



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Thursday, 1 November 2018

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Questions without notice

Taxation—rates

MR COE: My question is for the Treasurer and Chief Minister. Chief Minister, is it your position that the government will continue to use average unimproved land values as the determinant for the rates rather than the market value of properties?

MR BARR: The government has no plans to change the system but we are, of course, undertaking several reviews in relation to the next tranche of tax reform. We have looked at alternative systems. Any change would be very costly and very disruptive and would undoubtedly throw up a range of anomalies most likely even greater than the small number of concerns that have been expressed to date.

I see no reason to change the system. There has not been a compelling argument made that the system should be changed. Were such a compelling argument to be made, I would consider it and the government would consider it, but it would not be something that would be introduced overnight and I would imagine that such a change, which I am not contemplating, would need to be phased in over an extended period of time.

MR COE: Chief Minister, can you rule out using the market value of properties as the determinant for rates in this term of the Assembly?

MR BARR: Most definitely, yes.

MR WALL: Treasurer, has Minister Rattenbury ever raised concerns about the fairness of the system for determining rates while participating in the development of the budget or other policy?

MR BARR: I would not disclose the content of cabinet discussions and deliberations. But Mr Wall would be aware that the Greens party has released a discussion paper that would indicate a willingness from the Greens party to consider alternative approaches. But, as I understand it, it is purely a discussion paper. It does not yet form the considered view of the Greens party.

I am not a spokesperson for the Greens party. I will not ever be a spokesperson for the Greens party. Nevertheless, it is within their rights to discuss an issue. But I think that there are powerful arguments for the average unimproved value, the AUV, system that we have, with a rolling three-year average. Those who wish to change the system would need to mount a very persuasive argument and undoubtedly would need to go through the many different hurdles of forming committees, modelling, doing the whole song and dance that is necessary to change anything in this country at this point in our nation's history.

Domestic and family violence—digital technology

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, recent public commentary by police and domestic violence workers has been that domestic violence victims are increasingly being stalked, harassed and targeted by

high-tech devices, including, but not limited to, surveillance devices, apps, drones and other digital technology, and there is concern that laws are not keeping pace with digital developments. Attorney, are you aware of these issues, and what work is being done to close any gaps in the law to ensure that women and others are protected from this emerging form of harassment?

MS BERRY: Madam Speaker, I might take that question, as the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. Yes, all of the issues that Ms Le Couteur raises are concerns, regarding the different ways that people are being affected by domestic and family violence and sexual assaults in our community. As we know, it is a very complicated and complex issue. My office, the Coordinator-General for Family Safety and the Attorney-General work very closely together in our attempts to address all of the concerns that are raised by the community, and as we look at how, as our community changes and evolves, we address different circumstances where people might be affected by domestic and family violence.

With regard to the particular issues and changes to law, I am not aware of any details about specific changes to law at this point. However, those situations that Ms Le Couteur has referred to are, of course, points of discussion regarding the work that the coordinator-general has done with the co-design of the family safety hub. That work will continue, having regard to how we address this very important and complex issue.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can you provide an update on the review of civil surveillance legislation which the government commenced in 2016? When will it be completed?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question. The matter is ongoing. I will be able to provide further details to the Assembly in due course.

Education—literacy and numeracy

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for education: a few weeks ago it was discovered that you had misinterpreted the findings of a report by Professor Stephen Lamb which formed the basis of your future of education strategy, and Professor Lamb was forced to publicly correct you. An ANU working paper provided to the Education Directorate that demonstrated through statistical analysis that ACT school results were declining has been ignored for two years. During that time you have consistently claimed that ACT schools are excelling. Then the Grattan Institute found that the ACT is the worst performing state or territory when it comes to literacy and numeracy at both primary and secondary school levels. Minister, what are you doing to improve literacy and numeracy in our schools?

MS BERRY: The ACT government is doing a whole lot in our schools to address literacy and numeracy but is also taking a holistic approach to what happens in our school communities rather than just a point-in-time examination around a couple of details that are reported in the NAPLAN test and the circus that occurs around that each year. Ms Lee will know that the ACT is leading a review on how that data is used and whether it is benefiting our students' learning or, to the contrary, causing them harm. My view has always been if that is causing them harm then we need to

change it.

With regards to work that is happening across our system, the ACT government has made significant announcements, particularly through the development of a strategy—the future of education—which I have launched. It provides a road map for education over the next 10 years. That work will also consider the conversations that we have had over the development of the strategy—over 5,000 conversations—particularly with students, ensuring that students are at the centre of the future of education conversation.

