



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Questions without notice
Taxation—reform

MR COE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, has your tax reform regime been revenue neutral, as you have promised?

MR BARR: Yes.

MR COE: Treasurer, has rates revenue increased by more than 130 per cent since the reform program began in 2011-12? Is this amount considerably more than property price growth, population growth and inflation?

MR BARR: Yes, rates revenue has increased. It has increased as a result of a number of factors. The Leader of the Opposition outlined a number of them. There are significantly more rate-paying households and commercial ratepayers in the territory since the commencement of the reform because we have been experiencing a period of very significant population growth.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, members!

MR BARR: Also, Madam Speaker, as we have debated in this place on probably several hundred occasions since 2012, the government is switching the tax base away from transaction-based taxes, insurance taxes and payroll taxes towards the broad-based land tax, the most efficient form of taxation available to our level of government.

So insurance taxes have been abolished: nearly \$100 million of revenue annually. Around \$100 million it would be now if we had a 10 per cent tax on all insurance products—

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall!

MR BARR: Stamp duty has been significantly reduced for every property in the territory, including its abolition on commercial transactions below \$1.5 million. And we have lifted, and further lifted, the payroll tax-free threshold. So we have a choice. We can tax land, labour or capital. Land is the only area where people cannot easily avoid tax. It is the most simple, fairest and most efficient way to raise revenue at a state or territory level.

That is why we are phasing out stamp duty, why we have abolished insurance taxes and why we have lifted the payroll tax-free threshold in order to have a simpler, fairer and more efficient tax system for the ACT, utilising the tax line that is most efficient for this jurisdiction. *(Time expired.)*

MR PARTON: Treasurer, how much more will rates revenue increase over the life of

your tax reform program?

MR BARR: The future increases in both residential and commercial rates have been outlined in the budget papers. They are between about six and seven per cent annually and coming down each year. The most significant part of tax reform, the heaviest lifting, occurred in the first five years, as we were simultaneously abolishing insurance taxes, reducing stamp duty and increasing the payroll tax-free threshold. From here we will announce a further five-year phase of tax reform in the next couple of years to see through the third phase. In that phase you will see the rate of increase continue to taper off as we move into the second half of the tax reform. But the heaviest lifting has been undertaken already as we abolished insurance tax, as we have been reducing stamp duties and as we have been lifting the payroll tax-free threshold.

It is that reform of our taxation system that has seen the ACT have nation-leading rates of economic growth. We have continued to see very strong population growth in the ACT. People are voting with their feet. There are more people living in the ACT now than prior to the reforms, more taxpayers in the ACT, and that growth in the tax base has also been a significant contributing factor to the increase in the overall tax take. A broader tax base and a fairer tax system are what we are working towards. That is what economists recommend for our level of government. That is what the Henry tax review recommended. That is what your former leader Malcolm Turnbull said was the right tax reform for our jurisdiction. (*Time expired.*)

Public housing—renewal program

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development and relates to the plan for growing and renewing public housing. Which large multi-unit public housing sites have been earmarked for renewal as part of the five-year capital works program developed as part of the growing and renewing public housing 2019 to 2024 plan, which you released yesterday? What consultation has been done with the affected communities?

MS BERRY: As Ms Le Couteur will be aware, through the current renewal of public housing across the ACT, there has been significant consultation with existing communities, particularly with housing tenants, to ensure that they have their needs met and have the same choices as every one of us has about where, across the city, they would like to live.

Public housing tenants should have exactly the same rights as we do. They have their own goals and aspirations to a decent quality of life. There is no reason why they should not have a choice about where across the ACT they live in Canberra. As with everybody else also in our community, public housing tenants are entitled to some privacy about where they live and where their homes are.

Ms Le Couteur: Madam Speaker, I am afraid the minister misinterpreted. When I said “the affected communities” I was referring primarily to the affected communities of tenants who lived in multi-unit developments which may be about to be renewed. My question is about the multi-unit tenants.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Berry, you have time left.

MS BERRY: The housing properties that will be developed across the city will be low-density, multi-unit housing and individual houses across the city. As Ms Le Couteur will know, the high-density housing blocks were renewed and removed as part of the public housing renewal program. Public housing tenants are now living in brand new public housing that better suits their needs and that makes it more affordable for them to heat and cool in Canberra's challenging climates (*Time expired.*)

MS LE COUTEUR: Will the government's 15 per cent target for public, community and affordable housing dwellings apply to the new land releases and urban infill which will apply to these sites when they are eventually identified?

MS BERRY: These are not large, multi-unit sites. Let me be clear: they are not large, multi-unit sites that will be developed.

Mr Coe: Which ones are they?

MS BERRY: Mr Coe, I know you are very interested in the private lives of individuals in this town but public housing tenants have every right to have their homes not disclosed to anybody. It is not really any of your business, Mr Coe, where public housing tenants—

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, through the chair, and I would not respond to interjections. You have a minute and a half.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is not large multi-unit—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, the question has been asked. Resume your seat please, minister. Ms Le Couteur.

