



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

TENTH ASSEMBLY

8 FEBRUARY 2022

www.hansard.act.gov.au

Tuesday, 8 February 2022

Tonga—natural disaster (Statement by Speaker)	1
Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee	2
Petitions:	
Roads—speed limits—petition 1-22	4
Auslan—petition 33-21	4
Ministerial responses:	
Domestic Animal Services—dogs—petition 9-21	5
Municipal services—cycle lanes—petition 25-21	6
Parking—Campbell shops—petitions 21-21 and 40-21	8
Municipal services—Lyons shops—petition 41-21	9
Roads—speed limits—petitions 31-21 and 38-21	10
COVID-19 pandemic—disaster payments—petition 36-21	19
Play spaces—Fadden Hills Pond—petition 27-21	20
Melba—recreation area—petition 15-21	21
Municipal services—Hackett shops—petition 12-21	22
Sport—Waramanga playing fields—petitions 26-21 and 43-21	23
Motion to take note of petitions	24
Auslan—petition 33-21	24
Roads—speed limits—petition 1-22	25
Government—economic update and the year ahead (Ministerial statement)	26
COVID-19 pandemic response—update (Ministerial statement)	36
COVID-19 pandemic—return to school (Ministerial statement)	45
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee	47
Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee	48
Public Accounts—Standing Committee	51
Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee	53
Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee	54
Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee	55
Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee	55
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee	56
Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee	57
Public Accounts—Standing Committee	58
Standing Committees—Membership	59
Questions without notice:	
COVID-19 pandemic—teachers	60
COVID-19 pandemic—relief teachers	61
Crime—Yerrabi	61
ACT Emergency Services Agency—Belconnen storm	63
Housing ACT—developments	64
ACT Policing—crime clearance rates	66
Environment—Sustainable Household Scheme	67
COVID-19 pandemic—vaccination rollout	69
ACT Policing—public satisfaction	71
Mental health services—waiting times	73
Schools—use by community groups	74
ACT Emergency Services Agency—preparedness	75
Papers	77

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee.....	80
Leave of absence.....	84
Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill 2022	84
COVID-19 pandemic—economic recovery	89
Housing—affordability	104
Adjournment:	
Environment—ACT Environment Awards	117
Mr Victor Marillanca—Ohtli Award.....	118
Melba—play spaces.....	119

Tuesday, 8 February 2022

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms Burch) (10.00): Members:

Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal.
Yanggu ngalawiri, dhunimanyin Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari.
Nginggada Dindi dhawura Ngunnaawalbun yindjumaralidjinyin.

The words I have just spoken are in the language of the traditional custodians and translate to:

This is Ngunnawal country.
Today we are gathering on Ngunnawal country.
We always pay respect to Elders, female and male, and Ngunnawal country.

Members, I ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Tonga—natural disaster Statement by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the recent events that have occurred in the Kingdom of Tonga. On 15 January, the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcano, which is 65 kilometres north of the capital, erupted, raining ash and debris across much of the kingdom. Described as a once-in-a-thousand-years event, it was the world’s largest recorded volcanic eruption in 30 years. The heavy ashfall that followed polluted much of Tonga’s freshwater supplies.

The eruption also generated a tsunami which radiated across the Pacific Ocean. Tonga bore the brunt of this, with the largest waves estimated to be 15 metres high. The waves caused widespread damage and claimed five lives: three in Tonga and two in Peru, 10½ thousand kilometres away. On top of this, Tonga experienced its first community case of COVID-19 last week.

The kingdom’s parliament and our Assembly share a common bond built through the presiding officers and clerks conferences and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and its small branches group. I wrote to the Tongan Speaker in the days after the eruption to share words of comfort with him and the members of his parliament on behalf of our Assembly.

It is indeed hard to watch this unfold from afar. No-one would know this better than the proud Tongan community which calls the Canberra region home, and a community of which one of our number, Mrs Kikkert, is part. Some may still be waiting for news of loved ones back home. Members, I hope that you join me in wishing our Tongan community and the people of the Kingdom of Tonga resilience and strength as they together face this uncertain future.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (10.04), by leave: I rise today to speak about my beautiful homeland of Tonga. When natural disasters happen and the things around us begin to crumble, we know too well how small we truly are on this ever-changing, ever-moving living planet we call home. At 6 pm on 15 January, the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano began erupting. This volcano is only 65 kilometres north of the island of Tongatapu, where I grew up and where 70 per cent of Tonga's population live. This was the most powerful volcanic eruption in the world in 31 years, with a force so much greater than several atomic bombs.

The eruption caused powerful tsunamis as high as 15 metres which flooded many islands. Ash fell over much of the nation, covering roads and buildings, contaminating water supplies and destroying agriculture. I worried and wept for my father, his brother and my extended family. The pain and heartbreak was shared by Tongans throughout the world as we stood by, anxiously waiting for news from Tonga as they lost communication from the rest of the world for days.

Heroic, miraculous stories have emerged from survivors. One particular story is from Lisala Folau. Lisala swam for 28 hours after getting swept out to sea by the tsunami. He landed and recovered on two islands before reaching the main island where, at that moment, his family was holding a memorial for him. You could almost imagine the joyful reunion between them. It is a miraculous story of strength, determination and faith.

The Australian government was quick to offer help, committing \$3 million to Tonga's recovery and also sending 40 tonnes of emergency supplies, including fresh water and equipment. We are indeed ever so grateful. It has also been heartwarming to see local Canberran businesses, sporting groups, families and individuals donate to the Tongan disaster relief. From the bottom of my heart, I thank each and every one of them.

Oku ou ma'u ha tu'a 'ofa lahi atu kihe Tu'i Tupou 6, Pule'anga moe kakai 'oe 'otu Tonga, 'ihe fakatamaki fakaenatula kuo ne uesia e 'otu Tonga. In English, this translates to: I express my deepest love to the King of Tonga, the government and the people in the face of the disaster that mother nature has left them. I am most grateful for the Tongan people who are working so hard to clean and fix their islands. I know that their faith, their hard work and their love for each other will give them the strength that they need.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (10.07): Members, I make the following statement pursuant to standing order 246A. This follows discussions with the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure and party leaders. Members, you are aware that the Omicron outbreak has created significant challenges. The committee recognises that it is important that the Assembly, its committees and its members are able to continue to perform their democratic functions effectively. The Assembly will continue to legislate, scrutinise the government and represent the people of the ACT.

Equally, the committee recognises that all members have a statutory duty of care to ensure the health and safety of people who work in the Assembly precincts by ensuring that we all follow public health advice and take all reasonable steps to minimise the possibility of transmitting the virus. I remind members that members and their staff, the staff of the office and others working in the building to not, in any circumstances, enter the precincts if they are feeling unwell; if they are a household contact of a person who is unwell; and if they have had prolonged and close exposure to a COVID-positive person.

Members or staff who test positive to COVID and have been in the precincts while potentially infectious are required to notify the Office of the Legislative Assembly. Where an MLA or a staff member of an MLA tests positive to COVID and there has been prolonged and close exposure to other MLAs or staff, it may be necessary for those MLAs or staff to go into quarantine and to be tested.

We need to remember that if a COVID-positive person is present in the chamber for a prolonged period during a sitting day, this could impact the health and safety of others in our shared workplace. This could also lead to the risk that we could lose our quorum. Similarly, committees should give careful consideration to their arrangements for conducting public hearings and meetings to limit exposure to the virus and acquit their duty of care to witnesses, members and staff.

In line with public health requirements, members must ensure that they and their staff wear masks inside the building and maintain appropriate physical distancing measures and ensure that any visitors to their offices comply with these requirements as well.

There are also advantages in members and their staff undertaking home-based work where that is operationally viable.

Until further notice, while the precincts remain open to members of the public to make representations to MLAs, the public galleries for the chamber and for committees are closed for the time being. Similarly, group visits to the Assembly and the use of meeting rooms by external groups have ceased. The normal range of risk management strategies will continue within the precincts.

The admin and procedure committee has agreed that there will not be more than 13 members in the chamber at any one time and that arrangements for question time in this sitting period will be the same as we experienced in some parts of last year. As an additional precaution, members may wish to consider continuing to wear their masks while they are speaking in the chamber or in committee proceedings.

On behalf of the committee, I thank members and all of those who work in the Assembly precincts for your cooperation and for working together to ensure that we continue to have a safe but functioning workplace and parliament for the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Roads—speed limits—petition 1-22

By **Mr Davis**, from 12 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that: There are no speed limit signs on Bateman Street with many motorists assuming the speed limit is 60 km/ph. There are traffic islands at each end and painted lines on the street which indicate this is a major thoroughfare.

Bateman Street connects Learmonth Drive and Boddington Crescent which are both 60 km/ph and have speed limit signs. The route Boddington, Bateman, and Learmonth is also a short cut to the Tuggeranong Town Centre from Drakeford Drive to Athllon Drive. Motorists can avoid three sets of traffic lights with this shortcut.

Bateman Street is especially busy in the mornings and evenings with commuter traffic. Many of the vehicles exceed the 50 km/ph speed limit believing the speed limit is 60 km/ph. It is also dangerous to enter Bateman Street from the side streets due to the speeding traffic.

This installation of speed limit signs should be a relatively quick and easy task to complete. The installation of 50 km/ph signs would increase the safety for residents.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to: **Call on the ACT Government to install 50 km/ph speed limit signs at both ends of Bateman Street, Kambah facing both directions.**

Auslan—petition 33-21

By **Ms Lawder**, from 536 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly that Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is an essential method of communication for the ACT Deaf community. The ACT Deaf community is a network of people who share a language (Auslan), a culture and a history of common experiences, similar to an ethnic community. Deaf community members rely on Auslan to communicate. Deaf ACT is the peak body that represents the ACT Deaf community. The availability of services and information in Auslan in the ACT is inadequate, disadvantaging Deaf Canberrans. Addressing these inequalities will increase the extent to which the Government is complying with ACT legislation including the:

- ACT Discrimination Act 1991
- ACT Human Rights Act 2004.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to, in consultation with the ACT Deaf community:

1. commission an inquiry into the disadvantage and discrimination faced by Deaf people due to lack of access to services and information in Auslan;
2. strengthen and enforce legislation and policy to increase provision of services and information in Auslan across the public and private sectors in the following settings:
 - aged care
 - education and training
 - emergency services
 - employment
 - health care
 - justice
 - media (including Government announcements)
 - social opportunities.
3. create a set of agreed objectives and targets relating to these settings against which progress on the quantity and quality of services and information in Auslan can be measured against;
4. publicly report progress against these objectives and targets.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having more than 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Domestic Animal Services—dogs—petition 9-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 30 November 2021, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Lawder on 16 September 2021 concerning the provision of services to the community by Domestic Animal Services.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2021 regarding petition 9-21, lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA. The petition calls on the Government to ensure DAS provide an efficient and transparent service to the community.

I appreciate that animal nuisance matters can be very disruptive and aggravating to those affected. Under the *Domestic Animals Act 2000*, for enforcement action

to be taken the Registrar must consider the number of people affected, be satisfied that the nuisance is frequent and persistent, and presents an impost on the quiet enjoyment of the neighbourhood. Investigations into animal nuisance complaints can therefore be complex, and include noise monitoring exercises and the canvassing of neighbouring residents to help corroborate the nuisance complaint.

A number of notices or infringements can be sent to owners to enable preventative action under the existing *Domestic Animals Act 2000*. This includes:

- The ability for the Registrar to issue a nuisance notice to the keeper of the animal believed to be causing a nuisance. A nuisance notice will state that the animal nuisance must be reduced or stopped, and indicate that unless this is undertaken, proceedings may be instituted for contravention of the notice or an offence. If, after two weeks, the nuisance that was outlined in the notice has not stopped, then DAS may seize the animal. The keeper may also be fined under the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* for failing to prevent the animal nuisance.
- Allowing an authorised person to seize an animal if the animal is deemed to be causing nuisance. A seized animal may be released to the keeper of the animal if the animal nuisance is not likely to happen again.
- The ability for the Registrar to revoke a Nuisance Notice if the Registrar is satisfied, after carrying out an inspection, that the notice has been complied with; and adequate steps were taken to reduce the nuisance or stop the nuisance from happening again.

In order to support community awareness of DAS services, there are a number of documents available on the City Services and Access Canberra websites. This includes documents on Animal Nuisance Overview and a Service Manual which outline how DAS works to support the Canberra community and animal welfare. These documents transparently outline how DAS responds to animal nuisance complaints and provide context on what constitutes a complaint.

DAS has reviewed the processes used in several other jurisdictions, which are in line with the ACT's approach to managing animal nuisance complaints. This includes engaging with the animal owner to make them aware of the issue at the community level prior to the attendance of a DAS Ranger, and having support for reduction in noise by implementing requirements at a local level.

On average DAS receives 22 animal nuisance complaints a month. The most common nuisance complaint received is related to barking dogs. DAS recognises that there is opportunity for procedural improvement when dealing with animal nuisance complaints. DAS is acting to remedy this by focussing on resolving specific complaints, and thus providing a timelier response to the community.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Municipal services—cycle lanes—petition 25-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 30 November 2021, in response to a petition lodged by Mrs Kikkert on 16 September 2021 concerning Drake-Brockman Drive and Southern Cross Drive cycle lanes.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2021 regarding petition 25-21, lodged by Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA. The petition has requested enhanced connections for cyclists from Ginninderry, Holt and Higgins to the Belconnen Town Centre, via Drake-Brockman Drive and Southern Cross Drive.

The ACT Government takes road safety and residents' amenity seriously and wants to encourage all road users to share responsibility for road safety. The ACT Transport Strategy has a strong focus on encouraging active travel as a key way for Canberrans to move around our city. Having good quality active travel facilities is important to ensure that it is both easy and safe for people who choose to walk or cycle in our suburbs and town centres.

Canberra's active travel network has been delivered over many years, to the design standards of the era in which they were built. Work is underway to better connect existing networks and create new connections as well as upgrading existing assets to current design standards. This is a significant undertaking and Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) approaches this strategically by assessing and prioritising requests.

The ACT Active Travel Infrastructure Practitioner Tool (at <https://activeinfrastructure.net.au/>) identifies the current, intended and future on-road cycling routes and off-road community routes. This tool recognises that active travel improvements in West Belconnen are intended into the future. The ACT Transport Strategy also identifies future principle cycling route improvements intentions between Belconnen Town Centre and West Belconnen, via Kippax Group Centre.

The development of residential suburbs on the west edge of Belconnen is through the Ginninderry Joint Venture, which is governed by a commercial agreement between the ACT Government and Riverview Developments ACT. In relation to Drake-Brockman Drive, as you have noted, duplication is forthcoming. I am aware that in mid-2018 as part of Stage 1, the Ginninderry Joint Venture funded and completed a variety of improvements along Drake-Brockman Drive including adjusting line marking, introducing cycle symbols and marking through the intersections to protect cyclists. Planning for subsequent stages is currently underway for further augmentation works along Drake-Brockman Drive, which includes consideration of active travel facilities. Public consultation will be undertaken when planning has sufficiently progressed.

Of relevance to West Belconnen, I am pleased to advise that funding has been committed as part of the 2021-22 ACT Budget for the duplication of William Hovell Drive between Drake-Brockman Drive and John Gorton Drive. Along with catering for on-road cycling, this project includes building a new 6.7 kilometre, three-metre-wide asphalt off-road shared path along William Hovell Drive between Drake-Brockman Drive and Bindubi Street. The connection to Bindubi Street will link to C5, which is the primary route connecting Belconnen to Lake Burley Griffin to provide access to both the city and southern Canberra (e.g. Tuggeranong via Weston Creek).

As you may be aware, the ACT Road Safety Strategy and regulatory reforms have introduced minimum passing laws for overtaking cyclists and mandatory training and testing of driver's ability to drive safely around vulnerable road users including cyclists.

In line with the ACT Road Safety Strategy, and in conjunction with the Austroads national standards for cycling, TCCS consider on-road bicycle facilities as part of all new road planning, design and construction. However, in areas with older road infrastructure that may not comply with current design standards, it is not always possible to retrofit facilities due to the limited widths, parking demands and other activities along the route.

TCCS has introduced an On-Road Cycling assessment that incorporates the provision of dedicated bicycle lanes on roads in older Canberra suburbs. In this respect, Southern Cross Drive will be assessed for the provision of a continuous bicycle lane in coordination with a future resurfacing program. This includes assessing smoothed kerb transitions between the road and nearby path as appropriate.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Parking—Campbell shops—petitions 21-21 and 40-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 30 November 2021, in response to petitions lodged by Ms Lee on 6 October 2021 concerning parking and traffic management in Campbell.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 6 October 2021 regarding petitions 21-21 and 40-21, lodged by Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA. The petitions request a whole of suburb review be undertaken of parking and traffic problems in Campbell, with a view to implementing a parking and traffic management plan for the area.

Over recent years Campbell has seen considerable growth. The Government recognises that this has changed travel patterns and parking behaviours in the area.

To address this, Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) will undertake a parking and traffic management study for the Campbell precinct. This study will include a review of the publicly available parking and the effectiveness of current traffic management within the suburb.

It is understood that some of the current parking behaviours are a result of the continued building work on the Campbell Five development. The implementation of temporary traffic management arrangements will also be reviewed to identify opportunities to address or improve practices during the ongoing construction of that precinct.

TCCS will undertake community consultation with residents to better understand their issues and concerns. Any changes to parking proposed will be discussed with locally affected residents prior to changes being implemented.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Municipal services—Lyons shops—petition 41-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 30 November 2021, in response to a petition lodged by Mrs Jones on 8 October 2021 concerning upgrades at the Lyons shops.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 8 October 2021 regarding petition 41-21, lodged by Mrs Giulia Jones MLA. The petition seeks upgrades at Lyons Shops.

The ACT Government, through Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) is responsible for the management of public space across the ACT. This often includes the public realm that supports local shopping centres.

In general, shopping precinct upgrade projects consider the need for a variety of supporting infrastructure – such as play spaces, toilet facilities and seating – through the feasibility and design planning stages. Subsequent upgrades to support shopping precincts and recreational areas across Canberra focus on improving safety and access, providing improved landscaping and other facilities that encourage people to spend more time enjoying these public spaces.

Shopping precinct upgrade projects are assessed and prioritised based on factors like amenity, function, pedestrian lighting, public safety, parking needs, quality of street furniture and landscaping at each local centre across the ACT.

The Lyons Shopping Village has been upgraded within the last 10 years. The ACT Government has also recently completed active travel improvements in Lyons leading to and from Lyons Shops, which improve access for local residents while also strengthening connections between Weston and Woden.

I am pleased to advise that as part of the 2021-22 ACT Budget, funding was committed to an upgraded playground in Lyons, to be progressed in consultation with the community. This project will also consider supporting infrastructure such as seating. I note the petitioners' request for a playground to be installed adjacent to the shops. TCCS will undertake community consultation on this project which will consider the location within Lyons.

While there are some examples across the ACT where bike tracks have been co-located with playgrounds, another option may be for community members to submit a proposal to develop or formalise a community- built bike track on another piece of public land managed by TCCS. Community members may contact TCCS via email to explore the options, at:
TCCS.BumpsandBerms@act.gov.au.

The ACT Government provides public toilets in high-use areas such as town and district parks, large shopping centre precincts and sportsgrounds where private facilities are not available. These sites serve a broad catchment area and support visitation for longer periods. At this stage, there are no immediate plans to construct new ACT Government public toilet facilities at Lyons Shops. The request for a new toilet facility through this petition has been noted by TCCS for future consideration amongst other competing priorities when planning for the replacement and upgrade of existing toilet facilities.

In relation to informal use ovals, during the 1990s a number of ovals across the ACT were converted to dryland (non-irrigated), reflecting their low usage levels at the time. Unlike sportsgrounds, informal use ovals or low maintenance ovals are not irrigated and so are not suitable for organised, formal sporting use. While they also do not have facilities such as pavilions, toilets, change rooms and canteen facilities, these ovals are a great space for informal recreation by the local community.

Informal use ovals are mown on the same cycle as other suburban open space mowing – around six times per year depending on the season. Surfaces are also inspected periodically to ensure they are in a safe condition. The appearance of informal use ovals is dependent on rainfall. Like other non-irrigated open space areas, they will appear green during periods of strong rainfall but will brown off in drier weather. The Woden Valley is serviced by a large number of irrigated sportsgrounds and there are no plans to alter the maintenance regime at Lyons dryland oval or reinstate irrigation.

Installing street art on public assets such as bus stops is undertaken through the TCCS street art program. The petitioners' request has been noted and proponents are encouraged to make a request via the Fix My Street portal to enable TCCS to include this planning for future street art installations, as artist/community interest and funding allows.

