



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 19 February 2019

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official Weekly Hansard should be lodged with the Hansard office (facsimile 02 6205 0025) as soon as possible. Answers to questions on notice will appear in the *Weekly Hansard*.

Ministerial arrangements	1
Questions without notice:	
Taxis—regulation	1
Canberra Institute of Technology—Woden campus	2
Taxis—regulation	2
Taxis—government assistance	3
Gaming—poker machines	5
Taxis—government assistance	7
Taxis—regulation	9
Economy—outlook	9
Taxis—government assistance	11
Taxis—government assistance	12
Taxis—government assistance	12
Taxis—government assistance	13
Taxis—government assistance	16
Housing—affordable home ownership	17
Drugs—pill testing	18

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR: In the continued absence of Minister Fitzharris, questions in the health portfolio will be taken by Mr Rattenbury, in the transport portfolio by Minister Steel and in the higher education portfolio by Minister Stephen-Smith.

Questions without notice

Taxis—regulation

MR COE: My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. It is specifically in relation to the fine contribution and significant investments made by Canberra's taxi industry and its many owners. In September 2018, following the release of a government report titled *Evaluation of the 2015 innovation reforms to the on-demand transport industry in the ACT*, your government announced that it would release a further 142 plates to the taxi market. The value of existing perpetual plates is expected to fall to as low as \$45,000, if, indeed, buyers can be found. This is down from well over \$200,000 prior to the reforms. Chief Minister, given that the report that you commissioned clearly states that demand for taxi services has fallen, how can you justify releasing more than 100 plates to the market?

MR BARR: The government's primary interest is in consumers of transport services in the territory. We have a view, that would be very clearly shared by the overwhelming majority of Canberrans, that the taxi services in this city prior to reforms going back four or five years were not meeting the needs of consumers in terms of either the availability of service or the price of service. The government has, through a series of reviews, undertaken to improve on-demand transport and demand-responsive transport for Canberra residents and for visitors to our city. As part of that policy approach, we have also reflected the reality of new entrants into the marketplace and sought to regulate those appropriately. The government remains committed to a consumer-first approach to the delivery of on-demand transport services in Canberra.

MR COE: Chief Minister, will you meet with, look at or at least acknowledge the people in the gallery today and answer the question: why are you releasing more taxi plates in the ACT when there are dozens of licences left on the shelf?

MR BARR: The government recognises that this is an industry in transition, that there are a number of forces that are impacting upon what was previously a highly regulated, highly controlled market. No-one in this life is guaranteed a return on any capital investment and no-one is guaranteed a certain level of return on their investments in an industry in any context.

The government has as its primary focus the needs of consumers, the hundreds of thousands of people who need transport services. They come first for us. We are also particularly concerned about incomes for drivers of taxis and other on-demand transport forms. So our reforms have also been focused on ensuring that the costs of driving in the industry are reduced, the costs of leasing plates and participating in the industry are reduced. This is essential to ensure that consumers benefit, because the entire industry exists for consumers; not for capitalists, for consumers.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please!

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: I also remind folk in the gallery, please, to refrain.

MISS C BURCH: Chief Minister, how can you continue to claim that your government stands for fairness and social inclusion when your government's policy has decimated the retirement savings of so many hardworking Canberrans?

MR BARR: The government remains focused on the interests of consumers of transport services in the ACT. No government can ever guarantee a return on investment for any investor in any area of capital investment.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall, enough!

MR BARR: We, like every other government, will assess conditions within an industry and we have not sold a taxi plate for decades. This government has never sold them. The last government to do so was back in the 1990s. We lease plates and we will lease plates in accordance with market conditions with a focus on consumers, the hundreds of thousands of people who utilise on-demand transport services, whether they are taxis, Ubers or other forms of hire car and taxi services. That will be our focus and that will remain our focus.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Woden campus

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for suburban development and relates to the demolition of Woden's CIT. The budget review says the demolition is for "the renewal of the site for future community and development uses". Minister, what development and community uses are being considered?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am taking this question, as Minister for Urban Renewal. I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question. It is absolutely too early to say. This budget measure is really about demolishing buildings on the site that include asbestos and hazardous materials, to ensure that they do not become subject to vandalism or a danger to the public.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, given that, will the community be given a say in terms of what uses are actually put on the site, and what land is retained for community use?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Absolutely.

Taxis—regulation

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in

discussions with the ACT Taxi Plate Owners Association at a formal meeting on 31 January 2019, the ACTTPOA were advised by your department that neither your cabinet nor your department undertook a regulatory impact statement or a triple bottom line assessment with regard to your decision to release 142 additional taxi plates. Why was neither of these undertaken?

MR BARR: The government has undertaken extensive research and evaluation of the transition away from a highly regulated market, a transition that began many decades ago and that has been the subject of numerous pieces of research work and engagement. I repeat: we remain focused on the interests of consumers. That is what the industry is about. Without consumers, there is no industry. Consumers must come first.