Literacy and numeracy in our schools are important. One of the particular issues that the ACT government through the Education Directorate has implemented in our schools is a program with the expert advice, work and knowledge of Christine Topfer, a literacy expert from Tasmania. She has been working across our schools to embed literacy in different kinds of ways in our schools and also providing numeracy as leaders projects for our school principals. The majority of our school principals have now been through—*(Time expired.)*

MS LEE: Minister, what is that program that you are developing with Christine Topfer, and how will you measure the success of your initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy in our schools?

MS BERRY: I can provide some more detail on the work that is being done with Christine Topfer. Christine Topfer is well known for her work in schools and improving literacy outcomes in schools. Certainly, from a quality perspective, when I have visited schools that have implemented programs through the work of people who use the programs that Christine Topfer has recommended, their PIPS results have improved by up to 300 per cent. A good example of that work was at Kingsford Smith School. Kingsford Smith School was discussed during estimates hearings recently. I can refer Ms Lee to the discussion that was conducted there around the results at Kingsford Smith School and the particular program that has been implemented there.

MR PARTON: Minister, why are our students performing worse now than they were 15 years ago, given the five reports that prove this to be the case?

MS BERRY: Our schools have always been the highest performing schools in the country and it is the case that now other schools in the country have been catching up to the high-performing schools that exist here in the ACT. Madam Speaker, I—and I know you did when you were education minister as well—celebrate the success and the holistic approach that our schools take to education in the ACT.

ACTION bus service—school services

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, with a backdrop of reports of men approaching students at and near schools over a period of months, if students have to use the normal bus network and regular buses rather than dedicated school buses, what confidence can parents have that children will be safe using buses to and from school?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will ignore the dog whistle that is evident in Mrs Lawder's

question and remind her that those approaches—and I congratulate ACT Policing on the formation of their task force on this—which have very swiftly been responded to, are happening now, when there are dedicated school buses. And next year there will also be dedicated school buses. I know that families in our community, including many of us here, have young children and older children travelling to and from school every day. I utterly reject the pretty grubby dog whistle in Mrs Lawder’s question.

Ms Lawder: Ms Lawder, thank you.

MS FITZHARRIS: My apologies; Ms Lawder’s question.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will students as young as five years old be left unsupervised on buses using your new bus network?

MS FITZHARRIS: Students will use the new bus network as they use the existing bus network today.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, please!

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, enough! Miss Candice Burch.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, how long on average will children spend at bus interchanges under your new bus network?

MS FITZHARRIS: Probably about the same time as they do now. There will be those who want to spend even more time, and there will be those who want to spend less time.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please! You asked the question; hear the answer.

MS FITZHARRIS: I think the Canberra Liberals are really showing their true colours in these questions, Madam Speaker.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, you have only been back for a few days. I have had to call—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please. Mrs Jones, you are very close to being warned. Welcome back, but please don’t interject.

Health—cancer research

MS CODY: My question is to the minister for health and medical research. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the memorandum of understanding recently signed between the ACT government, the Australian National University and the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Cody very much for the question. The national focus of medical and health research is centred on collaboration to accelerate discoveries in medicine and health through the efficient sharing of ideas and resources. The MOU signed between the ACT government, the ANU and the world-renowned Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre facilitates such collaboration with these outstanding, internationally recognised research organisations. The MOU provides an exciting vehicle for the ACT to further develop research, academic and clinical excellence; innovation around improving cancer patients' experiences; and strong partnerships with other jurisdictions.

The ACT is fast becoming a key player in medical and health research, and this status will help to attract and retain highly regarded clinicians and scientists to the ACT and increase the potential for significant new grant funding and investment in infrastructure. The opportunity provided by the MOU gives confidence to investors that government can provide such support to the research sector and hope to those receiving treatment and care that new, effective treatments are being developed right here in Canberra.

The MOU opens up other opportunities to work with the University of Canberra, the University of Wollongong and other jurisdictions to implement a truly regional approach to medical and health research in the Canberra region.

MS CODY: Minister, how will the MOU enhance diagnostic genomics research and treatment in the ACT?

MS FITZHARRIS: The ACT, through a \$7 million 2016 budget initiative, has established Canberra Clinical Genomics as a research, diagnosis and treatment platform for diseases associated with germline mutations, more commonly known as inherited diseases. The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre has a pipeline in place for clinical-grade cancer genomics research.

The MOU provides the opportunity for the ACT to benefit in terms of the cancer genomics resources offered by Peter MacCallum to Canberra Cancer Services and the ANU, and the expertise, skills, facilities and technology that will be established here within the ACT Canberra Clinical Genomics Centre to support local targeted precision cancer medicine, research and treatment.