More broadly, the ACT Government is currently undertaking significant public investments in the area surrounding Lyons. Project examples include building light rail to Woden, the Woden Public Transport Interchange, the CIT Campus Woden and a major upgrade of Phillip Enclosed Oval. These projects will stimulate long-term economic growth in the area and deliver great new facilities for all residents of the Woden Valley.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Roads—speed limits—petitions 31-21 and 38-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 30 November 2021, in response to petitions lodged by Mr Parton on 16 September 2021 concerning new 40 kilometre per hour speed limit zones in Civic.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letters of 16 September 2021 regarding petitions 31-21 and 38-21, lodged by Mr Mark Parton MLA. These petitions have requested the fines

and penalties incurred in the month of July 2021 in the new 40km zones in Civic to be waived, and for the Government to take action to make clear where the speed limits apply.

As reflected in the Government's submission to the Public Transport and City Services Committee Inquiry into 40km/h zones in Civic, the Government will not be automatically waiving the fines and penalties incurred in the revised speed zones during the month of July 2021. ACT Government ministers are not empowered to waive individual fines under legislation; this is an important integrity measure for ensuring public confidence in the ACT's enforcement framework.

The policy rationale for the introduction of 40km/h speed zones in the city is based on protecting the safety of Canberrans, particularly vulnerable road users. The ACT Government undertook extensive communication activity leading up to the implementation of the new speed zones, throughout the subsequent three month grace period during which no enforcement was undertaken, and throughout an additional two-week warning period. Communication remains ongoing, including through large and prominent physical signage, on-road markings and the use of variable message boards in the revised speed zones in Civic.

I have provided further detail on both the policy rationale for this change and the communication activity supporting the revised speed zones below.

Canberrans who wish to query or dispute a speeding fine are able to do so by contacting Access Canberra via:

<https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/s/article/traffic-and-parking-infringements-tab-overview> or by calling 13 22 81.

Background

As Canberra has grown, more streets have evolved to be not only places to move through, but also places for people to stop and spend time. The City and Braddon have changed remarkably in the past decade, with a large increase in the number of people living in these areas. They have become hubs for dining, cultural events and other recreational activities, as well as for public transport use. This has resulted in more public transport users, pedestrians and cyclists using the area than ever before, who have to safely navigate the presence of motorists still using these roads to commute.

As a result, the streets in the City and Braddon have a changed function. Reducing speed limits reflects the changed use of streets by making the road system safer for all road users, particularly vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

In 2013, Roads ACT implemented 40km/h speed limit areas in all town centres within the ACT. This program was extended to include all group centres in 2015. Evaluation of this program found the community were broadly supportive of the reduced speed limit, including in the City and supported the expansion of the 40km/h speed limit to other adjacent streets in town centres.

The ACT Government has since implemented 40 km/h zones in all 18 ACT group centres. The extent of these speed limit zones has been reviewed for five

group centres and the expansion of the Belconnen town centre was completed in 2019.

Lower speeds in the City and Braddon, including a ‘people first’ focus on Northbourne Avenue, formed a key part of design guidance for streets developed with community consultation as part of the *City and Urban Gateway Design Framework* in 2018. This framework set the principles for development and growth in the city centre and along the gateway corridor of Northbourne Avenue including in relation to access and movement. Further extension of 40km/h zones in these areas also then formed an explicit action under the *ACT Road Safety Action Plan 2020-23* supporting our commitment to *vision zero*, the *safe system* approach and *safer roads*.

The ACT Government has particularly recognised that the commencement of operations for the first stage of light rail from Gungahlin to the City in 2019 led to a change in the road environment and function. We saw an increase in pedestrian movements in the city, particularly around Northbourne Avenue near the Alinga Street light rail terminus. Following the commencement of light rail operations, it was considered an appropriate time for the implementation of a permanent reduction to speed limits from 60km/h to 40km/h across the city, including the section of Northbourne Avenue between Barry Drive and London Circuit.

During 2019, Ministers from several portfolios worked together to consider the impacts of this measure on traffic, public transport, active travel, emergency services, ACT Policing and enforcement activity associated with the permanent speed cameras installed in the area.

The speed limit reduction was intended to be implemented in 2020 but was delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on traffic and pedestrian volumes and public transport patronage.

It was agreed to postpone the implementation until all traffic and pedestrian movements were normalised.

Once traffic and pedestrian movements had largely returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, the expansion of 40km/h zones across Northbourne Avenue between McKay Street to Vernon Circle, sections of Barry Drive and Cooyong Street with high pedestrian activity; and a large section of the Braddon commercial precinct was approved for implementation in December 2020 and executed in March 2021. Low speed zones were also expanded in March 2021 around the Tuggeranong Town Centre and Kingston Foreshore precincts.

Policy rationale

Research shows that the introduction of 40km/h zones significantly reduces the risk of death for vulnerable road users like cyclists and pedestrians. The risk of death for a vulnerable road user drops from approximately 80 per cent when a vehicle is travelling at 50km/h to 50 per cent when the vehicle is travelling at 40km/h.

This evidence has underpinned a number of strategies and frameworks developed by the ACT Government and other Government which support the implementation of reduce speed limits in the city and other town and group

centres, particularly in locations where there are high volumes of vulnerable road users. I have included the key excerpts of these documents below.

ACT Road Safety Strategy 2020-2025

Safe System

The Safe System approach provides the technical methodology and policy framework for achieving Vision Zero. The Safe System approach means that efforts must be made to manage the combined effects of the speeds at which we travel, the safety of the vehicles we use, and the level of protection provided by our roads – not only to minimise the number of crashes, but to ensure that when crashes do occur, they do not result in death or serious injury.

Traditionally the Safe System approach to road safety focuses on four pillars: safe speeds, safe roads and roadsides, safe vehicles and safe people and behaviours.

Safe Roads

The standards of the ACT's roads, the appropriateness of speed limits and the effectiveness of the road environment are critical to road safety. Safe roads, including safe road environments need to be designed to improve safety for all users. This includes ensuring speed limits are set appropriately for the conditions of the road environment (for example, the design and function of the road) and road rules and road signage are appropriate.

ACT Road Safety Action Plan 2016-2020

ACTION ITEM – CONSIDER FURTHER EXPANSION OF 40KM/H SPEED LIMIT AREAS

JACS will undertake community consultation to determine the community demand for lower speed limits, and will consider further expansion of the reduced 40km/h speed limit areas. This could include other areas which have high numbers of cyclists, pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

ACT Road Safety Action Plan 2020-2023

Focus Area: Speeding

The setting of appropriate speed limits that consider the road design, surrounding environment and road conditions is critical to improving road safety. In making decisions about setting speed limits, the ACT Government will apply the Safe System approach outlined in the ACT Road Safety Strategy 2020-25 and the Movement and Place framework which recognises that road environments cater to a wide range of users and often have dual purposes.

The ACT Government has implemented 40 km/h precincts in all 18 ACT group centres. A review of existing boundaries in the 5 town centres has been completed. An expansion of all existing boundaries has been designed and will be implemented in stages. The Belconnen town centre expansion was completed in 2019. Other town centres will be progressed in 2020 with planned expansion in the City, also including parts of Braddon.

City and Gateway Urban Design Framework December 2018 (ACT Government and National Capital Authority)

Strategic walking network

Strategic areas of focus for pedestrian facility improvements are:

- Lowering traffic speed in appropriate locations to promote place making outcomes, particularly in relation to improving safe pedestrian and cycling conditions.

Design criteria

- Implementing lower speed environments on targeted city and gateway corridor streets to support more pedestrian activity, cycling and to improve safety for all road users

Strategic cycling network

Design criteria

- Improvements to intersections, line marking indicating bicycle use, speed limit reduction and street car parking changes are among the measures to be implemented as part of defining active travel streets in the short term.

Opportunities

Transform Northbourne Plaza

Design criteria

- The completed plaza will feature new street trees and plantings, furniture, paving, lighting and public art, creating an attractive setting for this important civic, gateway and transit location. The improvements will reflect the ‘people first’ focus for this priority space, which connects the city centre’s eastern and western activity zones.

ACT Planning Strategy 2018

Actions

2.3.1 Establish an approach to the urban design of the city centre that focusses on interconnected precincts, and considers matters relevant to the city centre location including:

- implementation of the City Plan and the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework
- contribution to the ‘place’ experience of the city

5.2.1 Apply the Movement and Place Framework in future precinct planning to recognise people and place in the design and function of precincts. Include the following principles:

- permeable street layouts
- safe and efficient active travel routes connected to centres, schools, public transport and local activities

Transport Strategy 2020

Policy response

The ACT Planning Strategy 2018 introduces the concept of ‘Movement and Place’ for the first time to Canberra. This is a framework for integrating land use and transport. It recognises that roads and streets have dual purposes, they are both places for people to move through and places for people to stop and spend time.

As Canberra becomes denser more streets will evolve to have both a high movement and a high place function. The streets of Civic and our town centres are good examples of this.

Walking and cycling for a liveable city

The Safe Systems approach will be used to assess safe speeds to support vulnerable road users walking and cycling in Canberra’s town, group and local centres and school environments.

Safe System Approach

The Safe System Approach recognises that safe speeds, safe roads, safe vehicles and safe behaviours, all go together to create a safe system for road travel. Safe System is compatible with Movement and Place and we will implement it on road design projects through the Safe System Assessment Framework.

Communication

The ACT Government has been transparent at all times in introducing lower speeds in the City and on Northbourne Avenue. This policy implements direct actions from two major Government strategies which have previously been announced and consulted on; the Road Safety Action Plan and

the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework. A range of important steps were also put in place to inform Canberrans about the change in speed limits prior to and during implementation.

A Ministerial media release was issued, and media interviews were conducted in March 2021. There were over 20 media articles including ABC News, Canberra Times and the Riot ACT as well as most major radio stations and via radio ads across multiple time slots, and either side of the news during peak hour, including either side of the news, to alert motorists to the speed zone changes. The radio advertisements ran on AM and FM radio. Advertisements also included social media posts, which were run across ACT Government Facebook, with more than 170,000 impressions, over 1500 reactions and almost 1500 comments. Updates were also provided through the digital Our Canberra newsletter, and ministers and officials from Transport Canberra and City Services and Access Canberra also gave multiple media interviews.

To provide guidance and inform all motorist about the changes in speed limit, large Variable Message Signs (VMS) were installed in the area two weeks prior to the 40km/h zones being introduced in March 2021. The VMS signs remained

in place for an additional two weeks after the completion of the signage installation to reinforce the speed limit for motorists. Additional VMS were put in place on 11 May until 4 June 2021 to remind motorists of the reduced speed limit, then again on 21 June 2021 and are still in place.

A letterbox drop of 2,000 letters was undertaken in March 2021 to businesses and residences in the Braddon and Civic areas.

While the speed limit in this zone was changed in March 2021, the fixed road safety cameras were adjusted to capture vehicles driving above 40 km/h on 21 June 2021. In addition to the three month period this gave Canberrans time to adjust to the new speed environment, a further two week warning period was provided between 21 June and the commencement of enforcement on 5 July 2021. During this time Ministers and ACT Government officials publicly announced the intention to commence enforcement from 5 July and encouraged Canberra drivers to adapt to the new speed limits.

As our city continues to grow, the Government is not ruling out additional communications and educational activities to inform Canberrans on reduced speeds in the city, town and group centres.

The amount of public information over a sustained period relating to the new 40km/h speed zone change significantly exceeds that for any other change of speed limit implementation in the ACT.

Warning signage

It is the responsibility of each motorist to be aware at all times of the speed limits in the location they are driving in accordance with *Road Transport (Road Rules) Regulation 2017 SL2017-43* made under *the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999*.

The extension of the City area 40km/h zone to include parts of Northbourne Avenue, Cooyong and Barry Drive was designed in accordance with *Australian Standards (Australian Standard AS1742.4 Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Part 4: Speed Controls)*.

The permanent warning signage installed in March 2021 when the new speed limit came into effect included:

- a pair of 40km speed zone signs of standard sizing at each entry point into the speed limit zone;
- repeater signs following each major road that intersects with the zone. A key design constraint to the location of the start and end of the 40km/h zone was ensuring that entry point signs are visible for approaching drivers at distances that exceed the minimums required by the Australian Standards. Sign locations also considered the spacing relative to other road signs so that the entry speed limit signs are not obscured;
- additional 40 km/h 'roundel' road markings . These are not required by standards but do assist in making the speed limit more visible to motorists;

- additional repeater speed limit signs prior to each of the camera sites to assist driver awareness; and
- large pavement markings on Northbourne Avenue, Barry Drive and Cooyong Street.

In addition, to assist drivers to understand that the speed limit had changed the permanent signage was augmented with mobile VMS on Northbourne Avenue, Barry Drive and Cooyong Street which inform motorists of the speed limit change and that the speed limit is now 40 km/h. VMS have been in place, and remain in place, on all approaches to speed cameras within the 40km/h zone. VMS informing drivers of changes to the traffic environment are typically only deployed for short periods of time, but have in this case been used for an extended period.

In response to community feedback during and after the grace period, further permanent signage has been installed, including:

- additional 40 km/h road signs immediately in advance/on the speed camera poles located on Northbourne Avenue southbound and Barry Drive westbound to remind drivers of the reduction in speed limits, installed in July 2021. This is beyond the minimum standard practice in the ACT; and
- additional pavement markings at mid-blocks on Northbourne Avenue, Barry Drive and Cooyong Street, installed in September 2021.

The ACT Government will continue to consider further additional measures as appropriate to continue to warn Canberrans to slow down in built up areas and high pedestrian traffic zones in the city, town and group centres.

Infringements

Between 5 July 2021 and 1 August 2021 over 20,000 infringement notices were issued to offending motorists. Given the passage of time since July 2021, many Canberrans have taken up the legislative options available to them including:

- paying or entering into a payment plan (accepting liability);
- seeking withdrawal; or
- disputing their infringement. These are now a matter for the court.

The *Road Transport (General) Withdrawal of Infringement Notices Guidelines 2019* (the Withdrawal Guidelines) sets the process under which Access Canberra can consider withdrawing infringements. One of the core provisions is that ‘disagreeing with a law, or finding it inconvenient, to adhere to it, are not grounds for having an infringement notice withdrawn’.

In relation to the enforcement of the 40km/h zones, Ministers do not have the legislated authority to assess or grant applications for speeding fine waivers. This is an important safeguard against inappropriate intervention and supports the appropriate enforcement of the law.

Once a traffic infringement notice is issued, Access Canberra as delegate of the Road Transport Authority can only waive the infringements for reasons outlined in the Withdrawal Guidelines.

The ACT Government also provides a number of options for people experiencing difficulties as a result of having received infringement notices.

Infringement notice management plans

It is possible to pay off infringement notices in instalments via an infringement notice management plan. This involves agreeing a manageable amount for regular payments which can be debited from an individual's nominated bank account. Repayment amounts can be as little as ten dollars a fortnight depending on the circumstances of the customer.

Further information on how Canberrans can establish a management plan and apply for these arrangements is available at:

<https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/s/article/traffic-and-parking-infringements-tab-infringement-notice-management-plans>

Alternatives to licence suspension

The holder of a full licence may elect to serve a 12-month good behaviour period as an alternative to serving a demerit point suspension. This can be a useful option for people who need to use their vehicles for work or other essential transport reasons.

Throughout the duration of the good behaviour period, the licence holder's demerit point threshold is reduced to just two demerit points. A licence holder is suspended for double the original suspension period if they accrue two or more demerit points during the good behaviour period. Individuals are able to discuss and apply for these good behaviour arrangements by contacting Access Canberra by phone or emailing acinfingements@act.gov.au.

These measures are intended to ensure that individuals who have received an infringement notice as a result of breaking the law do not experience disproportionate hardship as a result.

Benefits already realised from the reduction in speed limits

In addition to the safety benefits, reducing the speed limit in town centres to 40 km/h helps to encourage active travel participation and the use of public transport a key objective of government. The reduced speeds can also lead to reduced noise levels and so can encourage greater activation of busy street frontages.

Pedestrian and cycle count data from December 2019 indicated approximately 14,000 pedestrians crossing Northbourne Avenue at the Alinga Street intersection. Research and evidence show that the introduction of 40km/h zones significantly reduces the risk of death for vulnerable road users like cyclists and pedestrians. The risk of death for a vulnerable road user drops from over 80 per cent when a vehicle is travelling at 60km/h, to 50 per cent when the vehicle is travelling at 40km/h significantly improving the risk to vulnerable road users.

Based on the preliminary reported crash data, there was a reduction in crashes of approximately 36% since the introduction of the 40km/h posted limit areas in Northbourne Avenue, Barry Drive and Cooyong Street.

I trust this information is of assistance.

COVID-19 pandemic—disaster payments—petition 36-21

By **Ms Berry**, Acting Treasurer, dated 16 December 2021, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Braddock on 16 September 2021 concerning income support for recipients of commonwealth social welfare.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2021 providing Petition No 36-21 lodged by Mr Andrew Braddock MLA, regarding income support for recipients of Commonwealth social welfare.

Over the last 20 years the ACT Government has made a significant contribution to ensuring Canberrans enjoy some of the highest living standards anywhere in the world. However, there are many Canberrans on low and fixed incomes on whom cost of living pressures weigh more heavily. The current Commonwealth JobSeeker maximum payment is set at about \$45 per day for single residents, almost half of the income of \$83 per day as recommended in the petition.

Recently many Canberrans have needed greater assistance as a result of the compounding impacts of bushfire, smoke, hail and the COVID-19 pandemic. The ACT Government is continuing to use the tools at our disposal to foster a strong, fair, economic recovery from a pandemic induced economic downturn, while continuing to address the day-to-day costs and stresses that Canberrans are facing.

In 2021-22 the Territory is delivering a range of assistance for the households that need it most, including some temporary measures for those impacted by the ACT lockdown. This includes:

- an additional \$250 rebate to the low-income households receiving the Utilities Concession, to bring the total rebate to \$1,000 for 2021-22;
- a \$50 increase to the pensioner rates rebate, to bring the ongoing rebate up to \$750 a year;
- offering a rates deferral to eligible homeowners experiencing financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown interest-free for up to three months;
- providing a land tax credit of up to \$100 a week to landlords who provide rent relief between 1 August 2021 and 31 December 2021 to tenants impacted by COVID-19.

This assistance is on top of the temporary payments provided to support lockdown, isolation and quarantine requirements. The Commonwealth's COVID-19 Disaster Payments and Pandemic Leave Disaster Payments sought to support Australians who lost work/income, including social welfare recipients. The ACT hardship isolation payment is an additional support for the ACT households more likely to face barriers in accessing Commonwealth assistance.

The ACT also joined other state and territory governments in calling for the Commonwealth to reintroduce the JobKeeper and increased JobSeeker payments to provide a more suitable level of support during periods of heightened restrictions.

With high vaccination rates and restrictions easing, many Canberrans will be able to work and spend more time out in the community. As this occurs, the temporary assistance provided to assist households throughout the impacts of the ACT lockdown will be reviewed.

Additionally, the Assembly recently passed a resolution to review and update the *ACT's Targeted Assistance Strategy*, including current transport, utilities and rates concessions and deferrals, with potential measures to be considered as part of the 2022-23 Budget.

The ACT cannot address poverty alone. Social security payments are key to reducing the levels of poverty and housing stress faced by Canberrans. Unfortunately, the scale of the funding required to supplement social welfare is beyond the capacity of all state and territory governments due to the significant vertical fiscal imbalance ingrained in our federal system of government.

Through adequate policies on welfare payments, the Commonwealth Government has the capacity to provide choice and control in the lives of vulnerable Australians, and in a more direct manner than other government programs.

This is a view well supported by experts. A recent report by ACTCOSS highlighted that following the Commonwealth Government temporary increase of JobKeeper to \$1,100 per fortnight in 2020-21, there was almost a 50 per cent reduction in the number of people living below the poverty line in Canberra. The ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods has also examined the impacts on poverty and housing stress during this time, and has highlighted that increasing social security payments had the greatest impact in lifting low-income households out of poverty.

The pandemic has shone a light on the capacity of the social welfare system to address poverty, and the ACT is actively working with other states and territories to call for the Commonwealth Government to reinstate a suitable safety net that enables a decent standard of living.

Play spaces—Fadden Hills Pond—petition 27-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 3 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Lawder on 9 November 2021 concerning the Fadden Hills pond playground.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2021 regarding petition 27-21, lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA. The petition seeks the removal of the tower at Fadden Pond Playground, and its replacement with another useful piece of equipment.

The ACT Government is committed to providing the ACT community with a safe and fun playground network. We currently manage over 500 public playgrounds located across the ACT.

