurer. Please resume your seat and stop the clock. Please, members, Ms Le Couteur is sitting at the back of the chamber. She is trying to hear the Treasurer who, as protocol requires, is facing the chair. So she is having difficulty hearing. Treasurer.

Mr Wall: Comments are directed to the chair, but don't you think he needs to be facing us?

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Mr Wall for the advice on whether I should in fact be addressing my comments to you, to him or to other people in the chamber. The form of this place, particularly sitting in this place, is that it is not appropriate for me to turn around and address all of my comments directly to Ms Le Couteur. I will put my comments, remarks and answers to the question to you, Madam Speaker, as I am addressing you, the chair of the Assembly.

Regardless of which direction I am facing and whether those opposite seek to interject over the top of me, Madam Speaker, the point is that there is a variety of different concession programs available for members of the community. The simple point is that those people who were paying an extreme amount of stamp duty are now paying significantly less. Had we left the policy settings alone, stamp duty would have been even higher. It is very important to address housing affordability challenges and one of the best ways is to reduce stamp duty.

MS LE COUTEUR: When did the government last conduct a detailed analysis of the eligibility rules for rates concessions and deferments to make sure that vulnerable people get the assistance they need?

MR BARR: In the concessions review recently completed.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how much has stamp duty reduced for a \$500,000 property in the ACT?

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question that Ms Le Couteur asked was about rates concessions for elderly Canberrans. It was not a general question about stamp duty. The question from Ms Cheyne does not flow naturally from the questions asked by Ms Le Couteur, and I think you have to rule it out of order.

Ms Le Couteur: My point was that the Treasurer did not in fact answer my question. I asked about deferment, not just concessions. He did not touch upon that in his answer. I did not have time to get up before Ms Cheyne was up with a supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Cheyne, I will give you an opportunity to rephrase your question.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: It has happened in this place before, and the previous Speaker has done that. Ms Cheyne.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Are we all settled down, members?

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, can you update us on concessions generally available in the broader context of how stamp duty is also reducing for Canberrans generally?

Mrs Dunne: I still have got a point of order. Madam Speaker, on the point of order, the question was about rates concessions for elderly people and any bringing in of stamp duty is clearly not in conformity with the original two questions.

MADAM SPEAKER: Even though an opportunity was provided, I will rule it out of order. I am probably still reflecting on your SLAB debate as well.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—aluminium cladding

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, has the government ordered or procured new cladding for the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children? If so, when did that order take place?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. No, not to my knowledge.

MS LAWDER: Minister, have there been additional safety measures implemented inside the hospital, as we have seen announced at the Queanbeyan hospital?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, there have been.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, can you guarantee that all visitors and patients in the women's and children's hospital will be safe until the new cladding is replaced, and can you outline the safety procedures that you have put in place?

MS FITZHARRIS: Madam Speaker, there were two quite distinctly different questions in that question. I would ask you to rule on whether I ought to answer both of them or just one.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mrs Dunne.

Mrs Dunne: There is no point of order.

Ms Cody: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order.

Ms Cody: There would seem to be two questions coming out of that question, Madam

Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister for Health, can you respond to the question and focus on the safety of the cladding.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes. Based on all the advice I have received from within both ACT Health and ACT Fire & Rescue, who have stated publicly that the building is safe, based on all of that advice from the experts, yes, I can reassure the Canberra community that they will be safe in the Centenary hospital.

Light rail—Mitchell

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for transport. Minister, when will there be a light rail stop in Mitchell?

Mr Barr: If it had been you lot, never.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Stop the clock. It is a very jovial question time. If we can, I will ask the minister to respond to Mr Milligan's question.

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Milligan for the question and the Chief Minister for his very succinct answer to that question. As has been indicated for a number of years now, the light rail stage 1 route is future-proofed for a stop at Mitchell. There was considerable consultation undertaken at the time.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS FITZHARRIS: Of all the champions of light rail stops on the other side of the chamber—Alistair Coe, the champion of light rail for his own electorate; Mr Milligan, the member for Yerrabi—I don't recall anybody opposite ever advocating for a Mitchell stop.

Mr Hanson: Mrs Dunne probably did.

MS FITZHARRIS: I recall them advocating for tearing up the contract. My apologies, Madam Speaker, Mrs Dunne did advocate for light rail. That is right. But, as has been discussed, as has been stated for a number of years now, the stage 1 construction of light rail is future-proofed for a stop in Mitchell, at the corner of Flemington Road and Sandford Street. There may well be an opportunity to further explore that over the coming years. I look forward to continuing discussions with the Mitchell businesses about that issue.

MR MILLIGAN: Do the thousands of people who work in Mitchell and the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of economic activity generated in Mitchell warrant a light rail stop?