Ms Le Couteur: The supplementary did not ask for locations. It just said, "Given they are somewhere in Canberra will the 15 per cent apply to them?" It is not about location.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, in the minute you have left can you go to that point of the question.

MS BERRY: If Ms Le Couteur was referring to her question, "Which multi-unit?" I have said that there are no large multi-units and that public housing will be renewed; individual dwellings all across the city, across every district.

MR PARTON: Minister, will the strategy address in any way the current three-year waiting time for those on the standard waiting list or will that waiting time continue to blow out as more Canberrans are squeezed out of the private rental market?

MS BERRY: Public housing is not a solution for every person in our Community so the ACT government has made sure that there are a number of different opportunities

for people across the ACT. Particularly for this cohort on the priority housing needs list, that is where the figure for the 200 new homes came from to make sure that we meet the needs of those people whose applications are required to have priority housing and that they get their needs met first of all.

The question gives me the opportunity to talk about Community Housing Canberra and their recent work with the ACT government in developing HomeGround and to call out to anybody in this place who might have a spare property, who might have an investment property available to—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please, let the minister—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MS BERRY: If there are members in this place who have a spare property, or if they are aware of others within their communities who might have investment properties and who want to provide those investment properties for the social good for people who are on low incomes so that they can be provided with an opportunity to get into a home in an affordable way and pay an affordable rent, this gives the opportunity for those investors to make the right decision and to provide an investment into the people of this town that is more than just bricks and mortar.

Taxation—small business

MISS C BURCH: The latest Sensis Business Index survey found that 41 per cent of Canberra businesses think that the current government is working against them, confirming the feedback on commercial rates from businesses that we heard in the recent Assembly inquiry. If federal Labor wins the next election, they will introduce a family business tax which will tax small businesses at the same rate as multinational corporations. Treasurer, why are your government and your tax policies working against local Canberra businesses?

MR BARR: They are not. In fact what we have seen through having the highest payroll tax-free threshold and the abolition of taxes on all commercial insurance products is that small and medium enterprises operating in the ACT pay less tax to the ACT government than an equivalent business operating in Queanbeyan would to the New South Wales government. That is very clear. So we will continue to pursue tax reforms that prioritise small and medium enterprises over the top end of town.

MISS C BURCH: Treasurer, how can local Canberra businesses compete interstate or internationally when your government's tax policies make it hard for them to survive in our territory?

MR BARR: As I pointed out, they pay less tax—small and medium enterprises in the ACT—than they would if they were operating in New South Wales or indeed in other jurisdictions in Australia. We have seen 3,000 additional businesses established here

in the ACT in recent years. We have very high levels of confidence in the small business sector and should there be a change of government on the weekend Canberra will benefit from hundreds of millions of dollars of additional infrastructure expenditure and there will be more money in our economy if penalty rate cuts that have harshly been put in place by those opposite are overturned and people get their Sunday penalty rates back.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call for the supplementary, members, 14 minutes into question time and it has been a wall of interjections. Can you manage to control yourselves for just a little bit.

MR WALL: Treasurer, what advice can you give local Canberra businesses on what government tax concessions or assistance might be available if they are struggling with the tax burden that you have placed upon them?

MR BARR: The best advice is, of course, to contact the revenue office. The revenue office have a range of information available on their website around concessions, payment plans and the like for anyone who is experiencing difficulty meeting their obligations. I also particularly encourage those businesses to look at the suite of policies that are on offer for them at this Saturday's election and support a change in our nation to support increased employment and a focus on investment in Canberra. If you are a small businesses in Canberra and you want more custom, then you would definitely be voting Labor this weekend.

Mr Wall: If you want to turn your large business into a small one.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall, I do not want to have to warn you.

Light rail—implementation

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Can the minister please provide an update on the implementation and development of light rail in Canberra?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Orr very much for the question. I am delighted to provide an update on the implementation and development in Canberra. The city to Gungahlin light rail project is the first of a city-wide light rail system and an integrated public transport network to support our growing city. We are very pleased to see the project delivered under budget at \$675 million.

The funding and delivery model of the project also broke new ground, with the ACT government entering into one of its first public-private partnerships. All stages of the project were overseen by a strong governance structure, and staff across the ACT public service, the private sector and Canberra Metro have worked collaboratively, particularly with local businesses, to deliver this vital project.

The ACT government's focus on quality and achieving the best possible customer experience for the people of Canberra prompted many improvements to the project's scope during its detailed design and delivery stage. These included an improved light rail stop design with improved aesthetics, larger sheltered areas and higher quality public seating, incorporation of public art in the design of each stop, and

comprehensive customer engagement to optimise passenger accessibility and comfort.

It was wonderful to see the years of hard work come to fruition on 18 April when the community preview loop opened, followed by the first day of operations on Saturday, 20 April. We are now working to extend light rail to Woden, creating a north-south spine of the light rail network and delivering a world class transport network to even more people and proving those doubters wrong.