Each playground provides unique opportunities for play with attractions and equipment varying in age and condition. Audits against Australian Standards for safety are a high priority and are conducted regularly. For example, City Services teams conducted more than 26,000 safety inspections at Canberra's playgrounds last year. General maintenance and repairs are actioned during these visits and any major work is programmed to be undertaken as quickly as possible.

The ACT Government continues to invest in new and upgraded playground facilities. Play spaces are prioritised for upgrade using recommendations from annual audits along with current demographic, spatial and social information, along with community input. This process ensures that safety standards are maintained, and public investments are suitably targeted. The ACT Government released the Play Space Strategy for public consultation on 2 November 2021, with this being open for public consultation for six weeks. When finalised in the coming months, the ACT Play Space Strategy will set the direction for the future development and delivery of play spaces within the ACT.

The ACT Government has committed to deliver significant upgrades at six play spaces over the next four years, including in Aranda, Kaleen, Ngunnawal, Lyons, Chisholm and Gordon. In addition, the Government has committed to undertake further comprehensive playground audits against Australian Standards and audits of skateparks throughout Canberra.

Replacement of the tower at Fadden Pond Playground with another piece of equipment is not currently prioritised within the funded upgrades program. In response to the community's feedback, it will now be placed on a works program to be progressed as future budget and priorities allow. Consultation will be undertaken to ensure community needs and preferences are identified and incorporated into any future upgrades.

In the interim, the tower will continue to receive regular safety inspections as part of our standing program to ensure the safety of playground users. The most recent audits indicate that the tower structure remains safe.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Melba—recreation area—petition 15-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 3 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 9 November 2021 concerning recreational space next to Melba Copland Secondary School.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2021 regarding petition 15-21, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA. The petition seeks upgrades to the recreational space next to Melba Copland Secondary School on Conley Drive, Melba.

The ACT Government continues to invest in new and upgraded facilities across the Canberra Region. The Government has a strong track record in listening to the community as we deliver a rolling program of upgrades to a range of recreational infrastructure, including play spaces, sporting facilities, footpaths, seating, lighting, and other important community facilities. All requests for improvements to Canberra playgrounds are assessed and prioritised annually and considered for future improvements where necessary. This includes considering the provision of community recreational infrastructure on a priority basis, taking account of factors such as demand, demographics, equity, sustainability, co-location, and availability of funding. This process ensures that investments in public spaces are suitably targeted and meet the needs of all Canberrans.

In November 2021 the ACT Government released the draft ACT Play Space Strategy for community consultation. It provides a clear vision, supported by key principles, objectives and actions to guide the future planning, delivery and management of play spaces in the ACT. When finalised in 2022, the Strategy will set the strategic direction for the future of play spaces in the ACT. It will guide the forward planning, delivery and management of play spaces across the entire play space network, ensuring an equitable, inclusive, diverse and engaging mix of play opportunities across Canberra to ensure Canberrans have equitable access to a mix of district, central and local neighbourhood playgrounds.

While there are currently no plans to upgrade the area adjacent to Melba Copland Secondary School, consultation will be undertaken to ensure community needs and priorities are identified and incorporated into any upgrades in the future.

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust this information is of assistance.

Municipal services—Hackett shops—petition 12-21

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 3 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Vassarotti on 9 November 2021 concerning public toilet facilities at Hackett shops.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2021 regarding petition 12-21, lodged by Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA. The petition seeks a public toilet facility at the Hackett shops.

The ACT Government is currently responsible for the management of 134 public toilets across the Territory. These toilets are located in various high use settings, including town and district parks, nature reserves, large shopping centre precincts (such as group and town centres) and sports grounds where private facilities are not available. These sites are intended to support a broad catchment area and support extended visitation.

While some local shopping centres have public toilets as a legacy of past policies, public toilets in local shopping centres are generally provided by the

asset owner as a part of the initial development or subsequent upgrades. In addition, private business owners may provide toilets as a service to their customers.

The ACT Municipal Infrastructure Standards provides further information regarding the provision of public toilets. At this stage there are no immediate plans to construct a new public toilet facility at the Hackett local shops however, this site-specific request for a toilet facility has been passed onto Transport Canberra and City Services for consideration.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Sport—Waramanga playing fields—petitions 26-21 and 43-21

By **Ms Berry**, Deputy Chief Minister, dated 7 February 2022, in response to petitions lodged by Dr Paterson on 9 November 2021 concerning lighting at the Waramanga playing fields.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2021 regarding petitions 26-21 and 43-21, lodged by Dr Marisa Paterson MLA. The petition seeks the installation of a LED lighting system on the two irrigated fields at the bottom of Waramanga playing fields (between Arawang Primary and Mt Stromlo basketball courts); allocate sufficient funding for this project as soon as possible; and provide assistance in coordinating the various government stakeholders ensuring swift approval of the works.

The ACT Government is aware of the need to upgrade sportsgrounds to meet growing participation demand and make best use of the large sporting asset base we are fortunate to have across the city. To this end, the ACT Government has committed to \$60 million in investment in sport and recreation infrastructure over the term of the current Government. A range of key priorities and commitments have been identified, including additional lighting upgrades at Mawson District Playing Fields and Kambah District Playing fields to be undertaken in 2021/22.

In 2018, the ACT Government engaged with Weston Molonglo FC and undertook an upgrade of existing lights at Waramanga Ovals and a full refurbishment of the pavilion. Future works in the Weston-Molonglo region will establish the new Stromlo District Playing fields with additional synthetic and natural grass fields and lighting suitable for football use.

A program of works for the establishment, upgrade and renewal of sports grounds assets across the region has been established for the 2021/22 year. This program does not include additional lighting for the Waramanga Ovals. Sportsground booking data indicates that the current use of the grounds at Waramanga under lights is around 20 hours per week, which is within the acceptable range of 20-25 hours per week for sustainable use.

The request for additional lighting at Waramanga Ovals has been noted and will be considered for future upgrade programs, in light of competing priorities.

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust this information is of assistance.

Motion to take note of petitions

MADAM SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Auslan—petition 33-21

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.14): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the petition that was lodged today to improve the rights of deaf Canberrans by creating better access to Australian sign language in our community. Australian sign language, known as Auslan, is an essential method of communication for the deaf community. Our deaf community in the ACT is a diverse, vibrant group of people who have a shared experience and culture that is centred around Auslan as a shared language. Inclusion in our broader Canberra community has been a constant struggle for deaf Canberrans, with the lack of access to services and information in Auslan a key barrier in their day-to-day life.

In recent years, Canberrans, and Australians more generally, have been reminded of the importance of Auslan. Auslan interpreters have been more visible to us in the media in response to natural disasters, whether it has been bushfire seasons or throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as just a couple of examples. In the ACT in particular we have often struggled to source enough qualified Auslan interpreters. For example, during the black summer bushfires this really disadvantaged deaf Canberrans during these difficult times because they lacked access to information.

Whilst the situation has improved a bit during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still occasions when government ministers have had to have media conferences without Auslan interpreters due to the limited number of qualified interpreters available. I appreciate and acknowledge that this is not necessarily due to a lack of will from the government; it is about the availability of interpreters. Whatever the background reason is, the issue remains that deaf Canberrans are disadvantaged and desperately seek improvements to enable them to have access to everyday information that the rest of us take for granted.

The lack of interpreters is just one obvious example but by no means the only obstacle. This petition today, which has gained enough signatures to go to a committee, hopes that a committee will look at the consequences of the lack of services and information in Auslan. I would really like to acknowledge the determination and, in fact, the bravery of many Canberra deaf community members in working on this petition and ensuring the gathering of signatures. I imagine it is difficult for deaf Canberrans to have to talk about the barriers they face time and again. But they will, if there is to be an inquiry by a committee in this place. They will because, as with many other difficult systemic issues in our community, they know that only by standing up and

shining a spotlight on these issues will anything ever change. We cannot keep accepting the same so that the next generation, or the next generation, of deaf Canberrans face the same obstacles.

The petition further calls on the Assembly to create a set of agreed targets and objectives to measure the progress of changes to services and information made as a result of the proposed inquiry's findings. Obviously that would be a matter for a committee inquiry to determine what might happen in future, but these Canberrans have put a lot of thought into what they would like to see to enable change into the future.

There are practical measures that can directly benefit deaf Canberrans and create a more inclusive community for users of Auslan. I look forward to, hopefully, seeing a committee inquiry in this space or a minister's response. I would be more than happy, after years of working in and with the deaf community, to add any information that I can to improve services and information for deaf Canberrans in Auslan. Lastly, I would like to thank our interpreter, Mandy, for being here today to assist. (*Time expired.*)

Roads—speed limits—petition 1-22

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (10.19): I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition of an additional 146 signatures relating to the Bateman Street speed sign petition.

Leave granted.

MR DAVIS: I table the following out-of-order petition:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Kambah—
Installation of speed limit signs on Bateman Street—Mr Davis (146 signatures).

On 15 September last year my constituent Peter Giles, of Kambah, wrote to me to draw to my attention the issue of antisocial behaviour and speeding behaviour along Bateman Street in Kambah, which, to be frank with you, came as no surprise to me as somebody who grew up on Boddington Circuit in Kambah and somebody who is, on occasion, guilty of doing the well-known rat run up Learmonth Drive through Bateman Street and down Boddington Circuit when running late into the office. So I know it quite well.

He wrote to me with a very simple request. You would know, Madam Speaker, as many other members would know, that often we get very complicated requests, perhaps very expensive requests, which perhaps become a bit more difficult or time-consuming to achieve. But Mr Giles's request was very modest. He simply asked me, "Mr Davis, I think that the street would be improved by the installation of 50 kilometre speed signs at each end of Bateman Street."

We wrote to Minister Steel and the TCCS department making that request and we were advised, rightly, with all fairness, that it would be impractical or impossible to install a 50 kilometre street sign on every single street where the limit was indeed

50 kilometres, as that is the standard speed limit across streets in the ACT. But Mr Giles was confident, and I understood anecdotally, as someone who grew up in the area, that this particular street had a number of issues that we needed to address when it came to speeding and antisocial behaviour.

Mr Giles was so convinced of this that he took it upon himself to sponsor this petition and go out and about introducing himself to his neighbours, asking the very simple question: do they think the street would be improved with the installation of 50 kilometre speed signs? As you can see, 158 of his neighbours, our constituents in Kambah, thought that the case. A number of hours were spent by Mr Giles collecting the signatures for the petition. Some time was spent by me in liaising with my constituent to get prepared to present the petition today. It is a spicy point, but I wonder how the hourly rate of that work might compare to just simply installing the signs in the first place.

The request of the petitioners is very modest. Antisocial behaviour and speeding has been a long and well-known issue along Bateman Street in Kambah. They deserve safer communities. We need to continue to encourage appropriate driving behaviour amongst Canberrans, particularly in residential areas. I would strongly encourage the minister and the department to consider, along with over 158 of my constituents, the installation of 50 kilometre speed limit signs on Bateman Street in Kambah.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Government—economic update and the year ahead

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (10.23): I rise this morning on this first sitting day of 2022 to outline the government's priorities for the year ahead.

Madam Speaker, we are now in the third year of the COVID pandemic. The pandemic clearly is not over and it continues to throw new challenges our way. I want to assure the people of Canberra that the government will be maintaining our public health response, providing Canberrans with a trusted source of health information, delivering a community-wide booster program and responding to the health needs of those affected by the virus.

Our economic recovery plan will also be front and centre of the government's work in 2022. The plan is focused on creating and protecting good local jobs in a diverse range of industry sectors, including health, education, construction, retail, renewable energy, tourism and hospitality and, of course, the technical, scientific and professional services that have been a real growth engine of employment growth in our city in recent years.

This year the government will also be pursuing an ambitious and progressive legislative program. For more than two decades this jurisdiction has advanced nation-leading reforms that have ensured Canberra remains one of the most livable,

inclusive and progressive cities in the world, and that will continue in 2022. The government will also continue investing in the infrastructure that will make Canberra even better—infrastructure that is built for Canberra and built to support the city that Canberrans want.

Madam Speaker, the ACT government's response to the pandemic has rapidly evolved over the past few months, through different variants, public health responses and vaccine rollouts. Health experts have suggested that the Omicron wave we are currently experiencing may have peaked across much of the country, and this advice is reflected in the ACT modelling and lived experience.

Yesterday there were 299 new cases of COVID in the territory. We anticipate that this number will fluctuate; it will move up and down in the coming days and weeks. But as we have said throughout the pandemic, vaccination remains the best way to protect ourselves, our families and our community. It is our high level of vaccination, the primary course and the booster program, that allows us to transition away from lockdowns and to return to a more normal life. The territory continues to have the highest double-dose vaccination rate in the country, approaching 99 per cent of our eligible population. We are also leading the way in providing boosters, with more than half of all eligible Canberrans now having received this crucial extra dose of protection.

However, we know this is not enough. We must continue this program to boost the protection of as many of our population as is possible. The willingness of Canberrans to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated has been the single most important factor in protecting our healthcare system and protecting our community, and we will work to continue this nation-leading program throughout 2022.

More recently, the ACT has also been successful in securing and supplying many more free rapid antigen tests across our community. This includes supply for the use of rapid antigen tests in high-risk settings, providing them to the most vulnerable in the community and distributing RATs to Canberra schools and early childhood education centres to give parents, kids and staff the confidence to return to face-to-face learning at the commencement of this school year.

Throughout the pandemic it has been clear that an effective public health response is crucial to economic strength and it is crucial in this circumstance, at the beginning of 2022, to our economic recovery. That is what underpins confidence, the confidence that has seen our economy bounce back from previous waves of the virus. Through all of the setbacks of the last two years the rebound has been incredibly strong.

Entering the pandemic, the ACT economy was resilient, strong and increasingly diverse. In the five financial years before the pandemic, our strategy to grow the local economy had seen the total number of businesses in the ACT grow from just over 25,000 to almost 29,000 by mid-2019, and that saw the creation of close to 20,000 additional jobs.

Additionally, the government's sound public finance management—once again recently endorsed—sees us remain the only subnational jurisdiction in the Asia

Pacific with an AAA credit rating: not just the only one in Australia, Madam Speaker; the only one in the Asia Pacific. This means the ACT government's balance sheet is able to provide countercyclical public investment that has been required over the past two years to buffer the enormous economic shock that we have experienced, that our fellow Australians have experienced and that has been a global phenomenon.

Throughout the pandemic our priorities have remained the same: ensuring support for the most vulnerable in our community, investing in our public health response and protecting local jobs. The territory government has provided more than half a billion dollars in additional health funding, allocated nearly half a billion dollars in targeted support for small and medium businesses, and more than \$200 million in additional funding for education and skills.

This public investment has delivered incredible economic outcomes. The ACT's real gross state product growth for fiscal year 2019-20 was 3.7 per cent, and in the peak of the pandemic in fiscal year 2020-21 we still grew by 2.8 per cent. Whilst household consumption fell 2.6 per cent in 2019-20, it was more than offset by a 7.7 per cent growth in the following fiscal years. Household consumption then bounced back in fiscal year 2020-21. It did so off the back of greater consumer confidence. That comes from effective pandemic management.

The beginning of the 2021-22 financial year was difficult. The most significant impact on our economy and how we function as a society was through the nine weeks of lockdown from August to October last year. As we took measures that allowed us to transition our city out of lockdown as safely as possible, the recovery commenced. During that period of lockdown we went from a vaccination rate of half of our population aged 12 years and older having had a first dose to 77 per cent having had two doses by the conclusion of the lockdown.

Coming out of that lockdown, as expected, retail trade turnover in the ACT increased by nearly 20 per cent, 19.2 per cent, in the month of November, to \$616 million. That was the highest monthly outcome ever recorded in the history of the Australian Capital Territory, higher than the three-year average across pandemic and non-pandemic months, which was \$544 million.

It was pleasing to see in the data released in the last seven days that this record spend was sustained through December, with \$596.6 million spent at ACT businesses during that month. That was the fourth highest month of retail trade ever experienced, the other three months being in calendar year 2021. So it is pleasing to see that, despite the pandemic, retail trade figures have grown each year from \$6.14 billion pre-pandemic, in 2019, to \$6.67 billion in 2020 and then growing again in 2021 to \$6.78 billion—each all-time records for expenditure at ACT businesses.

However, we know that the record spend in 2021 was not uniform and that some areas of the economy have benefited more from that record spend than others. Reflecting this, the government recently extended existing business support measures to targeted industry sectors, such as food service businesses and tourism and hospitality.

Overall, the ACT economy continues to show resilience in the face of COVID-19. Since the middle of 2019 to the middle of 2021, more than 2½ thousand new businesses are operating in the ACT. So we continue to have nation-leading business growth in our territory. We will continue to closely monitor the daily, weekly and monthly pandemic and economic data over the coming weeks and months as we take a considered and informed approach to the next step of our economic recovery.

We head into 2022 cautiously optimistic, with the early signs of household consumption bouncing back already from the Omicron wave once the impact of this wave subsides. We also see announcements in the last 24 hours that will certainly boost international migration and travel to Australia and to the ACT. This opening of the borders, or further opening of our national borders, is good news for the tourism sector and for higher education and, indeed, for skilled migration.

The ACT will continue to drive towards our objective of full employment and we will continue our 30 consecutive year record of sustainable economic growth. There is no other jurisdiction in Australia that has had 30 consecutive years of economic growth.

The ACT budget review is now less than two months away. Whilst I will not pre-empt the midyear update today, I can say that the review and the forthcoming 2022-23 ACT budget will continue to deliver on the government's plan for a more prosperous and progressive Canberra.

The path back to budget balance will continue to be a focus for the government over the medium term. However, the need to continue to support the economic recovery and position Canberra to respond to a range of opportunities as we emerge from the pandemic currently outweighs the need to balance the budget in the next few years.

Madam Speaker, we are very well aware of the disproportionate intergenerational impact that economic downturns have on the prospects of young people. Therefore, investment in education, skills development and ensuring economic opportunities for young people is critical, and critical right now, to building long-term economic strength.

The pandemic has required significant time and resources from the territory government. Our effective health response has been crucial not only to maintaining a strong economy and building a strong recovery but also to enable us to focus on other priorities for the year ahead, such as the delivery of key components of the parliamentary and governing agreement for this Tenth Assembly.

I will take the opportunity now to outline our priorities across a range of portfolio areas. This is not an exclusive list, but it is an extensive list that we will be pursuing this year. In health and mental health, our hospitals and healthcare workers have done a magnificent and tireless job of responding to the pandemic and we know that this work will continue in earnest in the coming weeks and months.

Of course, our continued work on the physical expansion of Canberra Hospital remains one of the government's key infrastructure projects. But other priorities in

this portfolio include: the delivery of the cancer research centre; rolling out the digital health record across our hospitals and community-based services; more support for alcohol and other drug services; working with the community to plan for more local services and better care coordination; and finalisation of the first 1,000 days strategy to ensure the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for babies and their families.

We know that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on mental health right across our community. The government has already made several investments in clinical and community support services. Work is underway to deliver more initiatives to support people with mental illness at risk of homelessness.

Turning now to early childhood development, education and youth affairs, this government understands the value of good public education and is continuing to focus on the development of new schools in growth areas in our city and upgrades to existing schools right across the territory. We know that this provides a better teaching and learning environment and it is important to meet the needs of our growing city.

We are also committed to providing every three-year-old child in Canberra with access to one day a week of free early learning by the end of this parliamentary term. We will continue to support young Canberrans with the safe and connected youth coordinated service response. These, amongst other priorities in education, training and youth affairs, will be a focus this year.

There is also important work underway in relation to workplace safety, including amending the ACT's portable long service scheme and work health and safety laws and introducing regulations to protect tradespeople from silica dust.

In the area of climate action, the ACT government continues to lead the way in responding to climate change and this year will introduce legislation to improve the climate change and greenhouse gas emissions act, following its review.

The government is committed to driving innovation across the energy and transport sectors, supporting businesses and households to save on their energy costs, to reduce emissions and to take advantage of new technologies. As part of our nation-leading policies to reduce transport emissions, we will develop a second zero-emissions vehicle action plan to expand on the very successful, and indeed nation-leading, first action plan.

EV take-up is accelerating in the ACT, faster than anywhere else in Australia. Our plan to electrify the Transport Canberra bus fleet is underway. We are developing a gas transition plan which will be further advanced this year. We will also progress procurement activities in relation to the Big Canberra Battery and continue to deliver the highly successful Sustainable Household Scheme.

Turning now to housing and suburban development, over the past two years there has been a significant rise in the cost of housing. This has occurred across the nation primarily as a result of very low, historically low, interest rates and existing commonwealth government tax settings. Property is an investment class of asset,

impairing the significant role housing plays in providing a safe environment as we become increasingly divided as a society between those who own property and those who do not.

