



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

**HANSARD**

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Wednesday, 1 August 2018

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## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR:** As members are aware, Minister Fitzharris is in Alice Springs chairing the health ministerial council. In Minister Fitzharris's absence, Minister Rattenbury will take questions in the health portfolio. On his birthday, Minister Gentleman will take questions in Transport and City Services. I will take questions in Higher Education, Training and Research.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** That is a birthday gift to remember, Mr Gentleman.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Land—Dickson land swap**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. I refer to comments by the Auditor-General during estimates, on 22 June, about the Tradies land swap. The Auditor-General said that she could not rule out criminality due to a "complete lack of those records". Minister, have you called in the police to investigate any possible criminality in the Tradies land swap deal?

**MR BARR:** No, I have not. I also note that the Auditor-General could not rule that in either and that she has made no such findings to that effect.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, have you called in any external auditors to investigate potential criminality regarding the Tradies land swap deal or any other matter regarding that deal?

**MR BARR:** No.

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, have you ordered an internal audit into the missing documents or other elements of concern regarding the Dickson land swap?

**MR BARR:** Yes. There are processes underway in that directorate in an attempt to ascertain the veracity of this claim of missing documents. The auditor has been communicated with by the director-general of the planning directorate seeking to find further information from her as to the nature of the documents that have been alleged to not exist or exist, depending on the circumstances of the inquiry.

The Auditor-General, obviously, is in the best position to advise the director-general, the Assembly and the community as to exactly what is alleged to be missing but until that process is complete it is difficult for me to comment further.

### **Gaming—poker machines**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services and relates to poker machines. Minister, last year's budget papers show that gaming tax revenue is expected to rise every year in the forward estimates from \$34.2 million in 2017-18 to \$38.8 million in 2021-22. Why is the government predicting a rise in gaming revenue despite the policy of reducing the number of poker machines?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. The predictions come from a range of areas. The key thing that the government is keenly focussed on is ensuring a reduction in the number of gaming machines, along with a range of other harm minimisation measures that we have been putting in place and that we will continue to put in place. The government's focus is on that at the moment. We will work with the clubs and with the community more generally to ensure that there is good protection and ongoing reduction and diversification in gaming machine venues away from a reliance on gaming machine revenue.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Has the government done any modelling work to work out when revenue from gaming machines will actually start to decline and how many machines will have to be removed for this to occur?

**MR RAMSAY:** Acknowledging that a number of areas of that are actually sitting in the area of the responsibility of the Treasurer rather than the Minister for Regulatory Services, which looks at the oversight and regulation of the area, what I can say is that it is a far more complex thing than simply the number of machines equating to gaming machine income.

What the government will continue to do, and certainly from my portfolio responsibilities we will continue to do, is to assist clubs in a number of ways away from relying on gaming machine revenue.

**Mr Barr:** May I add to the answer as it does relate to my portfolio?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Clerk, is there a capacity—

**Mr Barr:** If the clock has stopped, that is okay; depending on what the supplementary is, I may be able to assist.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, if gaming tax revenue is forecast to go up while your machine reduction is going on, does that not suggest that the machine reduction has no effect whatsoever on the level of poker machine gambling in the territory?

**MR BARR:** A range of tax lines are impacted by general economic activity as well as contributions from a number of different sectors of gaming activity. Members would be aware that the territory's total gaming tax take is broader than just that of poker machines; it also includes activity at the casino, interstate lotteries and the like. There are a range of taxes on gambling products.

Tax lines are also impacted not only by the rate of general economic growth but also by population growth, so another factor that members would need to consider is the number of people undertaking gaming activities. As our population grows each year, most of our revenue lines grow each year. The interesting analysis that members may want to consider is whether this is nominal or real growth. They would then need to look at inflation, population growth and a range of other factors before reaching the conclusion that the shadow minister has already leapt to, I think without undertaking that analysis.

## **Energy—national energy guarantee**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. Minister, what are the issues of concern with the federal government's proposed national energy guarantee?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The ACT has expressed a number of concerns with the policy. These are concerns that we share with some of the other jurisdictions. I think it boils down to what the promise of the NEG has been. The federal government has made a great deal of four key things: emissions reductions, reliability, certainty and costs. On each of those we have concerns that the NEG is not going to measure up as promised.

Certainly, when it comes to emissions, it is quite clear that, with the national energy guarantee—and this has been well modelled—the target of just 26 per cent emissions reductions from the electricity sector will have very little impact; in fact that target will be met very early in the decade, perhaps in 2021 or 2022, when this is a target, out until 2030, which will clearly stall progress in the electricity sector when it comes to transitioning to a clean energy future.