Canberra Clinical Genomics was established through an ACT budget initiative and draws on the infrastructure and bioinformatics expertise established at the ANU at the Centre for Personalised Immunology. The sequencing service established through Canberra Clinical Genomics has been implemented in parallel with a medical genomics clinic at the Canberra Hospital.

Canberra Clinical Genomics provides Canberrans with access to leading edge

diagnostics and more than 150 patients have been sequenced, providing new diagnoses for patients and their families. Through the MOU with the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, we are enhancing this research and treatment that will lead to longer life and better quality of life for cancer patients in the ACT, typically where standard treatments have not been successful.

This is an amazing outcome for the local medical and health research sector, our clinicians in ACT Health and academic partners here in the ACT and in Victoria. The focus on genomics research in the treatment of patients will significantly strengthen the ACT's position amongst other jurisdictions, especially as this type of precision medicine research becomes more mainstream in treating illness, including cancer.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what are the government's priorities for the Medical and Health Research portfolio?

MS FITZHARRIS: I was very pleased to add this portfolio to my responsibilities earlier this year. The government next month is convening the ACT Health summit on research teaching and training to determine the vision for the future of medical and health research in the ACT. It is anticipated that initiatives involving the ACT's proximity to New South Wales will play a role in defining the scope of some of the research priorities and partnerships.

The ANU and the University of Canberra will be the top priorities in terms of academic partners in the medical and health research space for the ACT. Primary healthcare partners, other tertiary institutions, consumer groups and other care providers will also be important partners. Research quality and capacity is a key focus. Initiatives in this area will take shape over the next few months that will significantly enhance the research methods and data analytic capabilities associated with our research discovery and translation endeavours. The ANU and the University of Canberra are involved with the office of research and ACT Health to make data science a centrepiece of health and medical research in the future.

The government is getting on with the job of providing safe, timely and sustainable health care when and where Canberrans need it. We are complementing this in the ACT's health system by taking steps to make the ACT a national and world leader in medical and health research. I look forward to updating the Assembly on the outcomes of the summit as soon as possible.

Light rail—drivers

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, what is the total number of light rail drivers that will be employed by Canberra Metro and how many have already commenced employment?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Miss Burch for the question. I understand it is in the 30s and I understand that they have all been employed. Of course Canberra Metro will continue to seek light rail drivers over the course of the project but I will check the numbers and take that question on notice.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, on what date did wages and salary payments to those

light rail drivers commence?

MS FITZHARRIS: I presume when they were employed, but I will take that question on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what is the weekly wage bill for light rail drivers for every week of delay in the commencement of operations of light rail?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will not take that question on notice because, as the opposition well knows, or should by now, Canberra Metro is providing not only the construction of light rail but also the operations and maintenance of the light rail project over a 20-year period, so it will be within the scope of the agreement that the ACT government has with Canberra Metro. Of course, I am happy to update the opposition once again on the procurement method we used for this project. One of the features of that procurement method was that any particular delays in the project will be at the risk and the cost of Canberra Metro, not the ACT taxpayer.

Gungahlin—light rail impact

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Transport. On 20 September you tabled the business impact assessment of ACT government-led construction activities in Gungahlin. Whilst I was very pleased to see that the government responded to community calls for a review and my motion to independently audit the impact on business, I wonder now what the government plans to do with this document. Can you explain what the government will do with the lessons learnt identified in this report?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. The lessons learnt were both for the current project and also for future projects. We certainly will be taking on board those lessons around how to improve collaboration with businesses, noting that there was extensive collaboration and engagement with businesses around the light rail project, and the importance of coordinating ACT government and other private sector construction activities in a particular precinct which may be impacting on businesses, and making sure there is improved coordination. There were matters such as providing information for businesses whose owners do not have English as a first language.

All those lessons will be learnt, and I thank the Canberra Business Chamber and the light rail business link project for the work they did on the impact study. We have used some of those lessons for further work on the light rail construction project as it has impacted the rest of the corridor and we certainly look forward to using those lessons for the construction of stage 2 of light rail to Woden.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister what does this mean for the businesses impacted by light rail during stage 1?

MS FITZHARRIS: It means that we will continue to work very closely through Transport Canberra, Canberra Metro and other ACT government directorates on the construction of light rail. But certainly it was the case that a couple of weeks ago we looked to have a celebration with Gungahlin businesses for not only the completion of construction of light rail stage 1 on the northern end of Hibberson Street but also the

opening of what is now the fantastic Hibberson Street shared zone and the Gungahlin bus station. All this goes to the significant investment that the ACT government is making in infrastructure in this city.

