



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 13 February 2018

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Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, the Attorney-General is absent from question time today. I will endeavour to assist members in the attorney's portfolios.

Questions without notice

Health—elective surgery

MR COE: The question I have is for the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, a few days ago, on 10 February, the *Canberra Times* reported that there are significant hidden waiting times for patients to see a specialist before they are booked for elective surgery. Some patients have to wait up to five years to see a specialist before they can get an appointment and in turn have to wait for a year further for an operation. The *Canberra Times* noted that Victoria posts quarterly updates on waiting times to see specialists in the public system but “An ACT Health spokesman could not provide ... waiting times to see specialists in the ACT”. Minister, what is the extent of the hidden waiting times here in the ACT to see a specialist?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Coe for the question. Like him, I read the article that appeared in the *Canberra Times* on the weekend. It is certainly a priority of this government to improve access and timeliness of access to all health services. Access to surgery has been boosted today, but I am particularly focused also on making sure that every person who is referred, both within the ACT and, of course, in the surrounding region, to a specialist in ACT Health is immediately triaged and will be contacted by ACT Health within a 10-day period to inform them of when they may see a specialist. We want to make sure, of course, that they will be contacted within 10 days of that referral being received by ACT Health from their GP. Then they will be informed of the time that it may take them to see their specialist depending on the clinical urgency. It is also important to note that not everybody who will see a specialist will necessarily be on the elective surgery waiting list. For example, in the specialty of urology only approximately 30 per cent of patients who may see a specialist will then go on to receive surgery.

On access to data, that is a great question and one I am pleased to answer. As has been an important part of the ACT-wide health data review, a very important pillar of the six pillars of that review is the information that we provide to consumers about ACT health data. That is an important component of the data review which will be completed late next month. I look forward to informing the Assembly on progress in that review and also subsequently the recommendations of the review and the government's response. Access to timely information for consumers is a priority for me.

MR COE: Minister, why is the ACT government unable to provide waiting times to see specialists in the ACT system? Does the data actually exist? If so, will you report on it in the future?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, we will be, as part of the data review referred to in my previous answer, looking very closely at significantly increasing the data that we provide to health professionals across the territory, and notably to those within ACT Health as well as, importantly, access to consumers in the broader community.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how many Canberrans have died while waiting to see a specialist or to have their elective surgery in the last three years?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am tempted to say that that outrageous question should not be dignified with a response and I will—

Mrs Dunne interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, please! You have concluded your answer?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Health—nurse-led walk-in centres

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, on 31 January 2018 the *Canberra Times* reported that you had said that the government's investment in more nurse-led walk-in centres would “ease pressure on emergency rooms”. Minister, in your answer to question on notice 611 to me you said:

A direct correlation between hospital Emergency ... activity and Walk-in Centre ... activity is not possible, because the issue is multifactorial.

Minister, how do you know that the walk-in centres will ease pressure on emergency departments when you are unable to measure the correlation between the two?

MS FITZHARRIS: What we do know about walk-in centres is that the opposition spokeswoman thinks they are “a criminal waste of taxpayers' money”.

Mrs Dunne: I stand by that.

MS FITZHARRIS: I am very pleased to hear that, because this government believes that investment in nurse walk-in centres is important. For 36,000 patients—

Mrs Dunne: At \$188 dollars a throw—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, you asked a question. The minister is providing an answer. Please have respect and hear that in silence.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, my question was about whether they had the information to tell whether walk-in centres would ease the pressure on emergency departments. The minister has not answered that question or attempted to.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister has over a minute left, and there was a series of interjections, so the minister has a minute left to answer.

Mrs Dunne: On the point of order, there is a substantial body of ruling which says that it is out of order to use an answer to attack other parties' policies in this place, especially when this question is directly about this government's policy.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I recognise your experience in these matters but I

am not going to provide that as a point of order. The minister does have a minute left to answer the question.

MS FITZHARRIS: We know that increased access to primary healthcare services, which includes walk-in centres and GPs, does assist in taking pressure off emergency departments because it gives people another option.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what did the business case for existing walk-in clinics say about their impact on the presentation at emergency departments and on what basis was that analysis made?

MS FITZHARRIS: As indicated in my answer in response to a question on notice, it is multi-factorial. The health system is a complex system if people do not otherwise have an option to present to a nurse walk-in centre. I repeat that 36,000 Canberrans did in the previous year and I am looking forward to more Canberrans having access to walk-in centres in the Gungahlin region, in the Weston Creek region and also in the inner north. This government's commitment to nurse walk-in centres is absolute. We will continue to work with other stakeholders to make sure that we can integrate primary health care and get value for money for ACT residents.

MR WALL: Minister, what does the business case for the two new walk-in clinics say about their likely impact on presentations at emergency departments at the hospitals?

MS FITZHARRIS: They have not been fully completed yet, but we look forward to opening the Gungahlin walk-in centre later this year.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members of the opposition, please.