The second one is reliability. It is clear from the design of the mechanism now that the reliability mechanism is unlikely to ever be triggered. This is probably a good thing, but I think that, in terms of the significant national discussion that has gone on, and the calls for more reliability, this is not the issue that it has been claimed to be.

When it comes to certainty, there is no doubt that because of the meagre target that is being set by the federal government under their legislation—the one that they are proposing—the target will be revised as soon as there is a change of government at a federal level. So I think that the claim of certainty is one that is being oversold in this context.

When it comes to costs, with the modelling—which is yet to be publicly released, I might add, and that is of itself a concern—of the \$550 that is claimed, only \$150 will come from the NEG. This is a question mark as well.

**MR PETTERSSON:** How would the national energy guarantee impact the renewable energy sector, of which the ACT government has been a great supporter?

**MR RATTENBURY:** The renewable energy sector has been one of the most vocal critics of the national energy guarantee. They feel it will have a significant detrimental impact on an industry that is rapidly growing and rapidly creating new economic opportunities and new employment opportunities. We have seen the Smart Energy Council perhaps as the most vocal critics but, as people whose members are made up of the wind and solar firms that are making these investments in Australia, they see the impact that this is likely to have because of that stall in investment linked to the lack of ambition in the emissions reduction target.

We are very concerned in the ACT. We now have the advantage of having a number of companies headquartered here in the territory as a result of our early moves on renewable energy. Those are the very companies that are expressing concerns about

their own viability because of the impact of the national energy guarantee.

**MR STEEL:** Minister, would the proposed national energy guarantee slow the growth of progress already made towards a reduction in carbon emissions?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I thank Mr Steel for the supplementary question. It seems almost certain that it will. As I have touched on, much of the modelling that has been done indicates that the 26 per cent emissions reduction target will be met early in the decade. Therefore there is no motivation and there is a lack of a market signal or any other kind of government policy signal to encourage further innovation and further movement towards the clean energy sector.

I am deeply concerned about the medium-term transition here. Slightly beyond 2030, modelling by the Energy Security Board shows, significant numbers of coal-fired power stations in Australia will reach the end of their useful life. If we have had a stall in investment in renewable energy between 2023 and 2030, we are going to be very poorly positioned as a nation when those coal-fired power stations start to close.

#### **Land—Dickson land swap**

**MS LAWDER:** Chief Minister, you said in question time on 31 July and again today that an investigation is underway into alleged missing documents regarding the Tradies Dickson land swap. Who is conducting the investigation into alleged missing documents and when will it be completed?

**MR BARR:** As I mentioned in my response to the previous question, the director-general of the planning directorate has sought further information from the Auditor-General in relation to the matter. I do not have a time frame. To a certain extent, if the missing documents exist and are found then that presents a time frame. But the search for non-existent documents could, in theory, go on forever.

**MS LAWDER:** Chief Minister, will the outcome of this investigation into the alleged missing documents be made public?

**MR BARR:** If the documents, a, exist and, b, are found, then, yes, there would be a huge amount of public interest. If the documents do not exist and/or cannot be found, then there is nothing to make public.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, when did the government initiate the investigation into these missing documents? How long have you been waiting for the Auditor-General to get back to the Director General?

**MR BARR:** It was initiated when the allegations that the documents were missing were aired, I understand. That would potentially have been during the audit process. I do not have an exact date. As to the second part of the question, that remains to be determined.

#### **Land—Dickson land swap**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Chief Minister and Minister for Economic Development. Minister, was a staff member from your office in regular contact with officials from economic development and/or the LDA regarding the Dickson Tradies land swap?

**MR BARR:** It would be routine business for staff members to be following up on cabinet decisions. What constitutes regular contact would appear to be, from a statement made by an official, every couple of weeks, which is not unreasonable. You would expect staff to be in contact with departmental representatives, probably on a weekly basis. I am briefed by most of my directorates on a weekly basis, and there would be follow-up actions that would come from weekly briefings. This was clearly a cabinet decision to alter the course of a process where the then directorate had a preferred outcome. The directorate's preferred outcome was not supported by cabinet. Cabinet took a different view, and the staff member would have been ensuring that the cabinet decision was followed.

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, did this staff member regularly report to you and/or senior staff in your office about the progress of the land swap?

**MR BARR:** Again, infrequently. I would seek follow-up on cabinet decisions and their implementation, not on a daily or weekly basis but to ensure that time lines that cabinet agreed to were being followed. That would be one of the fundamental jobs of both directorates and ministerial staff. I would not overstate it so as to say "regular". I would say that it would be a part of that staffer's job to ensure that those particular projects that had cabinet time frames, and decisions associated with them, would indeed be followed through.