MS ORR: Minister, can you please also share an overview of the first few weeks of light rail stage 1 operations?

MS FITZHARRIS: Light rail from Gungahlin to the city, as I mentioned, started its first day of operations on Saturday, 20 April. On that day alone, over 25,000 people enjoyed the experience of hopping on board light rail for the first time in the ACT. We had 10 vehicles running and 130 trips that covered 1,560 kilometres. The city and Gungahlin termini came to life with light music, kids entertainment and barbeques for people waiting to ride.

For Tuesday, 30 April MyWay data shows 90,854 boardings across bus and light rail, our largest day of public transport ever. The record figure includes 16,549 boardings on light rail, meaning that we have already surpassed the business case estimates two years ahead of schedule. More than 77,000 light rail trips were taken during the first week, adding to 290,000 journeys taken on the new bus network over the same period. Light rail is encouraging people who may never have caught public transport before to give it a go.

Additional light rail features and the finishing touches will continue to be phased in. The launch and high patronage figures show how invested the community is in the future of Canberra. Canberra is now better connected with the light rail route from Gungahlin to the city and we are pleased to get on with the work of extending light rail to Woden.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what work is underway on future stages of light rail, including planning and early works?

MS FITZHARRIS: As members well know, the government took light rail stage 2, from the city to Woden, to the last election. We are now actively working to deliver this next stage of Canberra's light rail network. Following the federal parliamentary joint standing committee inquiry into stage 2, we now have further clarity on the complex approval process for the parliamentary zone. We will soon make a submission under the commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. We expect that this will lead to an environmental impact study being produced, creating another opportunity for community feedback on the project.

At the same time, Transport Canberra will continue to progress transport, financial, heritage and other analysis in preparation for the design and construction phase of the project. The ACT government has also invested in related infrastructure upgrades, including redesigning the Woden bus station into a modern, integrated transport interchange with an initial \$3.5 million investment; investing to improve pedestrian and cycle access; developing options for a future park and ride facility adjacent to

Phillip Oval; and considering options for the Yarra Glen roundabout so it can accommodate light rail as it approaches the Woden town centre.

Of course, all of this will be made much easier if federal Labor comes to power this weekend, with their commitment of \$200 million for the second stage of light rail, a clear commitment that it is only Labor that is serious about better public transport for our city.

Taxation—rates

MR HANSON: My question is to the Treasurer. Carol is a self-funded retiree. She is struggling to pay her rates bill, which rose from \$1,153 in 2013-14 to \$2,016 in 2017-18, and land tax, which has increased from \$1,142 to \$3,044 during the same period. Carol is worried that she will need to go on the pension. Treasurer, why are your policies resulting in a growing number of Canberrans feeling that they have no option but to go on the pension?

MR BARR: In the circumstances that Mr Hanson has outlined, Carol clearly owns more than one property.

Mr Coe: No, she could be renting.

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, the imputation in the question from Mr Hanson was that the taxpayer in question, Carol, was paying both rates and land tax, which implies being a property owner and a property investor.

Mr Hanson: No, it could be the rates on the property that she rents.

MR BARR: If Carol is renting then those taxes are the responsibility of her landlord.

Mr Hanson: She owns and rents a property and she rents her principal place of residence.

Mr Coe: She rents and owns a property that she cannot live in.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe. Mr Hanson, you asked a question. The minister is on his feet answering.

MR BARR: Regardless of that—and there was not sufficient detail in the individual circumstances that Mr Hanson outlined—the government’s transition away from stamp duties, insurance taxes and payroll taxes is aimed at creating a fairer and more efficient tax system. Carol presumably consumes services in our city so she, like all other ratepayers, would be expected to contribute to those services. She is no longer paying tax on her insurance products, so presumably if she has motor vehicle insurance—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: I assume she has home and contents insurance. I assume she has building insurance on her rental property. So she is no longer paying tax on those properties,

and that makes a considerable difference. And of course Carol, if she is eligible, has the capacity to apply for deferrals for those charges.

Mr Hanson: Death tax! There it is. Andrew Barr's death tax.

MR BARR: She can apply for deferrals. But in the end what we are looking to achieve is a fairer tax system for all ratepayers. (*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I have asked you and asked you to stop your interjections. You are warned.

MR HANSON: Treasurer, what provisions has the government made for the increased number of self-funded retirees who will need to access concession schemes because of this Labor government's policies?

MR BARR: I do not think that there is any evidence at this point to support the assertion by Mr Hanson that this in fact the case. The government provides a range of concessions and they are means tested. It is not just your age but it is your means. In terms of concessions, they are means tested.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: That is enough, Mr Coe.

MR BARR: The more generous concessions are means tested and they impact on providing—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat. I remind you, Mr Hanson, you are on a warning. Mr Coe, I have asked you to be quiet a number of times. See how you go. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, there is a range of concessions and deferral schemes available for anyone who is experiencing hardship.

MS LAWDER: Treasurer, will you rule out increases to rates in the upcoming ACT budget to give Canberrans like Carole and many self-funded retirees a break?