MS FITZHARRIS: According to the opposition, no: no businesses warranted any light rail infrastructure. No businesses in Canberra warranted investment in major

transport infrastructure, according to the opposition. I will continue to have conversations. Clearly the government made a decision around the Mitchell stop which was important, and that was to future-proof a light rail stop.

MR COE: What other services will be offered for people in Mitchell if bus services to the city are no longer going to be in existence?

MS FITZHARRIS: The work to integrate the bus network with the light rail network is underway. I expect that broader community engagement on that issue will be able to start in the next couple of months and I look forward to having those conversations with the community and with stakeholders about accessibility of the Mitchell business precinct. I would note that currently public transport patronage to Mitchell is actually very low, and I can provide further data on that to the Assembly perhaps tomorrow after question time.

Economy—AAA credit rating

MS CODY: My question is to the Chief Minister. International ratings agency Standard & Poor's has recently reaffirmed the territory's AAA credit rating. What does having a AAA credit rating signify about our economy?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Cody for the question. For those who are not across the detail of a AAA credit rating, it is only assigned to an entity that has "extremely strong capacity to meet its financial commitments". This is the highest possible credit rating assigned by international ratings agencies. S&P has had a look at the wide range of indicators in the territory budget, including our forward investment plans, our revenue-to-spending and debt-to-revenue ratios, and the steady path back to balance that we have held to for the last five budget updates. S&P's decision to reaffirm the territory's AAA credit rating, having reviewed our forward budget plans, confirms that we are effectively managing the territory's budget. It also confirms that our borrowings are reasonable and manageable relative to our investment in city-building assets and infrastructure. It also reinforces that we have made sensible use of the territory's balance sheet to keep Canberra's economy growing to keep Canberrans in work during what have been challenging economic times. The S&P report makes it clear that the only real risk on the horizon for the ACT is the commonwealth government. The negative outlook on the ACT's credit rating reflects the potential for a downgrade of the commonwealth's rating, because no Australian state or territory can hold a credit rating higher than the Australian government. This would see, if the Australian government's credit rating were downgraded, all states and territories downgraded with it. But we have experience of managing economic risks posed by Liberal governments, and we will continue to manage the territory budget in a manner that is consistent with this AAA rating.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, can I seek your guidance before we go to a supplementary question, please? Standing order 59 relates to anticipation of discussion. I know that over time we have significantly watered down this standing order, but the issue of the AAA credit rating is on the notice paper and has been listed for debate tomorrow. I wonder whether, in light of that, a question about the AAA credit rating is out of order, given the reasonable time rule that is in the anticipation debate.

MADAM SPEAKER: I understand there have been interest in and comments about rates this morning. Is there not a motion on the notice paper for tomorrow about rates?

Mrs Dunne: That is my point.

MADAM SPEAKER: As I understand it, the question from Mr Coe was around rates, and there is a motion on rates tomorrow in private members' business. So the same rule would apply.

Mrs Dunne: Quite possibly. I do not know that this is something you necessarily would need to rule on now but perhaps it is something to reflect upon. There has been some change in thinking in the Assembly about this. If people are asking questions today about something which is clearly on the notice paper for tomorrow, and that applies across the board, it is something to think about.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is a point I will take.

MR BARR: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, in the 11 years I have been in this place the interpretation of the standing orders has certainly evolved from what was a very strict rule that you could not even go near the subject area to a much more liberal—with a small “l”—approach to these issues. That is why we did not raise a point of order in relation to Mr Coe's question which related to a matter that he himself put on the notice paper for tomorrow. Obviously you will need to reflect on these matters but, from the government's perspective, I do not think that a very strict interpretation of that standing order assists in the free flow of debate in the Assembly. The practice that has more recently evolved gets the balance right.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I think that was part of my comment as well—that there were questions that were already reflected. The members have had discussions with their whip about reviewing standing order 117 and getting some clarity about that, and about 118, so we can throw 59 into the mix. But this question will be asked and answered.

MR BARR: Thank you Madam Speaker. The benefits of maintaining a AAA credit rating—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: We can mark 12 September as the funniest day, I think.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: I can generally predict the opposition's questions too.

MADAM SPEAKER: You are on your feet for a supplementary, Ms Cody.

MS CODY: Yes. The Chief Minister would like one. I am pretty sure that the Chief Minister would like a supplementary, Madam Speaker. And I would really like to hear his response this time. I note that the other side were talking all the way through

Mr Barr's previous response, so it would be good to hear this one.

Chief Minister, what are the benefits to the territory of maintaining a AAA credit rating?