I do not as a matter of practice have the opportunity to meet with every single staff member every single day on every single issue. It is just not possible for ministers. But this issue—

**Mr Coe:** This was a very special issue, wasn't it?

**MR BARR:** No, it was not. This issue was far from being a very special issue. It was simply needing to be assured that the cabinet decision, which was to pursue the process that cabinet had determined, would be followed through by the directorate, given the directorate's own preference to go a different way.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, did your staff member concerned or another staff member regularly follow up on all property deals approved by cabinet that were undertaken by EDD or the LDA?

**MR BARR:** It is difficult to say exactly. To answer the opposition leader's question, staff members would follow up on cabinet decisions, whether they related to EDD, LDA or, indeed, any other portfolio. That is part of the government decision-making process and then following through on cabinet decisions. This is a fairly routine matter that you would expect both ministerial and directorate staff to follow up on when cabinet makes a decision. A range of follow-up actions are required both from ministerial offices on occasion and in most instances from directorates. Ministerial staff will engage with directorates to ensure that cabinet

decisions are enacted.

### **Government—emergency relief and financial support services program**

**MR STEEL:** My question is to the Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the outcomes of the redesign of the emergency relief and financial support services program?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Steel for his question and for his genuine interest in this topic. I am, indeed, delighted to share with the Assembly today the outcomes of the redesign of the emergency relief and financial support program. As members may be aware, the latest *Inequality in Australia 2018* report, launched yesterday by the Australian Council of Social Service and the University of New South Wales, underscores that growing inequality is an issue of national concern.

While Canberra is a wealthy city, many Canberrans experience financial distress at various points in their lives. Emergency relief and financial support services provide short-term support to individuals and families experiencing disadvantage or financial crisis. In 2017, the ACT government undertook a redesign process for this program, engaging with the community sector to better understand the nature of poverty in our city and the emerging needs of the community.

This process highlighted that support needed to extend beyond the provision of immediate financial or material aid and that people who seek this support may also benefit from services to help them address issues in key areas of wellbeing. This has resulted in a more strategic approach in these services to ensure that Canberrans get the support they need when they need it.

Following my announcement in June, I am pleased to confirm that the new emergency relief and financial support services commenced from 1 July with six community organisations: Care Inc, Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre, OzHarvest, St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army and UnitingCare Kippax.

Between them, these community organisations will be funded for a total of almost \$6.5 million over three years to deliver a range of services, including the ACT microcredit program, emergency material and financial aid, financial counselling, food assistance and the no interest loan program.

I look forward to hearing from the community as these providers continue to make a difference to the lives of many Canberrans.

**MR STEEL:** Why was it important to engage with the ACT community in the redesign of this program?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Steel for the supplementary. The redesign process was very important to enable the ACT government to leverage the knowledge and experience of the community sector to identify how emergency relief and financial support can better serve those in need.

The Community Services Directorate commissioned a report from leading researchers

at the Public Service Research Group at the University of New South Wales, bringing together insight from national and ACT data, existing providers and those who work with the most vulnerable in our community.

Emergency relief is a stop-gap measure to help people with immediate and unplanned short-term financial difficulties. It includes food, household goods, clothing, transport, assistance with prescription medicines, utility payments and other vouchers. Many people accessing emergency relief have not needed this kind of help before, people whose relationships have broken down or who have lost their jobs, for example. These are people who could very easily end up in a worse place or whose lives could be turned back around with the right support.

The report recognised the important role many emergency relief providers therefore play in being the first point of contact for vulnerable Canberrans. The report highlighted existing good practice in the sector and the need to further develop a model in which vulnerable families are supported, included and referred to appropriate services. By helping to link families and individuals to information where appropriate, emergency relief providers can play a role in enabling people to participate in school and community life, building capacity and resilience.

The report's findings along with conversations at two community forums helped to shape the new requirements for delivery of emergency service in the ACT, resulting in a greater focus on organisations taking a relational approach. Rather than simply focussing on poverty and its symptoms, this approach includes services such as advocacy, case management, counselling and referrals, all contributing to social inclusion.

**MS CODY:** Minister, how will this redesigned program better support Canberrans in need?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Cody for her supplementary question. This redesign has resulted in a more strategic approach in the investment in critical food assistance and emergency support services to ensure that Canberrans get the support they need when they need it. It also provided an opportunity to test the market and engage new service providers.

I was excited in June to welcome OzHarvest to the program for the first time, boosting the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as helping to tackle the challenge of food waste. OzHarvest already rescues between 35,000 and 40,000 kilograms of fresh and frozen food each month in Canberra. Funding through the ACT government food assistance grants will enable them to rescue more food and get it to more agencies and charities.

I am pleased that this recent process built on the expertise of the sector and would like to acknowledge the collaborative work of the Community Services Directorate and community partners in implementing this redesign. Through the redesign process we found that Canberrans in need are looking for and hoping for more. The redesign allows organisations, both new and existing, to step up and provide better support.