MR BARR: The government has already foreshadowed the next phase in the next few years of tax reform. They are already there for people to see. And rates have gone up every year in the history of Canberra; every year. They have gone up every year and they will go up every year into the future. No-one is suggesting—not even you lot at the last election were suggesting—that there will be no increase in rates ever into the future. The difference is whether there is any effort to reduce other taxes. You will put rates up and you will put all the other taxes up as well every year.

Mr Hanson interjecting.

MR BARR: You went to the last election proposing to increase all of the taxes. The

tax take on every tax line would have gone up under the Liberals, because you were not proposing to cut any other taxes. We are cutting stamp duty in every budget.

Canberra Hospital—obstetrics unit

MRS JONES: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. The obstetrics and gynaecology unit at the Canberra Hospital has experienced ongoing problems under this government. The head of the obstetrics unit resigned in both 2011 and then again in 2014. The media reported on May 1 that a consultant has been hired to try to fix the ongoing tensions between management, doctors and midwives at the hospital. What is this consultant doing?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mrs Jones for the question. I would like to take this opportunity to correct the reporting that implied, as Mrs Jones did, that this consultancy was to fix a particular problem. In fact, that is not specifically the case.

It is the case that we have discussed a number of matters related to maternity services here in the chamber. There is a consultancy underway to work across the variety of clinical professionals and other staff in the maternity service at Canberra Hospital. This is a very positive opportunity that came out of an all-staff meeting with members of that unit in March. I congratulate the CEO for taking this step to bring in some experts to work right across the maternity service.

I can give a sense of the success which I think the new CEO has brought to the role. This morning I attended Canberra Hospital for the launch of the new Canberra Health Services vision. It was an extraordinary event. I congratulate everybody involved. This work, undertaken and led by the CEO and a number of conversation starters within Canberra Health Services, resulted in over 5,200 members of Canberra Health Services having a conversation about how they can contribute to the vision unveiled today about the work that Canberra Health Services does.

It is this very approach that the CEO is taking with her executive team right throughout the organisation, working collaboratively with and listening to staff, and, when necessary, bringing in some expert assistance to be able to do this kind of collaborative work, that I believe—certainly in terms of the work that the independent panel undertook—Canberra Health Services needs. *(Time expired.)*

MRS JONES: My supplementary is: what recommendations did the independent culture advisory panel make about obstetrics and gynaecology in their letter to you?

MS FITZHARRIS: No particular recommendations. The recommendations that the panel made were in the panel's final report which has been circulated throughout the chamber.

MRS DUNNE: Can the minister confirm that she has not received a letter from the independent advisory panel on culture as was described by Mr Reid, that he would be writing to her about particular issues in particular areas in the hospital?

MS FITZHARRIS: I did receive a letter, which did not make specific recommendations about maternity services, which I believe was Mrs Jones's question.

Light rail—economic benefits

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what have been the economic and productivity benefits arising from the construction and operation of light rail?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. There have been, obviously, significant benefits to the territory economy from the largest transport infrastructure investment in the territory's self-governing history. This project is now delivering what Canberra needs as our city grows—better and more sustainable transport—and it is reducing congestion to keep our growing city moving.

As Minister Fitzharris has outlined, the delivery of the project under budget has improved the benefit-cost ratio immediately because the cost is lower. We are doing still further work in relation to the benefits but it is very clear that the pipeline of associated private sector investment along the transport corridor is ahead of what was anticipated in the initial business case development for the project. The cost-benefit ratio has already been revised up from 1.2 to at least 1.3 as a consequence of the project's costs being lower than expected.

In terms of direct economic impact, our gross state product in 2017-18 increased by four per cent. This was the highest growth rate of any jurisdiction in Australia. Two sectors of the economy that contributed significantly to that increased growth were the construction sector and professional, scientific and technical services. The light rail project had an impact in both of those areas and contributed positively to the territory's economic growth.

There is no doubt that the more investment there is in high quality transport infrastructure, the greater the productive capacity of the economy and of course we see, particularly as measured through GSP, a direct benefit of this project for the territory's economy.

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, how many jobs were supported in the construction phase and created through the commencement of operations?

MR BARR: The answer is that more than 5,000 people worked on the project, more than 300 local businesses were involved in delivering aspects of the project, and more than 70 per cent of the project workforce came from Canberra and the surrounding region. So it has been an absolute success for the local economy and for people who wanted to be part of the project, from traffic controllers and electricians, to engineers and construction managers.

Some of the local companies that participated in the construction of light rail include Capital Asphalt, Rodgers Electrical and ABS facade. Dozens more ongoing jobs have been created in the territory for customer service officers, drivers and maintenance team members, and these have been filled by Canberrans.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how has this project been structured to ensure that it was delivered on budget?

MR BARR: The final project costs released yesterday show that it has been delivered \$108 million under the territory's original budget, the business case, within the originally forecast time period and to a very high standard. This does not happen just by chance. It was possible because of a sound procurement process, a clear contract at the outset of the project, a robust governance framework and careful management of the contingency held by the territory.