MISS C BURCH: Chief Minister, what detailed consideration was given to the economic and social impacts for existing taxi plate owners?

MR BARR: The evaluations looked at those issues and provided advice to government that government has followed.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, what do you have against hardworking families who invest their hard-earned money into providing services for local Canberrans? Will you implement a compensation scheme or a government buyback scheme as has occurred in other states and territories?

MR BARR: Nothing. And I will not be announcing government policy in question time.

Taxis—government assistance

MR WALL: My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Chief Minister, in 2015 your government introduced reforms to the taxi industry which have since resulted in the value of perpetual taxi plates falling from approximately a quarter of a million dollars, or \$250,000, to currently less than \$80,000. How many taxi plate owners have to lose their livelihoods before your government admits that you got the policy wrong?

MR BARR: The government's policy intent was to ensure that, as new entrants came into the marketplace with new technologies—something that is not unique to Canberra but has in fact been occurring around the world—there would be a regulatory response by this jurisdiction. We were in fact the first in the world to regulate the arrival of rideshare services before they commenced operations. The difference here, as opposed to every other market in the world, is that we regulated in advance.

Through that process we have seen, from a consumer perspective, the number of rides taken—taxi, Uber and other services—increase, because service levels have improved as a result of competition, and prices have fallen. Consumers must come first. There is no industry without consumers and there is no world in which government will guarantee a return on investment regardless of changing economic circumstances, regardless of changing technologies and changing service delivery methods. It is very

straightforward. The government cannot and will not guarantee returns on people's investments in any industry.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, how can the government continue to defend a policy that you knew would destroy—and it has destroyed—the livelihoods of many Canberrans, all lost using ACT taxpayer dollars?

MR BARR: Because we support the interests of consumers, who were not being well served by the previous models, and because of the reality of change and innovation in service delivery. It is as straightforward as that. Uber was coming regardless. The industry had to adjust, and we sought to regulate the arrival of rideshare ahead of its commencement of operations. That is the difference between here and everywhere else. Again, no-one—no-one—is guaranteed a return on their investments by any government anywhere, and we are not going to entertain that here in the ACT.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how many perpetual plate holders actually reside in the ACT, and how many of those who bought their plate directly off the government fully recouped their investment?

MR BARR: I am advised now that there are 89 perpetual plate holders who are resident in the ACT. The ACT government has not sold a perpetual plate for some time; many decades, in fact. The ACT government has not been engaged in selling perpetual plates. But it would be fair to observe that over many years of operation in a highly regulated market there were significant returns to owners of perpetual plates through the lack of competition and a strangled, regulated market that did not serve the interests of consumers.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MR BARR: That is something that was changing, anyway, as a result of Uber's entry, and was being overwhelmingly demanded by consumers: by those hundreds of thousands of Canberrans who thought their taxi service was ordinary and by most of the visitors to the ACT who thought their taxi service was ordinary. It has improved dramatically as a result of competition and innovation, just as you would expect a properly functioning market to deliver. So for all of the catcalls of socialism from those opposite, we are seeing a market in operation and in markets there is not a guarantee of return on capital. Markets are competitive, and no government will ever guarantee a return on investment for the rest of time, particularly when there are so many forces impacting on a market, as is the case with on-demand transport.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, a point of order.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat. Mr Coe!

Ms Berry: Seriously, I am sure that the people in the gallery here today are interested in hearing the Chief Minister's response. They might not agree with it but they are

interested in hearing it. The continuous interjections by those opposite are interfering with them hearing the information that the Chief Minister is trying to provide.

MADAM SPEAKER: I remind members on my left that there has been a high level of interjection. When the minister is on his feet he should be heard in peace.

Gaming—poker machines

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Attorney-General. Can the Minister give the Assembly an update on the government's work to reduce the number of poker machine licences in Canberra?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Certainly this government is demonstrating very clearly that we can reduce the number of gaming machine authorisations, we can achieve stronger harm minimisation and we can develop a stronger clubs sector all at the same time. That is because we know that our clubs are places that support their local communities through sport, through culture and through social connections, not primarily as places to gamble.

That is why last year we passed legislation to create an incentives packages for clubs, backed by a strong framework for reaching 4,000 gaming machine authorisations by 2020. I am pleased to say that all of the clubs that are required to surrender authorisations engaged with the government and took up the incentives. As of now there are only 4,012 gaming machine authorisations in the territory, down from 4,981 at April 2018. Every single club with 20 gaming machine authorisations or more participated in the program.

This government's view is that reliance on gaming machines as a primary source of revenue is clearly not sustainable. The ACT Liberals spokesperson for poker machines, Mr Parton, may shrug his shoulders and disagree, as he does in public, but his comments on this policy again have made clear that he does not see the importance of reducing the number of poker machines in the territory at all. This is not about helping people eat fewer chocolates; this is not about losing a bet at the races. Our policy is clear and is about engaging constructively, reducing gambling harm and strengthening our clubs all at the same time.