Patrick McKenna, Director of Compliance and Governance at St Vincent de Paul

Society Canberra/Goulburn, said in relation to Vinnies emergency relief programs:

We are very pleased to be able to continue our emergency relief support via our helpline and home visits provided by our employees and volunteer members.

Our people are passionate about helping those in need in their local community and this service has been at the core of our work to help people break the cycle of disadvantage since the St Vincent de Paul Society was founded in 1833.

Of course we would all prefer that emergency support not be needed. However, I am confident that these new measures will assist families and, through earlier intervention and enhanced collaboration, support struggling families to reduce their reliance on crisis support.

### **Land—rural property acquisition**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the minister for planning and the environment. The government approved the subdivision of Fairvale to allow the seller's valuer to buy the most valuable part of Fairvale. The purchaser, a valuer for Knight Frank, had worked extensively for the LDA and had approached the former CEO of the LDA to agree to subdivide the land. The LDA had previously planned to purchase the whole property. Why did your directorate approve the subdivision of Fairvale?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It was approached from LDA at the time to do the subdivision. LDA looked at the recommendations and conditions that were required for that transaction and went forward with the subdivision.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what consideration did your directorate give to potential conflicts of interest in the sale process?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Milligan for the supplementary question. The directorate and staff always look at these sorts of issues when considering changes to the Territory Plan. They go through conditions. Obviously, many people in the directorate look at the different conditions that are imposed in those areas and look at the people involved in the processes to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest.

**MR COE:** Minister, how confident are you in the probity of your directorate's decision regarding the subdivision of Fairvale? Have you investigated it yourself, and who actually made the call to approve the subdivision? If you do not know the answer to these questions, will you take them on notice and report back to the Assembly this afternoon?

**MS BERRY:** Madam Speaker, I will take the part of this question with regard to investigations. Following the Auditor-General's report my office has asked for advice on the issues that have been raised by Mr Coe. I do not have that advice back yet. If I have legal advice and I can provide it, I will.

### **Land—rural property acquisition**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. I refer to the Auditor-General's report *Assembly of rural land west of Canberra*, which

found:

The former Land Development Agency gave inadequate attention to the establishment of contracts (licences/subleases) for the use and ongoing management of some rural properties to the west of Canberra that were the subject of this audit. This includes not collecting revenue from the first three purchases (Lands End, Milapuru and Fairvale), which the Audit Office estimates could amount to more than \$200,000.

Minister, what investigations have you ordered into the poor handling of these purchases?

**MS BERRY:** I refer the member to my last answer to Mr Coe's question regarding an investigation into that particular purchase, of Fairvale. I have asked for some advice on that issue, and on whether it needs to be investigated further. As I said, because I have asked for legal advice, if I am able to provide it then I will.

**Ms Lee:** Madam Speaker, a point of order.

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

**Ms Lee:** Yes. I did ask about the three purchases: Lands End and Milapuru as well. Will that be included in the minister's update?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can you add to that?

**MS BERRY:** An audit response is being developed, and we will provide that when we can.

**MS LEE:** Minister, why has the Suburban Land Agency not completed land management agreements for the properties identified in the Auditor-General's report on the assembly of rural land?

**MS BERRY:** Sorry, Madam Speaker; I might just ask for that to be repeated. I was not quite sure what she—

**MS LEE:** Why has the Suburban Land Agency not completed land management agreements for the properties identified in the Auditor-General's report?

**MS BERRY:** The government is working on a response to the Auditor-General's report. As soon as that is available, it will be published.

**MR COE:** Minister, has the Suburban Land Agency received a breach of lease notification from the planning directorate regarding the lack of land management agreements?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice.

### **Housing—government sales**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban

Development. Minister, I refer to *Canberra Times* reporting on your decision to sell 33 townhouses to the defence housing authority. Minister, why are you getting the Public Housing Renewal Taskforce to build housing for the Defence Force rather than for Canberrans suffering from housing stress and skyrocketing rent levels?

**MS BERRY:** First of all, as I have said previously, these particular houses that will be built were never planned for public housing. Having public housing in those numbers on those blocks would have meant a very high density of public housing in one area. Defence and the federal government recognised the great work that the renewal taskforce is doing and the quality of the product that it builds. They had a need to build housing for the great defence families, over 3,000 defence families, who live in our town and they were able to provide finance for that build straightaway. It was a good arrangement where there was recognition for the excellent work that ACT public servants have done through the renewal taskforce. It also provides a good social mix so that there is not a high density of public housing on that site.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What does a better social mix do for Canberrans who are denied an affordable housing opportunity?