Budget—2017-18 update

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what does the 2017-18 budget update show about the strength of the ACT economy and the territory's improving financial position?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. It is indeed pleasing to see that the territory's nation-leading economic growth, the 10,000 new jobs that were created in our city last year, is flowing through to business confidence across the territory and that we are also seeing a very strong outcome for the territory budget.

Our economy expanded by 4.6 per cent last year. That is higher than was projected in the budget and we are expecting further growth of around four per cent this year. This means that the government's policy settings are working effectively in the ACT and that this is as a result of the settings of this government. When we—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, please, can you resume your seat? Alistair—sorry, Mr Coe; I do apologise—Leader of the Opposition. Mr Wall, I add you to the

list. Mr Hanson! Welcome to question time 2018, I say to members. How about a bit of silence from the bunkers of the opposition, thank you. Chief Minister.

MR BARR: It is also very pleasing to see that the territory's rate of population growth continues to increase. All of this would not be occurring if this government had not adopted the suite of policies that we have over the past few years. We remain very confident and optimistic about the territory's economic outlook over the forward estimates period. Indeed, the mid-year budget update reflects that confidence both in the economic forecasts and the territory's underlying fiscal position.

MS ORR: How is the government continuing to deliver on its election commitments and boost services for Canberrans through the budget update?

MR BARR: We have this week completed a further suite of election commitment delivery through the midyear update. Clearly, there have been significant investments in health and education infrastructure, as well as a range of municipal and community service investments.

The budget update delivers on more of our election commitments, including the rollout of laptops to students in ACT public high schools ahead of schedule, the recruitment of a new full ambulance crew to help meet rising demand in that area, strengthening our community engagement efforts, and, of course, an election commitment we made to upgrade the Mark Webber track.

We laid out a very big agenda at the last election, and we are delivering on that progressively through this parliamentary term. At the same time we are also strengthening the territory's budget position. This gives us capacity to invest more in front-line service delivery across the range of state and municipal service delivery responsibilities that we have. We look forward to delivering more surgeries this year and to continuing our very significant infrastructure program throughout 2018 and beyond.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, given that this is the sixth budget update in which the government has maintained a projected return to balance in 2018-19, does the government remain committed to delivering a balanced budget?

MR BARR: Yes, we are.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, last year we learned that there were large numbers of Indigenous clients waiting to be treated at drug and alcohol rehab centres in Canberra. Many have to travel interstate to get this treatment. Minister, how many clients have been treated at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm since it opened in August last year?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Milligan for his question and note that it is not a fact that many have to travel interstate. In fact, that has not been made clear to me. But, in terms of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, there have been 31 clients who have been referred or identified and approximately 20 applicants from the through care program

were interested in participating in the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. A five-week, non-residential program was delivered from 14 November to 14 December. Programs were delivered four days a week; they were offered to male and female clients aged between 18 and 40 years of age who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

There remains strong interest from clients to make meaningful changes. I will take the specific number of participants on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what has been the hold-up for accepting more clients at the bush healing farm?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am not aware there has been a hold-up. I will take the question on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, when will you address the need for an Indigenous residential drug and alcohol facility in the ACT to meet the needs of Canberrans?

MS FITZHARRIS: As I believe was discussed in last year's annual report hearings, residential detox and withdrawal facilities are something that we are giving consideration to.

Planning—Curtin master plan

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Urban Renewal and relates to master plans. Given the community panel engagement process undertaken by ACTPLA in relation to the draft Curtin master plan last year, when will the Curtin community be able to see the revised draft master plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. Indeed, the community panel process has worked well, I think, in this situation. We tried it, of course, in other situations, and it did not work well, but we are up for trying different communication models as we go forward in looking at master planning and other planning issues.

The directorate advised me on Monday that they are almost ready to finalise the master plan for the area. There are a few more additions to go in. We want to ensure that we have all of the community interest and comments on board before we finalise that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you have a supplementary, Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: I would really like to say: please answer my first question, because—

Members interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: I was actually about to stand up and take a point of order to say that: please answer the first question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, there is no point of order, unless you have something to add to that, minister?

Mr Gentleman: No.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: When can the community expect the draft Territory Plan variation which implements the Belconnen master plan, and, as I said, when can we expect to see the Curtin draft master plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: As soon as they are finalised.

MS LAWDER: Minister, can you provide advice on the finalisation date of other master plans that are not yet finished, including the Tharwa draft master plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: The Tharwa one is just about finished.

Mrs Dunne: They are all just about finished.

MR GENTLEMAN: These are detailed master planning processes that, of course, involve the future planning for these areas. The community wants to have a great deal of comment on these master plans. It is important that we bring that comment on board. We take knowledge of that comment and, of course, put that into the master planning process and any variations that occur after that.