MR BARR: Ms Cody, I am grateful that you asked. Clearly our maintaining a AAA credit rating demonstrates that the government is managing the territory's finances and our economy in a responsible way. And it clearly signals to global investors that the ACT is a stable, safe and low risk investment destination providing access to a large investor base. The AAA credit rating shows that the government can deliver infrastructure and services to the community at a lower cost than would otherwise be the case.

Whilst many factors contribute to the rate of interest that we pay on our borrowings, it has been estimated that having the highest possible credit rating reduces our borrowing costs by between five and 10 basis points. That is somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 saved annually for each \$100 million that we borrow.

As one of only three AAA rated states or territories in Australia, and one of just 26 subnational jurisdictions around the world outside of the US, to hold this rating, our credit rating is also a useful selling point for attracting inbound investment to our city.

We have ambitious but very achievable plans for our city. We are showing inbound investors who are considering delivering major projects here that they can look at our AAA credit rating as one of several very positive signals about the strength of the city's economy and the soundness of our city's public finances.

MR PETTERSSON: What factors have contributed to the territory maintaining its AAA credit rating even while expanding investment in Canberra's health, education and transport infrastructure?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Standard & Poor's have said, "The ACT's financial management will successfully deliver its infrastructure plans, including private-public partnerships and the asbestos eradication scheme, while containing debt levels."

It says that the government has "successfully addressed a number of challenges, including the global financial crisis in 2008-09 and the commonwealth government's fiscal consolidation," as well as "addressing the substantial costs involved in remediating asbestos issues in private dwellings within budget." And our work "on reforming the ACT's tax system towards a more stable income source and away from volatile conveyance duties," and our plan to fully fund our superannuation liability by 2030 have been confirmed and affirmed by S&P as "credible".

The quickest way that we could lose our credit rating, of course, would be, for example, to seek to rip up a contract for a major infrastructure project. That would be one way that we could do that. But there is only one party in this chamber that has taken to an election that policy approach of ripping up not only a contract but the territory's credit rating. We saw the result of that.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Before we go to further questions without notice, I want to acknowledge in the chamber Mr Hargreaves, a former member of this place. Welcome back!

Questions without notice Government—citizens juries

MR WALL: My question is to the Chief Minister. The citizens jury on compulsory third-party insurance will, according to the government's frequently asked questions handbook, "hear from a range of experts and consider evidence, including the community feedback and survey results". Feedback will be published online and the jury's deliberations will be open to the public but places will be limited. Chief Minister, will all of the evidence provided to the citizens jury, including presentations by experts, be made public online, and if not, why not?

MR BARR: It would certainly be my hope. We cannot control the format or nature of every single piece of evidence or contribution that would be made. But where people present, and do so in a format that would allow for that information to go on the website, I have no problem with that.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, will the jury's deliberations be made public on line or in any other form?

MR BARR: Again, perhaps subject to reasonable limitations of technology and capability; I do not think it will be a *Big Brother* episode but, again, members of the jury will no doubt have a range of discussions and deliberations and reach a conclusion.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, what other processes, in addition to making the evidence public, are in place to ensure that the information provided to the citizens jury is accurate, balanced and comprehensive?

MR BARR: These are matters that can, of course, be subject to a variety of different opinions. In this day and age there is even conjecture over what constitutes a fact or what might be real news or what might be fake news. But I am certain that in this process we have given the stakeholders the variety of opportunities that there will be for all the different perspectives in this debate to be put before the jury. This Assembly, and indeed the broader Canberra community, can have confidence that the jury members will be able to hear from a wide variety of perspectives.

Will it be possible to verify every single fact contained within every utterance of everyone in the context of this debate? That might be a challenge that is beyond anyone but then that, I think, would apply to almost any public policy debate in this city, this country or the world at this point in time.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call questions without notice, I will just go back to Mrs Dunne's point on standing order 59. The Clerk has brought to my attention that

there was once, under standing order 117(f), the following: questions may be asked to elicit information regarding business pending on the notice paper but discussion must not be anticipated. That was struck out in 2008. Again, I will take your comment. I think it will go to both sides. It may limit where you want to go as well.

Transport—roadside drug testing

MR HANSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, it has been announced that New South Wales will become the first state in Australia to include cocaine in roadside drug testing. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's national wastewater analysis showed the ACT to be in the top three cocaine-using jurisdictions in the country, reportedly "far above" all other states. Attorney-General, what studies have you done on the implementation of cocaine testing for drivers in the ACT?

MR RATTENBURY: Madam Speaker, I have responsibility for roadside drug testing in the ACT.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, personally; it is a big job. I will take Mr Hanson's question on notice and provide him with the details of any studies that have been done or any examination of that matter by the ACT public service.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you be reviewing the ACT laws in light of the new decision? Will you make any review public?