**MS BERRY:** That is really quite a silly question. I have explained again and again that the whole purpose behind the renewal of public housing in the ACT was to provide higher quality, newer homes that were affordable for families to heat in winter and cool in summer: much more sustainable and environmentally friendly. They were also designed to make sure that we remove that high densification of low-or no-income people living together, which does not provide the social benefits that a mixed—

**Mr Parton:** If we say that, we're—

**MS BERRY:** All the experts say it Mr Parton. That is the case. There is advice from ACT Shelter, ACTCOSS—all the organisations that advise me on the decisions that government makes—that high density public housing does not lead to good social benefits for housing tenants. This program is about making sure that there is a good social housing mix all across the city, which is completely in line with the ACT government's salt and pepper policy of having public housing distributed all across our neighbourhoods. This is appropriate and gives us all the chance to have public housing tenants as excellent neighbours.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how can you possibly argue that you aim to assist those suffering from housing stress when the Public Housing Renewal Taskforce is building 33 dwellings for the Defence Housing Authority?

**MS BERRY:** I am surprised that the Liberal Party are not supporting our defence families. Defence families are an important part of our community, indeed, for Australia as well. This is a great—

**Mr Coe:** It's bizarre.

**MS BERRY:** It is not bizarre at all; it is a very great outcome for a number of reasons: it provides a good social mix of housing; it provides housing for our fantastic

defence families—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members on my left, please!

*Ms Lawder interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Lawder, I did not invite you to say anything, so please refrain. The minister was asked a question and she is answering it. Please give her the respect to be heard.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I said, this is a great outcome for recognising the fantastic work that the renewal taskforce has been doing in the ACT in renewing public housing and making better, more sustainable, environmentally friendly, more affordable homes for our public housing tenants. It is also a great outcome for the fantastic defence families, who we welcome into our city.

### **Emergency services—recruitment**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, what update can you provide about recruitment of firefighters to the ACT?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Cody for her interest in our emergency services workers across the ACT. The government is committed to helping grow key services as our city grows. This is why the government is supporting our front-line emergency workers through additional measures. An important part of this is the commitment we made in last year's budget to fund the ACT Fire & Rescue recruitment program, the recruit college 39.

This recruit program not only helps recruit the firefighters that our city needs but also actively focuses on getting more female participation. Increasing the numbers of women in our emergency services is at the heart of the women in emergency services strategy, something I have spoken about in this place in the past.

Recruit college 39 resulted in 17 new firefighters, including two Indigenous firefighters and four female firefighters. This follows on from the nine firefighters who commenced duty as part of the recruitment in November 2017 and the 16 firefighters who joined ACT Fire & Rescue as part of the 2016 recruit college in October 2016.

This year's budget includes funding for a further recruit college for 18 new firefighters. I look forward to seeing the new recruits who come through as a result. Through the stewardship of the Chief Minister, this government is providing firefighters and paramedics, as well as more front-line staff in other areas, and also investing in the core services that a growing Canberra needs.

**MS CODY:** Minister, I note that you just mentioned paramedics in your answer. Has there been any recent recruitment of paramedics in the ACT?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary question. Indeed I did mention this. Of course we need to grow services as the city grows, something that the government is delivering on. In addition to new firefighters the government is providing new paramedics. Members may recall that last year the government provided funding to allow 24 additional staff for the ACT Ambulance Service, including 23 paramedics, and these are coming through. Recruitment is ongoing for ACTAS.

I had the pleasure of attending the ACTAS graduation ceremony in May. It was wonderful to see the 14 new staff who have qualified across a range of areas of service delivery, including Certificate III in non-emergency patient transport (NEPT), Certificate IV in ambulance communications and authority to practise as an intensive care paramedic.

The safety of our community is paramount. Graduates are now fully equipped for the day-to-day challenges of working for the ACT Ambulance Service across a range of services provided. The graduates will serve the community in their time of greatest need. I have no doubt that they will contribute positively to the service, building on its strong reputation in recording the best response times in the country over the past six years and the highest levels of patient satisfaction. We are supporting our paramedics with additional staff as well as new equipment and fleet upgrades.

**MS ORR:** Minister, having spoken about recruitment of firefighters and paramedics, are you able to advise if ACT Policing has had new recruits recently?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her interest in ACT Policing matters. Police officers, like firefighters and paramedics, do an important but difficult job in keeping our city safe as it grows. I am pleased that in the past few years we have been able to fund new initiatives for ACT Policing. The most recent budget included funding for the upgrade of equipment, as well as six new positions.

In my role, I am privileged to see firsthand the fantastic work our police do, and I understand the rigorous and thorough training that they undertake to join our force. That is why the graduation ceremony is such an important milestone for new recruits and a proud moment for their families. I was fortunate to attend the recent graduation ceremony and saw 25 new uniformed officers being sworn in who will join the ranks of ACT Policing. I also had an opportunity to talk to their families. It is clear that these new recruits are committed to serving and protecting our Canberra community as the city grows.