Education—school device rollout

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the rollout of devices to ACT public secondary students?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Cody for the question. Yes, I can provide an update. In fact, last week the Chief Minister and I visited Kingsford Smith School in west Belconnen, where we were able to hand out some of the Acer Chromebooks that have been provided to year 7 and year 11 secondary public school students in the ACT. I can tell you that it was a really great experience for us to be able to be taken through, from the students who will be using the Chromebooks, exactly how the Chromebooks will work and how they will assist in the child's learning.

I have had very positive feedback already from the families of students who are receiving the Chromebooks as well as from students and teachers. In fact, yesterday I had a parent tell me how enthusiastic her daughter was to receive a Chromebook and how she was already planning her educational outcomes for the 2018 year. Some teachers have already put all of their work for the year on the Chromebook, available for the students. For some people, that might put them off a bit, but the students whom we were talking to were very happy to see the work already out and planned, and happy that they could go ahead and start using their Chromebooks effectively within their schools.

I will be visiting some other schools to check in with the Chromebook rollouts, 15,000 of them to year 7 and year 11 secondary students in public schools. I look forward to hearing stories from students who receive them.

MS CODY: Minister, how will these devices support student learning?

MS BERRY: It will change the way that students learn in our schools. It will give teachers the opportunity to support students as well. Teachers have already received a lot of training—in November last year—on how the Chromebooks will be able to support students, and teachers, in their learning in school. There will be more pedagogical support training this year on how to better use the Read&Write for Google programs in schools.

If you have not seen how Chromebook works, I have a display model in my office and I would be happy to have my office or somebody from the directorate take members through the Google Classrooms and how they help students learn academically, and also how they can connect with each other and with their teachers every step of the way as they learn their schoolwork and also do their homework activities on the Google Chromebooks.

Being able to have their work plans on their Chromebooks has been a really great outcome for students: to be able to see where they have come from, where they want to go to and how they can achieve even better outcomes with their academic and other learning experience in our schools.

MR STEEL: Why is the government providing devices to public secondary school students?

MS BERRY: At the very forefront of the delivery of this excellent education election commitment is the very strong focus on equity to ensure that every student in year seven to 11 in public schools gets the same access to technological-assisted learning no matter what their background, that every family will not have to have the financial burden of purchasing a device or even having to decide what device would be the most appropriate and that every teacher will not have to be an expert across a number of devices. That will free up their time to spend with the children doing what they do best, giving our children the best education possible.

Health—ministerial priorities

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, I refer to an article in the *Canberra Times* on 2 January this year in which you said:

... as minister I don't need to know everything that's happening. That is why there are seven and a half thousand people working in health. I see my role as providing clear priorities for health ...

Minister, how can you set clear priorities for health when you are unaware of the key issues in your portfolio?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am aware of the key priorities in my portfolio.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why have you not known about key issues in your portfolio including data, poor levels of maintenance, waiting times in the emergency department

and flammable cladding?

MS FITZHARRIS: I have known about all those issues and I have responded with urgency to them.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, has your lack of knowledge of your portfolio resulted in wrong priorities being set in health?

MS FITZHARRIS: Absolutely not.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—mail policy

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, on 5 February 2018, ABC news online revealed that a convicted paedophile sent a letter from the Alexander Maconochie Centre to one of his victims. The report stated, and I quote “The family asked the government how he was able to send it from prison as they believed they were on a no-contact list.” Minister, why and how was a convicted paedophile allowed to send a letter from the AMC to his victim?

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, I was disappointed to read that report as well. I am sorry for the family for what happened there. I have written back to them this week. My advice is that they were not on a no-contact list. That has now been remedied. They are now on a no-contact list. That was, of course, for written postage. What I can inform the Assembly is that for email, it is a positive vetting process in the sense that you cannot send emails to particular addresses until it has been approved. So this was exclusively an issue with written postage.

The process for getting on the no-contact list actually requires people to opt in. In this case the family had not done that. I think this has raised some important questions about how people opt in. At the moment, shortly after the completion of the court proceedings and sentencing of somebody to custody, people are sent a letter inviting them to join that list. But, on reflection, in light of this matter I think we will now re-examine that process because that is possibly not the best time for people to be focused on those sorts of matters at the end of an undoubtedly difficult court process. We will now review that.

The other part of it is that I think we need to reflect on whether in fact it is an opt-out process either for all offences or some categories of offences. We need to be careful in thinking about this because for some people they will not be wanting to receive updates about the person who has been convicted. They may not want to get any contact. So we need to work some nuance into that system.

What I can also inform the Assembly is that this is exactly why we are working on a victims charter, trying to improve the experience of victims in the ACT to make sure that they are getting the support they deserve and need from the ACT government.

MRS JONES: Minister, how many disappointments have you experienced as a minister in this system?

MR RATTENBURY: I am sure Mrs Jones feels she has a longer list than I do.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, your newest member is keen to ask her first supplementary.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what did you learn from this incident, and what changes have you made to protect victims and their families?

MR RATTENBURY: I invite Miss Burch to reflect on the answer I gave to the initial question, in which I went into some detail about the reflections on this incident.