The good governance arrangements ensured clear direction on the project, timely communication from relevant agencies and directorates to government, and the ability for the territory to make well-informed and prompt decisions on key project matters. I particularly acknowledge the chair of the board, John Fitzgerald, and the entire project advisory board for their efforts to deliver light rail for Canberra. With this sort of important governance structure in place, we were confident that we would be able to deliver the project as we promised.

As we move into the next phase of light rail, we do so with clear confidence in both the due diligence associated with the procurement process, the quality of the public-private partnership, and indeed all of those participants who have been a united nations of entities that have come together, with companies from Europe, Asia and Australia all involved in the delivery of the project. It is a great result for Canberrans. We look forward to the election of a federal Labor government on Saturday and being able to work constructively with a federal government that is interested in Canberra and does not just think that this city is a bubble.

Canberra Hospital—emergency department performance

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. I refer to the most recent AMA report card on hospital performance and a particular graph in that report card that shows that the ACT's performance in ED access for patients needing urgent access to treatment has fallen. It shows that in 2003-04, nearly 75 per cent of patients were seen on time if they had an urgent need. In 2017-18, only 37 per cent of patients needing treatment were seen on time. Minister, why has the performance of our hospital system in seeing people on time for urgent treatment halved over the past 15 years?

MS FITZHARRIS: Timely access to care is a significant priority—in fact, the greatest priority—for Canberra Health Services. That includes, of course, timely access to the emergency department. Yes, we have seen some of those waiting times not meeting my expectations, but there is significant work underway to address this.

There are, of course, a number of factors. Certainly, federal cuts from 2014 have had an impact that we have seen. The AMA reports that nationally this continues to be an issue. The 2014 federal budget cuts, the AMA says itself, had a significant impact on hospital services, as did the extended freeze on the Medicare payment to GPs.

Mrs Dunne quite freely referenced an AMA report card. We see that the AMA had certain things to say federally about their colleagues and the federal government, including the ongoing impact of cuts from the 2014 budget. That has had a significant impact in hospitals right across the country. State health ministers, be they Labor or

Liberal, are united in that fact, that those cuts had a significant impact on timely access to care. The AMA federally has said it; federally, Labor has said it; and right across the country, state and territory health ministers have said it. So that is a significant impact over recent years.

Madam Speaker, a number of other factors contribute to that including that we are seeing people with more complex conditions presenting to our hospitals. That is a matter of significant concern to me and of concern in the community. There are, right across the country, emergency departments now dealing with many people with more complex issues who are presenting to emergency departments. In fact, where we see our most significant growth in emergency department presentations is in categories 1, 2 and 3. (*Time expired.*)

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why has the ACT been consistently unable to meet the targets for emergency department treatment, and why have they, over time, got progressively worse than the rest of the country, notwithstanding all the reasons you have given?

MS FITZHARRIS: It is the priority of Canberra Health Services to improve those waiting times. We are seeing a number of strategies in place at the moment in the emergency department to improve waiting times in the emergency department.

One aspect of the work that we have been doing is to introduce walk-in centres to provide another alternative for people needing treatment.

Mrs Dunne interjecting—

MS FITZHARRIS: Category 5 presentations to the hospital have come down by 15 per cent, whereas category 1 patients have gone up by about the same number. Obviously these are very different presentations.

We have a number of strategies in place at Canberra Hospital and also at Calvary hospital. One other significant measure that this government is taking is investing in the Calvary hospital emergency department to deliver a significant expansion and upgrade of the emergency department. We look forward to that being delivered, particularly for Canberrans on the north side.

MS LEE: Minister, why has the ACT been the only jurisdiction that has not been able to provide accurate data for the performance of its hospitals when it is the smallest hospital system in the country in terms of number of hospitals?

Ms Fitzharris: I am not clear what Ms Lee is specifically referring to. If she could provide clarification that would be welcome.

MS LEE: I repeat: why is the ACT the only jurisdiction not able to provide accurate data on the performance of hospitals?

MS FITZHARRIS: No, it is not. I certainly know that there have been well-canvassed views and discussions in this place on the ACT not providing data to a ROGS report a number of years ago and subsequent to that there have been

agreements with AIHW about providing certain data sets. But I am not aware of anything in particular that is different to that that Ms Lee may be referring to.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Treasurer. It is regarding the Indigenous bush healing farm, for which \$10.8 million was appropriated in the 2007-08 Appropriation Bill (No 2). The purpose of that appropriation was outlined in the 2007-08 Appropriation Bill (No 2). Treasurer, what actions did you take to ensure that the usage of the Indigenous bush healing farm was consistent with that purpose?

MR BARR: I believe it is.

MR MILLIGAN: Treasurer, what actions have you taken to ensure that the expenditure of public money on the Indigenous bush healing farm has been consistent with the Financial Management Act?

MR BARR: There is no suggestion that it has been otherwise.