MS CHEYNE: Attorney, how is the government able to achieve such a high level of participation by clubs in the incentives package?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. From the outset, this government focused on transparency and good faith engagement with the clubs. We engaged Neville Stevens AO both to develop recommendations for incentives and also to help clubs make decisions about taking up a package. His work resulted in an independent report to government on how to achieve 4,000 authorisations and independent advice to clubs about how to engage.

An independent and transparent framework for this incentives package meant that clubs could make decisions with full information and with certainty. This government provided clubs with the exact number of authorisations that they would have to surrender last August, along with the dollar value of incentives for doing so

voluntarily. We also published a clear time line for the process. Our legislation, introduced and passed last year, met those commitments precisely.

This government values its partnership with the clubs and with the community. We have worked closely with the industry, with community advocates, with unions and with individuals who have lived experience of gambling harm to develop these reforms. On the basis of our shared commitment to reducing gambling harm, and through our clear vision for supporting clubs, we enabled them to deal with us from a position of trust and confidence. The results have been, and will continue to be, fantastic for this community.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how will this package of reforms help clubs be less dependent on poker machine revenue into the future?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. A key feature of our incentives package was to promote opportunities for income diversification through redevelopment. That is why the value of offsets for new land-related work was prioritised over cash in the package.

Mr Coe: Why don't you give incentives to taxi plate owners? You give compensation to poker machine owners but not to taxi plate owners.

Mr Wall: He's got a conflict of interest when it comes to a club, hasn't he?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe and Mr Wall, you've been asked to stop interjecting.

MR RAMSAY: Yet again we hear from the Canberra Liberals their absolute lack of interest in reducing the impact of gambling harm and helping clubs to be vibrant and supported as they move—

Mr Coe: If the Labor Party operated taxis they might have got a better deal.

Mr Wall: How much money are you putting into the CFMEU and the Labor Club's coffers?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, Mr Wall, one more time and you will be warned.

MR RAMSAY: Again: no interest in supporting clubs, no interest in supporting community, no interest in helping people move away from gambling harm. Canberra deserves so much better from the Canberra Liberals.

Access to this support will make it easier for clubs to appropriately redevelop their land to create new revenue opportunities that will reduce their reliance on gaming machine revenue. We are going to be doing more to support clubs, of course. This year the government will be creating a diversification support fund for clubs. We'll be providing training for staff, executives and board members of clubs to improve the capacity of clubs to develop and operate new businesses. This measure will work hand in hand with the incentives that have already been made.

I am pleased to see that our clubs are engaging so positively with the government to

reduce the number of gaming machine authorisations, to strengthen the harm minimisation framework and to provide even better services to the community. We know that Canberra clubs are here for the sake of the community. We will assist them to do that and to build a strong, vibrant club sector and a strong, vibrant community.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call Mrs Kikkert, members, no interjections, please.

Taxis—government assistance

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Business and Regulatory Services. Minister, in 2015 your government introduced reforms to the taxi industry which have since resulted in the value of perpetual taxi plates falling from approximately \$250,000 to less than \$80,000. Following your announcement of an additional 142 taxi plates, these values are expected to fall further, to around \$45,000, while these new plates are expected to raise additional revenue of \$710,000 a year for government. Why are you allowing small business owners to go broke while the government reaps the benefits?

MR RAMSAY: It is important to make sure that the information that is before the Assembly is correct. Twice today, the Canberra Liberals have quoted incorrect numbers. By doing that, I fear that they have guided the Assembly into a space that is neither accurate nor helpful for us considering this matter, including the matter for tomorrow. Twice now, they have said that we have released 142 additional taxi licences into the market. That is not true. What we have done is increase the regulated cap by that amount. The number of licences—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

Mrs Jones: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order, Mrs Jones

Mrs Jones: On relevance, the question was why he is allowing small business owners to go broke, not why he thinks our interpretation of data is a bit different from his.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order. He is answering the question on the policy. And on a point of order, I have called members on my left to order and called on them not to interject a number of times. Perhaps you could consider that point of order, Mrs Jones.

MR RAMSAY: Continuing to correct the opposition, what happened is that there are 80 that have been or will be released into—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order. The standing orders require that the minister answering a question be directly relevant to the question. The question was: “Why have you allowed small business owners to go broke?” We are not talking about 80 or 142; we

are asking about the policy effect of causing people to go broke. I ask you to require the minister, under the standing orders, to be directly relevant to the question or sit him down.

MADAM SPEAKER: The time has expired.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, given that a regulatory impact statement or a triple bottom line assessment was never completed, what then informed your decision not to provide compensation or a buy-back scheme?

MR RAMSAY: As has already been indicated by the Chief Minister, there was the report on the evaluation of the reforms that was received in early 2018. That report and its associated analysis are available on the your say website. I am sure that we will be continuing this debate, this conversation, tomorrow in the debate on the substantive motion on this matter that has already been lodged.