Health—report on government services

MR STEEL: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Compared to the national averages in the recent report on government services, in what areas has the ACT been able to show that Canberrans are healthier?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Steel very much for his question. It is a pleasure to share with the Assembly that the latest report of government services data released at the end of January confirmed Canberra's status as one of the healthiest cities in Australia. It shows ACT residents are healthier and live longer when compared to the rest of the nation. It also highlights that when they do get sick, they have access to a world-class health system to help them get better.

Let me go to some of the highlights from the report. In 2014 the ACT had a lower incidence of all cancers except cervical cancer compared to national figures. Excluding 2013, when it was the second lowest, the ACT had the lowest rate of potentially avoidable deaths between 2007 and 2016. In 2015-16, the ACT had the highest life expectancy in Australia, and we have had the highest or equal highest life expectancy in Australia since 2005. Between 2008 and 2016, the ACT has had the lowest age-standardised all-cause mortality rate across the states and territories. Not only are we living longer; we have a lower incidence of death compared to the rest of the country. This does not come by accident; this comes from having a high quality health system. We have high levels of immunisation. In the last financial year, the ACT was the only jurisdiction to achieve at least 95 per cent immunisation coverage for every antigen for children aged 12 months to less than 15 months. In 2015-16, the ACT had a lower rate of potentially preventable hospitalisations and selected vaccine preventable conditions compared to the national figure.

This government will continue to invest in our health system, promote healthy lifestyles and expand existing health services and preventative programs here in the ACT.

MR STEEL: Minister, in the report on government services information, how well is the ACT served with health professionals?

MS FITZHARRIS: The ACT has a very strong record of investment in our health system and our health workforce. In 2015-16 the ACT had the highest overall rate of full-time equivalent medical staff. We have committed \$36 million in investment to increase and develop the ACT Health nursing workforce.

We have also been developing a targeted approach to attracting medical specialists to come and work in our wonderful health service and city, letting them know about the significant investments this government will make in health infrastructure and health services. This is in response to some specific specialist skill shortages but will target the broader medical profession.

As I mention our highly skilled workforce, I do want to acknowledge the hardworking and dedicated doctors, nurses, health professionals, other allied health staff and teams who work very hard every day to ensure that the Canberra community receives the highest level of health care. We simply cannot be the healthiest city in the country without having a high quality health service. We also have high rates of dental therapists. Our primary healthcare providers, GPs and allied health professionals who work in the primary healthcare space are often the first point of contact for health care.

Now we know, of course, that they have been let down by the only remaining remnant of that appalling 2014-15 Liberal budget, the Medicare rebate freeze, but the ACT government is committed to supporting our GPs. Just yesterday we saw the opening of bulk-billing grants to support additional access to increased bulk-billing services in the Molonglo Valley and the Tuggeranong Valley. Nurses, of course, are integral to our healthcare services at the tertiary-community level as well as in our popular nurse-led walk-in centres. I look forward to the ACT health workforce continuing to grow and provide excellent healthcare services to our community.

MS CHEYNE: Can the minister expand on the ACT showing improvements in elective surgery waiting times, as demonstrated in the report on government services information?

MS FITZHARRIS: The ACT government has done a lot to increase access to elective surgery, with record numbers of surgical procedures being delivered. In the last financial year our target was 12,500, and 12,826 procedures were performed. Although it is pleasing to see that we are reaching our targets for the number of procedures performed, we know that demand for both emergency and elective surgery continues to grow.

As a result of this demand, the ROGS report did show that the ACT has higher median wait times for certain elective surgery procedures than the national median wait times. We recognise that getting on top of this wait list is a challenge for us. It will be a priority this year.

To build on the work that has been done in recent years to increase access to surgery, we have today announced another funding boost to elective surgery, with an additional \$6.3 million for more surgeries, taking our surgeries, and elective surgeries in particular, this year to over 13,000—a record number of surgeries. This investment will bring another 600 Canberrans off our waiting list. We have begun cross-territory planning to complete a range of surgeries for patients, with a key focus on those who are currently waiting beyond the recommended time frames. We are committed to addressing elective surgery wait lists so that more people can come off these wait lists.

Roads—traffic management study

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Can the minister update the Assembly on the outcomes of the local area traffic management study on Tillyard Drive and the surrounding streets in Fraser, Flynn and Charnwood?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Cheyne for her question and her interest in this particular intersection in her electorate of Ginninderra. Of course achieving safer speeds on our road network is an essential element of the safe system approach outlined in national and ACT road safety strategies. A range of integrated speed management measures, covering engineering, enforcement, encouragement and education, are part of the ACT road safety strategy. One of these measures is to conduct local area traffic management treatments in residential areas.

Roads ACT, as members know, uses a traffic warrant system to objectively assess the need for and priority of traffic management and road safety measures on residential streets. The intersection of Tillyard Drive and Ginninderra Drive ranks relatively highly in this warrant system.