MR RATTENBURY: Certainly, I have been actively considering this issue of roadside random drug testing broadly in the context of both concerns that have been raised by people about thresholds and what the appropriate thresholds are for roadside drug testing; and also substances that are not currently included.

There are a number of substances that are not currently included that can inhibit a driver's ability behind the wheel, including some legal prescription drugs that can inhibit people's capabilities. This is a live issue within the government and I will be happy to inform the Assembly if the government does form a view to make any change in that space.

MR PARTON: Minister, is this another case where New South Wales residents are going to be protected by laws but ACT residents are not?

MR RATTENBURY: I am happy—as Mr Parton was not here at the time—to remind members that it was actually because of the Greens and the Liberal Party, who first passed these laws in a combined effort in the 2008-12 Assembly, that the ACT now has random drug testing.

Mr Hanson: You've changed, Shane.

MR RATTENBURY: I think Mr Hanson is the one who has changed. He used to be able to do sensible policy. Certainly the ACT government is actually very vigilant on

this issue and we will continue to monitor the latest developments. We want to improve road safety for people in the territory and I think that there are a range of drugs which need to be examined for their impact on road safety, just as there are other matters where we need to be constantly vigilant in this space.

Transport—Canberra to Sydney rail service

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the support for upgrading the Canberra-Sydney rail service.

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. I can advise the Assembly that since I took that somewhat slow train ride to Sydney earlier this year, I have received a significant number of letters and expressions of support from Canberrans and from New South Wales residents along that rail corridor, bemoaning what is a 19th century rail service that currently exists between Canberra and Sydney.

I am pleased to advise the Assembly that there is significant support from Canberra region councils, including Queanbeyan-Palerang and the Yass Valley Council, for this service to be upgraded. A more efficient and timely rail linkage for Canberra and the surrounding region would create significant benefits for our community; it would increase tourism, increase job opportunities and make it even more attractive to live and invest in our region.

I recently discussed this issue with the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, and she agreed that both of our cities would stand to benefit from better transportation links. I am also very welcoming of recent comments by Premier Berejiklian supporting the prospect of improved eastern seaboard rail links. The ACT government is actively engaging with the New South Wales government to build the case for an improved rail link.

The possibility of a higher speed Sydney-Canberra rail link has long been discussed by the ACT, New South Wales and commonwealth governments. But, let's be frank, there has been a lot of talk and very little action. Now is the time to act given that the commonwealth's national rail program is slated to invest \$10 billion over the next decade in major rail projects.

MR PETTERSSON: What are the next steps in upgrading the rail line?

MR BARR: The ACT government will continue to work closely with New South Wales, in particular the New South Wales transport and infrastructure minister, Andrew Constance, whom I met with at the end of that slow trip to Sydney earlier in the year, to put forward a joint ACT-New South Wales proposal to the commonwealth for funding from its national rail program.

We are also working with the New South Wales government on possible investment in new high-speed tilt trains and associated infrastructure upgrades, which would at least bring this service into the late 20th century. An improved rail service to Sydney will require significant investment on the New South Wales side of the border, and I am keen to work with New South Wales and the commonwealth to make this

necessary upgrade a reality.

Both the ACT and New South Wales governments are very supportive of the Canberra region as a true region, with Canberra at its heart, but with the surrounding local government areas strengthening their economies. Improving rail links between Canberra and Sydney will certainly help make this happen. I am confident that we will be able to speed up this rail link to get people and freight moving between our capital cities.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how will both Canberra and the City of Sydney benefit from a better connection?

MR BARR: I discussed the rail line at last month's Council of Capital City Lord Mayors meeting. Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, was enthusiastic about the economic opportunities of improved services between Canberra and Sydney. Upgrading the track to suit more modern trains would cut the journey time down from the four to 4½ hours it currently is, making rail between Sydney and Canberra competitive with current driving, bus or flying options.

This opens up the door to increased labour market movement and growth, tourism opportunities and better business connections for Canberra. Improving this strategic transport link would support economic growth and export opportunities for small businesses in the Canberra region and, importantly, provide genuine transport choices for people travelling between the national capital and Australia's largest city.

The New South Wales government's south-east and tablelands regional plan recognises a connected and borderless Canberra region with our city at its heart. A better connection to Sydney will help Canberra achieve recognition as the world-class events destination that we have outlined in our 2025 major events strategy. We will continue to advocate for a rail service befitting a 21st century nation and for the benefits to be gained by Canberra, Sydney and the surrounding regions.

Waste recycling facility—government shareholder status

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 2 August you advised the Assembly:

... in order to ensure effective commercial management of Icon Water, its shareholder Ministers provide approval only on a narrow range of significant decisions such as board appointments and major purchases or divestments;

Chief Minister, do you regard the Fyshwick waste to energy proposal, in light of the proponent being Actew/AGL of which Icon Water is the owner, to be a major purchase?