The government has undertaken extensive industry and community consultation. It undertook extensive research and analysis prior to the reforms to determine the full range of the potential impacts to stakeholders, noting, of course, that the primary focus of this government is the increased number of people who are using on-demand transport, not only those who are using taxis but also those who are using a whole range rideshare services.

We note that there has been a significant increase. There is a new cohort of people who are using on-demand transport. That has been a key part of our focus. What we will continue to do is a range of ongoing policy work that benefits consumers, those people who are here, the significantly increasing number of people living in the ACT and the substantially increasing number of people who are travelling to the ACT.

We have, as has also been noted in this chamber a number of times, arranged, as this is an industry in transition, for people to receive access to counselling through the Woden Community Service.

MR COE: Minister, what changes to regulations or policies did you make in response to the consultation that you had with taxi owners?

MR RAMSAY: I met with taxi owners on a number of occasions throughout the process as well as meeting with a range of other organisations, a range of other individuals. So too did government more broadly. This was all part of the consideration as we worked through the reforms. I again refer Mr Coe and others to the report on the evaluation that is available on the website.

Mr Coe: On a point of order, on relevance, the question was specifically: what changes to policy or regulations did he make in relation to the consultation? He cited consultation in his response to the first supplementary question. I think it is reasonable that he answer the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: In the time you have left you may want to outline any changes that you made.

MR RAMSAY: I refer to the position that we are in at the moment and the position that we were in beforehand. They are the changes that were made.

Taxis—regulation

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Business and Regulatory Services. Minister, the government report titled *Evaluation of the 2015 innovation reforms to the on-demand transport industry in the ACT*, released in September 2018, showed that demand for taxi services has declined and demand for taxi licences has remained static. Following the release of this report, you announced that the government would release further plates to market. Given this analysis, why did the government not choose to pursue taxi industry policies that would ensure that owners and operators remained profitable?

MR RAMSAY: I note that the reforms that have been implemented, the reforms made on the basis of the evaluation, have always been on the basis of ensuring that we have a strong, vibrant and diverse on-demand transport industry. We have said that that is an important part of the industry. It is a matter of ensuring that that is available not only to consumers. As the Chief Minister has also commented today, we wanted to make sure that those people who are operating the taxis, the drivers of the taxis, are able to do so in an increasingly deregulated space. We wanted to make sure that we were careful with that. We did so, and we will continue to do so.

MR HANSON: My supplementary question to the minister is: why will you not admit that your decision to release additional taxi plates is simply a revenue raising measure?

MR RAMSAY: Because it is not.

MR COE: How many people, such as Antonio, Edo, Soc, Stanley and William, and the dozens of other people here, have to lose their livelihoods and their life savings before your government finally acknowledge that they are the cause of the harm?

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: I say to our good community folk in the gallery, there is to be no noise, thanks.

MR RAMSAY: The ongoing reforms are for the overall benefit of Canberrans. We have made that very clear. We note, as the Chief Minister has said, that the government has not sold any perpetual plates since 1995. The evidence is also clear, on the basis of the evaluations that have been done, that any person who has owned a plate since 2005 has already received a positive return on their investment.

Economy—outlook

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what is the ACT's economic outlook for 2019, and how does this compare with the national outlook?

MR BARR: Last year our economy grew by four per cent, which was the fastest growth rate of any state or territory in Australia. It builds on nation-leading growth in recent years, bringing the real economic growth for the territory over the three years to June 2018 to 12 per cent. Over the same period, real gross state product per capita has also grown, rising 5.6 per cent to \$94,831.

This demonstrates that, as our population grows and our economy grows, we are becoming materially better off. This growing prosperity is an important part of the government's economic growth and diversification agenda. This year, the ACT is projected to continue to grow significantly above the national rate, with economic growth at 3.5 per cent and jobs growth around two per cent.

At a time when much of the national and international economic commentary is focused on emerging risks and uncertainties, it is important that we keep an eye on what happens nationally and internationally. But it is also important that we recognise the good position that the ACT is in because of our increasingly diverse, services-driven economy, the strength of our economic growth outlook for the year ahead and the opportunities that this will create for Canberrans to find a good job and to get a pay rise in 2019.

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, which sectors have seen particularly strong growth in recent times and are projected to contribute strongly to the ACT's growth and job creation going forward?

MR BARR: On a per capita basis the ACT is now Australia's leader in service exports. We are home to around 1.7 per cent of Australia's population but we are now exporting 2.5 per cent of Australia's service exports. Over the last decade service exports from Canberra have grown by more than 150 per cent, as we have been engaged in a very active promotion of what our city has to offer international markets.

This growth has been particularly strong in two sectors: education and tourism. International education is Canberra's largest export and generated \$977 million for our economy in 2017-18, which is an increase of more than 100 per cent over the past five years. This is leading to the creation of many more high-wage jobs in our city and around one in 10 Canberrans are employed in the education sector.