Roads ACT engaged engineering consultants to undertake a local area traffic management study on Tillyard Drive and surrounding streets in Charnwood, Flynn and Fraser. As discussed in last year's annual report hearings, this principally looked at just the length of Tillyard Drive and not at major intersections. But the study at that point did include a technical component analysing traffic speed, volume and crash data, as well as seeking the views of local residents. Following extensive community consultation with residents of Charnwood, Flynn and Fraser in particular, issues were identified that concerned the community.

The study has been completed and a final scheme for improvements on Tillyard Drive has been determined, with priorities assigned for the proposed treatments. This study will guide the implementation of all the elements proposed in the scheme over a number of years.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, has the government considered the signalisation of the Tillyard Drive intersections with Ginninderra Drive and Lhotsky Street?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, the government is currently looking at that signalisation. As was also discussed in last year's annual report hearings, a detailed study of the Tillyard Drive intersections with Ginninderra Drive and Lhotsky Street has also been completed, in addition to the local area traffic management study. It has recommended the installation of traffic lights. Intersection improvements and upgrades are significant investments, and we have a strong track record of delivering investment in roads infrastructure right across the territory, and principally also in Belconnen. I would like to reassure Ms Cheyne and other members that this study is now being carefully considered by government.

In addition the government will get on with implementing the high priority safety measures over the coming financial year along the length of Tillyard Drive, as identified by the community draft consultation. This includes improvements to intersections with Crawford Crescent, Spalding Street, Kerrigan Street and Daley Crescent south; lane narrowing between Covington Crescent and Crawford Crescent and between Barber

Crescent and Kuringa Drive; a pedestrian refuge island adjacent to the bicentennial trail; improvements to pedestrian signage near Charnwood shops and to line marking and signage on Kuringa Drive; lane narrowing and line marking improvements on Spalding Street; lane narrowing between Tillyard Drive and Shakespeare Crescent and improvements to pedestrian signage on Kerrigan Street; speed cushions in Shakespeare Crescent and Cartwright Street; and a pedestrian refuge island near Rouse Place.

It is important to note that the final scheme is an overall master plan for the area, and that not all proposed safety measures will necessarily be installed at once. The master plan will guide implementation over a number of years.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how was the community consulted during the development of the study and how is the government addressing their areas of concern?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. In November and December 2016, Roads ACT collected feedback about issues of concern from residents, in particular in Charnwood, Flynn and Fraser. This included over 600 survey responses and eight phone or written submissions, with 120 people attending information sessions.

A range of areas of concern was identified, including safety at intersections. Notably, residents did raise concerns over the intersections on Tillyard Drive and Lhotsky Street. Residents also raised concerns around speeding, safety at midblock intersections, peak hour congestion and safety around Fraser Primary School. Speeding and intersection safety were identified as requiring alternative solutions.

More recently, the residents of Charnwood, Flynn and Fraser have been informed of the outcomes of the study, the final scheme for improvements and the priority of treatments through a newsletter distributed to all households earlier this year. Information is also available on the TCCS website.

The design of recommended high-priority measures will be undertaken in 2018. Implementation will commence in the 2018-19 financial year. We will continue to consider intersection signalisation as well.

Housing—homelessness

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, on 29 January this year, the *Canberra Times* reported that numbers sleeping on the pavement in Civic near the Uniting Church's early morning centre had "shot up" with what they described as a "semi-permanent camp" appearing. Minister, how many people are homeless or sleeping rough in the inner city and in other areas such as Mount Ainslie and the Cotter?

MS BERRY: I was aware of the story and I met some of the individuals who were sleeping rough up near the Uniting Church at the early morning centre late last year. In fact, at the moment my advice is that there are around 30 to 40 people who we have data on who are sleeping rough in the ACT. All of these people are being supported in different ways by organisations like St Vincent de Paul through their street to home program. And of course the ACT government announced an expansion of hours at

UnitingCare at the early morning centre so that rough sleepers or people who were living in the city could go and get support if they needed it at the early morning centre.

At this stage, those are the numbers that I have been advised of. I have double-checked and sought to make sure that that is the number of people whom Housing ACT and the street to home program are aware of. I continue to keep a very close eye on the situation.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many people have been displaced onto the street or into couch surfing situations from the closure of the ABC flats in Civic due to the public housing renewal program?

MS BERRY: I believe I have had questions about this in the past in this place. My response has been that, for the people who were living in some of the older apartments in Civic who are now being rehomed, we asked tenants to let us know who the rough sleepers were, or who the people couch surfing were, so that we could put them in touch with services or give them the support that they needed. \

When I investigated this, when the reports were first made last year, it was very difficult to get the numbers because none of these people came forward to get support. But that does not mean that Housing ACT and the street to home program do not work actively to ensure that, if they are aware of people who are sleeping rough, who are couch surfing or who are not the actual tenanted person within a residence, they are supported in any way that they can be. We invite the tenants, if it is the case that they have somebody couch surfing in their residence, to let us know, so that Housing ACT can support them appropriately.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why were these impacts not more adequately addressed and mitigated in the assessments you conducted prior to the closure of the complexes, given that the numbers at the EMC have shot up?