There has been enormous investment in infrastructure in the Gungahlin town centre and I think that anyone who visits there today can see the incredible benefit that it has brought to the Gungahlin town centre. We are only just at the beginning of not only residents but also local businesses fully realising the enormous benefit that will come to them from the ACT government's investment in the town centre.

MR COE: Minister, should people and business owners in Gungahlin have any hope at all that this government will provide any tangible support to them to help them to recoup the business losses and personal debt that they have racked up over the past 18 months as a result of light rail?

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer Mr Coe to my previous answer, but I am happy to reiterate that I think businesses are already seeing, and the community is already seeing, the benefits that will come from having enormous activity right outside their front door as a result of the single biggest infrastructure investment in this city's history: the building of light rail from Gungahlin to Civic.

I certainly acknowledge that a number of those businesses struggled over the period of construction but, in speaking with many of them, they also knew that the benefits would come. As Mr Milligan indicated, we did do a business impact study. We will learn lessons from that, as governments and businesses around the country and around the world realise that when public infrastructure is built, it delivers public benefit and benefit to business.

Mr Coe: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe.

Mr Coe: It is on relevance. The specific question was: should businesses and people have any hope that they will have any support with regard to recouping the debt and costs? She has not directly answered that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you have a minute left. Do you have anything further to add?

MS FITZHARRIS: No.

Work safety—government priorities

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety. Minister, could you update the Assembly on the ACT government's activities during Work Safety Month.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question and for his ongoing commitment to workplace health and safety. This year's theme for national Work Safety Month was "a moment is all it takes". It reflects on the fact that a safety

incident can happen in a moment in any workplace but a moment's forethought is also all it takes to prevent harm that may last a lifetime.

As part of Work Safety Month, WorkSafe ACT held and attended a number of workshops, events and seminars in relation to a broad range of issues currently facing Canberra's workplaces. The workshops focused on issues such as occupational cancers, mental health and safe work method statements, to name a few, with stakeholders such as the ACT Cancer Council and beyondblue.

The Work Safety Commissioner and I also attended important events such as the launch of Airport Safety Week and the ACT New South Wales cross-border breakfast, both highlighting the importance of collaboration in safety: collaboration across the varied roles at Canberra Airport from check-in to baggage handling through to the boardroom; and collaboration across the border, including between the ACT and New South Wales regulators.

As I said, WorkSafe ACT also held a number of safe work method statement—SWMS—seminars over safe work month and will be continuing to run them into the future, with hundreds of employees and employers coming along to each seminar to learn about how to minimise or eliminate risks to health and safety for workers conducting high-risk work.

Everyone plays an important role in workplace safety. We ask that everyone take a moment to ensure that they do their part for workplace safety not only during Work Safety Month but every day of the year.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how do WorkSafe ACT's activities in Work Safety Month reflect the national work health and safety strategy?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. The national work health and safety strategy's vision is of healthy, safe and productive working lives. It is underpinned by two key principles: that all workers, regardless of their occupation or how they are engaged, have the right to a healthy and safe working environment; and that well-designed healthy and safe work will allow workers in Australia to have more productive working lives. The strategy sets three national targets to be achieved from 2012 to 2022: a reduction in the number of worker fatalities due to injury of at least 20 per cent; a reduction in the incidence rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30 per cent; and a reduction in the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30 per cent.

As I mentioned in my previous answer, WorkSafe ACT has been working with a broad of range workers to ensure that everyone has the right to a healthy and safe working environment, including within the retail sector in the lead-up to Christmas. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that in 2016-17 the ACT private sector lost-time injury rate remained at its lowest recorded level for the second year in a row. An independent actuarial review of the territory's workers compensation scheme found that there were 0.24 lost-time injuries for each million dollars of wages paid. This is a reduction of more than 20 per cent since 2010-11. But there is always more to be done. More recent data from 2017-18 shows that the number of lost-time work related

injuries reduced by a further six per cent. We will continue to work towards our goal of ensuring that every worker goes home safely at the end of every day and every shift.

MS ORR: Minister, what else is the ACT government doing to improve worker safety outcomes?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. As the Assembly would be aware, we have introduced a number of important measures in order to improve worker safety outcomes over the past few months. The first of those that I will talk about is the Work Health and Safety Amendment Bill that passed in the Assembly earlier this year. The purpose of this bill is to improve the safety culture in the ACT's construction industry by facilitating greater consultation between employees and employers on major construction projects, something the ACT government believes is core to safe workplace culture.

Consultation is an important part of the risk management process, and this was confirmed by the RMIT University's review into work safety culture in the construction industry last year. Formal mechanisms assist workers to be able to have their voices heard in relation to concerns at work as well as to have a genuine opportunity to contribute to health and safety decisions in the workplace.