Our tourism sector is currently the second fastest growing in Australia, after our friends in Tasmania, and we are experiencing an all-time record level of both domestic and international visitors to our city. Some time ago we set the target of achieving \$2.5 billion in overnight visitor expenditure in the ACT by 2020 and total annual overnight visitor spending is now at \$2.37 billion. So we are on track to achieve this goal.

The ACT government has supported and championed the growth of these service export sectors, along with the broader service sector more generally, because we know that a more diverse economy is a more resilient one and one that will continue to create more good jobs for Canberrans.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, the construction sector is a major contributor to the

ACT's economy and employs thousands of Canberrans. What is the outlook for this important sector in 2019?

MR BARR: The construction sector is set for a period of strong activity through 2019. There is an extensive pipeline of both private and public sector projects and ongoing growth in residential construction. It all contributes to a positive outlook.

In last week's budget review we updated the government's own capital program, which now includes over \$2.8 billion worth of infrastructure projects to be delivered over the next four years, including \$753 million this year alone. We are getting on with the construction of the new health, education, transport and community infrastructure that our fast-growing city needs, thus supporting good local jobs in the process. The latest monthly data shows that residential building approvals are up more than 35 per cent compared to the same time last year. This is the strongest result nationally, particularly worth noting at a time when approvals fell by 22½ per cent nationally.

Although we have seen a record period of residential approvals and building across Canberra in recent years, it is clear that our strong economic fundamentals, like employment and population growth, are providing the foundation for continued growth of the construction sector in our local economy. Workers and business owners in the construction sector can look forward to the year ahead with more confidence and optimism than their counterparts elsewhere in Australia because our local market continues to perform strongly.

Taxis—government assistance

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Seniors and Veterans. Minister, Narelle and her husband invested in five ACT taxi plates to fund their retirement. Now, after her lifetime of work, three of Narelle's plates are on the shelf and virtually worthless because your government has flooded the taxi plate market. Narelle has had her income reduced by over 75 per cent in just 12 months and now has to continue working at the age of 75. Minister, what do you have to say to Narelle?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. Before I come to the details of the question, I want to deal with the premise of the question. It is based on a flawed premise, which is that there has been a flooding of the market. That is not true. There has been a gradual release of extra taxi plates into the market over a number of years. It is important for there to be accuracy on that.

For people affected by the transition there has been some impact and, again, I draw people's attention to the counselling and support services that the government is providing through Woden Community Service.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what do you have to say to the dozens of Canberrans who have lost more than 75 per cent of their retirement income as a direct result of your government's taxi plate policies?

MR RAMSAY: Again, I note that for people who are affected through this transition there is support that is being provided. I refer them to that.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what will you do, as minister for seniors, for the dozens of senior Canberrans who saved for their retirements by investing in the ACT transport industry?

MR RAMSAY: Again, echoing the words of the Chief Minister earlier on, it is not the position of the ACT government to be guaranteeing any particular investment. It is certainly not our position to do that. I refer people to the Woden Community Service.

Taxis—government assistance

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety. Minister, for decades the ACT government has encouraged private investment in the ACT taxi sector, with auctions and the direct sale of perpetual plates. Has the ACT government misled Canberrans who own taxis, like Ibrahim and Soc, who have acted in good faith by investing in this government's regulated industry?

MR RATTENBURY: I do not believe so. I believe that this industry has been in a state of flux for some considerable period of time. As the Chief Minister has outlined, the ACT government has not released a perpetual plate since 1995. Since that time there has been a steady number of reviews, regulatory reform considerations and the like, as well as external forces well beyond the control of the government, that have reshaped this industry. I think that owners and potential investors have had a series of points of information and external reference points to consider in weighing up their investment options.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why did you support the government implementation of these substantial changes, which had a potential social and economic impact on people like Bobby, David and William and which may amount to tens of millions of dollars to that community, without ensuring that there was a proper cabinet process involved?

MR RATTENBURY: I think the very premise of Mrs Dunne's question is not the case. As outlined earlier by both the Chief Minister and the Attorney-General, there have been extensive reviews, there have been economic papers commissioned by the government and the matters did go before cabinet in the normal way.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what do you say to the dozens of Canberrans who have lost more than 75 per cent of their retirement income as a result of this ACT government's policies?

MR RATTENBURY: I can say that the government is giving careful consideration to the competing interests here. We need to ensure that we deal with the changing shape of the on-demand transport industry; we need to ensure that we deal with the needs of consumers, particularly with the significant increase in both the population of Canberra and tourism numbers; and we need to try to ensure that there is clear information available to all of the people with various interests in this discussion.