MR BARR: It certainly has potential to be but it is at the early stages of its consideration.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, why is this not a conflict of interest?

MR BARR: Because we have a statutorily independent planning system.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, to date what involvement have you had with the proposal for the Fyshwick power facility, as Chief Minister, Treasurer or as a shareholder minister?

MR BARR: I have read about it. I have been invited to attend a briefing in relation to the proposal. That would be about the extent of it to date.

ACTION bus service—timetable

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Can the minister please update the Assembly on Transport Canberra's new bus timetable that will commence in October?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Cheyne very much for the question and her ongoing interest in Canberra's transport network. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the new Transport Canberra bus timetable will start on Saturday, 7 October. Updates to the weekday and weekend timetables across the network are the first in a series of improvements as we progress towards the introduction of light rail and an integrated public transport network. The focus in this update has been on more services and more connections for more passengers, more rapid routes and more services on the weekends.

This government is delivering on our integrated public transport plan. We went to the last ACT election with a clear time frame for the delivery of new rapid bus services right across Canberra. That is why I am really pleased that this will include, come October, the new black rapid in Canberra's north, the new green rapid throughout south Canberra and the extension of the blue rapid bus services to the Lanyon marketplace. We are also providing passengers with an opportunity to use these new rapids for free during the first two months.

October will also see the introduction of new public transport infrastructure, with the Dickson interchange opening on Cape Street in Dickson. This precinct will continue to grow as the light rail stop will come on line and urban renewal will see the reimagining of the old Dickson registration office. The area will truly be a showcase of transport-oriented development.

In the lead-up to the timetable change, Transport Canberra will continue to provide more information to passengers on changes and more opportunities for them to travel more frequently around the city, and this will include information on Transport Canberra's website, the ability to review your travel options online and customer service officers available to assist right across the network.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what improvements are being made to the rapid bus service?

MS FITZHARRIS: We are continuing to build on the rapid bus network started under this Labor government, with the red and the blue rapids the most frequently used services in Canberra. We will be introducing the new black rapid and the new

green rapid in October.

The introduction of the black rapid will see changes to the 250 route, with services every 15 minutes or better. The service will run via Aikman Drive, providing the fastest possible connection between the Belconnen and Gungahlin town centres; connection to the new University of Canberra public hospital, opening next year; and, of course, the UC student campus.

The introduction of the green rapid will see changes to the current routes 4 and 5. The green rapid, formerly route 6, has been designed to provide faster connections from Woden and the city via Barton, Kingston and Manuka. Connecting to the green rapids will ensure south Canberra access to the Woden town centre, Canberra Hospital, Reid CIT and Fyshwick.

There are also important changes for rapid buses on the weekends. The blue rapid, the 300, will now run seven days a week between Belconnen, the city, Woden and Tuggeranong, providing faster journeys, particularly to Woden, city and Belconnen, for passengers travelling to and from the town centre as well as a seven day a week service to the brand-new Wanniasa park and ride.

The route 950 between Gungahlin and the city will change to the red rapid 200, so we now have a red rapid available on the weekends as well as on weekdays. On the weekends it will be every 15 minutes. The significant increase in service levels will ensure that there is capacity to meet the demand along Flemington Road and Northbourne Avenue as we build towards the introduction of light rail services.

MR STEEL: Minister, how will the network improve travel times and connections to meet the needs of our growing city?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Steel for the supplementary question. The network planners within Transport Canberra have been working hard to review the bus network and make improvements and adjustments. These improvements will ensure our most popular services, including the blue and red rapids, continue to keep up with increasing demand. The blue rapid between Belconnen, the city, Woden and Tuggeranong will change to run seven days a week; and the red rapid 200 between Gungahlin and the city will also now run seven days a week.

To support the seven-day alignment of blue rapid services through Tuggeranong, the route 971 will be extended through Erindale to the Woden town centre, ensuring good service levels through Erindale bus station as well as better access to Woden for residents of Isabella Plains, Calwell and Theodore. For residents in Kaleen and Giralang, changes to weekend routes will further align to weekday services through the introduction of the routes 930 and 931. Kaleen and Giralang locals will be able to catch more convenient public transport every day of the week, particularly to Belconnen and Dickson, for more connections to the red and blue rapids.

The popular free city loop has carried over 114,000 passengers since commencing in July last year. To ensure the continued reliability of this service, it will be moved from Northbourne Avenue and continue to connect the city centre with the ANU, New Acton and Braddon. Lastly, significantly, the Weston line route 182 will extend to

service the new suburb of Denman Prospect. This will ensure that residents in Molonglo continue to have access to Cooleman Court, the Woden town centre and the city.