I have put on the public record that I believe the medium-term objective of all jurisdictions in this country should be the design of policies that will result in property price growth that is no greater than wage price growth. To achieve this, it requires the active participation of governments at all levels. While commonwealth tax arrangements remain structured in the way they are, this will continue to be an uphill battle. The ACT government has provided an additional \$100 million in our 2021-22 budget towards the social housing program, which we will continue to deliver.

Here in the ACT we will continue to implement our five-year \$50 million program to improve building efficiency and sustainability of social and public housing and to support low-income owner-occupier households and the city's lowest performing rental properties to improve their sustainability. We will continue working towards our ambitious affordable rental housing target, with the goal of 600 additional dwellings by fiscal year 2025-26.

Turning to planning and sustainable building and construction, this year the government will introduce legislation to reform the ACT's planning system. This work has involved extensive community consultation and will see significant reforms to deliver better outcomes for development, the environment and the community. We will also continue our work on and our commitment to enhancing the natural environment by protecting and increasing our urban tree canopy.

Law reform will be a significant part of this year's parliamentary agenda. We will continue to examine drug law reform, including the decriminalisation of small quantities of illicit drugs, as we consider how to develop a modern, support-based approach to drug abuse and addiction.

There is also important work continuing a range of other important law reforms, including the multicultural recognition act, the review of the Discrimination Act, and the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioner. The ACT government will also raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the ACT.

Addressing domestic and family violence continues to be a significant priority, and the government will implement important reforms, including those arising from the recommendations of the Family Violence Act 2016 review, overseen by the Attorney-General. Minister Berry is continuing to lead the government's response to the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee's final report. I also acknowledge this morning Dr Paterson for her work in relation to re-examining the ACT's consent laws, ahead of the introduction of the Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill later today.

Over the coming months, I will release the government's second action plan under the Capital of Equality Strategy that outlines how we will continue to build on our progress to keep Canberra as the most LGBTIQ+ inclusive city in Australia. We will

look to reform the births, deaths and marriages registration legislation to ensure a better and more inclusive process for changing birth registration and birth certificates for trans and gender diverse people. We will consult with the community and introduce legislation to support people with variations in sex characteristics and their families, deferring some medical interventions until a person can give personal consent.

The government will also continue to engage with the Disability Royal Commission and the National Disability Insurance Scheme as we strive to achieve better support and outcomes for people with disability in the territory.

The government remains committed to continue working with First Nations Canberrans to close the gap and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We will continue to work towards a treaty process for the ACT, the development of sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, returning Boomanulla Oval and the Yarramundi Cultural Centre to community control, and further progress in reconciliation through the Healing and Reconciliation Fund. We will also continue our efforts to employ an additional Justice Health Service alcohol and other drugs nurse at Bimberi, and develop a model of care for this service, to increase the support available for children and young people.

Turning to gambling reform and the club industry, there is work underway to support our community clubs and to reduce gambling harm. These two are not mutually exclusive. We will continue the government's work on harm minimisation and supporting clubs by working with clubs to diversify their revenue-generating streams and to transition away from gaming revenue, and we will continue the preliminary work and consultation on introducing bet limits and a credit limit on gaming machines operating in the ACT.

Of course, none of us has forgotten the impact of the smoke emanating from the Black Summer bushfires. It seems like many years ago, but it was not that long, so we need to continue to explore options to support our community clubs to become heat and smoke refuges for their local communities.

Turning now to business and better regulation, in relation to regulation reform the Better Regulation Taskforce will soon finalise its discovery report, setting the scene for a program of work that will position us to do even better in attracting, retaining and growing businesses in the territory.

The government heads into 2022 with a range of priorities, and we will continue to keep the Assembly and the Canberra community updated on these initiatives. I have touched on many of them this morning, but there are many others. I did not want this speech to be a 90-minute affair, so I have limited my comments. However, I would like now to touch on some of my portfolios and provide the Assembly with some further updates.

As I stated earlier, the territory continues to lead the nation with our climate action policies as we work towards a zero-emissions future. The Sustainable Household

Scheme is helping households to transition to cheaper and more sustainable energy sources. This continues to be a key component of the government's emissions reduction strategy. The scheme is continuing to support Canberra households to benefit from a clean energy future by offering zero-interest loans for rooftop solar panels, household battery storage, zero-emissions vehicles and energy-efficient electric appliances.

Uptake of loans through the scheme has surpassed expectations set by similar schemes interstate. As of 7 February, I can advise the Assembly that 3,000 loans have now been approved, worth a total value of about \$30 million. To date, 10.1 megawatts of rooftop solar has been installed under the scheme. To put this in perspective, that is more than four times the size of the Majura solar farm. The Sustainable Household Scheme is not only helping households to reduce their energy bills; it is contributing to our emission reduction targets. It is supporting Canberra businesses and creating local jobs. The scheme's top eight suppliers have premises here in the territory, and they are receiving more than \$18 million of this new business.

Based on the early success of the scheme, it has the potential to be one of the most successful examples of policy development and implementation in the history of self-government in the territory. It is a scheme that is delivering the benefits of a zero-emissions future, both financial and environmental, to a wider range of Canberra households, not just those that could afford the upfront capital cost. It is creating a pipeline of work that hundreds of Canberrans can rely on for years to come.

In 2022 the government is progressing the Big Canberra Battery project. It is a project that will provide at least 250 megawatts of battery storage. Once complete, it will be one of the biggest distributed battery storage systems in the country. The project will include three "streams" of different sized batteries. Stream 1 is batteries greater than 10 megawatts, focused on the delivery of a large amount of battery capacity at a low cost. Stream 2 is a series of smaller batteries of between 10 and 250 kilowatts at government and public sites—for example, schools and universities. Stream 3 is neighbourhood-scale batteries of 100 kilowatts to five megawatts, with a focus on trialling community investment models and innovation.

A call for expressions of interest for stream 1 batteries was released in December and has already garnered strong interest. The EOI period will close later this week, on 11 February, and will be followed by a request for proposals from a shortlisted group. I am very pleased with the progress of this program and look forward to updating the Assembly in the coming months on its continued success.

Turning now to infrastructure, the government has a plan—and we are implementing it—to build the infrastructure of our city's future, with a \$6.4 billion investment program outlined in the 2021-22 budget. I believe that now is the time for the ACT government to put the steps in place to design and construct the infrastructure that our growing city needs. This includes new and renewed facilities in our public healthcare system, across the public education system, in our transport network, in city services and in our arts and entertainment precincts.

For Canberra to be a true, modern 21st century city, with modern 21st century infrastructure, the time to invest is now. Over the coming years, the government will be working on both the delivery of the infrastructure priorities that we have already outlined and what comes next in the infrastructure plan. Over the next two years we will continue to update the community on our infrastructure plans as we deliver the largest program in the territory's history.

The Canberra Hospital expansion will ensure that Canberrans have increased access to better health care when and where they need it, enhancing capacity across the hospital's intensive care, surgical, coronary care and emergency services. The project is creating 600 jobs during the construction phase and contributes to our commitment to employ new healthcare professionals, once the facility is open, across this parliamentary term. The work to deliver the critical services building is also underway. Bulk excavation is due to be completed by mid this year, enabling early construction work to commence on this important project.

With respect to a topic that we have talked about a lot in this place, the government is getting on with extending the light rail network to Commonwealth Park, on its way to Woden—our city's biggest ever infrastructure project. Members would be aware that early works are already underway for stage 2A to Commonwealth Park, with work to raise London Circuit to form an at-grade intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. Raising London Circuit not only enables the expansion of the light rail network to Canberra's south but also significantly improves connectivity between the city and Lake Burley Griffin. Over the lifetime of the project, light rail to Woden will support over 6,000 jobs.

We are also committed to providing Canberrans with a wide range of sustainable transport options—strengthening our bus network and introducing the ACT's first zero-emissions buses, expanding our shared path network for pedestrians and cyclists, and continuing a range of targeted road upgrades that include construction of the John Gorton Drive bridge and work on the Monaro Highway.

The south of our city, and the territory more broadly, will benefit significantly from the construction of a new CIT campus in the Woden town centre. The campus will be a flagship facility for the delivery of skills and training, and it will also further contribute to the rapid revitalisation of the Woden town centre. Construction work on the first phase of the new CIT precinct is already underway, with the final design for the new campus due to be revealed later this year.

There is no doubt—and I touched on this earlier in this speech—that skills and training will play an incredibly important role in our economic recovery. The government is investing a record \$126.3 million in vocational education and training in 2022. Growing our city requires further investment in education—new and expanded schools across Canberra. This government believes, and believes very strongly, in the value of the education system for our territory. It is an education system that Canberra families put their faith in, and those families can be assured that we will continue to fund investments in our local schools and provide local teachers and students with what they need to thrive.

Canberra has just welcomed the opening of its newest school, in Throsby, the third zero-emissions public school in the territory. I know Minister Berry will have more to say about this later this morning. Work continues on a range of school projects across the city. Construction is underway on a new high school in Kenny, in the Gungahlin district, which is due for completion in 2023. The development of new schools in growth areas in Gungahlin and west Belconnen is also on track, with a head contractor tender for a high school in Taylor and a design consultant contract for a new primary school in Strathnairn both due to be awarded early this year. The Evelyn Scott School in Denman Prospect, in the Molonglo Valley, is already open to preschool and primary school pupils, ahead of welcoming high school students in 2023.

Throughout all that I have spoken about this morning, there is a key theme of wellbeing, quality of life and making Canberra an even better place. That is a strong and coherent part of everything that I have talked about. Wellbeing is a key focus for the territory government and continues to be a significant consideration in developing policy and the decision-making process around budget priorities each year. Pleasingly, the ACT has some of the highest wellbeing outcomes in the world, compared to other OECD nations and regions. In Australia we have the highest levels of wellbeing across 10 of the 11 areas of the OECD Better Life Index, compared to our interstate counterparts.

Of course, not everyone in the ACT shares the same quality of life. Some groups have been more affected by the pandemic than others, for example. Understandably, this has impacted mental health, with more people in the territory, and indeed more people across Australia and around the world, accessing mental health services. However, both local and national surveys suggest that our overall wellbeing is improving since exiting lockdown last year.

Canberra continues to be a livable city, with nine in 10 Canberrans saying they would recommend our region as a great place to live. And why not? Canberrans enjoy the highest life expectancy in Australia, the greatest access to green space, and the highest perceptions of safety compared to the national average.

The ACT also continues to be the country's most digitally inclusive state or territory. We embrace new technologies and we support each other. Volunteerism is higher in the territory than elsewhere.

At the conclusion of these remarks this morning, and to start off what will be a challenging year again for our community, I want to acknowledge that it has been an incredibly difficult few years for everyone, not just here in Canberra but across Australia and around the world. We need to acknowledge that not every challenge that COVID-19 throws at us can be easily or quickly resolved. We need to acknowledge that some sections of the community and the economy have been more affected than others. These facts have invariably influenced the ACT government's immediate priorities as we have responded to the pandemic. This was evidenced in the delayed budget in October last year, where the largest new expenditure initiatives were the hundreds of millions of dollars allocated to business support programs.

We live in a time of great uncertainty. We do not know what is coming next. However, we enter 2022 with optimism, with community resilience, and with a sharp focus on delivering our important legislative, infrastructure and services programs, many of which will contribute significantly to our economic recovery in the months and years ahead.

I present the following paper:

Economic update and the year ahead—Ministerial statement, 8 February 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Gentleman**) adjourned to the next sitting.

COVID-19 pandemic response—update Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (11.03): I rise to provide my first update of 2022 to the Assembly on the COVID-19 situation in the ACT and the actions taken by the government to protect the health and wellbeing of Canberrans.

The COVID-19 situation here in the ACT and across Australia has evolved significantly since my last update on 2 December 2021, with public health responses adapting rapidly to manage the continued transmission of the Omicron variant of concern. After a difficult couple of months, however, the ACT remains in a strong position, thanks to our nation-leading vaccination coverage, our incredible public health team and healthcare workers, and the efforts of Canberrans to remain COVID safe.

The Omicron variant was first detected in Australia in late November 2021, with the first positive case in the ACT recorded on 3 December. The Omicron variant has now spread to all states and territories in Australia, due to its increased transmissibility, and increased interstate travel and social interaction over the Christmas and new year period. As a result, Omicron has become the dominant variant in Australia, with unprecedented daily case numbers being recorded.

The ACT is working closely with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions, as the national COVID-19 response continues, to ensure that our restrictions are proportionate and effective in responding to the level of risk in the community.

The COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT continues to remain relatively stable at this time. Following a steep increase in cases over the Christmas and new year period, the ACT's daily case numbers have declined steadily over the past few weeks. As at 8 pm on 6 February, there have been a total of 38,698 cases since the start of the pandemic

in March 2020. There are 2,406 active cases, with 57 COVID patients admitted to hospital, two of which are in intensive care, with one requiring ventilation. Sadly, there have been 29 deaths since the start of the pandemic. The ACT government expresses its sincere condolences to the families and loved ones of those who have died with COVID-19.

As at 9 am on 7 February, there were 1,097 close contacts in quarantine in the ACT being supported by ACT Health. We also recognise that many people will be isolating on any given day as a result of a high-risk exposure or awaiting a PCR test result.

As a result of the increase in community transmission and our high vaccination coverage, the ACT's public health response has shifted, in line with other jurisdictions, to prevent high-impact outbreaks and protect vulnerable population cohorts. A range of test, trace, isolate and quarantine measures, as well as public health social measures, have been revised as we continue to transition to living with COVID.

With effect from 11.59 pm on 15 December 2021, the ACT government revised domestic and international travel restrictions. With the exception of close contacts of interstate cases, all restrictions on interstate travel to the ACT were lifted. Individuals returning to the ACT were no longer required to fill out a declaration or exemption form, and all high-risk geographical areas of concern were removed.

From 11.59 pm on 5 January 2022, changes were introduced to the management of confirmed cases, contacts and exposures in the ACT, based on advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. These changes align the ACT with most jurisdictions in Australia to have a consistent national approach. These changes have enabled ACT Health to contact people at highest risk of contracting COVID-19 and to focus on preventing outbreaks in high-risk settings as the number of confirmed cases continues to sit in the hundreds per day.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 are required to isolate for at least seven days from the date their COVID-19 test was conducted, regardless of their vaccination status, until they are cleared to leave isolation by ACT Health. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 is required to inform their household contacts of their positive result and should notify any workplace and social contacts they have interacted with in the two days before the onset of symptoms or their positive test result that they are at risk of contracting COVID-19.

Contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19 are now directed to self-assess their risk of exposure, based on ACT Health's updated exposure guidance for household contacts and individuals who have had high, moderate or low-risk exposure to a case. A household contact of a confirmed case is at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and is therefore required to undergo a PCR test as soon as possible and quarantine for seven days from the date of the positive test result of the first case in the household, complete the ACT Health online declaration form and undergo a rapid antigen or PCR test on or after day 6.

A high-risk exposure is categorised as when someone has spent a long time with a confirmed case of COVID-19 but is not a household contact. This could include

staying overnight with a confirmed case, spending an evening indoors at the house of a confirmed case, driving a long distance with a confirmed case or looking after children who have since tested positive. A person who has had a high-risk exposure should undergo a PCR test as soon as possible and quarantine for seven days from the last date of exposure to the confirmed case, and undergo a rapid antigen or PCR test on or after day 6 of their quarantine. Household and high-risk exposure contacts are advised not to visit high-risk settings, such as healthcare facilities, disability care and correctional facilities, and to avoid mass gatherings and large-scale events from days 8 to 14 following their seven-day quarantine period.

A moderate-risk exposure is categorised as someone who has spent some time with a confirmed case of COVID-19—for example, someone who had dinner with a confirmed case or met at a public venue or social function. A person who has had a moderate-risk exposure should undergo a rapid antigen or PCR test as soon as possible and quarantine until a negative result is received. If their first test was within five days of their last exposure, they should undergo another rapid antigen or PCR test on or after day 6. There are no testing or quarantine requirements for other people in the same household as someone who has had a moderate-risk exposure—unless, of course, that person tests positive for COVID-19.

A low-risk exposure is categorised as someone who has had a brief or distanced contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19—for example, someone who went for a walk outdoors with a confirmed case or visited an exposure venue for a short period of time. A person who has had a low-risk exposure should monitor for COVID-19 symptoms and, if symptoms arise, they should undergo a PCR test—which is the preferred test for people with symptoms—and quarantine until they receive a negative result. There are no testing or quarantine requirements for other people in the same household as someone who has had a low-risk exposure unless, again, the person tests positive for COVID-19.

ACT Health has shifted its focus on whether cases have visited any high-risk sites and if they have come into contact with people at higher risk of serious illness in order to protect our most vulnerable community members and settings. In addition, the sources of acquisition—whether local, interstate or overseas—and individual cluster numbers have become less important and are not needed to guide the public health response. Exposure locations are no longer listed on the ACT government COVID-19 website as it is simply not possible to list every single location or business with the higher number of cases.

The ACT's COVID-19 vaccination coverage of people aged 12 years and over continues to be world-leading, with 98.4 per cent of eligible Canberrans having received two doses of vaccine. Across Australia, as at 4 February, the ACT also had the strongest uptake of booster doses, with 54.7 per cent of Canberrans aged 16 or over having received a third or booster vaccine; and paediatric vaccines for five to 11-year-olds, with 73.1 per cent having taken up the opportunity for a first dose.

As of 5 February, ACT government clinics have administered just over half of all COVID-19 vaccine doses in the territory, with our partners in primary care administering 46.4 per cent and 2.8 per cent delivered through commonwealth

aged-care programs. This is an outstanding effort by all involved and has put the ACT, as the Chief Minister said, in a very strong position.

While the initial uptake of booster and paediatric vaccines has been strong, there are many appointments still available. International data shows that boosters significantly reduce the risk of hospitalisation and death from Omicron. Protection against Omicron declines six months after the second dose of any recommended COVID-19 vaccine, so booster vaccination is critical to topping up your immunity against the Omicron variant. ACT Health is implementing a communications campaign that will help to educate the community on the benefits of booster vaccination. I strongly encourage Canberrans who have not yet done so to come forward for their vaccination so that the community can remain as protected as possible against the Omicron variant.

The Equity to Access program is still in operation and is providing vaccines to people in our community who are less able to access mainstream health services. ACT Health and Canberra Health Services have worked closely to deliver these clinics since September 2021. Last year the Equity to Access program delivered more than 2,000 vaccine doses to marginalised and hard-to-reach community members. Vaccination opportunities were provided to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living with disability and their families and carers, LGBTIQ+ community members, and people living in social housing and insecure accommodation.

This year the team has already commenced offering booster vaccines to adults and is running in-reach clinics for children aged five to 11 years at some of our specialist schools, supporting a safer return to education.

Pop-up clinics will also recommence operating later this year. Pop-ups target areas across the ACT with lower than average vaccine uptake. They were essential to the success of the initial vaccination program and will continue later in the year, offering booster vaccinations.

The ACT Health Directorate will continue to work with community sector partners and healthcare providers to offer these targeted programs and assistance to address identified gaps. Canberra Health Services will also continue to offer vaccination outreach to patients in settings such as hospitals and hospices, mental health units, dialysis centres, adult incarceration centres, disability hubs and methadone clinics.

The Equity to Access program represents the best of our community and our expectation that everyone, no matter their circumstances, should have access to health care. The program has helped the ACT to lead the nation in vaccination rates, providing everyone with the opportunity to be protected as we continue to live with COVID. This, in turn, has helped to reduce the impact on our health system and our economy.

As at 9 am on 7 February, the ACT is nearing an average of two tests per Canberran since the start of the pandemic, with a total of 833,678 negative tests. Testing numbers in the ACT and across Australia increased dramatically throughout December and into January due to the increase in cases and exposure, as well as the requirement for

domestic travellers to several jurisdictions to receive a negative PCR test result prior to travelling.

This increase in demand placed significant pressure on testing sites and testing capability in most jurisdictions, with waiting times in some jurisdictions extending to more than eight hours. As case numbers and testing demand increased, the turnaround time for results also increased in outbreak jurisdictions. The pressure was no different in the ACT, although the effects felt elsewhere were not quite as extreme locally, thanks to the rapid work of ACT Health, Canberra Health Services and our private pathology partners, which included extending opening hours and relocating the Nicholls testing centre back to the Gold Creek School.

On 22 December 6,738 tests were conducted in a 24-hour period—the highest number of tests conducted since the beginning of the Delta outbreak in August. Over the Christmas period Canberra Health Services, ACT Pathology and Capital Pathology worked tirelessly to meet demand. While we acknowledge the significant frustration experienced in the community, this was a herculean effort and I thank all staff involved for their ongoing commitment over the holiday period.