Taxis—government assistance

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety. Minister, in December 2018 you were provided by ACTTPOA with a detailed report and evidence of massive social and economic impacts to these small business owners in the ACT taxi industry. Despite your commitment both to review the material and to meet with the representatives in January 2019, you denied the meeting with the ACTTPOA and proceeded to support the government's policy that issued 30 new ACT government taxi plates. Why did you refuse the meeting?

MR RATTENBURY: As Mrs Jones has outlined, I did meet with the ACTTPOA in December and we had a number of discussions then. At that time, the government had already indicated its intent to issue a series of taxi plate licences—80, not the 142 the opposition has claimed. It was 80. We had given an indication of a time line for that.

In light of the meeting I had with the Taxi Plate Owners Association, I further considered the material, and the date of release of some of those plates did take a bit longer as I sought to review some of that material. To go to Mrs Jones's question directly as to why I did not take the second meeting in January, in the intervening period I was threatened with legal action by the Taxi Plate Owners Association. On legal advice, I declined to take a further meeting.

MRS JONES: Minister, will you now meet with taxi plate owners like Ibrahim, Soc, Simeon, Balsar, Antonio and Aldo?

MR RATTENBURY: As I outlined in my previous answer, given the circumstances that have now been forming and the threats of litigation, I have been advised that those meetings should not take place.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, will you apologise to the taxi plate owners who are sitting in the gallery today for knowingly misleading them into thinking that you stand for fairness and social justice when you continue to support a government policy that is neither fair nor just?

MR RATTENBURY: All I can say is that we have thought about these matters very carefully. These are not black and white matters; they are difficult matters to work through. I have thought about this quite carefully and we are trying to proceed in a way that takes into account the range of interests that are present in this debate.

Mr Steel: Point of order, Madam Speaker. In her question, Ms C Burch used the word "misleading" in reference to Minister Rattenbury. I understand that that is unparliamentary language. I ask her to withdraw.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will review *Hansard* on it, but it is my understanding that the premise was about misleading the taxi community, which is within the scope of being a right question to ask, rather than an individual member misleading the Assembly. I will check *Hansard* just to be sure.

Taxis—government assistance

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, do taxi

owner-operators like Stanley, who is with us today, deserve to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars simply because they trusted the ACT government?

MR BARR: As I have indicated on numerous occasions during this line of questioning from the opposition, there is no guarantee of investment return in any industry. No government will ever, or can ever, give that guarantee.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall, you are now warned.

MR BARR: It remains a fact that this government has not sold any perpetual taxi licences—none. It has not sold any.

Mrs Jones: It's released more.

MR BARR: We have not sold any—absolutely none.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, was Stanley wrong to put his trust in ACT government regulations?

MR BARR: Everyone who makes an investment decision based on a perception that government policy or circumstances in a market will never change would not be making an astute investment because everything changes all of the time in almost every industry ever in the history of the world. There is no guarantee on any investment. There cannot be, because circumstances change, and this industry is no different from hundreds of other industries around the world over the history of time where things have changed.

The devaluation of a taxi plate licence to the extent that that is a real phenomenon in the market is impacted by so—

Mrs Dunne: Turn around and ask them whether it is a real phenomenon.

MR BARR: You are asking me to breach the standing orders, Mrs Dunne, and not address the chair. You are the standing order Nazi—Mrs Dunne is—all the time.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Madam Speaker; two points of order—

MR BARR: I withdraw. Mrs Dunne is fastidious about standing orders.

Mrs Dunne: I take the point that the Chief Minister has withdrawn the term “Nazi” but, on a separate point of order, the standing orders require that the chair be addressed, that you do not talk to a member opposite. It does not require you to specifically have your eyes locked on the chair at all times.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs Dunne. But the standing orders are very clear on interjections. Let us be clear on that one. To my left: how about no further interjections?

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You are warned, Mr Parton. That was unnecessary, frivolous, cheeky and certainly not in character. Perhaps in character. Chief Minister.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There can be no guarantee in any industry. And this government has not sold a perpetual taxi licence. It is as simple and straightforward as that. There are many factors that will impact on the value of people's investments in many industries. But in the end, as I have indicated, the government's priority is consumers because in the end there is no industry without consumers.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, given that Uber was entering the market regardless—

Ms Lawder: I raise a point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: On the preamble?

Ms Lawder: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: I was about to stop Ms Cody and ask her to go straight to the question. There is no preamble in a supplementary question.

MS CODY: What work did the government undertake to assist transition while protecting consumers?

MR BARR: There was a considerable amount of work prior to the entry of Uber into the ACT market. That included significant regulatory changes and the reduction of ACT government fees for those operating in the industry, as well as the application of regulation to Uber in the ACT that did not occur in other parts of Australia.

But there is the simple fact that that competition was coming and that competition was only coming, and would only be utilised, because of the high levels of dissatisfaction from consumers. If there had been no problem at all with our taxi service prior to Uber's introduction, no-one would have used Uber. But people do, because they believe they get a better service. That is the market operating.