Keeping our city safe, delivering services and planning and building the infrastructure that our growing city needs is what this government has done, and will continue to do as we make the city even better.

### **Housing—affordability**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. I refer to comments by former senior treasury official Khalid Ahmed in the *Canberra Times* of 16 July 2018 about the government's revenue driven land release policy. Dr Ahmed said:

... the one thing that doesn't lie is the movement in price and the rising dividend the government is receiving ... I see it's a problem of the government's own making, because it causes an economic and social problem.

Dr Ahmed concluded that the government had made things worse as its exclusive control of zoning and pricing of land has driven up prices.

Why has the ACT government made housing affordability worse?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Parton for the question. However, I would say that it is this government's view that land in the ACT should be managed by the ACT government. I would much rather see land and profits from land sales going to the community via the government than going into the pockets of private developers and others. Whilst private developers do have a role in this town, and they are providing some developments, I would much rather see funds for housing and land development go back to the ACT government and then be provided for services for the community.

With regard to housing affordability, Mr Parton, too, attended the summit last year and was part of the discussions, I believe, on all of the ideas that have come through from all parts of the community about how we resolve this very complex issue. As the government has been working towards developing a strategy to manage housing affordability and other issues to support people who are homeless or experiencing homelessness, it has been taking action on a whole raft of measures, including such measures as: providing taxes on vacant premises to, hopefully, get more houses into the market; setting up an affordable housing website so that people can enrol and register for affordable housing which is highly targeted and goes to the people who need it; and a setting a land supply target of 4,000 a year, which is significant and will make a difference for people to be able to get into homes of their own.

**MR PARTON:** Irrespective of arguments about developers not being involved, why is the ACT government continuing to receive an increasingly rising dividend as housing affordability and homelessness is getting worse?

**MS BERRY:** As I said, I would much rather that the funding returns to the community via the ACT government to build new hospitals and to build schools for our growing population in the ACT. I guess that what the Liberal Party is asking for here is some kind of reaching into and mucking around with the market. If that is the suggestion—that we actually muck around with the market—that will mean that people who have purchased homes will have mortgages above what other people are paying in the future. If that is the suggestion, I will be very interested to see the Liberal Party's affordable housing policy. They have not had one previously, and I look forward to seeing it when it is developed and seeing that it will include some market interference by the Liberal Party around housing and land prices in the ACT.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Coe and Ms Lawder, please. Minister, have you concluded?

**MS BERRY:** I want to complete my answer by making it very clear to Mr Parton and the Canberra Liberals that homelessness has improved in the ACT. The ACT government has improved its support for homelessness and compared to the increase in the rest of the country the ACT's homelessness numbers have gone down. That does not mean that the ACT government will stop responding—as we always will, as a good, socially progressive government—to ensure that we support people, whether they are sleeping rough, whether they are seeking housing or whether they are seeking a home to rent. Everybody deserves to have a home and the ACT government will continue to work on that. I look forward to releasing the housing and homelessness strategy later this year. *(Time expired.)*

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, when will the government start releasing more land to ease the land affordability crisis in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** We have just released a land release program. I draw the attention of members opposite to that.

### **Australian Labor Party—preselection**

**MISS C BURCH:** My question is to the Chief Minister. I refer to two dirt sheets on a Labor preselection hopeful which were distributed to members of the Labor Party. One of these documents is reported to have possibly forged documents attached. A former ACT Labor minister said that only party officials or public officeholders including MLAs would have access to the memberships used to circulate these dirt sheets. Chief Minister, will you absolutely guarantee that no-one in your office was aware of or involved in the creation or distribution of this material?

**MR BARR:** Yes.

**MISS C BURCH:** Chief Minister, have police or other investigators spoken to any MLAs or their staff about possible involvement in the creation or distribution of this material?

**MR BARR:** I do not believe so, no.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, what actions have you taken to ensure that no member of your ministry, your caucus executive or MLAs' staff were involved in the production or distribution of this material?

**MR BARR:** I am very confident in the integrity of everyone within the government, and I would have no reason to believe that anyone would be involved in such activities.

**Mr Coe:** A point of order.

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

**Mr Coe:** The specific question was: what actions have you taken to ensure that no member of your ministry, your caucus executive or MLAs' staff were involved in the production or distribution of this material? The Chief Minister has not answered what

action he has taken and I ask that he be directly relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** His answer has gone to the point, the ideal, of the question. Do you have anything to add, Chief Minister?

**MR BARR:** As I said, Madam Speaker, and I repeat: I am absolutely confident in the integrity of all members of the government and of staff in this place, and that they would not be involved in such activities.