MS BERRY: The numbers have not shot up, as I have explained on a number of occasions in this place. We continue to have the lowest number of rough sleepers in the country. The people who attend the UnitingCare early morning centre are not necessarily all rough sleepers. A lot of them are tenants of Housing ACT and go to the early morning centre to get the different kinds of support that the early morning centre provides to everybody, not just to people who are experiencing rough sleeping.

Public housing—Braddon

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, on 28 December the *Canberra Times* reported that a five-year-old public housing block in Lowanna Street, Braddon has stood vacant for almost two years. Minister, why has this complex been vacant for so long when there are desperate homeless people throughout the inner south and the inner north of Canberra?

MS BERRY: Yes, I am aware of that report and I do have some information that I can provide the Assembly on the reasons why that particular group of Housing ACT residences has been vacant for some time. What I might have to do, because I cannot easily put my finger on it right at this moment, is take that question on notice

and I will provide some more information very shortly.

MR HANSON: Thank you, Minister. What actions have you taken personally to deal with this problem?

MS BERRY: Sorry, Madam Speaker, I might just have to get an explanation. The problem of Braddon or—which problem?

MR HANSON: The problem of the vacant public housing in Braddon. What have you done about it?

MS BERRY: I have done a number of things, and I have sought advice and have received advice every step of the way from Housing ACT, and from planning as well, to ensure that the housing that we provide for people who need it is the best possible, most sustainable housing all across the ACT, including here in the city.

MR PARTON: Minister, when will this complex in Lowanna Street, Braddon be available to meet homelessness needs?

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

Schools—composite model

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, Mawson Primary School has a population of 460 students, according to the February 2017 school census. Parents at that school learnt that classes had moved to a composite model only when their children returned to school last week. Why has the composite model been introduced at Mawson Primary School?

MS BERRY: I cannot provide any information about that particular school, and why that particular model was introduced. I would suggest that if schools were making decisions about the different kinds of models that they were implementing, they would be made based on the make-up of the school community. With respect to that particular school, I will take the question on notice and see if I can provide some advice to Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Minister, does the Education Directorate have a policy guiding composite class decisions and, if so, what is it and how is it implemented?

MS BERRY: Schools generally have some autonomy about how they create their school learning environment and composite classrooms are not uncommon across the ACT, across a number of schools, depending on the school community and the make-up of the school community in achieving the best learning outcomes for their students. So those decisions are generally made within the schools.

MR HANSON: Minister, what does the policy say about consultation with parents and ultimately who has the say about whether or not classes are made composite?

MS BERRY: Again, these are generally decisions that are made by the schools based on the make-up of their school communities.

Schools—mobile phones

MISS C BURCH: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, on 7 February 2018, the *Canberra Times* reported you as confirming that banning mobile phones in any ACT public school was “not on the cards”, notwithstanding that both the federal and Queensland ministers for education have expressed concern and want them banned. Minister, on what basis have you come to your decision, and with whom did you consult?

MS BERRY: I spoke to a number of teachers in schools and also people within my local community about whether or not phones or devices should be banned within the classroom. All of the reports that I have been hearing from school principals in the ACT are that schools are very careful to ensure that devices are used appropriately. Sometimes these devices, like phones, are used for providing different supports for education for different students’ needs. I know that some students use the mindfulness app on their phones so that they can listen to whatever music or noises help them with their study in the classroom. These are the kinds of things that we need to be very careful about in making decisions across the board, denying students and other people access to phones when they are very clearly a part of our community and our society. It is more about making sure that they are used appropriately and that students, schools and families know that appropriate use of phones in schools is the best way forward rather than a prohibition completely.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what protocols on the use of mobile phones in schools are in place, and do they differ between primary and secondary schools?

MS BERRY: For mobile phones, schools generally will make decisions about whether or not phones are handed in, in primary schools, at the front gate or whether they can take them into the classrooms. Generally, students are not allowed to use their iPhones in the classroom without there being some agreement with the teachers or within the school communities.

I do not understand why people are wanting to prohibit something which is clearly part of the lives of everyone in our community, and within our schools as well. There is no point in taking that away from students when it will be a part of their lives now and well into the future. If it is such a problem, and perhaps if people are of the view that devices, iPhones or other things are not important to achieving academic outcomes in schools, I have a bucket here, and I ask members to donate their technology into the bucket; then I can take it—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, can I ask whether presenting a bucket is the use of a prop?

MADAM SPEAKER: Suffice to say that I was going to call the minister to order and say that you know my views on that. There are no props or stunts allowed. Do you have anything further to add in your remaining 38 seconds?

MS BERRY: Well, if I can’t use the bucket—

MADAM SPEAKER: No, you can't.

MS BERRY: I am very happy still to take members' devices and recycle them, if they are of no use to anyone.

MS LEE: Minister, do principals have autonomy to decide on mobile phone use in their schools?