MRS DUNNE: My supplementary question to the minister is: Treasurer, what role does treasury have in ensuring that public funds are used for the purposes appropriated for it by the Assembly, and what steps were taken to ensure that the money appropriated for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm was in compliance with the Financial Management Act?

MR BARR: They are all hypothetical questions.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing regarding the Indigenous bush healing farm. Minister, is the usage of the Indigenous bush healing farm consistent with the purpose detailed in the Appropriation Bill (No 2) 2007-2008?

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly, the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm has been in operation now since around about a year ago. It is, I know, a very welcome addition. It is certainly the case that I have stated in this place that it is our intention for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to be a residential facility. Certainly, in this case it did not open as a residential facility, but I stated at that time that it has the capacity, with rooms, to be a residential facility. Work is well underway to ensure that that is the case.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what actions have you taken to ensure that the expenditure of public money on the Indigenous bush healing farm has been consistent with the Financial Management Act?

MS FITZHARRIS: Since taking on this portfolio we have seen the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm open. We have seen the fourth program of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm underway as we speak, with approximately in total 85 clients having received treatment at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. I indicated that we would

be looking very carefully at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm once it started operating to ensure that we could make it the best facility that it can be for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Mrs Jones: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question was about steps that have been taken or actions that have been taken to ensure that the farm is consistent with the Financial Management Act. The minister has not referred in any way to the question that was asked. It is not relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think she is on the policy area about the use and how it has been operating. I think the other questions are consistent with the budget outline. Minister, you have a minute left.

MS FITZHARRIS: I would refer to the Chief Minister's previous answer and also note that steps are taken each year to ensure that all initiatives comply with the Financial Management Act. It has certainly been the case that there has been a long history with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and each step in the procurement, delivery and construction phases is subject to the normal processes of governing the way that the ACT government expends public funds.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why has the government not used the facility as an Indigenous-specific drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation facility?

MS FITZHARRIS: As I mentioned in my previous answers, the government is taking a number of steps to ensure that the bush healing farm can be a facility that meets the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. To that end, Minister Stephen-Smith and I attended a very important workshop last month. That workshop was intended to bring a number of stakeholders together. Over 35 people participated in a full-day workshop. They included representatives of UNEC and of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, ACT government staff, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and the Healing Foundation. They came together at a workshop to discuss the future of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm so that we can get on and provide residential services in the medium to long term, and the healing framework that will underpin not just the work of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm but also a range of other initiatives undertaken across ACT government.

Light rail—environmental benefits

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Environment and Heritage. Minister, what benefits does light rail bring to the environment?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cheyne for her important and timely question. It is often easy to forget that air pollution, including from cars, harms both human health and our environment. Unlike other countries, Australia has failed to clean up emissions from vehicles. Madam Speaker, thanks to this Liberal federal government, Australia has one of the least fuel efficient fleets in the world, even worse than Saudi Arabia. This is bad for both the environment and Canberrans. In contrast, this ACT Labor government is taking steps to help improve our bush capital and create better environmental outcomes while connecting more Canberrans to the city we all

love.

Light rail for Canberra means improving our public transport system so that it becomes more convenient, efficient, affordable and reliable—a genuine alternative to driving. Light rail has a proven ability to attract development and investment opportunities that will help revitalise a transport corridor and city. It will bring environmental, social and community benefits to areas by increasing accessibility and encouraging better use of green spaces. The light rail is an important contribution in Canberra's response to environmental challenges such as air quality, traffic volumes, congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, how does having more Canberrans taking public transport improve the ACT's environment?

MR GENTLEMAN: Canberra is one of the great planned cities of the world. We are home to 420,000 people, heading towards 510,000 people in 2030 and 640,000 people in 2050. Canberra is one of the world's most liveable cities, thanks to its natural and built environments, with over 70 per cent of the ACT preserved as green space. Canberra has the highest car dependence of any major Australian city. Transport is responsible for 34 per cent of the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions and 11 per cent of the ACT's particulate pollution emissions.

These figures will continue to grow, harming the environment and our health. As the years progress, light rail will continue to be a positive influence not only on our carbon and pollution footprints but also on economic, health, social and environmental factors. The light rail network will become the backbone of an integrated transport system for Canberra, powered by emissions-free renewable electricity to support the shift to a more sustainable Canberra. The light rail system will help increase public transport use, thus helping improve environmental outcomes for the territory.

MS CODY: Minister, does expanding public transport, including adding more light rail routes, help the local environment?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cody for her important question. Urban life in Canberra is changing as our population and suburbs grow. Canberra is now known as the bush capital and a smart city, boasting the country's best natural and urban environments, a highly educated workforce, high labour productivity, modern infrastructure, low business costs and a culture of innovation. We are well placed to compete in this changing global environment and make our city one of the most attractive environments to live in.

The ACT government is committed to giving Canberrans a wider choice of how we live. We are taking action to grow our city while maintaining everything that is great about Canberra, creating new and exciting environments for people to live, work and play in. Light rail for Canberra means improving our public transport system so that it becomes even more convenient, efficient, affordable and reliable. It will bring environmental, social and community benefits to areas by increasing accessibility and encouraging the better use of green spaces. It is our environmental values that we appreciate—some of the world's very best environmental values and a great city.