Greyhound racing—transition package

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, I have spoken with local greyhound breeders and trainers who are concerned that this government's treatment and demonisation of the industry is having adverse effects on families and individuals. I have some deep concerns for some of those individuals. Minister, how many people have made contact with the greyhound transition team?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for the question. In relation to the transition team, I will take the specifics on notice regarding how many people have made contact so far. Certainly, I would take this opportunity again to encourage those people who are going to be transitioning out of the industry to make contact with the team.

I note that there is some significant time still available for that transition process and I would certainly encourage people to note—and I draw this to the attention of the Assembly, Mr Parton and, through him, the people involved in the industry—that one of the key areas of support under the transition taskforce is counselling support, personally offered support, to make sure that the attention is provided to those people in the way that is most appropriate to them.

MR PARTON: Minister, when will this government take real responsibility for the stresses that they have placed on individuals and families who are making an honest living or participating in an honest, legal activity?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for the supplementary question, noting that it is a matter that I have answered on a number of occasions. What we are doing is moving to end the industry. The government is taking responsibility for the work by way of establishment of the transition task force and ensuring that there is a range of support provisions made for people, and I encourage them to make contact with the task force.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, will you reconsider the details of the transition package, given that few to no trainers are taking up the government's package?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. With respect to the premise of the question, I do not have the information at this stage to be able to accept it, but we are working with the transition task force in being able to develop a range of services. There is still quite a significant amount of time available, and I do encourage people to make contact with the task force between now and the time that the task force support will end, which is 30 June next year.

Canberra Hospital—risk assessment report

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, in your statement delivered this morning, you outlined 15 groupings of works under the upgrade and maintain ACT Health assets initiative. You said that your statement was given in response to the Assembly's motion passed on 2 August 2017.

Minister, the Assembly's motion specifically called for an update on the cost, progress and time lines to fix each of the extreme and high risk issues identified in the report, not to put them into groups. Minister, will you table, by the close of business today, the detail required by the Assembly's motion of 2 August? If not, why not, and will you table it at a later date if not today?

MS FITZHARRIS: I think that Mrs Dunne may have missed an addition that I made to that statement at the end of presentation of statements by ministers. I inadvertently did not include information on the costs, and I made a subsequent statement on that.

Given the scale of the initiative and the range of information that I have provided under each of those packages, I do feel that I have met the requirements of the motion passed by the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what was the identified extreme risk referred to in your statement this morning that has been downgraded to a high risk?

MS FITZHARRIS: That is the windows.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what measures were put in place to ensure the safety of patients, staff and visitors to the Canberra Hospital, both internally and externally, to justify that downgrade?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am afraid I did not quite understand the question. If Ms Lawder could repeat it?

MS LAWDER: What measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of patients, staff and visitors, externally and internally, to justify the downgrade of the window from extreme to high risk? How did you justify downgrading it?

MS FITZHARRIS: In my statement today I answered Ms Lawder's question about the measures that have been taken to downgrade that risk, and that is to have locking of the windows unless for access to relevant balconies. But I reject the assumption that it has any impact on the safety of staff, visitors or patients at Canberra Hospital. I did outline those measures in the statement earlier this morning.

Children and young people—foster care

MR STEEL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Youth. This week is Foster and Kinship Care Week. How does foster and kinship care contribute to supporting Canberra's most vulnerable children and young people?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his very important question and his interest in this topic. We mark Foster and Kinship Care Week from 10 to 16 September to recognise and thank foster and kinship carers for their important contribution to our community.

Foster carers and kinship carers are the backbone of our out-of-home system. Carers open their homes and their hearts to some of the most vulnerable children and young

people in our community. In fact, I encourage anyone who has not yet watched last night's *Australian Story* about two amazing foster parents who made a real difference in many children's lives to take the opportunity to do so.

Where children cannot live safely with their birth families it is important that we find them a safe, stable and loving home where they can safely grow and thrive, whether that is for a short period or forever.

Some carers become carers by choice. For others it is about stepping in to help family members experiencing difficulties. No matter whether a person chooses to become a carer or caring chooses them, all carers step up to a vital role and it is important that we support them.

As you would be aware, Madam Speaker, A step up for our kids introduced a range of additional supports and training for carers. In particular, the independent kinship and foster care advocacy support service, delivered by Carers ACT, provides independent support and advice to assist carers and to resolve issues with service providers and child and youth protection services.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the ACT government to thank the foster carers and kinship carers in our community who provide a safe, stable and loving home to children and young people when they are most in need.