**Ms Lee:** In other words, nothing.

**MR BARR:** The allegation that has just been made by Ms Lee is disgusting.

### **Canberra Hospital—safety**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, non-removal of ligature points at the Canberra Hospital was identified as an extreme risk by the accreditation committee. For the information of members—I am sure you know, Minister—a ligature point is anything that could be used to attach a cord, a rope or other material for the purposes of hanging or strangulation. Media reports on 12 July claimed that the removal of ligature points had been delayed by a year and was expected to be completed by August or September. This is something that ACT Health has known about for some time. A spokesman for ACT Health was quoted in the media story as saying:

“It’s not a cheap process so that did take ACT Health some time to work through how that was going to be funded.”

Minister, why did budget considerations delay the removal of the extreme risk ligature points in the Canberra Hospital?

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is a fair question that Mrs Dunne has asked. I can inform the Assembly that when this matter was brought to my attention in the second half of last year as a potential budget bid, I discussed it with the acting director-general at the time and said I was not prepared to wait for this to be a budget bid and it had to be dealt with immediately. The acting director-general at the time, who happened to be the Under Treasurer, agreed with me. At that point, matters were sought to be progressed rather than waiting for a budget case to come through.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why is it that the adult mental health unit had ligature points, given that it was opened in 2012 and should have been state of the art?

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is also a good question and one that certainly crossed my mind in coming into the portfolio. I think it is a reflection of the fact that the standards are changing, and changing quite rapidly. The reason there is that the particular ligature points identified in the accreditation report, and that had been identified prior to that, are in fact, without getting into too much detail, doors and door frames.

The new standard is that doors should have a pressure pad point on them, an electronically activated pressure pad, so that if someone does seek to use them as a

ligature point, an alarm is activated and staff are notified straight away.

My advice is that in 2012, and presumably before that when it was being designed, that was not considered to be the standard considered necessary for an adult mental health unit and I think you will find that many mental health units in Australia do not comply with that standard now.

**MR WALL:** Minister, have the extreme risk ligature points at the Canberra Hospital been removed yet? If not, when will they be removed?

**MR RATTENBURY:** In part, the answer is yes. There are two doors identified for each accommodation unit. One is the door to the bathroom, or the ensuite, in each of the accommodation areas. Those doors were removed immediately. The external door from the accommodation unit into the corridor is obviously more problematic from a privacy perspective.

Also, the actual changeover of the doors is a difficult technical exercise. A prototype door—I will have to check this, and if I have up-to-date information I will provide that on notice—has recently been developed and is being tested. My expectation is that a transition process will begin for those doors in the coming month, if it has not already commenced.

### **Access Canberra—construction measures**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Can the minister outline recent measures to help support Access Canberra ensure good quality building in Canberra?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Orr for the question and her demonstrated interest in good quality building here in Canberra. I am pleased to say that the government is getting on with the job and working to improve the quality of building in the territory. We currently have licence examinations for those applying for C class licences. By the end of this year, that will have been rolled out and extended to B and A class licences. This means that people seeking to become builders here in the territory will need to prove that they have the skills and the knowledge necessary to enter the industry before they become a licenced builder.

We will also roll this test out to one in five renewals of builders licences to ensure that those in the industry have knowledge that is current and reflects the building code of the day. These exams can also be used as a skills assessment at any time while they hold a licence where we believe that someone's knowledge is not up to scratch to see whether they should continue to hold a licence.

In the budget, the government has also provided funding for two additional building inspectors for Access Canberra. These inspectors will initially be focussing on clearing current cases to ensure that quick and appropriate action is taken against builders where a complaint has been substantiated against them.

Access Canberra has also established a rapid regulatory response team to respond to building complaints. This team is able to undertake site inspections to quickly

determine whether there is or there is likely to be a building code breach, to close off complaints in a more timely manner where no regulatory response is warranted or required, allowing the remainder of the inspectors to focus on existing and more complex cases. These are just a few of the measures we are taking to improve the quality of building here in the ACT.

**MS ORR:** Minister, can you outline how we are communicating this to builders?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. Just a few weeks ago the Construction Occupations Registrar, the statutory office holder responsible for builders licences, wrote to all licence holders who had a substantiated complaint made against them with Access Canberra and informed them that the next time they seek to renew their licence they will need to undergo a licence exam. This sends a clear message to the industry that if you build poorly and the regulator determines that you have breached the building code we will be checking to see if you still have the knowledge and skills to continue in the industry. From next year, 20 per cent of those who renew their builders licences will sit the exam. This will include all of those builders I just mentioned who have a substantiated complaint recorded against them by Access Canberra.

Through this process Access Canberra has been working with industry groups such as the MBA and HIA as well as training providers such as CIT to discuss the changes, including providing information resources for these organisations to pass on to their members. All licensed builders have also received a message by text where we have a mobile number for them. That is over 3,000 licensed builders who have been put on notice that we expect those building in the territory to do so at the required level.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, could you please outline why these measures are so important?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. These measures are important because buying a home is often the biggest investment that someone will make in their lifetime. The government wants to do what it can to ensure that it is a sound investment.