Light rail is an integral part of achieving those outcomes.

Industrial relations—long service leave

MR WALL: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety. Mental Health Australia has been embroiled in a long-running battle with the ACT government through the ACT Long Service Leave Authority about their requirement to contribute employee LSL entitlements into the portable long service leave scheme. This issue has been ongoing since 2010 with conflicting advice having been provided regarding their requirement to contribute or not contribute, as the case may be. Minister, what action or steps have you taken to ensure that a negotiated resolution with Mental Health Australia has occurred prior to this date?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Wall for the question. I have been briefed on this matter a number of times in my time in this portfolio. As the issue in relation to Mental Health Australia and the amounts paid to the Long Service Leave Authority under the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act 2009 is now subject to litigation brought by Mental Health Australia, I will not be able to comment on the matter specifically. In relation to the specific question, I have been briefed a number of times and I have indeed written to Mental Health Australia in relation to this matter. My correspondence with them reflects the information that I have been provided with.

MR WALL: Minister, why have the ACT government and the ACT Long Service Leave Authority been unable to apply this legislation consistently across applicable peak advocacy and industry bodies?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think Mr Wall's question goes directly to the matters that are subject to current litigation. Therefore I will not be commenting on that matter.

MRS DUNNE: Is the ACT government using the Mental Health Australia example as a legal test case for the failures in the long service leave scheme?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I note that the litigation was brought by Mental Health Australia, not by the ACT government.

Industrial relations—long service leave

MS LEE: My question is also to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety. Minister, Mental Health Australia has claimed that it is adversely affected by the inconsistencies in the application of the ACT Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act. How many not-for-profit organisations could potentially be affected by these inconsistent applications of the act?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think the answer to Ms Lee's question probably goes to the outcome of the current case. Therefore, it will not be possible to answer it at this point in time. If Ms Lee would like me to take on notice her question in relation to how many organisations are currently registered under the community sector industry part of the scheme, I believe that that information is public. I am happy to take that

question on notice and come back to the Assembly with the answer about how many community sector industry businesses are registered for portable long service leave.

MS LEE: Minister, what actions have you taken to ensure that the experience of Mental Health Australia is not going to be replicated in other not-for-profits?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not aware of and I have not been briefed on any other organisation that has had this kind of matter raised. Again, I do not want to speak to the specifics because the matter is currently the subject of litigation.

MR WALL: Minister, will you guarantee that no not-for-profits will be adversely affected by the inconsistent application of the long service leave act?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think the assertion in Mr Wall's question speaks directly to the matter that is currently subject to litigation.

Construction industry—consultation

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Building Quality Improvement. Minister, I refer to comments in the media from Gary Petherbridge from the Owners Corporation Network on 4 May this year about consultation with your office:

As for consultation, I attempted to have a meeting with the Minister about three or four weeks ago and that was refused. I did meet the chief of staff, but generally the access to the Minister is very poor.

The head of the MBA ACT, the Housing Industry Association and the Australian Institute of Building Surveyors ACT Branch were advised of delays to the introduction of the national construction code the day before they were due to begin. Why have communication and consultation with stakeholders about building quality been so poor?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for the question. I reject the premise that it has been poor. Certainly there has been a range of consultation in relation to a number of matters in building reform and certainly what has happened recently is that we have been in close consultation with both local and national bodies: the MBA and the HIA, the building surveyors and the Property Council. We will continue to work very closely as we roll out other reforms that we know are the reforms that Canberra deserves.

As I have said before, there are 43 recommendations that have come through on the reforms. A number of those have already been implemented. A number of those will be implemented by the end of June. The rest will be implemented by the middle of next year.

I will continue to work closely with industry and closely with people right across the community to make sure that Canberra does indeed have high quality buildings, confidence in the sector and a strong and active regulatory system.

MR PARTON: Minister, what actions have you taken as minister to improve

consultation and communication with the stakeholder groups who do not seem to agree with your summation of the adequacy of your consultation to date?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for the supplementary question. I have spoken not only with the head of EPSD but also with Access Canberra to ensure that consultation is clear. I have made sure that my office is working with them, and that has increased over the last few days.

MS CODY: Minister, what is the directorate currently consulting on in the building space?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary question. There is, indeed, a large number of matters that are being consulted on at the moment following on from the work that has come through in relation to the national construction code and its implementation to make sure that there is a good and adequate transition period for those matters that are implemented this year under the changes to the code.

In addition to that, we are consulting in relation to a number of the reforms. The most specific reform at the moment relates to design documentation to make sure that people are very clear about what is needed in terms of any design documentation, to make sure that certifiers and builders are clear on what needs to happen to make sure that Canberra has the highest quality of building. We will continue to work very closely with industry and the rest of the community on that.