MR STEEL: Minister, how are the ACT government and the ACT Together consortium working to recruit and support foster and kinship carers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his supplementary. The out-of-home care consortium established under A step up for our kids—ACT Together—is responsible for recruiting foster carers in the ACT. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that they are now halfway to their 2017 target of recruiting 80 new foster carers, with 40 new carers so far stepping up to care for some of Canberra's most vulnerable children.

ACT Together, led by Barnardos, has a dedicated carer recruitment team that has developed an innovative carer recruitment strategy. This includes promoting foster care through several mediums, including social media, radio, print, stalls and information sessions.

There are various types of foster care, from short-term emergency care to becoming a permanent carer. I would encourage anyone thinking about taking on this rewarding role to contact 1300 WE FOSTER to have a chat. Recently, a new committee has been established by child and youth protection services and ACT Together to focus on carer wellbeing. The committee's membership includes carers with lived experience of kinship and foster care.

As I mentioned, new advocacy support and engagement services under A step up for our kids are also important elements of the service system. Carers ACT's kinship and foster care advocacy service, which I mentioned earlier, complements our supports for children, young people and birth families, including through the children and young people engagement support service operated by the CREATE Foundation, and birth

family advocacy support services operated by Australian Red Cross.

These services support the very important goal of families, carers, children and young people, community organisations and government working together collaboratively to make the best decisions for the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person when they need our support the most.

MS ORR: Minister, how is ACT government working with the Red Cross to support families who are engaged with the child and youth protection system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. As I mentioned, new advocacy, support and engagement services under A step up for our kids are a critical element of the system. The birth family advocacy support service operated by the Australian Red Cross provides independent information and support to birth families with children in care or with children at risk of entering care. The aim of this service is for parents to be supported and empowered to engage with the care system in an informed way.

Coming into contact with the child protection system can be a stressful and traumatic time for a parent. Having a better understanding of what may happen during the process goes a long way towards making this extremely fraught time a little easier. This includes information on what parents' rights are, the rights of their children, and the legal obligations of Child and Youth Protection Services. That is why CYPS has worked with the Australian Red Cross and the Women's Legal Centre to develop new "Working together for kids" guides.

These guides, which replace a previous single book, have been made available in hard copy and online to inform families about the child protection process and the roles and responsibilities of those involved. These guides provide straightforward, accessible information about child concern reports and what happens when one is made; going to court and working to reunite families; what happens when children are in care; how parents can represent themselves; and how to raise concerns and make complaints within the system. These five guides are an invaluable resource not just for families but also for any agency that provides support to families navigating the child protection system.

Children and young people—protection

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Youth. Minister, what specific lessons have been learned and implemented following the Glanfield inquiry?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: To start with, I would refer Mrs Kikkert to a quite comprehensive statement that I made during the last sitting of the Assembly where I outlined the things that have been done to respond to the five specific Glanfield inquiry recommendations that relate to child protection. One of the incidents that, unfortunately, led to the establishment of the Glanfield inquiry was, of course, the tragic death of Bradyn Dillon and I want to take this opportunity, again, on behalf of the government, to convey our deepest sympathies to Bradyn's mother, Rachel, and the rest of her family.

As Bradyn's mother said recently, domestic violence is too often the cause of children being unsafe in their own home. That is why the ACT government is putting so much effort into ensuring it takes a system-wide approach to addressing family violence. And I have to say the ACT community is also responding with increased vigilance. We are seeing this through an increase in child concern reports and we have recently responded to that with extra resources, including almost \$44 million committed in the 2017-18 budget.

In the wake of the Glanfield inquiry of course, the government responded to that report and two other reports with a comprehensive \$21 million safer families package which was further supplemented in the most recent budget. Among the many other measures, the safer families package included almost \$2½ million for enhanced child protection case management and coordination, building on work that was already underway. Part of this funding was for improved quality assurance through independent case analysis, drawing on lessons from other jurisdictions. The case analysis team provides independent analysis of individual cases at key decision points and identifies good practice, practice concerns and knowledge gaps.

At a systemic level we have established a child and youth protection quality assurance and improvement committee which includes members from other jurisdictions who offer a fresh set of eyes to identify areas for improvement in case management.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, with due respect to Bradyn Dillon's mother, Rachel Jones, when will the government release information about what was known about her child, Bradyn Dillon, in the weeks and months prior to his death?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Mrs Kikkert is well aware, there are very strict privacy provisions under the Children and Young People Act, and I am not in a position to provide any information about the Bradyn Dillon matter.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, has the matter of Bradyn Dillon been referred to the Children and Young People Death Review Committee? If not, when will it be?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for her supplementary question. As I am sure she is well aware, the Children and Young People Death Review Committee reviews all deaths of children and young people in the ACT.