Another is the secure local jobs package, which is designed to use the government's purchasing power through procurement to encourage employers to do the best they can by their workers by meeting the highest ethical and labour standards. It is our hope that by creating a scheme that allows businesses that treat their workers fairly to flourish this will flow through to benefit all Canberra workers.

There are many more examples of what the ACT government is doing to improve worker safety outcomes, including the recently tabled outcomes of the independent review of the ACT's work safety compliance infrastructure, policies and procedures which will better position WorkSafe ACT to continue and improve on the work they are doing.

I look forward to working with the Assembly, staff, WorkSafe ACT, unions and other stakeholders to ensure that safety remains a priority not only for the ACT government but for the community we serve.

Canberra Hospital—offsite scanning contract

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, in an answer to a question on notice you said that the medical imaging department at the Canberra Hospital had a contract with Everlight to provide offsite CT scan analysis and reporting services. This was to cater for unplanned leave of radiology staff at the hospital. Between 1 January and 21 September this year, 833 scans had been referred to Everlight at a cost of \$100,000. You also advised that the contract had not been loaded onto the contract register. Minister, why is it necessary for the government to spend in excess of \$100,000 per year to cover the unplanned leave of medical imaging staff?

MS FITZHARRIS: To make sure that patients get access to timely medical imaging.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, does the budget for offsite CT scanning, analysis and reporting services for 2019 anticipate similar levels of unplanned leave as those we experienced in 2018?

MS FITZHARRIS: I do not believe so because, as has been discussed in this place, there have been some staff vacancies, a number of which have been filled. But I know that it is the priority of Canberra Health Services to make sure that patients who need access to imaging receive it. It would be remiss of Canberra Health Services not to have a backup plan for unplanned leave to make sure that patients can get access to the imaging that they need.

But with Mrs Dunne's questions on medical imaging, I will update the Assembly on some of the quite extraordinary improvements in the medical imaging department in recent years. For example, there is currently no waitlist for children to have MRI scans under a general anaesthetic, or for breast imaging. The findings of the 2017 health round table, used by hospitals around the country, which mapped Canberra Hospital's median wait time performance against 19 other public hospitals, showed significant improvements across the board and that Canberra Hospital is a leading hospital in this area.

For example, Canberra Hospital's median performance against these other hospitals in patient wait times was: 15.5 hours for an MRI compared to 26.2 hours; for a CT, 8.2 hours versus 11.2 hours; and for an X-ray, 3.7 hours versus 5.6 hours. Canberra Hospital's performance against these other hospitals for emergency department requests was: for an MRI, 3.1 hours versus 24.8 hours; for a CT scan, one hour versus 2.5 hours; and for an X-ray, half an hour compared to 1½ hours.

I expect Canberra health services to continue to improve performance in medical imaging so that patients in the ACT and around the region can continue to access timely diagnostics and medical imaging. I will insist that they have a plan in the event of unplanned leave, as any good health service would. *(Time expired.)*

MISS C BURCH: Minister, why was this contract not loaded onto the contracts register, and what have you done to satisfy yourself that other contracts have not also been left off the register?

MS FITZHARRIS: It is very clear to ACT Health and to Canberra Health Services that this should be done. I understand that it was an oversight at the time. That has been corrected.

Canberra Hospital—pharmacy service

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, I refer to your answer to Mr Parton's question yesterday about churn in the Canberra Hospital pharmacy, with 32 per cent of staff having left between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2018. You acknowledged in your answer that the level of turnover is high and, in your words, "not optimal". Minister, why has there been such a high turnover of staff at the Canberra Hospital pharmacy department since January 2017?

MS FITZHARRIS: I did note that and I have noted publicly and also directly with pharmacy staff themselves that this is indeed not optimal and it is not ideal at all and that I expect to see improvements in this area. Some of those improvements have come from ACT Health, Canberra Health Services and pharmacy staff working collaboratively on a range of important work to address a number of these issues. Some of those have been addressed through the enterprise bargaining round.

These include making sure that there are pay rates competitive with other jurisdictions and indeed other jurisdictions in the ACT, principally the Therapeutic Goods Administration as well, and also to look at the banding of health professional classifications, including options within pharmacy, Canberra Health Services and as part of broader ACT government work.

What I have asked the new CEO of Canberra Health Services to do is work with pharmacists and, as was reported, and Mr Parton noted in his question earlier in the week, I have been pleased to see progress on this matter. But that does not stop now. It will continue, and I look forward to welcoming even more pharmacists into Canberra Health Services.