ACTION bus service—journey times

MS LAWDER: Madam Speaker, my question is to the minister for health and Minister for Transport. How many buses would a person need to catch to travel between the Lanyon Valley and the University of Canberra hydrotherapy pool?

MS FITZHARRIS: Of course, it depends on where that person lives in the Lanyon Valley. I note that the rapid 5 from the Lanyon Valley is actually a very well-performing new service in our network. Transport Canberra is keeping a very close eye on the performance and capacity on that route. It has proven to be a popular route.

I encourage Ms Lawder's constituent to use the journey planner if they would like to catch public transport to take that journey. Generally, I expect that they would be able to catch the rapid 5 and they would be able to use the journey planner to plan their journey to the University of Canberra Hospital.

MS LAWDER: Minister, can you confirm the advice from the Transport Canberra website that a return journey between Lanyon Valley and the University of Canberra public hospital would take at least three hours?

MS FITZHARRIS: It would depend on what time of the day that particular person wished to travel.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what estimates has your Health Directorate made in relation to the time it would take an elderly person with arthritis to walk the standard distance

to a bus stop in the Lanyon Valley?

MS FITZHARRIS: Mrs Dunne, could you repeat the question, please?

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what estimates have officers of your directorate done to determine how long it would take the average elderly person with arthritis to walk to the average bus stop in the Lanyon Valley?

MS FITZHARRIS: I have not asked my directorates to undertake that analysis.

Government—procurement policy

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Government Services and Procurement. Minister, can you update the Assembly on recent progress in procurement policy in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cody for her question and for her ongoing interest in matters of procurement. Procurement in the territory continues to grow, and we are constantly looking for ways to support the growth of business while driving sustainable procurement outcomes.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy is a clear demonstration of our commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises. I spoke in detail about this policy recently in this place. I am pleased to say that it is expected that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy will be finalised shortly and come into effect on 1 July 2019. Following final approval of the policy we will undertake training and engagement activities to support both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises and government agencies in the implementation of the policy.

We have also introduced recently a supplier complaints management procedure as a consistent and effective way to respond to supplier complaints, in line with our commitment to continuous improvement in procurement. Further to this, we have established a cross-agency advisory group to identify specific areas in the procurement framework that could benefit from further clarity or enhancement.

I cannot speak about recent developments in procurement without mentioning the secure local jobs code. Around 650 businesses have now received a secure local jobs certificate to date, having been audited and certified that they meet the highest ethical and labour standards and treat their workers with respect. We have also incorporated the secure local jobs policy into our procurement processes more broadly and we provide ongoing support to territory agencies and industry to meet their obligations under this important policy.

MS CODY: Minister, can you advise the Assembly of recent milestones in the secure local jobs code?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary and, again, her continued interest in the progress of the secure local jobs code. As I mentioned, the Secure Local Jobs Registrar has approved approximately 650 secure local jobs

certificates as of today and I have heard a number of positive stories from the Secure Local Jobs Code Registrar. For example, the recent light rail launch event, a fantastic event enjoyed by me and many others across Gungahlin and Civic, was only possible with extensive traffic management and security services. I am pleased to say that the businesses engaged by the ACT government for these services held secure local jobs certificates and had been certified that they provide their workers across the events and indeed the entirety of their businesses with the highest ethical and labour standards.

A significant milestone for the secure local jobs code is that we have received and approved an application from one of the country's largest facility service providers, with over 11,000 employees across the country delivering cleaning, support, property, aviation security and catering services. Every one of those 11,000 employees now covered by the secure local jobs code is providing the high standards set out by our progressive government.

We have also seen the secure local jobs code's reach go beyond ACT government work and beyond those companies. The registrar has been contacted by a local non-government organisation that is undertaking construction work that will require construction companies tendering for their work to hold a secure local jobs code certificate.

These examples further highlight that the expectation that businesses provide the highest ethical and labour standards for their workers is not only an expectation of the ACT Labor government but also an expectation of our entire community.

MS ORR: Minister, how can businesses find out more about secure local jobs code certification?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary and her interest in this very important policy area. As I have mentioned, businesses that tender for ACT government work in security, cleaning, traffic management and construction currently require a secure local jobs certificate. That said, we have received applications from a broad range of industries beyond those four sectors.

Application for a secure local jobs code certificate is open to any business that can demonstrate that it provides their workers with the highest ethical and labour standards. Indeed, it would be worthwhile for any business that intends to tender for any government work, particularly when the secure local jobs code is expanded to tenders over \$200,000 from January next year, to consider getting certified early.

Businesses have reported that undertaking certification has been a very helpful exercise beyond just receiving the certificate. Auditors have not only been ensuring compliance with relevant obligations but have also been providing guidance and advice in relation to how to meet those employment obligations in an efficient way. I have heard reports of some businesses, through an audit, identifying and rectifying issues that they may not have been aware of and ensuring that they continue to meet high standards for their workers.

If businesses want to find out more in relation to certification or even what they are

required to do for their tenders, they can get in touch with the secure local jobs code team through the Procurement ACT website.

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