Government—gambling harm minimisation

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, what outcomes does the government seek from the upcoming gambling harm minimisation round table?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for her question. I am convening the round table this Friday to give the government a solid evidence base for introducing—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: new and more effective harm minimisation measures in clubs. The

government is absolutely committed to reducing the impact of problem gambling in this community.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: We have been clear in our election policies—

Ms Orr: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please, minister. Ms Orr, a point of order.

Ms Orr: As the minister needs to address you, I am finding it quite hard to hear his response with Mr Hanson's interjections.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, that would be a reminder not to interject so the minister can be heard. Minister.

MR RAMSAY: We have been clear in our election policies and in our commitments and we have been following through in the past year. That includes reducing the number of electronic gaming machines to 4,000 by 2020.

Alongside new policies, the government will continue to look for ways to improve the effectiveness of our current framework for regulating gambling. Just some of the key questions that the round table will be considering on Friday are: what additional harm minimisation rules can we adopt from other jurisdictions? Are our self-exclusion rules for clubs strong enough to help problem gamblers to get help? Can clubs support staff to identify and respond appropriately to individuals at risk of gambling harm?

The round table will develop information about our options, including the implementation of bet limits and pre-commitments on gaming machines in the territory. It will examine evidence about the effectiveness of different harm minimisation measures and practical issues with implementation. I am confident that this round table will help shape the future direction of gambling harm reduction in the ACT.

MS ORR: Minister, how will the community's expectations and views be represented at the round table?

MR RAMSAY: Canberrans have made it particularly clear that they expect this government to treat harm minimisation as a priority and to deliver robust and effective reforms. Problem gambling has devastating consequences for individuals, for families and for the community. Courageous individuals, including Professor Laurie Brown, have come forward and shared detailed and personal accounts of the effects of problem gambling. Their examples show us why it is critical to keep working towards a stronger harm minimisation framework.

The round table will bring together industry knowledge, expertise in harm minimisation, and community views on gambling harm. It has been structured to ensure that the group focuses on meeting our community's demand for better harm minimisation and that the viewpoints and the expertise necessary to achieve results

are there.

Representatives of the clubs sector, including Canberra Community Clubs, Clubs ACT and the independent clubs, will be attending. Community groups, including organisations that assist people and families affected by problem gambling, and gambling reform advocates, will be there. There will be academic experts in harm minimisation to provide knowledge of the latest evidence and research. Most importantly, individuals with lived experience of problem gambling will be attending and sharing their experiences and viewpoints. The government will continue to encourage—

Mrs Dunne: You've got lived experience of problem gambling. It's how you get into government.

Mr Hanson: You're addicted to the pokie money, aren't you?

Ms Orr: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am about to call Mr Hanson and Mrs Dunne to order. The interjections continue; the volume goes up. Enough is enough. I cannot hear the minister responding. Even though there are only 23 seconds left, I expect that he be able to be heard. Do you have anything to add, Ms Orr?

Ms Orr: No, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR RAMSAY: The government will continue to welcome and to encourage the engagement of those who are directly affected by gambling harm, as well as organisations working to reduce gambling harm, and the industry, including the clubs sector, as the government takes forward this important work.

MS CODY: Minister, how will the government incorporate the recommendations of the round table into its current framework?

MR RAMSAY: The government will be looking closely at the evidence about our gambling industry, and ways to improve our legislation. The round table will provide the necessary foundation to create enhanced measures. Where there is evidence to support making changes to our laws and our policies, we will take action. We have a track record of taking action quickly and effectively. An example of this is our work on EFTPOS limitations. In August this government introduced and the Assembly passed legislation to restrict cash withdrawals from EFTPOS—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Cody: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat. Ms Cody, is there a point of order?

Ms Cody: A point of order. I am finding it very difficult to hear Mr Ramsay's response, as I have all day today. The opposition have been ridiculously noisy.

Ms Lawder interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder, I think you were interjecting then, so I will ask you to be quiet. There is a recurrent, an eternal, request for you, Mr Hanson. Minister, do you want to resume, with some level of silence, in the 59 seconds you have?

MR RAMSAY: We can hope that there will be a level of silence. That legislation was a direct response to the concerns raised earlier this year. The round table was established by the government to support a broad harm minimisation agenda by focusing on the regulation of gaming at clubs. The people who will attend the round table will bring industry, community and expert viewpoints. The process will give us an evidence base for taking action.

It is important to recognise that this round table's findings are part of a range of consultation, investigation and reform processes. As you are aware, Madam Speaker, my directorate is currently circulating a paper on options to reduce the number of electronic gaming machine authorisations to 4,000. I anticipate ongoing consultation and action in this area as we continue to address the issue together. We are seeking community views on mandatory pre-commitments and bet limits on gaming machines at the Canberra Casino. This is a government that acts and will continue to do so.

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