MR HANSON: Minister, what are the levels of risk or delay in scripts being filled when there is a high churn in hospital pharmacists, resulting in mistakes in the filling of scripts for patients?

MS FITZHARRIS: In the majority of instances where people have left, those positions have been filled. I understand that there are still some positions to be filled, and I believe that the agreements that we have reached now and the work that is underway within Canberra Health Services will continue to support pharmacists and I expect to see that improve over the next six to 12 months. It is certainly the case that there is risk in any pharmacy delivery within a hospital. I will take the specifics of Mr Hanson's question on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what concerns do pharmacy staff have about the Canberra Hospital that are contributing to this high level of churn?

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer to the matters I raised earlier. They include issues around career progression and wages. I think they were principally the issues. And also, of course, working in a very busy hospital environment. We are looking to work very closely with pharmacy staff to make sure they are supported.

Housing—community

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. I refer to an article by a good friend of all of us, former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, in the *CityNews* of 1 November 2018—I note the nod from the minister—regarding Community Housing Canberra, CHC. Mr Stanhope wrote:

... the ACT Greens/Labor government called in the \$50 million revolving finance facility ... and cancelled the MOU guaranteeing CHC access to land.

What impact has the decision to call in the \$50 million revolving finance facility and

cancel the MOU guaranteeing CHC access to land had on the supply of affordable housing in Canberra?

MS BERRY: I nod because I note Mr Stanhope's notoriety and his penmanship, if you like, on issues of this government. I have not read the article, but I am not surprised that Mr Parton has read the article and has come here and asked a question about it in the Assembly.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: Well, you know. The ACT government has just announced an additional 151 dwellings that will go to community housing providers. Of course, with the line that was provided to CHC for \$50 million and then a further \$13 million, more than \$13 million, to provide community housing in the ACT, that work is still continuing. The ACT government will continue to work closely with community housing organisations like CHC.

MR PARTON: Will these changes in regard to the \$50 million revolving finance lead to CHC ceasing to build affordable housing and to sell existing rental stock in order to pay bills?

MS BERRY: I believe that is an assumption that Mr Stanhope made in his article, but the case is that the ACT government has just announced an increase of 151 dwellings for community housing providers in the ACT in 12 months. That is more than the sector has been able to deliver in four years and it shows that the ACT government is committed to working with community housing providers to provide affordable rentals and homes to the ACT community.

Mr Coe: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order. Resume your seat, minister.

Mr Coe: On relevance, Mr Parton's question was specifically about whether it was going to lead to CHC ceasing to build. I note that the minister has made reference to the government's in-house program but not to CHC's program.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you have a minute-plus if you can provide that answer.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did at the start say that that was an assumption made by Mr Stanhope, but I would say that the ACT government is not responsible for the management of CHC's work as far as the building or renting of their homes is concerned.

MS LAWDER: Minister, has the government called in the MOU guaranteeing the CHC access to land in order to make higher profits from your sale of land?

MS BERRY: No.

Government—waste to energy policy

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, why is the ACT government considering a waste to energy policy?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. The ACT government is committed to improving the ACT's waste management methods and performance. The ACT needs to look at new and innovative ways to manage waste if we are to reach our commitment of 90 per cent waste recovery by 2025 and a carbon neutral waste sector. These commitments were outlined in the ACT's waste management strategy: Towards a Sustainable Canberra 2011 to 2025. The development of a waste to energy policy was one of the 18 recommendations from the waste feasibility study road map released in May 2018.

There is currently no national policy on waste to energy. Different states are currently exploring how to respond to the range of technologies emerging in this space. There are clearly positives in terms of diverting waste from landfill, especially where this means additional recycling takes place. However, the community rightly will have some concerns about the technology involved. That is why we are seeking the community's involvement in developing this policy. A waste to energy policy will provide certainty to the community and to industry about what technologies will be supported by the Canberra community.

MS ORR: What are the methods of converting waste to energy?

MR STEEL: Thank you for the supplementary. Converting waste to energy is the process where energy and resources are extracted from waste. Waste to energy utilises many different kinds of technology and can be a potential method to extract value from our waste while diverting waste from landfill and reducing greenhouse emissions at the same time. Not all waste to energy involves any burning, or even heating. There are several methods of converting waste to energy, including but not limited to anaerobic digestion, landfill gas capture, gasification and combustion.

For example, anaerobic digestion is essentially an advanced form of composting. As the name suggests, this is a process that occurs in the absence of oxygen. When waste breaks down, it creates a digester that can be used as a soil conditioner or a fertiliser, and producing a biogas which can also be utilised as fuel.