Following the Christmas-new year period, furloughed workforce and reagent supply chain constraints impacted PCR testing across Australia and further contributed to pressure on testing capability in the ACT. This resulted in the temporary closure of Capital Pathology testing clinics while additional reagent supply was secured. On 20 January PCR testing supplies returned to near normal levels and the ACT's testing centres were reopened. I am pleased to advise members that turnaround times for PCR are now well within a 24-hour period and, as a result, ACT Health is encouraging Canberrans to present for a PCR test if they experience any cold or flu-like symptoms, are a household contact or identify that they have had a high or moderate risk exposure.

Another key focus for the government since my last update has been the supply and provision of rapid antigen tests. ACT Health received an initial supply of 58,000 rapid antigen tests in early January that were prioritised to household contacts, people who were symptomatic and those who were at high or moderate risk of contracting COVID-19.

The Kambah COVID-19 drive-through testing clinic began distributing RATs to Canberrans on 14 January, and this quickly expanded to the Mitchell and Garran test centres to meet testing demand while PCR testing was disrupted. From 14 to 24 January the centres distributed nearly 50,000 RATs, and they continue to do so on an as-needed basis through Mitchell and Garran.

An online registration form was published on the ACT government COVID-19 website on 12 January to enable ACT residents to register their positive RAT result. This registration provides ACT Health with a better understanding of transmission in the community and the ability for confirmed cases to receive support. ACT Health now reports daily case numbers from positive PCR and RAT results.

The ACT government has now secured significant additional RATs, and some of these are being distributed to our own essential workforce, as well as workers who provide support to vulnerable people in the ACT. These RATs will be distributed by the government over the coming weeks, and the Community Services Directorate will work closely with our community partners to ensure that vulnerable people and non-government-sector workers receive these tests.

The National Rapid Antigen Testing Concessional Access Program commenced on 24 January and will provide eligible concession cardholders, including low-income health card, pensioner concession card and Department of Veterans' Affairs gold, white or orange cardholders, with a maximum of 10 RATs over three months free of charge. The establishment of this program was agreed to by national cabinet, with costs to be shared equally between the commonwealth and states and territories under the national partnership agreement.

On 24 January the ACT government released its ACT public schools return to school plan. The plan was in line with the advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and the ACT government health guidelines for schools and early childhood education and care, including out of school hours care.

The ACT government acknowledges that COVID-19 will not be able to be kept out of our schools. However, a range of risk mitigation strategies have been put in place and key COVID-safe behaviours are encouraged to limit the spread of COVID-19 and limit disruption to the school year. The Deputy Chief Minister, Ms Berry, will have more to say about this in her statement.

To support the return to face-to-face learning, the ACT government will be distributing 200,000 rapid antigen tests to schools each week for the first four weeks. This has been a major logistical exercise, and I would like to thank all involved—in particular, the staff and volunteers at the Emergency Services Agency who have supported the packaging and delivery of these tests. ACT Health will continue to work with the Education Directorate to support school communities as the term progresses so that learning environments are as safe as possible.

In an attempt to slow the rate of transmission in the ACT and minimise outbreaks in high-risk settings, some public health measures have been reintroduced by the Chief Health Officer since my last update. With effect from 11.59 pm on 21 December 2021, all individuals aged 12 years and over are required to wear a face mask in indoor public settings, including public transport, taxis and rideshare vehicles. Visitor restrictions for residential aged-care facilities were also introduced at this time, with residents permitted to have only five visitors per day, with a maximum of five visitors at any one time, except for end-of-life visits.

In late December 2021 the ACT government also strongly recommended that individuals should continue to work from home throughout January 2022 when it suited them and their employer, while recognising that some employees needed to return to the workplace to meet business needs or for their own wellbeing.

At present most businesses and venues across the ACT are permitted to have 25 people across an indoor venue before density limits of one person per two square metres apply to each usable indoor space. With effect from 12 noon on 8 January, further restrictions were implemented for hospitality and licensed businesses, including cafes, bars and nightclubs and indoor entertainment venues, in response to the spike in cases.

These venues must adhere to the following restrictions: patrons must be seated while eating and drinking; dancing is not permitted; and nightclubs are permitted to operate as a bar, within existing density limits. In addition, the ACT government made the difficult decision to cease category 2 and 3 elective surgeries at Calvary Public Hospital for six to eight weeks to support our frontline health workers and redeploy healthcare staff to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.

On 31 January the ACT government announced that the restrictions implemented from 8 January would be extended for a further four weeks to 25 February, unless a review in two weeks indicated they were no longer required for the level of risk being managed. This included a further recommendation that people should continue to work from home wherever possible during February.

Visitor restrictions at all hospitals, community health centres and walk-in centres were also tightened from 12.01 am on 26 December 2021 to protect vulnerable patients and reduce the risk of outbreaks within the ACT's healthcare facilities. No visitors are permitted to enter these healthcare facilities other than in exceptional circumstances, such as end-of-life, birthing or for paediatric care.

Yesterday the ACT government also announced changes to the Check In CBR requirements to better reflect the territory's current public health situation and response. But we are not "scrapping the app", as those opposite floated last week. We know how important Check In CBR has been to our public health response, and the Chief Health Officer's advice is that it will continue to be needed as the pandemic continues to change.

From 11.59 pm on Friday, 11 February, check-in will no longer be required at the majority of businesses and venues. However, it will continue to be required when entering licensed bars and pubs, registered clubs, nightclubs, strip clubs and brothels, and organised events that are not ticketed or pre-registered. Check-in will also continue to be required for staff and visitors entering school grounds and early childhood education and care settings, in line with the health guidelines for schools and early childhood education and care services.

In addition, we are asking those businesses and venues where checking in is no longer required to continue to display their QR codes for people to use voluntarily. We know Canberrans have embraced the app, and many value having that record of where they have been in their phone.

The rapid increase in COVID-19 cases across the country has caused significant workforce and supply chain pressures as many essential workers have been

furloughed due to isolation or quarantine requirements. The furlough of workers in transport, freight and logistics, and food and grocery supply chains has caused the most noticeable impact. As a result, national cabinet agreed to all jurisdictions implementing a standing exemption to allow asymptomatic “close contact” essential workers in priority industries to return to work.

Following consultation with unions and industry stakeholders, the Chief Health Officer implemented the standing exemption for essential workers to apply to household contacts under the Public Health (Diagnosed Persons and Household Contacts) Emergency Direction 2022, with effect from 11.59 pm on 27 January.

Under the standing exemption, an essential worker will only be eligible to return to work if they meet a range of requirements and conditions aimed at protecting them and their colleagues. In addition to these conditions, employers are required to adhere to their work health and safety obligations and undertake a range of actions if they seek to use the standing exemption to return workers to the workplace. The Chief Health Officer will give consideration to extending the standing exemption to workers in other priority industries, as agreed by national cabinet, should workforce shortages be experienced in these industries in the ACT.

The ACT government is focused on ensuring that our health system is ready and able to respond to the needs of Canberrans as we move forward in our COVID-19 response. Our health services have responded incredibly well to the increase in people with COVID-19. Our response and outcomes have been amongst the best in the country. In response to Omicron, the Clinical Health Emergency Coordination Centre has implemented plans and processes across the ACT’s health facilities to manage COVID-19 and protect those most at risk of severe disease.

COVID-normal operations are underpinned by implementing infection prevention and control as if all patients and staff have COVID-19, while recognising that a person’s COVID-19 status should not determine access to timely and appropriate care. Currently, only COVID-19 patients with respiratory symptoms are cared for in a designated COVID-19 ward or area, and patients at risk of severe disease due to COVID-19 are identified and supported, in line with revised operational procedures.

We have experienced an increase in hospitalisations since December. However, these numbers have stabilised, and our health system is well equipped to support patients who require care in hospital, including in intensive care, or at home if they experience milder symptoms. It is worth reminding the Assembly that the hospitalisation numbers include those who have subsequently been cleared of COVID. With Omicron, we have seen a high percentage of patients admitted with COVID rather than for COVID. Some of these will have a long length of stay to treat their reason for admission; hence hospitalisation numbers will have a long tail. However, the advice from Canberra Health Services is that the length of stay for most patients who are admitted for COVID treatment has reduced over time, with increases in vaccination and improvements in treatment.

Canberra Health Services established the COVID Care@Home service to provide support to community members who tested positive to COVID-19. As cases increased,

this service evolved into a 24/7 telephone monitoring service which is supported by doctors and nurses, to discuss the management of symptoms and assist those who have concerns about their condition. Establishing the COVID Care@Home service has allowed healthcare professionals to efficiently manage the escalation of patients requiring admission and keep patients at home who may have presented to the emergency department if they were concerned about their condition. In addition, the program has been able to identify any high-risk patients who may benefit from specific treatment, such as a Sotrovimab infusion.

On 10 January Canberra Health Services opened the COVID clinic at Garran surge centre, providing face-to-face health care for people with COVID. This service has been very well received by consumers and reflects Canberra Health Services' innovative approach. The number of patients requiring ICU care for COVID-19 has remained well within capacity and, indeed, below the modelled projections. The peak of hospitalisations in the mid-70s was also within the system's capacity. All of this means that the ACT has managed this outbreak with minimal disruptions to other health services.

The Chief Health Officer has provided me with her 21st, 22nd and 23rd reports on the status of the public health emergency due to COVID-19, which I will table. These reports outline the actions taken by the Chief Health Officer and ACT Health's COVID-19 response in the 30 days to 7 December 2021, 6 January 2022 and 5 February 2022.

The Chief Health Officer is of the view that it remains necessary to maintain effective test, trace, isolate and quarantine measures and public health social measures to mitigate the risk of widespread transmission of the Omicron variant in the ACT and protect vulnerable Canberrans. While case numbers have been declining, we are still in an uncertain period, with increasing movement in the community after the summer break. There remain a high number of high-risk sites impacted by COVID-19, and the seven-day incidence rate of COVID-19 indicates that the ACT is still experiencing high community transmission of the Omicron variant.

The Chief Health Officer is therefore recommending that the public health emergency declaration be extended for a further period of 90 days to May 2022, noting that there will continue to be a review of the ACT's situation every 30 days, with a report provided to me. This recommendation is consistent with that of other Australian jurisdictions, including the commonwealth, which are maintaining emergency status or similar at this time and focusing on suppression for the purpose of minimising transmission in high-risk settings and among vulnerable population cohorts. Yesterday I signed the extension of the public health emergency declaration, in line with the Chief Health Officer's advice.

The ACT continues to be well placed in our response to COVID-19, and the government is focused on supporting our community as we live with COVID. I want to thank Canberrans for their continued efforts in adhering to the public health advice and keeping Canberra safe and strong.

I present the following papers:

Status of the Public Health Emergency due to COVID-19—Chief Health Officer Reports—

No 21—December 2021, dated 7 December 2021.

No 22—January 2022, dated 10 January 2022.

No 23—February 2022, dated 7 February 2022.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)—ACT Government response—Ministerial statement, 8 February 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

COVID-19 pandemic—return to school Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (11.31): I am very pleased today to address the Assembly during the second week of our school term and report that 83,000 ACT school students are back in the classroom with their teachers and peers.

To ensure that we could return to face-to-face learning during this current Omicron outbreak, many thousands of people have worked together, united by a common purpose for the benefit of our kids—to create a COVID-safe back to school experience. We have seen volunteers, school leaders and educators, and public servants making extraordinary efforts in order to find the best and safest way to return Canberra's children and young people to the classroom.

I want to make special mention here of the work of principals, teachers and staff in all schools, early childhood workers educating and caring for our youngest students, and those providing out of school hours care. I also express my thanks to Canberra's parents, carers, children and young people, who have shown incredible resilience, flexibility and kindness, as our schools grapple with the challenge of delivering high-quality education in the midst of a pandemic.

With the current level of community transmission in the ACT and across the country, cases of COVID-19 in our schools are both expected and planned for. Every public school has a COVID safety plan tailored to its own circumstances, staffing arrangements and group of students. These plans prioritise the safety of students and staff, while putting in place a series of measures to minimise the disruption to learning.

All schools in the ACT are following a clear set of health guidelines developed by the ACT Chief Health Officer. The key measures involve the compulsory use of masks indoors for all adults, and for students in years 7 to 12. Masks for years 3 to 6 are encouraged, as is arranging students and staff into groups and keeping these groups separate through measures like staggered timetables for shared spaces and different entry points to school. This is known as “cohorting”. The measures also include improved ventilation in classrooms to ensure good circulation of fresh air, outdoor learning where possible, and increased cleaning across schools.

In addition, our public schools have implemented COVID safety plans, updated indoor air quality plans, and revised drop-off and pick-up arrangements, restrictions to visitors on site during school hours and restrictions on school events and excursions. We have also seen high vaccination rates across the ACT.

Our education and health systems have been in lockstep, encouraging and supporting school communities to access COVID-19 vaccines. The government has given school staff and early childhood educators priority access to booster doses at the airport vaccination clinic. Our program to vaccinate five to 11-year-olds is leading the nation since bookings opened on 10 January. More than 60 per cent of this cohort had received a first dose before school returned, and second doses will be delivered before the end of term 1.

Another important element of Canberra’s return to school is access to rapid antigen tests. All schools in Canberra are providing two per week to every student and staff member. Staff in out of school hours care and early childhood workers are also receiving two tests per week. These tests are our early warning system. They allow us to identify cases of COVID-19 in schools as quickly as possible. If the test is positive, parents or staff must notify the school and ACT Health. This allows us to identify who has been exposed and take action to protect others at school.

I want to remind parents and the Assembly that, while it is not compulsory, we encourage all staff and students to do a rapid antigen test twice a week. This will help us to identify cases as early as possible, including anyone who is asymptomatic. In particular, if a person has symptoms of COVID-19, we urge them to take a test. Protect your loved ones and other members of our community. Take the test and report a positive result.

The ACT government understands how important it is to keep our children and young people in their classrooms. Students need to be with their teachers and classmates to most effectively learn, collaborate and develop social and organisational skills. A teacher in the same room can better engage, more closely observe development and more accurately assist with learning solutions.

On-campus learning is the best way we know to help our children and young people to succeed in life—not only to lead to employment opportunities but, just as importantly, to participate in society as an engaged, thoughtful and compassionate member of the community.

We also know that keeping students in their classrooms during a pandemic means additional costs. Late last year we announced two tranches of additional funding to meet COVID-19-related costs in schools and early childhood education and childcare services. In October we committed \$5.7 million for term 4 costs, and in November we announced another \$12.6 million to cover the first two terms of this year.

Almost \$3 million of ventilation works have been carried out or are underway. The focus is now on preparing for the cooler months, including the installation of new ventilation systems that provide warm conditioned outdoor air. Three schools are receiving new shade sails, at a cost of \$500,000. Construction has begun at Duffy primary, and design work is underway for Charles Weston and Evatt primary. We are also planning another \$2.5 million worth of shade structures this year.

To date, about \$200,000 has been spent on mask and sanitiser provision at ACT schools, with another \$1.5 million earmarked for the first two terms of this year. About \$500,000 was spent on casual and relief staff at the end of last year, and a further \$2.9 million has been allocated for the first two terms of this year. Telehealth psychology services have also been bolstered, with an extra \$13,000 in term 4 and a further \$200,000 allocated for the first two terms of this year.

As I have said before, this pandemic is posing a significant challenge to schools and the communities that surround them. However, it is a challenge that our community is working together to overcome, and we will continue to do so. Schools are the beating heart of Canberra, and we will do what we need to in order to keep them as safe as possible and to ensure a great education for our next generation.

I present the following paper:

COVID-safe return to school—Ministerial statement, 8 February 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 12

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.38): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 12, dated 1 February 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR HANSON: Scrutiny report No 12 contains the committee's comments on seven bills, 24 pieces of subordinate legislation, two regulatory impact statements and seven government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

In doing so, I note that this is likely to be the last scrutiny report that I deliver. I am moving on from the JACS committee as a result of an internal reshuffle within the Canberra Liberals. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those involved with the scrutiny committee for their diligent work—Julia Agostino, the secretary; Anne Shannon, the assistant secretary; Sophie Milne, the other assistant secretary who has worked for the committee; and the two legal advisers, Stephen Argument, who is the legal adviser for subordinate legislation, and Daniel Stewart, who is the legal adviser for bills. I would also like to thank the members of the committee that I worked with during that time, including Dr Marisa Paterson, Ms Jo Clay and, more recently, Mr Andrew Braddock.

I would also like to thank the government for their interaction with the committee. They have been timely with their responses. They have engaged cooperatively with the committee. I think that, as a whole, we have worked well together to make sure that the committee has performed its functions. It is a sometimes difficult, complex and laborious area of responsibility, as those who are on the committee will attest. The enthusiasm with which the two legal advisers in particular, Stephen and Daniel, perform their roles is to be commended. They are forever cooperative. They provide real insights to the committee. I would like particularly to commend both Stephen and Daniel, and thank them for all of the work they have been doing for the committee.

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 8

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.41): I present the following report:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 8—*Inquiry into Giralang Shops—Interim Report*, dated 9 December 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I wish to present the interim report and make a brief tabling statement. On 10 February 2021 petition 4 of 21 was tabled in the Assembly seeking an update on the progress of the Giralang shops development. That petition was referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services under standing order 99A and the committee agreed to inquire into and report on the petition.

Following referral by the Assembly, the committee called for and received 69 submissions and held three public hearings, during which the committee heard from the site lessee and property developer, Giralang residents and the Minister for Planning and Land Management.

The committee has considered the issues and made 13 interim recommendations. These cover the Crown lease; suggest a memorandum of understanding between the property developer and the ACT government; site maintenance; and public realm improvements. The committee has also recommended a further update on the progress of the Giralang shops development be provided to it by July 2022. We have stated that we intend to finalise this inquiry with a view to updating the community on the progress of the development of the site in mid-2022.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who participated in and assisted our inquiry. In particular, I would like to thank my colleagues, Ms Orr and Mr Parton, and our committee secretariat, particularly Joanne Cullen and David Monk, who actually were taking on additional duties to help us with this interim report. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Report 9

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.42): I present the following report:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 9—*Inquiry into the impact of revised speed limits in Civic—Petitions 31-21 and 38-21*, dated 20 January 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

On 16 September 2021 petitions 31-21 and 38-21 were tabled in the Assembly, sponsored by Mr Mark Parton MLA, and they were signed by 1,286 and 17 residents respectively. The petitions requested that the Assembly call on the ACT government to waive fines and penalties incurred in July 2021 and take action to make it absolutely clear where the new 40-kilometre speed limit zones in Civic applied. The petitions were referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services under standing order 99A.

The committee agreed to inquire into and report on petitions 31-21 and 38-21 in relation to the new speed limits in Civic. During our inquiry the committee heard from community organisations, the Minister for Transport and City Services and Canberrans impacted by the change, through their submissions. The committee considered the issues and made recommendations in four areas. We indicated support for Vision Zero as a road safety policy under the ACT government and we supported the continued expansion of 40-kilometre zones to reduce road deaths and protect our vulnerable road users.

We acknowledge that the July fines had a large impact on a lot of people. In this case we recommended the ACT government consider waiving fines and demerit points for the month of July 2021 in the speed zones under review where the fines resulted in

financial hardship or similar circumstances. Further guidance on this recommendation was detailed in the report.

We recommended the ACT government consult on the adoption of a New South Wales system for waiving traffic fines where the individual is a vulnerable person due to financial hardship, for mental health reasons or otherwise, and we recommended the ACT government review processes for similar road safety changes in future. Additionally, we noted advice from the NRMA and related agencies that made submissions proposing additional warning systems in the reduced 40-kilometre speed zone areas.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who participated in and assisted our inquiry. In particular, I would like to thank my colleagues, Ms Orr and Mr Parton, and our committee secretariat, particularly Joanne Cullen, who once again took on additional duties to produce a very high-quality report in very limited time.

I would now like to make a few comments speaking in my own private capacity as an MLA and as the ACT Greens spokesperson for road safety, transport and active travel. I was really pleased to see some of these recommendations come out. It is really important that, when we are setting up our fines system and when we are administering that, we remember that it affects different people in different ways. Vulnerable people and those who do not earn as much money cannot always afford to pay fines, and it has a really disproportionate impact on people who are already suffering hardship. We have got a system that allows for some waivers, but it is actually very limited on the grounds that it allows waivers to exist.

We also find that mostly people are given work orders, and people who do not have a lot of money do not necessarily have a lot of time either. They are often working multiple jobs or working casual jobs that they do not have a lot of control over. They have caring responsibilities. They cannot necessarily afford to work off their debt.