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, your colleague has asked a question. I will call the minister to answer.

MS BERRY: School principals and school communities work to ensure the best outcomes for students in their schools, as I have explained and tried to explain—and certainly it is the case with children that I know in my local neighbourhood—on when is the appropriate time to use a device within a school and how it can be appropriately used to improve academic outcomes for students in schools.

Prohibition does not work. Isolating young people from a device that plays such an important part in their lives is not the solution. The solution is ensuring that these devices, iPhones, which every single one of us has, are used appropriately in the schools. Adults actually have a very important role to play in ensuring that these devices are used appropriately and that what they are used for is appropriate, and setting a very good example for young people in our community as well.

National Multicultural Festival—consultation

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, in a media release on 30 August last year, you spoke of, and I quote, “the ACT government's commitment to strengthen community consultation”. Which community organisations did the ACT government consult with before deciding on a blanket ban on community organisations selling alcoholic beverages at this year's Multicultural Festival?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Kikkert for her question. Each year festival organisers seek feedback from all stakeholders. That includes stallholders, festival goers and ACT government agencies that participate in helping to organise and run the festival.

The festival organisers have a reference group or a steering committee—I cannot remember the exact title of it—that includes the showcase organisers from a range of communities. People would be aware that there are a number of showcases—at least half a dozen showcases; I cannot give the exact number off the top of my head—organised by different cultural communities. Those showcase organisers are consulted by the festival organising group in aspects of the organisation of the festival.

So it is an ongoing consultation process following each festival and in the lead-up to each festival with a range of community organisations. I can take on notice the exact detail of who those are.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, why did you not you consult community organisations that were selling alcohol at the 2017 Multicultural Festival before making a decision which has robbed many of them of a large part of their income?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I said, community organisations are consulted about organisation of the festival in an ongoing way, and I have certainly committed that following this festival we will actively seek feedback, as the festival organisers do every year, not only from stall holders but from festival participants and from ACT government agencies but, of course, particularly from stall holders, to see what the impact of this policy is, to see if we need to review it for next year. We will be reconsidering this policy for next year's festival.

MR COE: Minister, in what form will that consultation take place, following this year's Multicultural Festival, and how much do you expect that community organisations will lose as a result of their inability to sell alcoholic beverages?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. A range of consultation mechanisms is undertaken with community organisations, both in the lead-up to and subsequent to the festival. There are surveys of festival-goers. Obviously, that will include volunteers working on community stalls as well; that is my understanding. There are then feedback sessions with stallholders following the festival. I will take the detail of the question on notice, as to exactly what those mechanisms comprised; and, again, commit to ongoing consultation in the lead-up to the next festival.

As to the second part of the question, which I think was about whether or not community organisations will be losing money as a result of this decision, I would point out that we have had feedback from a small number of stallholders expressing concern about that aspect. There are two concerns that stallholders have raised that we have taken on board. One concern is about them losing opportunities to raise revenue through the sale of alcohol. The festival organisers have been actively engaged with communities who have raised that particular concern, to support and encourage them to diversify their activities, and to look at other ways of raising money. I certainly encourage them to do that, or to partner with the commercial stallholders who are able to sell alcohol, to ensure that their culturally appropriate alcohol is available on the footprint, which is, of course, the second concern that stallholders have raised with us.

I should emphasise that this condition was part of the stallholder application process, the participation policy, which was made available in September. The amount of feedback we have had from actual stallholders in relation to this matter has been quite small.

Business—Local Industry Advocate

MR WALL: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Economic

Development. Minister, part of the role of the Local Industry Advocate is to ensure that work that can be done by local businesses stays in the ACT through the procurement process. Minister, what input has the Local Industry Advocate had on the procurement process for green waste collection services in light of the recent rollout of green bins across parts of the territory?

MR BARR: The Local Industry Advocate does play a role in advising government on a range of procurement matters. I will need to seek some information in relation to whether the Local Industry Advocate has played a significant role in relation to that particular procurement. But I think the issue in question was a very clear election commitment from the Labor Party at the last election.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: There was a very clear commitment.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: I would be surprised, Madam Speaker, if I could get a word in without the constant interjections from the *Muppet Show*—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MR BARR: That gets them on their feet, doesn't it?

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, the point of order is about—

MADAM SPEAKER: Use of language.

Mrs Dunne: Appropriate language. That will always get me on my feet, whether it is this side or the other side that does it. I would ask that the minister withdraw the comment. There has been a ruling in the past.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, I recognise that you were suffering a serious level of interjection, but I do ask you to withdraw “muppets”.

MR BARR: May I stand on the point of order? The *Muppet Show* is indeed a much loved children's television show.

Mrs Dunne: This is frivolous, Madam Speaker. The minister needs to withdraw immediately and without reservation.

MADAM SPEAKER: I understand the rules, Mrs Dunne. Chief Minister, can you withdraw, and without explanation.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Mrs Dunne: Perhaps use the adjournment debate—

MR BARR: As I was saying, the *Muppet Show* is indeed a—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, the Chief Minister was about to get to his answer and you are interjecting again.