The government intends to make sure that only those with the appropriate skills and knowledge are building in the territory. That is why we have been systematically rolling out changes to the system since 2016, after a review. We will continue to roll out changes to ensure that there is confidence in the building system here in the ACT.

We will certainly not be apologising for setting the bar high to enter and to stay in the building industry. The ACT government is committed to improving the quality of buildings in the territory and compliance with building laws is a priority for Access Canberra.

Additional resources have been committed in both policy and operational areas to achieve this outcome. This includes inspectors and auditors who work cooperatively with industry to ensure that both builders and buildings comply with the regulatory framework. There are many builders in the ACT who are doing the right thing and building quality buildings. We want to ensure that they can continue to do so and that

they are not squeezed out of the market by those who are doing the wrong thing.

**Chief Minister—Asia trade mission**

**MS CHEYNE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you give the Assembly an overview of the various inbound investment opportunities you highlighted during your recent trade mission to Asia?

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

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Resume your seat, please, Chief Minister. Stop the clock. Mr Coe, I have asked you a number of times to refrain from interjecting. Please, see if we can get to the end of question time without my calling you again. Chief Minister.

**MR BARR:** The primary focus of the mission was, of course, on investment, trade and tourism opportunities. I met with 10 financial institutions across the three Asian markets that we were participating in with this trade mission. We took the opportunity to promote a range of property investment opportunities across those three markets. These are, of course, large commercial investors.

I am very pleased to advise the Assembly of the significant interest, firstly, for investment in Australia. Our nation is seen as a stable and secure place for investment and there is growing interest in Canberra particularly, given recent moves by state governments in New South Wales and Victoria to put in place a range of measures to discourage foreign investment, particularly in their property markets. We have, I think, a very positive story to tell, and that was well received across the three markets.

In addition to inbound investment, the government also focused on opportunities in partnership with the CBR Innovation Network and ANU Connect Ventures to secure more venture capital for start-ups and SMEs in Canberra. That included a series of pitches from those start-ups for that venture capital direct to the series of forums, particularly one in Singapore.

In Hong Kong I had the opportunity to meet with the Ovolo hotel group to pursue tourism investment opportunities. *(Time expired.)*

**MS CHEYNE:** How does engagement in international financial markets benefit the territory?

**MR BARR:** We are one of only a handful of sub-national governments around the world that hold a AAA credit rating. That is a very attractive proposition for international investors. Diversifying our bond program in terms of the split both between international and domestic investors and between bank balance sheets and other asset managers not only assists to drive down the cost of borrowing for the territory but also enables further engagement with international financial markets on investment opportunities for the ACT.

These particular approaches in the international bond market have been well received.

I can advise that when the ACT went to market earlier this year, three of the significant international investors who participated in our bond offering were institutions that we had met with during our earlier bond roadshow.

This is important for the territory's long-term infrastructure needs. We meet the bulk of our infrastructure program through asset sales and through our cash surplus but we also will borrow for significant long-term infrastructure for the territory, the same as all other Australian states and territories and, indeed, the Australian government. That is part of prudent infrastructure investment. Sourcing that capital at the lowest possible cost with the most diverse range of financiers is common sense.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Chief Minister, have there been any direct outcomes to local Canberra businesses or start-ups as a result of the mission?

**MR BARR:** Yes. I am very pleased to advise that a number of businesses have already received investment or are close to securing investment as a result of their participation in the trade mission.

We have significant interest in commercial property in the ACT across a range of asset classes and a range of different markets. The Canberra Business Chamber worked with six Canberra businesses to explore opportunities in Singapore. Participants have reported making important contacts and will continue to engage with investors and markets. An example is the local producer Majestic Mushrooms. Their story appeared in the media following their participation in the mission. They are now looking at stepping up their production to meet new market demand in South-East Asia.

Investors also responded favourably to presentations given by the eight Canberra start-up companies at the innovation network investor showcase. The innovation network at ANU Connect Ventures will be assisting these start-ups with follow-on connections.

I was also very pleased to hear that VSI Singapore, a technology manufacturing company, has reached broad agreement to invest \$3 million in the new Significant Capital Ventures venture capital fund to invest in Canberra regional companies.

We also are confident that our initial engagements with Hong Kong Airlines will be productive in the medium term and we look forward to further engagement with tourism industry stakeholders in the south-east Asian region as we continue our efforts to improve international connectivity to Canberra. Of course, this approach worked with Singapore Airlines. We continue our partnership with Qatar Airways, and we will always seek to encourage new airlines to fly to Canberra.

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