It is really, really great to see these 40K speed zones and to see slower streets. That really makes all of our community safer and it really encourages active transport. But we have got to make sure that we get our fines system right to go along with that, and it would be really good if we could improve it more along the lines of the New South Wales system.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.48): I stand initially to speak as a member of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. I just want to say first up, “Who could have possibly imagined that Jo Clay, Suzanne Orr and I could come together on such a busy committee and that we could get through the first full year being able to come to a consensus on pretty much everything that has come before us?” I think that is pretty amazing. I do not think that I am breaking committee confidence in any way when I suggest that I believed that we would find it impossible to arrive at a consensus on this report. But somehow we did.

Thanks to my fellow committee members for the way that they conduct themselves in our many meetings and the hearings and, of course, thanks to all those who have assisted us at a secretariat level in what has been a period of turmoil for our

committee as well as being supremely busy. Again, it is a credit to everyone that this report has been rolled out at all, but I think it is a credit to all those involved that consensus was arrived at.

As an MLA and as the Liberal spokesman for transport matters and also as the MLA responsible for bringing the petition to the chamber, I just want to say that I believe these sorts of inquiries are the bread and butter of what this parliament should be doing. We are witnessing various ways in the city at the moment that people can make a point about stuff that they do not agree with or things that they want changes to. I would think that, for people who are going down this channel, it is a much more sensible way for them to effect change. We are elected to represent the people and, when a large number of ACT residents have a certain view on something that they believe requires action from us, I think it is important for all of us to listen to them. Like thousands of Canberrans, I look forward to the government response to this committee report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 3

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (11.50): I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 3—*Inquiry into the Auditor-General's Report No. 1 of 2020: Shared Services Delivery of HR and Finance Services*, dated 9 December 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Tenth Assembly. The public accounts committee examined the audit report and held public hearings into the matters it addressed, hearing from a number of witnesses from the relevant directorates and the ACT Audit Office. The committee has made two recommendations as part of its inquiry.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the relevant minister and directorate officials, and the Auditor-General and his staff, for their contribution to this inquiry. I thank our secretary, Mr Samuel Thompson, for all his hard work.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Report 4

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (11.51): I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 4—*Inquiry into the Auditor-General's Report No. 6 of 2020: Transfer of Worker's Compensation Arrangements from Comcare*, dated 4 February 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Tenth Assembly. The public accounts committee examined the audit report and held public hearings into the matters it addressed, hearing from a number of witnesses from the relevant directorates and the ACT Audit Office. The committee has made one recommendation as part of its inquiry.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the relevant minister and directorate officials, and the Auditor-General and his staff, for their contribution to this inquiry. I thank Mr Samuel Thompson, the secretary of the PAC, for his hard work.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Report 5

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (11.53): I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Inquiry into the Auditor-General's Report No. 5 of 2021: Management of Closed-Circuit Television Systems*, dated 4 February 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Tenth Assembly. The public accounts committee examined the audit report and held public hearings into the matters it addressed, hearing from a number of witnesses from the relevant directorates and the ACT Audit Office. The committee has made four recommendations as part of its inquiry.

Finally, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the relevant minister and directorate officials, and the Auditor-General and his staff, for their contribution to this inquiry. I thank the PAC secretary, Mr Samuel Thompson, for all his hard work.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (11.54): In accordance with standing order 246A, the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure has agreed to the following statement. Members may recall that in the report on the review of committee support function which was undertaken by Dr Rosemary Laing and presented to the committee, the following suggested reform was made:

10. When the Administration and Procedure Committee is reviewing the standing referral of bills, it may wish to consider the observation about the usual non-availability of legislative scrutiny comments to committees considering whether to undertake policy inquiries into bills and consider possible mechanisms to overcome this.

This relates to the requirement that, when a bill has been presented to the Assembly, under the resolution agreed on 2 December 2020, committees have 14 days to decide whether to undertake an inquiry and then inform the Speaker, who shall inform the rest of the members.

The Clerk of the Assembly brought this matter to the attention of the committee and, whilst the committee will undertake a substantial review of Assembly standing orders and its practices later this year, the committee considered that the suggested reform could not wait that long. Accordingly, a member of the committee has placed a notice of motion on the notice paper proposing that the 2 December 2020 resolution, as amended, be amended further to allow committees three weeks from the dates of bills being presented to decide whether they will undertake an inquiry or not.

Such a change will, in most cases, allow the relevant committee to be apprised of any comments made by the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety (Legislative Scrutiny) and therefore will provide a much cleaner framework for referral of bills to committees.

Statement by chair

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (11.56): In accordance with standing order 246A, the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure has asked me to present the following statement. The committee has been made aware of several occasions where a complaint has been made against a member and the Commissioner for Standards has decided not to accept the complaint and not to investigate it further. On these occasions the commissioner is aware of the complaint, as well as the complainant, but the member who is the subject of the complaint is not.

The committee has considered whether it would be desirable for a member to know whether a complaint had been made against them, even though the commissioner has decided not to undertake any further investigation. The committee considers that there is merit in the MLA being aware of such a situation.

To cover this situation where the commissioner receives a complaint about a possible breach of the code of conduct and decides not to investigate it, and to facilitate the commissioner being able to let the MLA know only that she or he has had a complaint made against them, a notice of motion has been lodged to amend continuing resolution 5AA to facilitate this new practice. If the Assembly agrees to this change, the following proposed change to the protocols for the Commissioner for Standards will also be made. That will include:

Insert new paragraph 7(c):

If the Commissioner receives a complaint and the Commissioner believes on reasonable grounds that there is insufficient evidence to justify an investigation or that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious, or only for political advantage, the Commissioner will inform the complainant that the matter will not be further investigated. The Commissioner will also inform (without revealing the complainant's identity or the nature of the complaint) both the committee and the Member the subject of the complaint that a complaint has been received but not further investigated.

Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.58): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality. As members will recall, pursuant to standing order 216, the committee resolved on 4 May 2021 to inquire into the future of the working week—in particular, what a four-day work week would look like and whether it is the future of work. The committee informed the Assembly of its decision on 13 May 2021. The committee announced its call for written submissions on 16 June 2021.

Members will also recall that the committee released a discussion paper on 16 June 2021, tabled on 23 June, to assist individuals and organisations to prepare written submissions to its inquiry. The committee had originally called for submissions by Monday, 1 November 2021. The deadline was subsequently extended to 28 February 2022. The committee decided to extend the deadline for submissions at its meeting on 7 December 2021. The new deadline for submissions is close of business, 13 May 2022. A media release to this effect was issued on 17 January 2022. The committee has emailed a wide range of stakeholders directly, inviting a submission to the inquiry.

Statement by chair

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.59): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality. On 15 June 2021 the committee agreed to consider the particulars of petition No 6-21 concerning monumental women, lodged in the Assembly on 2 June 2021, as part of a wider inquiry. Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee resolved on 15 June 2021 to inquire into memorialisation through public commemoration.

At its meeting on 7 December 2021 the committee decided to extend the deadline for submissions from 7 February 2022 to close of business, 8 April 2022. A media release to this effect was issued on 16 December 2021. The committee has emailed a wide range of stakeholders directly, inviting them to make a submission to the inquiry. The committee will conduct an online survey for the inquiry into memorialisation through public commemoration.

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (12.00): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity. At its private meeting on 14 December 2021 the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into environmental volunteerism in the ACT. At that meeting the committee agreed to the following terms of reference for the inquiry:

The Standing Committee ... will inquire into and report on matters relating to environmental volunteerism in the ... ACT, with particular reference to:

1. the type and nature of volunteerism in the environment sector in the ACT and the existing or potential benefits and challenges they bring to Canberra's:
 - biodiversity conservation and enhancement;
 - parks and conservation;
 - environmental protection;
 - climate resilience;
 - wildlife protection;
 - landcare; ...
2. opportunities to improve environmental volunteerism in the ACT, including in encouraging the involvement of young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to improve community stewardship;
3. managing relationships between volunteers and their organisations, the ACT Government and the public;
4. current policy or regulatory settings that facilitate and/or impede the work and the involvement of volunteers and volunteer organisations in the ACT; and
5. other relevant matters.

The committee will report to the Assembly at a time to be determined. The committee called for public submissions on 15 December 2021, with a closing date of 10 March 2022. The committee intends to hold public hearings from March 2022.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (12.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

relating to its review of ACT health programs for children and young people. The committee originally set a reporting date for this inquiry of 30 November 2021. The committee held a productive hearing with the Minister for Health on 2 November 2021 and, considering this evidence and other factors, the committee has decided to change its reporting date to 31 March 2022.

The committee set this date noting that there are annual reports hearings in February and March. Further, the committee is inquiring into the Public Health Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2) and must report on that bill by the end of February.

The committee appreciates the contribution of witnesses and submitters to the inquiry and anticipates that its recommendations will assist in improving health services for younger Canberrans.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (12.03): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. At a private meeting on 8 December 2021 the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into petition 32-21. This petition, titled “No Rights Without Remedy” was tabled in the Assembly on 23 November 2021, with 518 signatories. The petition calls on the Assembly to amend the Human Rights Act 2004 to:

- enable a complaint about any breach of the Human Rights Act to be made to the Human Rights Commission for confidential conciliation, and
- if conciliation is unsuccessful, enable a complaint about a breach of the Human Rights Act to be made to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal for resolution.

The committee notes that such a proposal would supplement the Human Rights Commission’s existing complaints powers. The committee called for submissions on 4 February 2022 and anticipates holding hearings in April this year.

Statement by chair

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (12.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety relating to statutory appointments in accordance with continuing resolution 5A. During the reporting period 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, the committee considered a total of 17 appointments and reappointments to the following bodies: the Public Trustee and Guardian Investment Board, the ACT Bushfire Council, the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, the Official Visitor (Indigenous) for the Children and Young People Act 2008 and the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission Governing Board. I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period. I present the following paper:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2021.

As I noted earlier, I will be moving on from the JACS committee. In doing so, I would like to thank the other members of that committee that I have served with over this period. It has been a very good, cooperative group of MLAs.

In particular, I would like to thank the secretary, Brianna McGill. In my view, she is a standout. She is dedicated. She is discreet. She gives great advice to the committee, shows initiative and is always well informed. The committee has, over the time that I have chaired it, had to navigate some very complex issues, and her advice has been very sound, timely and accurate. I particularly pay reference to the last set of estimates hearings that we had, where Brianna played a role not just in the JACS committee but also across committees in the schedule. I know that I speak for the other members of the committee when I thank her for her service.

It is with a sad note that I can inform the Assembly—she has made it public, but you may not be aware—that she will be moving on from the Assembly. She is leaving the JACS committee. She is staying within the ACT government. She has got a job in one of the directorates. I would have to say that, in this case, their gain is our loss, or our loss is their gain, whichever way you want to put it. But what I would like to say is thank you very much, Brianna, for the support you provided me and the other committee members. You will be sorely missed by the committees and by the Assembly more broadly.

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.07): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services relating to referred bills. The Public Place Names Amendment Bill 2021 was referred to the committee on 30 November 2021. The committee has considered this bill and resolved not to inquire further into the bill. The Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2) was referred to the committee on 1 December 2021. The committee has considered the bill and resolved not to inquire further into the bill.

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.08): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services relating to referred petitions. Petition 13-21, concerning traffic management in Gordon, was received by the Assembly on 2 June 2021 and referred to the committee under standing order 99. As signatories to petition 13-21, 52 residents of the ACT requested the Assembly to call on the government to develop and implement a traffic management plan for the southern streets of Gordon.

The committee notes that, in his response to the petition, the Minister for Transport and City Services said that Transport Canberra and City Services completed a traffic study on Knoke Avenue in June 2021 which resulted in a traffic management plan to mitigate identified road safety concerns that will be considered in the budget process

for implementation under a future capital works program. The minister also noted that Transport Canberra and City Services will continue to monitor and take action as necessary on other roads in the area. Given the minister's commitments and the potential budget allocation, the committee will not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petition 13-21.

Petition 24-21, concerning housing development on the Federal Golf Club course, was received by the Assembly on 8 August 2021 and referred to the committee under standing order 99A. As signatories to petition 24-21, 1,527 residents of the ACT requested the Assembly to reject amendments to the Territory Plan that would enable housing development on the site of the Federal Golf Club course.

The committee notes that, in his response to the petition, the Minister for Planning and Land Management said the ACT government has undertaken considerable community consultation and environmental studies in developing the integrated plan for Red Hill Nature Reserve and surrounds. Stakeholders informed the development of the plan, and the government undertook extensive consultation on the plan in draft form prior to its finalisation. The minister also noted that the plan received strong community support during the engagement processes, promotes a compact and efficient city, provides for protection of the ecological values, potentially increases the area of the Red Hill Nature Reserve, provides housing choice in the local community and retains an 18-hole golf course. The committee considers the government response to be satisfactory and will therefore not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petition 24-21.

Two petitions concerning parking in Campbell were received by the Assembly on 6 October 2021 and referred to the committee under standing order 99A. As signatories to petitions 21-21 and 40-21, 630 residents of the ACT requested that the Assembly call on the government to conduct a whole-of-suburb review of the parking and traffic problems in Campbell, with a view to implementing a parking and traffic management plan for the whole suburb.

The committee notes that, in his response to the petitions, the Minister for Transport and City Services said that Campbell had experienced considerable growth in recent years, with travel patterns and parking behaviours changing, and that Transport Canberra and City Services will undertake a traffic study for the Campbell precinct. In light of the minister's commitment, the committee will not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petitions 21-21 and 40-21.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (12.11): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to the following Auditor-General's report: *Auditor-General's Report No 4/2020: Residential Land Supply and Release*. The committee has resolved to inquire further into the audit report. The committee's inquiry will focus specifically on the conclusions and key findings in the audit report, the government's response and its implementation of the audit report's recommendations. The committee is expecting to

report to the Legislative Assembly on the Auditor-General's report as soon as practicable.

Statement by chair

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (12.12): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to the following Auditor-General's reports: *Auditor-General's report No 5/2020: Management of household waste services*, *Auditor-General's report No 10/2021: 2020-21 Financial Audits Overview*, *Auditor-General's report No 11/2021: Digital Records Management*, and *Auditor-General's report No 12/2021: 2020-21 Financial Audits Financial Results and Audit Findings*. The committee has agreed to note and not inquire further into these reports.

Statement by chair

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (12.13): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts relating to statutory appointments in accordance with continuing resolution 5A. I wish to inform the Assembly that during the period 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021 the standing committee of the Assembly considered two statutory appointments. In accordance with continuing resolution 5A, I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period. I present the following paper:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—
10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2021.

Standing Committees Membership

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Pettersson): Pursuant to standing order 223, the ACT Greens whip wrote to the Speaker advising of proposed changes to the membership of a number of standing committees. The Speaker agreed to the following changes on 9 December 2021:

Ms Clay be discharged from the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety and the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety (Legislative Scrutiny Role);

Mr Braddock be appointed to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety (including the Legislative Scrutiny role);

Mr Braddock be discharged from the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity;

Ms Clay be appointed to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity.

I present the following paper:

Standing Committees—Membership—Proposed changes—Copy of email correspondence between the ACT Greens' Whip and the Speaker, dated 9 December 2021.

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to:

That the changes to the membership of the Standing Committees, as proposed, and agreed to by the Speaker, pursuant to standing order 223, be adopted.

Sitting suspended from 12.15 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice
COVID-19 pandemic—teachers

MR HANSON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, over the break we have heard from teachers directly that many ACT schools do not have enough teachers from day one of this term, even without COVID outbreaks. Minister, how many schools in the ACT did not have the full complement of teachers on day one of this term?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. COVID and the Omicron variant have caused our schools to have plans in place to ensure that they have teachers in place, on the ground. If there are not enough teachers, there are strategies in place for schools to plan for different types of educational supervision of students while they are at school. There have been some teachers who have been affected by COVID and so have not been able to attend school. However, for the most part, they have been replaced with our casual relief-teaching workforce. I do not have the exact numbers at any point in time, and of course that changes every day and every week, as people move through their isolation periods with regard to COVID.

MR HANSON: Minister, how will schools cope with a COVID outbreak if they do not have enough teachers?

MS BERRY: There are a number of scenarios that the Education Directorate and schools have worked on to ensure that there are plans in place, should there be the need to have different activities occur in schools. If there is a severe shortage of teachers or school staff within a school, the Education Directorate and that school will plan what sort of action they might need to take. That could be, in the worst case scenario, a return, for some of those students, to remote education for a period of time. It might not be the same remote education that they experienced last year, because there might be teachers who are unwell and have to look after themselves and their families. However, those students will be supported with online resources from the school. As I said, that is the worst case scenario. Up until then, there are three other scenarios where there will be gradual changes or implementing the replacement of staff through our casual relief pool and also support from the Education Directorate.

MR PARTON: Minister, could you detail the plans for that worst case scenario with regard to remote learning, should that be enacted?

MS BERRY: I believe that those scenarios are publicly available. The opposition could avail themselves of that. I think I have pretty much given as much detail as I can. A school's circumstances might be different from the scenario that I have described today.

COVID-19 pandemic—relief teachers

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, recently the Australian Education Union ACT secretary Patrick Judge said that the lack of relief teachers to cover for sick or isolating teachers was the biggest issue schools were facing this year. He also said, “It’s going to be very challenging for schools to continue in person.” Minister, how many relief teachers are available across the ACT, and will that be enough for schools to continue to teach in person?

MS BERRY: I do not have the number of relief teachers that are available at the moment, but I understand that 85-or-so relief teachers have been engaged over the last week or so within our school communities. I will see if I can get the actual number of relief teachers. Again, that number might change depending on people being available or coming in to offer their services as part of the casual relief pool.

MR PARTON: Minister, why do we have such a shortage of relief teachers in the ACT, and why is it that you do not even know how many are available?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Parton for the question. As he will know—and I have responded to this question a number of times in this Assembly—there is a shortage of teachers all across the country, and the ACT is not immune to that. However, what the ACT government is doing differently is working very closely with the teachers’ union, Australian Education Union to set up a taskforce, which they are a part of, to investigate the reasons why there is a teaching shortage in the ACT and what more we can do in the ACT to encourage people to take up teaching as a profession and to encourage people to stay in our public schools and continue to provide our children with the best possible education.

MR HANSON: Minister, when is the taskforce due to report, and will you commit to tabling any report from the taskforce here in the Assembly?

MS BERRY: The taskforce has just commenced its work. The first thing that was done as part of the taskforce work, with support from the Education Union, was to set up a central relief pool point where the Education Directorate actually does the running around for relief teachers should a particular school need to have relief staff on site. That has already made a huge difference last year and in the beginning of this year, where schools do not have to do the checking of lists and the phoning of teachers to find out when they are available. The Education Directorate does that. The taskforce does not have a timeframe of when it will be reporting. It will be a continuous piece of work working with the Education Union on the issues that arose around the teaching workforce but also how teachers work in our schools and what more we can do as a government and as a community to support this wonderful profession.

Crime—Yerrabi

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the minister for police. Constituents have contacted the Canberra Liberals to say they are concerned by the rising rates of crime

in the Yerrabi district—being awoken by car hoons terrorising the streets late at night and having to take to Facebook resident groups to track down criminals committing these petty crimes. Minister, how many incidents of antisocial driving and graffiti have been reported in the Yerrabi region in 2021?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Castley for the question. It is important that we have safe streets across the ACT. The government and ACT Policing have zero tolerance for antisocial driver behaviour. Whilst ACT Policing have a significant presence on our roads, they cannot be everywhere, all of the time. That is why information from the community, like what is suggested has been provided, is crucial in identifying problematic areas. Those issues that are occurring are dealt with by police. This information helps ACT Policing to better assess, prioritise and direct resources to incidents.

I do not have in front of me the numbers for hoon driving for the particular area. I can say that, in addition to responding to complaints from the community, a further 73 traffic targeting patrols were conducted during the month of November by officers from the road policing and other ACT Policing portfolios. Police targeted speeding motorists on roads across the ACT during January 2022, as part of ACT Policing's and the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate's road safety calendar focus.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what has been done in Gungahlin to address property crime?

MR GENTLEMAN: Madam Speaker, the patrols that police are doing are helping to reduce crime across the ACT. Indeed, if you look at the recent *Report on Government Services*, you will see a decrease in crime across the ACT. The 10-year trend is trending down, which is quite positive. Of course, property crime still occurs. We go about a campaign of informing the ACT community of how best they can combat it, as well as ensuring we have police on the ground to respond to that crime.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many reports of property crime have actually been attended in person by police in Gungahlin, as opposed to just online reporting?

MR GENTLEMAN: Police will attend, of course—

Mr Hanson: Will they?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, police will attend crime as it is occurring. That is the focus; that is the reason that we want to ensure we have enough police to attend to crime.

Mr Hanson: That's not what the Chief Police Officer said.