In response to whether this has been done in the ACT, some waste to energy technologies are currently being utilised. Members may be aware of the current landfill gas capture plant at Mugga landfill, which produces around three megawatts of electricity every year, powering thousands of homes across the ACT while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Waste to energy utilises different types of technologies and is already being used in other Australian and international jurisdictions, taking into account a clear understanding of the health and environmental impacts.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, who is involved in the development of the policy?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Cheyne for her supplementary. As the Minister for City

Services, I want to make sure that our community and industry are partners in helping to design a long-term, informed, evidence-based policy vision for waste energy in the ACT. The ACT government is consulting the Canberra community through the your say website, with consultation open until 27 November. Canberrans can also visit their local library and receive a hard copy of a survey that is being conducted. We are also providing drop-in sessions for residents and the opportunity for one-on-one sessions as well. This will be complemented by focus groups for industry and the community.

The period of consultation will be incredibly important in how the ACT will approach waste to energy policy, particularly around certain technologies that will be regulated. Waste to energy is something that needs to be carefully considered and, as the minister responsible, I am looking forward to working with both industry and the community to investigate and formulate effective waste management policy.

Housing—affordable rental properties

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, your long awaited ACT housing strategy says that an objective is to grow the supply of affordable private rental properties. How do you expect to increase investment in the private rental market when this government continues to punish people for owning a rental property?

MS BERRY: I do not think that that is an entirely truthful statement that Mr Wall has made. Affordable rentals in the ACT are supported by the ACT government, particularly with regard to providing support to community housing providers that provide affordable rentals in the ACT. We will continue to work with community housing providers to do that.

MR WALL: Minister, when will you introduce a land tax exemption for properties that are provided as affordable rentals?

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, land tax policy sits with me, so I will answer the question. I direct the member to the statements contained within the housing policy framework, which was released earlier in the week, that indicated that the government would prepare such legislation, cognisant, of course, of the available—

Mr Coe: It's going to be hard to prepare given Mark's already written it.

MR BARR: His legalisation you could drive a truck through. We have been very clear about how we will approach that task. We will do so in accordance with the available time for the Assembly in this sitting year and the two sitting weeks in February next year.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you now accept that this government has created a rental affordability crisis?

MS BERRY: No, I do not accept that at all. The ACT government's tax reform has made homes more affordable for everyone.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: It is true.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, Mrs Dunne, Mr Hanson. Mrs Jones, perhaps you can ask them to be quiet next.

Housing—affordable home ownership

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, your housing strategy outlines a goal of increasing affordable home ownership. It states:

The product will be primarily aimed at low income households and, in particular, those currently in the community rental sector looking to transition into home ownership. Such a model could be considered in relation to land releases in future years.

Minister, do you now accept that the government's land release policies have at times locked low income households out of that buying market?

MS BERRY: No, I do not.

MRS JONES: Minister, when will you announce a time line for implementing your policy to make home ownership more affordable?

MS BERRY: The housing strategy is a 10-year strategy that has been announced, and it is right that through the implementation of the different parts of the strategy time is taken to ensure that we get the responses to different ideas that came out of the consultation. Over 100 ideas were part of this conversation. The implementation plan will provide more detail as the government takes the time in different parts of the road map to get the response right. It is only appropriate. It is a 10-year strategy.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you now agree that your government must take responsibility for creating a housing affordability crisis?

MS BERRY: No, I do not; absolutely not, and this government has not. In fact, the ACT government is leading the way in tax reform to ensure that housing in the ACT becomes more affordable. Of course, the ACT government, in leading the way, has also called on the federal government to ensure that they pull on the tax levers that they have responsibility for and make adjustments around negative gearing and capital gains.

If the Liberal Party, the Canberra Liberals, were really after making sure that affordable homes were available here in the ACT, then they would back the ACT government and get behind the campaign for the federal government to pull the tax levers that they have responsibility for.

In addition to that, one of the other issues around affordability in the ACT is not in the ACT government's control. It is around wages and I am very happy to see the federal Labor Party commit to improving and increasing Newstart, which this government and our Chief Minister have called for consistently, and will return penalty rates to the lowest paid workers in the ACT so that they can afford to have a decent crack at happiness, which is more than I can say for the Canberra Liberals.

Ginninderry—conservation

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability: in answer to a question about whether you had been consulted on the impacts of the Ginninderry development on three endangered or vulnerable animals you replied, “No, not formally.” The endangered or vulnerable animals involved include the little eagle, the golden sun moth and the pink-tailed worm-lizard. However, you replied to a supplementary question saying that you had been involved in “active discussions” about the decision as to whether gas would be available for the development. Does that mean that you did not discharge your duties as sustainability minister in ensuring that this development would not have an adverse impact on the three endangered or vulnerable animals?