The government is not in a position to hold back the tide of global events as they relate to on-demand transport industries. It is as simple and straightforward as that. We have put in place a series of measures to appropriately regulate the entry of a new form of transport and a new on-demand transport operator and, indeed, others, into the marketplace. But we cannot and will not provide an investment return guarantee for anyone who bought a licence from the ACT government in the last century. We cannot and will not do that.

Taxis—government assistance

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business and Regulatory Services. Does the ACT government have a philosophical or ideological objection to providing compensation to the taxi industry?

MR RAMSAY: As part of the evaluation and looking at broader matters, it was considered whether people would have some form of compensation or some sort of buyback. The evaluation and the evidence—and the government agrees with the evidence-based evaluation—indicated that individuals who purchased their licences from the government from 1995 and who held on to them will have achieved full return on their investments.

Further, the CIE report indicates that around half of the licences have not changed hands since 1995. On the basis of the evidence, the government has not decided to proceed with a buyback.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why is the ACT government providing compensation incentives for poker machine owners but treating the taxi industry completely differently?

MR RAMSAY: Again there are so many false premises in the questions that are being asked today. There is not compensation being provided regarding gaming machine authorisations. We are working closely on this. I presume that the opposition paid attention—they do not always pay attention to the answers to questions—and I hope that they noticed, in the answer to a question that I was asked today, that it is an incentive scheme to help people to diversify their income away from a reliance on gaming machine authorisations. We have continued to do that. We are working very closely with clubs. I am proud of the way that we are working with them so that we have a strong, vibrant clubs sector. We also believe that having a vibrant and strong on-demand transport sector is important, and we are working with that sector, given that they are quite different matters. Given that the clubs are a not-for-profit industry, given that the taxi plate owners—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: It is not our role to guarantee business income.

MR COE: Minister, if the test is whether the capital has been repaid, why is it that you are providing \$12,000 to \$25,000 for poker machine licences that also probably have been repaid in full?

MR RAMSAY: The Canberra Liberals: grabbing selective quotes as they are wont to do. I note that part of the test in relation to the taxi plate owners, a for-profit industry, is on the basis of the evidence-based evaluation, which is available for people to see. I refer the—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Gentleman: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order?

Mr Gentleman: You have warned both Mr Wall and Mr Parton. Mr Wall continues to interject across the chamber after you have warned him. I ask that the member be named.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members on my left, including Mrs Jones, please be careful of how you interject. Mr Wall, the next time you will be warned and you will be named. You have been warned. Mr Parton, I suggest that you refrain from any further contributions.

MR RAMSAY: Again, I simply draw attention to the fact that this government works on evidence-based policy. We do that. It is important for us to have a chance to make that clear here. We will work on the evidence that is here. The evidence that is here in relation to on-demand transport is the CIE report. It is available for people. The evidence in relation to the clubs and the gaming machine authorisation incentives was provided in relation to the specific report that was provided through Neville Stephens. We will continue to work with the evidence.

Housing—affordable home ownership

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, in a growing city such as Canberra, where our economy is one of the strongest in the country and we experience very low unemployment rates, how does the ACT government forward-plan and supply land for residential development?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Cody for the question. As members will know, there is a significant amount of planning and analysis that goes into the forward planning of land supply for current and future Canberrans. The work is complex. It requires considerable analysis, and it does take many years to complete.

I can confirm that it is not just a matter of driving down a street and identifying an empty paddock. Included in the required analysis, as we did with Tuggeranong in site identification prior to 2016, the government speaks to the community to find out what they think before final decisions are made. In the case of west Tuggeranong, by way of a reminder, the government went further, and established a community panel, which determined that urban development in the area was not supported.

As a government we talk to the community, as we have done with Molonglo, as we have done with west Belconnen and as we have done with Gungahlin. There is a range of different things that happen to supply land for residential development. To facilitate the development of land for residential purposes, due diligence processes mean that it can take many years to undertake further planning and environmental studies to satisfy both the commonwealth government and the ACT planning authority; and, of course, there is engaging with the Canberra community.

Once the work is completed, the government can start to look at developing the area of land, which, again, has a significant lead-in time to being sale-ready. As members will know, there is a detailed process through the planning authority to get a suburb approved, as is appropriate, and then sell the blocks to buyers. At that stage, when it is sold, it is sold in a number of different ways to the buyer, which now includes an option for buyers to go in and get it over the counter.

As reflected in the ACT housing strategy released in October last year, I remind members that the first objective is to model and publish housing supply and demand projections—*(Time expired.)*

MS CODY: Minister, what are the different ways that Canberrans can choose to purchase land in the ACT?

MS BERRY: There are a number of ways. At the moment there is a lot of land in the pipeline to be sold in a range of ways to prospective buyers from both private sellers and the ACT government. It is important to remind members that it is not only the government that hold the levers of land sales. At this time there are some 20,460 greenfield dwelling sites in the planners' pipeline, over 9,300 dwelling sites in the developers' pipeline and more than 6,000 dwellings in the builders' pipeline.