MR GENTLEMAN: What the Chief Police Officer said—I will respond—is that we want to move to a more efficient way of reporting. That does not mean we are not going to respond to property crimes. It is just a change in the way that crime can be reported, and they are going through the process of talking through with the community how that can occur. If we are able to use online reporting, and use the

efficiencies of AI and algorithm, we may well be able to have more police on the street rather than simply answering the telephone. I think that is a good response in this day and age, to be able to have more police responding to crime as it occurs, rather than simply taking the report.

ACT Emergency Services Agency—Belconnen storm

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, how did the ACT government respond in the immediate aftermath of January's serious Belconnen storm to support affected suburbs and communities?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. This storm that ravaged Belconnen and a range of other suburbs in the north of Canberra on 3 January was not the start to the new year that Canberrans wanted or needed. After an exhausting 2021, and a festive season dominated by COVID-19 and disrupted holiday plans, this was the last thing that they needed. To support the community at this very difficult time, crews from across the ACT government got to work right away, many of them coming back from leave early to help the thousands of households who lost power or suffered damage to their homes from falling trees and debris.

City Services moved quickly to address hazards on roads, driveways and pathways, and our Urban Treescapes team responded to dozens of requests for assistance to assess damaged or fallen trees and provide advice to residents. Molonglo ACT Rural Fire Service established a support facility in Higgins to provide residents with access to showers, washing machines, dryers, electronics, chargers, food waste disposal and more. We rolled out an additional green bin service collection for 14 Belconnen suburbs in the fortnight following the storm, in two stages, to help with the disposal of garden debris and leaf litter. We also provided free drop-off for food waste at our resource management centre to support those residents who were unfortunate enough to lose power, in some cases for several days, resulting in food spoilage.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, can you please provide an update on how the clean-up operation is going and priority activities for this?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary. Cleaning up after an extreme weather event like this takes months of hard work, even with our crews getting started in the immediate aftermath. Last week we announced that additional crews would be deployed to help with the government's coordinated clean-up effort. More than 20 workers from the ACT's Parks and Conservation Service have joined the clean-up effort, doubling the workforce on the ground. As part of the additional capability, a dedicated storm response coordinator has also been appointed to strategically manage resources and ensure that the most affected areas are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Once immediate safety issues on roadways, driveways and pathways were made safe, our team turned their efforts to public land, particularly in high-use areas like shopping centres and schools. As we clear through this work, attention will then turn to nature strips, playgrounds, sportsgrounds and parks. However, even with these extra resources, the large number of damaged trees and branches on public land

means that the storm clean-up is going to take several months. We understand the impact that this work can have on the community, as well as people's keenness to see their local areas looking neat and tidy again. I want to thank Belconnen residents for their ongoing patience as we work through the extensive amount of work required to clean up after a storm of this size.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how can Belconnen residents report any further issues they identify in their neighbourhoods and keep up to date with the progress of the clean-up?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. While we have been out there proactively assessing the work that needs to happen on the ground, talking with residents as well, we are of course grateful for the community's patience and involvement. That includes those who have put in requests through Fix My Street. Almost 2,000, in fact, have been lodged. They help to make the government aware of issues that need to be looked at. We appreciate the community letting us know where that work needs to happen and we encourage people to continue to report, using the Fix My Street website or by phoning Access Canberra.

If you see a fallen tree on powerlines, please call Evo Energy ACT, and if you see a tree that continues to be unsafe or is damaging property then ACT SES is the best contact, on 132 500. I would like to remind the community that cleaning up debris on private land is the responsibility of the landowner. I encourage anyone in this position to contact an arborist if they need assistance with larger fallen branches or debris, although we know that there is a big call on arborists at the moment.

Government tree maintenance and clean-up crews are hard at work cleaning up our public spaces, so please do not place green waste and other material on your nature strip. Green waste can be dropped off for free at our green waste drop-off centres at the Parkwood Road recycling facility in west Belconnen. If households still have additional waste to dispose of after the additional green waste services provided, they can go there as well.

Despite this difficult start to the year, Canberrans have rallied together like they always do. I want to thank the community for their efforts and support for each other during this very difficult time. I also want to thank and acknowledge all the volunteers and the ACT government teams who are continuing to work hard on the recovery and clean-up effort over the months ahead.

Housing ACT—developments

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, our two parties took ambitious policies on housing to the last election, with ACT Labor committing to build 260 new homes and the ACT Greens committing to build 1,000 new social and community homes. But we are adults and we compromised, and our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement will see 400 new homes built. I would like you to talk me through the project management process between when we decide to knock down an ACT Housing property and build new

properties on that block—about what judgements we make during that knockdown-rebuild process.

MS BERRY: Housing ACT identified properties all across the city that, for various reasons, are no longer suitable and no longer meet the needs of Housing ACT tenants. That could be for a range of reasons. It could be that the property is an older property. It could be that the land is big enough to build more dwellings on that site, and it could be part of the renewal program, where tenants need to live in a more suitable property, perhaps for their growing family.

Once those properties are identified, Housing ACT goes through the next stage of talking with tenants about relocating to another home that better suits their needs. That is a significant piece of work and, very importantly, the tenant is put at the front of those conversations to make sure that they can live where they like just like the rest of us, in any part of this city, in a home that best meets their needs, that is sustainable and will keep them happy and able to live a happy life into the future.

Once the tenant has been able to be relocated, the dwelling is fenced up. That can take a number of months, depending on the circumstances, and the site is maintained by Housing ACT while the demolition process is engaged. Of course, demolition contractors are engaged, the demolition occurs, planning and design work happens for a new dwelling and then a development application process, like any development in the ACT, occurs on that particular site.

All of that is not a linear process, of course. There are different time frames along the way, depending on when we can get the tenant into a home that best meets their needs. Building a new home and moving tenants into new homes and then demolishing older homes that no longer meet tenants' needs—broadly, that is the process that we go through.

MR DAVIS: Thank you, Minister. The reason I asked is that a number of constituents have reached out to me concerned about a vacant block on the corner of Langdon Avenue and Longmore Crescent in Wanniassa, which I understand has been vacant for more than a year, expecting a new housing development. Can you provide an update on that particular site?

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, if that is not the biggest preamble I have ever heard—

MADAM SPEAKER: It was a preamble. I am sorry, I was concentrating more on the numbers in the place. I will let it go this time, but this is a supplementary question, Mr Davis. You have been in the Assembly for over 12 months now; you should know the rules of engagement.

MS BERRY: Mr Davis will know that it is not generally the form of the government to discuss individual properties of public housing tenants. I am happy to provide some information outside of the Assembly on that one.

MS CLAY: I have a supplementary—

MADAM SPEAKER: Straight to the supplementary, Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Minister, what is the benefit of redeveloping existing ACT housing blocks?

MS BERRY: Thank you, Ms Clay, for the question. Was it about the benefit?

MS CLAY: What is the benefit of redeveloping existing ACT Housing blocks?

MS BERRY: Thank you for that clarification. Of course it means that we are able to provide tenants with homes that best meet their needs—that are sustainable, that are modern, that are more flexible in design and that are able to provide tenants with a home that they can live in when they are younger but also when they are ageing. When they need to have modifications on older properties that can be really difficult and time consuming and not meet a particular tenant's needs; newer properties actually meet the needs of tenants. It also allows Housing ACT to ensure that those homes then relieve some of the maintenance that is required on some of the older properties. What the housing growth and renewal program is all about is making sure that we meet our tenants' needs as best we can, providing them with properties all across this city, depending on their life circumstances and what their families need.

ACT Policing—crime clearance rates

MR HANSON: My question is to the minister for police. Minister, the latest *Report on Government Services* shows that the ACT has the lowest clearance rates for property crimes in Australia, at the 30-day mark, including motor vehicle theft at seven per cent clearance, other thefts at 4.8 per cent and unlawful entry with intent at just 3.8 per cent clearance. Minister, can you explain why 93 per cent of all motor vehicle thefts in the ACT are not cleared, which is the worst rate in Australia?

MR GENTLEMAN: It is clear from the 2022 *Report on Government Services* that Canberrans disagree with the Canberra Liberals scaremongering on police numbers. The ROGS data demonstrates that ACT Policing continues to enjoy the trust and confidence of the community. Canberrans have high perceptions of safety at home, walking in their neighbourhoods and travelling on public transport. In my response to the previous question—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please, Minister.

Mr Hanson: The question I asked was very specific to the 93 per cent of motor vehicle thefts in the ACT not cleared, which was from the ROGS data. The minister has gone completely to some other set of data, perhaps in the same report. I ask him to be specific as to why 93 per cent of motor vehicle thefts in the ACT are not cleared, not what he is trying to answer, which is, I think, a public perception of policing in the ACT.

MADAM SPEAKER: Go to the ROGS data around vehicle rates, please.

MR GENTLEMAN: Indeed, Madam Speaker. Of course, police work as hard as they can to identify the perpetrators of stolen vehicles. I encourage them to keep doing that very important work. But it is difficult sometimes; the perpetrators are skilled in ensuring they can cover their tracks where they possibly can. Detailed investigations of those thefts occur. Quite often we see that perpetrators will use those vehicles for other crimes. They are therefore tracked down during that criminal investigation process as well.

I encourage police to continue to do the important work they do. Of course, they have done some incredibly good work over recent times in catching burglars and catching motor vehicle thieves as well. On Monday, 10 January—(*Time expired.*)

MR HANSON: Minister, why are 95 per cent of other thefts uncleared at 30 days—again, the worst rate in Australia?

MR GENTLEMAN: Of course, our property crime rates overall, in comparison to other jurisdictions, are relatively similar. We do have rates that fluctuate, depending on particular perpetrators. Usually, it is a small group of perpetrators which create the largest amount of crime in these particular areas. Of course, once they are caught, those crime rates go down.

MR PARTON: Minister, why are 96 per cent of cases where a person unlawfully enters a property with intent left uncleared after 30 days—again, the worst in Australia?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, the time lines certainly have stretched over the last 12 months. It is in response to the work of business-as-usual.

Mr Parton: The time line's stretched?

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Parton, you mentioned 30 days not cleared; this is a time line set for the ROGS, of course. We need to ensure that we can support police to do that investigation, reporting and clearance wherever possible. But they have been stretched. Indeed, over the last couple of weeks, even from earlier this year, police have been stretched across the ACT in dealing with a number of other matters, including COVID. Whilst that drops down we will certainly be supporting them in resourcing and encouraging those numbers to be met.

Environment—Sustainable Household Scheme

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Action and relates to the sustainable household loans scheme. Minister, I am a big fan of the sustainable household loans scheme, but it provides more benefits to home owners and high-income earners than to others. For instance, someone living in an apartment cannot install solar panels; a renter cannot make modifications to the house they rent to upgrade their hot water from gas to electric; and not everyone can afford an EV,

even with an interest-free loan. An electric bike would be available to nearly everyone regardless of their home ownership status, dwelling type or income. Have you decided that e-bikes will be included in the scheme in future? If not, when will you decide?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Clay for the question. I am aware of her ongoing interest in e-bikes. It has been pleasing to see that as production of e-bikes is increasing they are falling in price. One of the factors associated with the scheme is that the minimum loan amount is \$2,000. There are literally dozens of e-bikes, from a variety of different manufacturers, that fall well below \$2,000 and so would not be eligible for the scheme regardless. The cap on access to capital is not a major barrier to purchasing an e-bike. You can buy an e-bike for less than \$1,000 and you can certainly buy a wide range of e-bikes for between \$1,000 and \$2,000, all of which fall below the minimum loan amount of the scheme.

From what I can ascertain, the more expensive e-bikes that are in the \$4,000 to \$5,000 range would perhaps be considered more of a luxury product, given that there are more affordable e-bikes available. We will continue to evaluate the possibility of new products being added to the scheme. There are a range of considerations that the government puts in place in relation to whether new products can be added. There are a wide-ranging set of criteria that I will not have time to outline in the next 20 seconds that I have made available to Ms Clay, I understand, numerous times before, because this is not the first time that this question has been asked.

MS CLAY: Minister, would you consider dropping the minimum floor so that access to e-bikes would be available for someone who cannot perhaps afford a \$1,000 or \$2,000 outlay without a loan?

MR BARR: No. The reason for the minimum amount in the loans scheme really goes to administration costs. There is also a credit assessment that needs to be applied. Given the nature of the scheme and the fact we are looking to provide support for more capital intensive items that have ten-year paybacks—a loans scheme that goes over many years—reducing the loan amount below \$2,000 is not something that we will consider.

MR DAVIS: Would you include any other forms of electric transport in the scheme, such as electric scooters or e-cargo bikes?

MR BARR: This question has been raised as well. It has been interesting to see the particular focus on e-bikes, as opposed to some of the other types of personal transport e-boosted that Mr Davis has talked about. I understand that in the market now those products are comparable to or even cheaper than e-bikes. The purpose of the scheme is not to provide small-scale loans. That is why the minimum loan amount is \$2,000 and the maximum amount stretches up to \$15,000. It is designed for more capital intensive products and services that deliver significant emissions reductions, deliver significant cost savings. That is why it is focused on the areas that it is.

Access to capital for amounts below \$2,000 tends not to be an area that is covered by these sorts of schemes. There would be other forms of microcredit that would be available. An individual who cannot raise \$2,000 may have difficulty paying a loan

back, so we would have to be very wary of the types of credit arrangements that you would put people into in that context for a loan of such a small amount. That is a concern. That has been a problem with some of the microcredit schemes in the past and the loan shark behaviour that has occurred in the private sector. Really, the Sustainable Household Scheme is for the types of products that are in the scheme at the moment that have a much higher capital cost.

COVID-19 pandemic—vaccination rollout

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the ACT's nation-leading rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations for five to 11-year-olds.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for her ongoing interest in our nation-leading COVID-19 vaccination programs and in ensuring that five- to 11-year-olds in our community are protected. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the ACT continues to lead the nation, with nearly 75 per cent of ACT five- to 11-year-olds receiving their first dose of a vaccine so far. To deliver this result has required careful planning. The ACT government opened bookings for children on 20 December 2021 to provide peace of mind to parents heading into the Christmas period and ensured our clinics were prepared to hit the ground running when we received supply from the commonwealth. That is exactly what we have done. Since the program commenced on 10 January, more than 29,000 vaccines have been administered to children through ACT government clinics, GPs and pharmacies.

The government also made adjustments to the AIS arena, incorporating several child-friendly initiatives to support the delivery of the paediatric vaccination program. Children can now stomp, jump, squash and count the COVID-19 virus stickers as they journey through the clinic. Designated children's bays have been established to help kids feel more comfortable when receiving their vaccines. They bays have posters and wall images that help our COVID-19 superheroes find their way. Whilst in recovery, children can watch animated movies and receive stickers and a lollipop treat before they pose for a vaccination photo at the superhero selfie wall.

I am excited to announce that on Saturday 12 February, AIS clinic will be holding its very own superhero Saturday vaccination clinic for children. Children can come to the AIS clinic dressed as their favourite superheroes as they help Canberra to fight Covid. Accompanying parents and carers will also be able to receive their booster vaccination at the same time. I strongly encourage parents, guardians and carers to book in their kids that have not yet received their first vaccine dose.

DR PATERSON: Minister, can you please update members on the rollout of the COVID-19 boosters in the ACT, which is ensuring that Canberrans remain protected during the latest wave of the COVID-19 infection?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary question. The ACT launched the delivery of COVID-19 vaccine boosters to all eligible adults on 1 November 2021. On 3 February, following advice from the commonwealth expert vaccine advisory body, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation,

booster eligibility was extended to include 16- and 17-year-olds. There are around 9,000 Canberrans in this age group, with around 8,300 of them immediately eligible on the basis of their second-dose timing. I encourage them to come forward to receive their boosters.

I am pleased to advise that the ACT continues to achieve nation-leading booster vaccination rates, with 54.7 per cent of all residents aged 16 years or older having received their third dose or booster vaccine. These are yesterday's numbers, so they will be even higher today! This compares with a nation population coverage of just over 40 per cent. Together ACT mass vaccination clinics, GPs and pharmacies have administered more than 190,000 third and booster vaccine doses.

To ensure we have the capacity to provide boosters as quickly as possible and continue to be the most protected jurisdiction in Australia, the government reopened the airport clinic on 24 January. In its first week of operation, the airport site prioritised booster appointments for Canberra's critical and high-risk frontline workers. This included school and early childhood education staff as well as healthcare, disability, aged care and community sector workers.

While initial demand for boosters was strong, across the nation we are seeking a decline in demand, with fewer people making appointments. As of 3 February, almost 155,000 Canberrans aged 16 or over who are eligible to receive their boosters have not yet come forward. I strongly encourage anyone who has not received their booster to make a vaccination appointment as soon as possible. This booster effort will assist the community to remain as protected as possible against the omicron variant. The ACT COVID-19 website has resources in multiple languages. (*Time expired.*)

MS ORR: I have a supplementary question. Given that the ACT has led the nation in the rollout of vaccines by ensuring that everyone was able to access their first and second doses, can you update the Assembly on how every Canberran is now being provided the opportunity to receive a booster.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. The ACT continues to have leading COVID-19 vaccination rates, with about 98.5 per cent of Canberrans aged 12 and over having received two doses. We have achieved these remarkable rates by ensuring that every member of our community has access to vaccination in spaces that are appropriate for them. Through the Equity to Access program, COVID-19 vaccines are provided to members of the community who experience barriers when accessing mainstream health services. This includes people with disability and people in insecure and temporary accommodation, as well as other people for whom a range of factors exist that can make attending a mass vaccination clinic or a GP more difficult. ACT Health delivers this program in collaboration with many non-government partners to offer dedicated booster clinics in community-based settings. These organisations, which are trusted touch points in the community, are integral to the ongoing success of the Equity to Access program, and I want to thank those organisations for their commitment to protecting our community's most vulnerable members.

This year the ACT government began proactively contacting homebound community members who received first and second doses at our clinics to offer a booster. I am pleased to advise that this initiative has been really well received, with excellent uptake. To provide all children with the opportunity to receive their first vaccination before school restarted, the Equity to Access program also provided dedicated vaccination clinics for five to 11-year-olds at Malkara and Cranleigh specialist schools. The team will return to these schools during March to provide second doses.

The Access and Sensory clinic in Weston is now also offering booster vaccinations plus paediatric vaccination for children who are five to 11 years old. Through the ongoing commitment and tireless work of our health professionals, the ACT community can be confident receiving COVID-19 vaccinations, and be confident that this is accessible to every eligible Canberran.

ACT Policing—public satisfaction

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for police. Minister, the latest *Report on Government Services* shows that those people who had contact with police in the latest 12-month reporting period rated their satisfaction with the interaction at 77.6 per cent. This is well below the national average of 81.9 per cent, and the worst of all the police jurisdictions in the country, and continues a long-term decline. Last year, ACT police announced the move away from face-to-face reporting of many crimes and to reporting online. Minister, why has satisfaction with police interactions declined under your watch to be the worst in the country?

MR GENTLEMAN: I do support police in their work across the ACT, and I support their move to modernise the way that they are working with the Canberra community. Of course, you cannot compare particular ROGS data with that of other jurisdictions. We work completely differently to other jurisdictions. We are a smaller jurisdiction. Police are much more agile across the ACT and are able to respond, where possible, in very short time lines. This is what has made us very flexible. The Chief Police Officer has said—indeed, I think he said it to one of our standing committees, most recently—that police are able to respond in 15-minute time limits across the ACT. So it is very difficult to compare this ROGS data to that of other jurisdictions.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Minister.

Mr Hanson: It is on relevance. The question actually was: why has satisfaction with police interactions declined under your watch, to be the worst in the country? He is not going to the decline; he is comparing us with other jurisdictions, but he has not explained why we have declined.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think he is referring to the measurements that are used in ROGS, and I believe that answer is in order. Mr Gentleman, you have 40-odd seconds left.

MR GENTLEMAN: Of course, it is incredibly important that we do have the confidence of Canberrans. We see that in the data reporting on safety across the ACT, and the feeling of wellbeing across the ACT community. So in the worst possible time for Canberra, in the middle of a global pandemic, we see very safe reporting across the ACT, and a very strong feeling of wellbeing and safety in the Canberra community.

MR PARTON: Minister, how will removing face-to-face policing and replacing it with an online system improve the satisfaction situation, given the backlash that we have seen over this so far?

MR GENTLEMAN: This reporting is in addition to the work that police are doing. It is not separate from the work that they are doing. They are adding an extra way of reporting so that they can work more closely with the Canberra community.

Mr Hanson: No. Rubbish!

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, they are. The Chief Police Officer has made it very clear—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson.

MR GENTLEMAN: I think the tense of this is very important, too, Madam Speaker. He said that they will look at bringing in online reporting over the next 12 months. Contrary to what you hear from the opposition, it is not occurring right now; it will happen in the future with consultation with the Canberra community. I am sure, knowing the good work that ACT Policing have done, and the response that we have had from the Canberra community, that they will work through that, and they will be on the doorstep of where crime is being committed whenever they are needed.