MR RATTENBURY: As Mrs Kikkert could observe from the administrative arrangements, I do not have formal responsibility, as the minister for sustainability, for the endangered species act in the ACT. Whilst I have a significant personal interest in those issues, they do not formally sit within my ministerial portfolios.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, did your informal discussions include seeking the views of conservation groups and/or local community groups and did they support an exemption from an EIS process?

MR RATTENBURY: I have spoken to a number of different people who have an interest in Ginninderry. I think it is fair to reflect, as one can easily see from the public record, that there is a range of views on this matter, including different views amongst some of the environmental or conservation groups in the ACT, on the exact question that Mrs Kikkert is asking about.

MS LEE: Minister, do you ever pass on some of those concerns raised by the environmental and community groups to the minister for the environment? If so, when? If not, why not?

MR RATTENBURY: Yes; I have discussed these matters with the minister for the environment.

Housing—residential property approvals

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, how have residential building approvals been tracking recently, and what does this indicate about housing supply?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Over the past 12 months the ACT has seen annual growth of 64.2 per cent in the number of residential building

approvals. I can advise the Assembly that this is the strongest rate of growth of all Australian jurisdictions. Through the year, growth has been positive for eight consecutive months. There has also been significantly higher than the national growth rate over this period. This strong data from September builds on the all-time record month in the history of the Australian Capital Territory's residential building approvals: June, when 739 approvals were granted in just that one month. A strong pipeline of building approvals means that more new homes are coming online to meet demand in the months and years ahead.

At a time when the ACT's population is growing by 2.1 per cent a year, second only to Victoria's, it is important that we continue expanding our housing stock to ensure all Canberrans can find a suitable and affordable home. In this context it is worth mentioning that, according to the Grattan Institute's *Orange Book*, which was released earlier this week, the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia to have grown its housing stock per adult between 2011 and 2016. I repeat: the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia to have grown its housing stock per adult between 2011 and 2016. We have continued growing housing supply because we understand the need to continue to supply housing to a growing population.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, what sorts of residential properties are being approved, and how is this improving housing choices for Canberrans?

MR BARR: We are continuing to see a mix of freestanding homes, townhouses and units being approved across Canberra, which is important for diversifying our housing mix and giving Canberrans more choices about where they live.

In the 12 months to September 2018, there were 6,170 approvals in total, consisting of 2,595 approvals for houses and townhouses along with 3,575 approvals for units or apartments. The number of approvals for freestanding homes increased by 32.3 per cent over the past year, with September's approvals also being significantly above the five-year average for this segment of the market. The new freestanding homes will add to the 112,311 existing detached homes which make up 70 per cent of residential properties across the ACT.

Our housing mix is changing over time as we renew the city and town centres in line with the planning principles laid down by successive Labor governments, firstly, of course, by former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope. By promoting a strong pipeline of both freestanding homes and townhouses and apartments, we are working to ensure that there are housing options available at price points and in locations that suit all Canberrans, from the youngest first homebuyers and singles to families with kids and older people looking to move to more suitably sized housing at certain stages of their lives.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, what steps has the government been taking to improve residential housing supply and ensure a strong pipeline of building approvals?

MR BARR: The most important way that we can support housing supply and a strong building pipeline is through our forward land release program. This year's program stepped up the number of properties that we will deliver, detailing a plan for a further 17,000 new homes over the next four years from 2018-19 to 2021-22. Delivering this

program over four years will add 10.5 per cent to the ACT's total housing stock in four years.

Under the new housing strategy that the Deputy Chief Minister and I released during the week, the government has renewed our commitment to providing land and housing development opportunities that meet demand and see us maintain a healthy four-year building pipeline. This will include dedicating 15 per cent of the annual land released through this program to affordable, community and public housing which, as the Deputy Chief Minister has outlined, is around 630 new homes each year.

We are also supporting a strong building pipeline through urban renewal efforts in our city and town centres. We are investing in high quality transport infrastructure like new light rail and new roads and bridges, and we are reviewing policies on planning and taxation across government to ensure that the policy direction of government is one clear direction to provide more affordable and accessible housing across our growing city.

What will complement this policy agenda that is comprehensive at a territory level is a similar policy direction from a federal government interested in increasing housing supply and removing distortions within the federal taxation arrangements. As the Deputy Chief Minister has pointed out, these are changes to negative gearing to incentivise new build only, a very significant policy shift that this country should adopt, and revision of capital gains tax policy being equally important to support, particularly, owner-occupiers and first homebuyers entering the market, just as we have done by abolishing stamp duty for first homebuyers.

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