Sometimes, depending on the location or development type, the government decides to develop through a joint venture arrangement as we have done in west Belconnen and in the past with Crace and Forde. Sometimes it is sold as englobo, a whole area or suburb to a developer, as is the case in Denman Prospect and Lawson, and sometimes the government develops the land for release to the community through a range of sale methods such as auction or tender.

In terms of pipelines, private developers will make decisions, usually based on market conditions, on what they might release or construct at any time. But I also want to remind members that that land is also available over the counter. Currently there are 396 single residential blocks available for sale over the counter from the Suburban Land Agency. These blocks are available in Taylor, Throsby, Coombs and Wright.

An objective of the four-year indicative land release program is to make sure that enough residential commercial, mixed use, industrial and community land is released to the market to cater for the city's growth. It is a simplistic assessment to say that raising prices is all we do in our land release. Through all of the work that has been done with the community to develop the housing strategy over the past decade, we have delivered all these initiatives through previous affordable housing strategies as well as new ones in the current strategy.

MR PARTON: Minister, has the government absolutely ruled out future residential development in west Tuggeranong and Kowen Forest?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to my first answer. There was significant feedback from the community, as well as analysis that was done by the government, that, at this time, there are no plans for development in those areas.

Drugs—pill testing

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, why is the ACT government supporting pill testing at the Groovin the Moo festival?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. The government is determined to reduce the negative health and social consequences associated with the use of drugs, for the user, for their families and for the wider community. Drugs are dangerous and illegal. Our clear message is that people should not take them. But we recognise that people do take drugs, and they will continue to, no matter what their parents or the government say. The government is going to do as much as it can to stop the senseless loss of life of our young people and the devastation caused to too many families by one stupid mistake.

Following the work of Minister Fitzharris to assess the proposal, the government has decided to support a further pill testing trial at the upcoming Groovin the Moo music festival in April. The trial will be run by Pill Testing Australia. We were the first jurisdiction to run a pill testing trial in Australia, at the same festival last year, with dozens of potentially lethal pills discarded following testing. This can save lives on the day and give people another opportunity to make the right decision.

This is the last line of defence. We recognise that it is not a silver bullet, but it is one more important step to protect Canberrans. We will not be jeopardising their lives to make a political point. This is a sensible, structured and thoroughly assessed testing process. The data that came out of the first pilot was incredibly informative for our health and emergency services in the event that someone does fall ill at one of these festivals.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, what other harm minimisation strategies is the government pursuing?

MR BARR: The government's drug strategy action plan outlines 43 actions to tackle harms from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The action plan is based on three pillars of harm minimisation: demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction. We are willing to explore and implement innovative ways to save lives and we are willing to engage in a political debate, particularly with those opposite, if it means that more people do not take drugs or are able to get healthy outside of the criminal justice system.

To prevent and reduce fatal and near fatal overdoses, including those associated with pharmaceuticals, we plan to address and expand access to Naloxone and access to opioid maintenance treatment. We are investigating the feasibility and effectiveness of establishing a medically supervised injecting facility in the ACT. We are working to integrate more effective responses within alcohol and other drug services for people who either experience domestic and family violence or who are at risk of using it.

This government is putting people first and not judging and punishing them for their addiction. That is what the majority of people in Canberra, our progressive and compassionate community, expect. We are not afraid to think about and to trial innovative programs and policies that can reduce harm from drugs and alcohol use, particularly when we know that that will contribute to saving lives.

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: There should be no disorderly conduct coming from the gallery, thank you.

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: That is really disorderly and unacceptable behaviour here. It is more telling about yourself than anything else.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how is the ACT government sharing information about the benefits of the pill testing trial and its harm minimisation strategies with other jurisdictions?

MR BARR: I am pleased to advise that, following on from the trial that was conducted last year, jurisdictions across the country are interested in learning more about it. The previous trial triggered a tremendous amount of interest from other jurisdictions as they work through their own policy on pill testing and harm minimisation strategies.

To help other Australian states and territories better understand the benefits and the findings from the trial, Minister Fitzharris is inviting government representatives from the other states and territories to come to the ACT to observe the trial and to make up their own minds based on the evidence. This invitation is extended to those sitting opposite, if they are also interested in participating and observing the trial.

We will be commissioning an independent evaluation of the trial, to remove it, we hope, from the party-political debate that we have seen in this place over recent months and years. The ACT government has also provided a paper to the December 2018 Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council meeting, and Minister Fitzharris plans to take a paper to the next COAG Health Council meeting.

The ACT intends to lead the nation on drug law reform and harm minimisation. Pill testing is one way we are saying to Canberra parents that we will do everything we can to keep their sons and daughters safe. We do not, and we will not, apologise for that. We will keep encouraging other jurisdictions to follow our lead so that young people right around our country can make the best and most informed choice to stay safe.

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