Mrs Dunne: I did not interject. Madam Speaker, seeing that you have raised the matter with me, I raised my hands in a questioning way because I still have not heard the Chief Minister withdraw the comment, which you have asked him to do at least twice.

MADAM SPEAKER: He has withdrawn, and I heard your comment from here. Chief Minister, you have 13 seconds left on the clock if you desire to answer.

MR BARR: It would appear to be down to about four seconds now, Madam Speaker, so my time has expired on this question.

MR WALL: Minister, how many times did the local advocate meet or engage with locally owned green waste collection businesses as part of the procurement for the green waste service?

MR BARR: I will need to take that on notice.

MR COE: Chief Minister, how many times have you met with the Local Industry Advocate in the past 12 months? Did you chat with her about the impact of green waste collection businesses and your nationalisation policy?

MR BARR: I have met with the Local Industry Advocate on I think at least half a dozen occasions over the—

Mr Wall: Outside Labor Party meetings?

Mrs Dunne: Outside Labor Party meetings?

MR BARR: Oh, Madam Speaker—course of the past 12 months—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, please! Let the Chief Minister answer the question.

MR BARR: It is only day one of the parliamentary year, Madam Speaker, and already those opposite can barely contain their inner stand-up comedian. It is perhaps disappointing, Madam Speaker.

In response to Mr Coe's question, I have met with the Local Industry Advocate on around half a dozen occasions over the past 12 months. Mr Coe's description of the government's policy, whilst it might be wryly amusing for the most conservative leader of a political party in this country, is a long way from the truth.

Tourism—international flights

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the recent major expansion of international flights to Canberra?

MR BARR: Yes, it has been a particularly interesting couple of month in international aviation and particularly as it impacts on Canberra. We now have daily services connecting our city to both Singapore and Doha provided by two airlines that are, I think, universally accepted as being amongst the very best in the world.

Today we have obviously had the opportunity to attend a series of events with Qatar Airways, who have commenced their new service to Canberra. This service, a Boeing 777-300, for members who are interested, carries just short of 360 passengers. The total seat capacity coming into Canberra now has, with the combination of both Singapore Airlines' announcement of daily flights together with these announcements, added around 170,000 seats coming into Canberra each year. That is a very significant boost to international aviation capacity for our city.

It is very pleasing to see that what has been a long-term campaign by my government, together with Canberra Airport and tourism industry partners, has delivered a further boost to international aviation capacity. We are seeing that flow through into investment in the tourism and hospitality sector, a sector which, I would remind members, employs more than 16,000 Canberrans.

In 2017 we achieved an all-time record level of both domestic and international visitors to our city and, with this announcement and the commencement of daily services Canberra-Doha, we will add significantly to our tourism numbers in the years ahead. It is a very exciting time for aviation and tourism in Canberra.

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, how will the daily service by Qatar Airways build on Canberra's reputation as a city to visit in 2018?

MR BARR: This announcement comes on top of the wonderful endorsement from *Lonely Planet* of Canberra as a very desirable tourism destination, indeed one of the top three cities that people should visit in 2018. I think it gives a further boost to confidence within the tourism and hospitality sector. We have already seen a significant number of announcements of new investment, a new hotel product and new tourism experiences not just within the borders of the ACT but also in the broader Canberra region.

We look forward to seeing further commitment from the airlines. The government will continue to pursue our focus on low-cost carriers in the domestic and international markets as well as looking to international routes that head east to New Zealand and then on to North and South America, and north with a connection through to China. They will be the priorities in aviation growth over the coming years. We look forward to working closely with Canberra Airport and our tourism industry partners to achieve those outcomes.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, how does increased global connectivity affect the territory economy?

MR BARR: It certainly improves our city's capacity to export both goods and services,

and we see, particularly in higher education, for example, where this increased connectivity makes it easier for our territory's single largest export industry, higher education, to be able to attract and retain students. It is also a wonderful opportunity for producers in the broader Canberra region, and indeed a quite extensive footprint south of the ACT, as getting goods to market through Canberra airport is a more efficient and cost-effective practice than going to the congested Kingsford Smith airport in Sydney.

Tourism and hospitality, as I have mentioned, is a very significant industry for the ACT, and is coming off a period of record growth and opportunity. This increased global connectivity assists our city in attracting new investment from a variety of different sources, as well as new visitors and new people coming to Canberra. We all know, as residents of this city, that it is one of the world's greatest cities to live in. Perhaps it is a secret that has been kept from the rest of the world for too long, but there is now a wonderful opportunity off the back of the *Lonely Planet* endorsement. These additional flights mean we will be able to share, with the rest of Australia and the rest of the world, all of the wonderful experiences that we perhaps sometimes take for granted about our city and our region. It is a very positive experience and an opportunity for our city, and one that I hope we can all celebrate.

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