MR HANSON: Minister, if it has nothing to do with online reporting then—

MR GENTLEMAN: Preamble, Madam Speaker.

MR HANSON: why has satisfaction with police interactions declined under your watch?

MADAM SPEAKER: Did you get the question, Mr Gentleman, in order to respond?

MR GENTLEMAN: I will again say that we are not removing face-to-face policing. More police will be out there to respond to the Canberra community, and we have been investing in more police, of course, over the last couple of years—

Mr Parton: Madam Speaker, on a point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Minister.

Mr Parton: I do not think that the minister heard Mr Hanson's question. It was: if this has nothing to do with the move from face to face, why has the satisfaction declined? I do not think he is moving in the direction to answer that question.

MADAM SPEAKER: You took a point of order within 20 seconds of him being on his feet. Minister, go to that question, please.

MR GENTLEMAN: Madam Speaker, I am very confident that the extra resourcing we have put into ACT Policing over the last number of years, and that we continue to put into ACT Policing, will ensure that we can have that face-to-face work with the Canberra community. Of course, the police service model is right about that. Not only is it putting more police on our streets; it is allowing them to have the personal interaction with the ACT community, ensuring—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of relevance, my supplementary specifically excluded the issue that the minister is talking about, and specifically went to why satisfaction has declined. The minister is refusing to answer that specific question.

MADAM SPEAKER: I cannot direct the minister to answer, but he is responding.

Mr Hanson: He is responding, but he is not being relevant, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: He is being relevant on the broad question of ROGS and data. Mr Gentleman, you have 20-odd seconds left. No?

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, your colleague is on her feet, seeking the floor.

Mental health services—waiting times

MS CASTLEY: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the 2022 *Report on Government Services* revealed that only 41 per cent of mental health presentations at Canberra hospitals were seen within the clinically recommended time frame, the lowest by far in Australia. Lifeline has also revealed a 31 per cent increase in calls from Canberrans in distress between 2019 and 2021. Minister, why is the situation so bad for mental health patients in the ACT?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank Ms Castley for the question. We are continuing to improve mental health services in the ACT. That is why we invested an additional nine per cent in mental health services in the ACT budget. This includes a range of mental health services based at the Canberra Hospital but also more services in the community. Things like the Safe Haven that has recently opened, the MindMap youth navigation portal to help connect young people to the right mental health services in the community, and more investment in the PACER service will all help in reducing the number of people who need to go to emergency for mental health services. Over a period of time, we should start to see that this has an impact on people's improved mental wellbeing and people being able to stay in a recovery space for longer, instead of being in a crisis.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what do you say to the 59 per cent of Canberrans showing up to hospitals seeking emergency mental health care who are forced to wait longer than clinically recommended?

MS DAVIDSON: I expect that we will find that the time periods before you can see someone at emergency vary quite a lot over the course of the year. It depends a lot on what else is happening at the time. People who are going to hospital to seek mental health care often have quite complex needs and it can take quite some time to ascertain exactly what clinical needs they have, whether there is a combination of physical and mental issues or drug and alcohol issues as well. To provide the proper care to people, it is worth investing the time in doing that. It is also why we have invested in more beds in Canberra Hospital, such as the opening of ward 12B for subacute care, so that there are places that people can go, so that they can get out of emergency and start receiving that longer term health care sooner.

MR PARTON: Minister, why has your government not done more to ensure that mental health care services are meeting demand?

MS DAVIDSON: I will remember that the next time I am going in to have a talk to the Treasurer and asking for even more than a nine per cent increase in funding for mental health services. The increase in funding for mental health services has been quite significant over a number of years recently, but particularly in recognition of what has been happening during this pandemic. A lot of people have been really struggling with their mental wellbeing. That is quite normal when you are experiencing the kinds of economic and public health issues that we have experienced all over the world over the past two years. Canberra is no exception. That is why we have increased our mental health services so significantly and why we are continuing to invest in mental health services. For example, we have tenders out at the moment for new services in treating eating disorders. We are also looking at what is happening with the new Safe Haven and the additional resources that have been provided to PACER to see whether there are lessons that can be learned from that that can be applied at a greater scale or could be otherwise improved so that people do not end up in distress and needing to go to emergency. The real aim is to reduce the number of people who are experiencing that kind of crisis by delivering better health care in the community.

Schools—use by community groups

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister Berry, we know that community groups make a great contribution to Canberrans' health and wellbeing. What is the Education Directorate doing to support access by community groups to Education Directorate facilities out of school hours?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. Our schools are primarily places for students to learn and for teachers to provide a great education and for school staff to work. I think we always need to have front of mind that that is what our schools are for. Of course they are facilities that are used and loved and utilised by the community, with the generosity of those school communities, as well. Every time we build new

schools, we take into account community service organisations to make sure that we have facilities that those organisations are able to use. For example, the new school that we opened this year in Throsby has the school ovals being built, hard courts, gyms, halls and community rooms for community groups to be able to utilise outside of school hours. Once we get back to a point where it is a little bit safer to have more people moving through our school communities, community groups will be able to have access to those facilities across all our schools to ensure that they can meet and support our community where they need to.

MR BRADDOCK: What could be done to give these community groups long-term access—beyond the 12 months they were initially offered—to the school facilities?

MS BERRY: As I said, every school that we build has facilities available for community groups to utilise, and we will continue to do that to make sure that our schools are utilised outside of school hours by groups that support people in our community for a range of different reasons—sports organisations as well, using our sports facilities. These will always be part of a new school’s construction to ensure that we have these rooms, facilities and sports spaces available for other parts of our community to utilise outside of school hours.

MR DAVIS: Minister, can you outline how community access is incorporated into the designs for new schools like the Kenny school.

MS BERRY: As members know, sports facilities in particular are a wonderful asset for the ACT community, with Canberra having the highest participation rates in the country. Having sports facilities at schools for use within school but also outside of school hours is an important part of planning when building new schools. When we build high schools, in particular, we always build a double gym to make sure that there are facilities available for sports groups and other community organisations to utilise.

But we also make sure that those facilities are included in the designs of our new schools and upgrade older school facilities where we can, to ensure that we meet the needs of community groups to use those school facilities outside of school hours. But, as I said, primarily they are schools and they are for education. We make sure that we have a balance so that when community use occurs it does not interfere with the primary role of our schools, which is for the education of our children.

ACT Emergency Services Agency—preparedness

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, can you please provide an update on the storm and bushfire season?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for her interest in the safety of Canberrans during these difficult times. I want to acknowledge and thank all our wonderful staff and volunteers across the Emergency Services Agency that are dedicated to keeping us safe and continue to do a wonderful job. In emergencies they respond quickly and professionally to keep our city safe. Our ACT SES staff and volunteers have had a busy summer period, with an unprecedented storm season. I want particularly to thank

them, along with staff and volunteers across the ESA, for their support of residents in west Belconnen following the storm in early January.

With the ongoing wet conditions, the bushfire risk has, thankfully, remained low so far this season. The ACT Rural Fire Service and ACT Fire & Rescue remain prepared and ready to respond if needed. Our firefighters continue to proactively prepare, with ongoing skill and maintenance training, as well as monitoring areas for heightened risk. We have also established new processes and invested in new technical tools and skills to further enhance our emergency preparedness and response capability. While our emergency services personnel remain ready to respond to storms and bushfires, this is a timely reminder to all Canberrans to know what they can do in an emergency. Survival plans and information about emergency preparedness can be downloaded at esa.act.gov.au.

MS ORR: Minister, how has the Emergency Services Agency been keeping Canberrans safe?

MR GENTLEMAN: ESA remains well prepared to respond to all emergencies, despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canberrans can be assured that resources continue to be available to support and protect our community, and always will be. All of our ESA personnel, including our firefighters and paramedics, are continuing their business-as-usual activities to support the community, working 24/7 to respond to calls for assistance and keep Canberrans safe. We have put in place strong business continuity plans to manage a range of impacts which could affect our staff and volunteers. Careful planning and preparedness have enabled ESA staff and volunteers to keep our community safe while contributing to the pandemic response and supporting other government agencies leading the recovery efforts from recent storms.

I commend all services for continuing to demonstrate high levels of commitment and dedication whilst dealing with the challenges of COVID-19. Together we will continue to ensure that Canberra remains well protected and we are able to respond effectively to all emergencies.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what role has the ESA played in the government's COVID-19 pandemic response?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in our safety as well. Our Emergency Services Agency has been supporting the whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 health pandemic, once again helping our community when they need it most. From assisting with contact tracing, compliance checks and welfare support at testing sites to delivering goods to vulnerable members of our community, our emergency services staff and volunteers have been stepping up to help where they can.

Most recently, ESA has been working in collaboration with ACT Education and ACT Health to prepare and deliver rapid antigen tests to schools across Canberra, with volunteers and staff distributing approximately 20,000 RAT packages per day. They

have also commenced delivering RAT packages in support of the Community Services Directorate, supporting the most vulnerable members of our society.

The Deputy Chief Minister and I recently visited the ESA training centre to help out with RAT packaging and thank our personnel for their amazing work. I want to take this opportunity once again to recognise our volunteers from the ACT State Emergency Service, the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT community fire units, ACT Fire & Rescue, the historical society, Canberra Pipes and Drums, and ESA staff for their outstanding efforts. We remain incredibly proud of our volunteers and staff, who continue to show their flexibility and compassion in support of the community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Papers

Madam Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 17(5)—Auditor-General's Reports—

No 12/2021—2020-21 Financial Audits—Financial Results and Audit Findings, dated 15 December 2021.

No 13/2021—Campbell Primary School Modernisation Project Procurement, dated 22 December 2021.

Bills referred to Committees, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended 30 March and 22 April 2021—Correspondence—

Bills—Inquiries—

Electoral Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 8 December 2021.

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, dated 9 December 2021.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Corrections Management Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 8 December 2021.

Crimes (Policing) Legislation Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 8 December 2021.

Public Place Names Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 9 December 2021.

Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 9 December 2021.

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act, pursuant to subsection 12(5)—ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 2020-21—Prepared by Point.Advisory, dated 10 November 2021.

Inspector of Correctional Services Act, pursuant to subsection 30(2)—Report of a Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services—Escape of a detainee from a secure escort on 9 July 2021 (CIR 01/22), dated February 2022.

Integrity Commission Act, pursuant to subsection 213(2)—Special Report—Acquisition of Block 24, Section 65, Canberra City, dated 3 February 2022.

Standing order 191—Amendments to the Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, dated 10 December 2021.

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

COVID-19 Emergency Response Act, pursuant to subsection 3(3)—COVID-19 Measures—Report No 13—Reporting period 1 October to 31 December 2021, dated February 2022.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 2—*Inquiry into the 2020 ACT Election and the Electoral Act*—Government response.

Planning and Development Act, pursuant to subsection 79(1)—Approval of Variation No 372 to the Territory Plan—Watson Section 76, dated 8 February 2022, including associated documents.

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—

Report 4—*DV365—Housing Choices—Co-Housing and Boarding Houses*—Government response, dated February 2022.

Report 5—*Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 364—Gungahlin Town Centre: Amendments to the Gungahlin precinct map and code*—Government response, dated February 2022.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act, Emergencies Act, Road Transport (General) Act and Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act—Emergencies, Road Transport (General), Waste Management and Resource Recovery (Embassy and Diplomatic Residence Fees) Determination 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021 297 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act—Civil Law (Wrongs) The Institute of Public Accountants Professional Standards Scheme 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-296 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act—

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-290 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-291 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2021 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-292 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2021 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-293 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measurement Method) Determination 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-269 (LR, 25 November 2021).

Cultural Facilities Corporation Act and Financial Management Act—

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-285 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-286 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Gaming Machine Act—Gaming Machine (Emergency Community Purpose Contribution—Local Live Performance Industry) Declaration 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-273 (LR, 6 December 2021).

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission Act—Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (Regulated Water and Sewerage Services) Terms of Reference Determination 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-278 (LR, 13 December 2021).

Leases (Commercial and Retail) Act—Leases (Commercial and Retail) COVID-19 Emergency Response Declaration Revocation 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021 283 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff) Act—

Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff) Members' Salary Cap Determination 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-276 (LR, 9 December 2021).

Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff) Speaker's Salary Cap Determination 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-277 (LR, 9 December 2021).

Liquor Act—

Liquor (Permit Fee Refund) Determination 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-295 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Liquor (Permit Fee Refund) Determination 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-294 (LR, 20 December 2021).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods (Vaccinations by Pharmacists) Direction 2021 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-287 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Motor Accident Injuries Act—

Motor Accident Injuries (Defined Benefits Application) Guidelines 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-279 (LR, 13 December 2021).

Motor Accident Injuries (Income Replacement Benefit) Guidelines 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-280 (LR, 13 December 2021).

Motor Accident Injuries (Treatment and Care) Guidelines 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-281 (LR, 13 December 2021).

Plastic Reduction Act—Plastic Reduction (Public Event) Declaration 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-270 (LR, 24 November 2021).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Whitlam) Determination 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-288 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Public Sector Management Act—Public Sector Management Amendment Standards 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-298 (LR, 22 December 2021).

Public Trustee and Guardian Act—Public Trustee and Guardian (Disposal of Unclaimed Deceased Person) Guidelines 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-282 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Radiation Protection Act—Radiation Protection (Radiation Protection Series) Codes of Practice 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-284 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) (Pay Parking Area Fees) Determination 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-274 (LR, 9 December 2021).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Manuka Oval) Declaration 2021 (No 5)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-271 (LR, 29 November 2021).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation Declaration 2021 (No 9)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-272 (LR, 6 December 2021).

Road Transport (General) Exclusion of Road Transport Legislation (Summernats) Declaration 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-289 (LR, 16 December 2021).

Taxation Administration Act—Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable—Ambulance Levy) Determination 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-275 (LR, 13 December 2021).

Workers Compensation Act—Workers Compensation Amendment Regulation 2021 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2021-29 (LR, 24 November 2021).

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 5—government response

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.01): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 364—Gungahlin Town Centre: Amendments to the Gungahlin precinct map and code*—Government response.

Draft variation 364 was prepared to implement the recommendations of the Gungahlin town centre planning refresh snapshot 2018. The snapshot was in response to community concerns about building height and character, public spaces and active travel and roads. The changes promote high-quality design outcomes as the centre continues to develop. No zoning changes are proposed through the draft variation. The ACT government has a vision for the Gungahlin town centre as a place where people can live, work, study and engage in recreational activities. The planning controls contained in draft variation 364 will facilitate a centre with commercial, community, employment and residential opportunities. Green spaces and active streets and economic activity will create a vibrant centre during the daytime, and a night-time economy. The vision for the Gungahlin town centre will be realised through a suite of policies, including planning settings, the land release program and private sector investment.

The ACT government is the largest employer in the Gungahlin town centre. The government will continue to invest in the town centre through employment and the provision of community facilities.

I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services for its thorough inquiry and report into DV364. The committee made eight recommendations in its report No 5, which was released in September 2021. Many of the recommendations of the committee relate to achieving a vibrant, diverse and active mixed-use centre with greater employment within the Gungahlin town centre. The ACT government supports these outcomes and has considered and responded to the recommendations of the standing committee report. Three of the recommendations are agreed, and the remaining five recommendations are agreed in principle.

The government agrees in principle to recommendation 1. This recommendation relates to the government undertaking an analysis of different types of commercial activity that could be undertaken in the Gungahlin town centre and that this information be used to inform future land releases. This recommendation is agreed in principle. In response to this recommendation, the ACT government will undertake an assessment of the commercial market potential. This assessment will consider economic and market factors and will be used to identify potential additional commercial use in the town centre. The detail of the types of commercial activity that can be achieved will be delivered through the land sales process rather than planning controls.

Additionally, the ACT government has already committed to undertaking consultation and planning to develop a precinct planning approach to future land sales in the town centre. We will look at the blocks along Flemington Road, to the east of the town centre, to achieve an appropriate best practice mix and integration of uses. The planning will also take into account public spaces so that we can have vibrant streets and the buildings integrate with Linear Park.

The community and recreational facilities needs assessment for the district of Gungahlin is nearly complete and will identify current and future demand and gaps for community facilities. This assessment will inform the government strategy and

planning for facilities in the town centre and the district. Community facilities are key to the future of the town centre, both for their provision of important community services as well as their value in providing employment. The ACT government has commenced work towards the new community centre in the town centre as a commitment of the parliamentary and governing agreement for the Tenth Legislative Assembly.

The second recommendation of the standing committee is agreed, and criterion 43 and the new rule 44 will be removed from draft variation 364 to reserve priority commercial space in the town centre. This would be an ideal site for a large Australian government department, and we would love more Australian public service employees to join our ACT government employees in the Gungahlin town centre.

Recommendation 3 proposes that unsold blocks in the Gungahlin East precinct are sold as a precinct. The recommendation includes details proposing a mix of uses and how the land sales process may achieve this outcome. It has also recommended that the precinct is designed in consultation with the community.

The ACT government agrees in principle to this recommendation and is strongly committed to a precinct planning approach to these blocks. This precinct planning approach includes setting the planning framework for land release development and uses along Flemington Road.

Land releases will be in accordance with the ACT government's indicative land release program, with the method of release determined by the Suburban Land Agency in the context of the precinct planning outcome and community consultation. The appropriate mix of commercial and community floor space for future years land releases will be considered in light of the commercial employment assessment I mentioned in response to recommendation 1.

The fourth recommendation refers to requirements for a precinct planning outcome for Gungahlin East, where the blocks are sold individually. This recommendation is also agreed in principle. The ACT government has a strong commitment to a precinct planning approach for Gungahlin East. This can be achieved by either one developer or multiple developers, with sales or deed conditions requiring a delivery of part or all of the coordinated precinct. As with the previous recommendation, the appropriate mix of uses for this precinct will depend on the results of the commercial employment assessment.

The fifth recommendation suggests that an additional two storeys of building height be applied to all blocks with height limit provisions in the town centre. This recommendation is agreed in principle. Any additional two storeys will be applied to specified sites in precinct 2B but only where the additional height does not have an adverse impact on adjacent development.

Building heights in metres will be adjusted to allow for higher floor ceiling heights for commercial developments. The draft variation already proposes an additional two storeys for buildings in precinct 2A, mixed use east along Flemington Road, and for this reason additional storeys will not be permitted in that precinct.

The ACT government agrees to recommendation 6, which suggests active travel and parking arrangements are reconsidered following the completion of traffic and transport assessments being undertaken by Transport Canberra and City Services. Any changes required as a result of these assessments will be incorporated into the Territory Plan at a later date.

The 2021-22 ACT budget allocated \$200,000 to Transport Canberra and City Services for a route planning study for the Gungahlin town centre. The aim of this study is to encourage a shift to active travel and includes feasibility of cycle connectivity improvements and priority designs for active travel network connections.

The ACT government has agreed to recommendation 7, which recommends active frontage placements are considered, with priority for active frontages in areas identified as pedestrian thoroughfares. The government will make these changes and they will be incorporated into the final version of DV364.

Lastly, the committee recommends that the study area for the Gungahlin town centre draft variation be extended to incorporate Yerrabi Pond recreation and commercial area and key connections to Gungahlin Place, in recommendation 8. This recommendation is agreed in principle. The area subject to the draft variation was based on the 2018 Gungahlin town centre refresh, which focused on town centre components of the suburb of Gungahlin. However, the route planning study that I just mentioned will take into account linkages with the Yerrabi Pond recreation area.

Following changes to DV364 for the Gungahlin town centre in line with the government's response, I intend to consider the revised variation for approval. The planning controls contained in DV364 will facilitate a centre with commercial, community and government employment opportunities. Progressing the draft variation will enable the government's vision for a vibrant, lively, mixed-use commercial centre to be realised. I look forward to seeing the precinct planning in the centre progress this year.

I now commend to the Assembly the ACT government's response to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services report No 5: *Draft variation to the Territory Plan 364—Gungahlin town centre: Amendments to the Gungahlin precinct map and code*.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.11): The Gungahlin community have very clearly said that they do not want more apartments crowding out employment opportunities and spaces for community. I welcome the report today, and that there are some improvements to how the town centre will be developed. However, I will say it does not go far enough.

I am pleased with the wins for the Gungahlin community, including ensuring that commercial zoning will remain for the two large blocks in the Gungahlin town centre east; the precinct planning approach to the unsold blocks in that area as well; the study into the commercial market potential of the Gungahlin town centre; and also agreement about the important linkages from the Gungahlin town centre to the Yerrabi Pond recreation area. I extend my appreciation for all of these.

However, with Omicron and the rise of flexible work, now is the time for us to think creatively about how we want to enliven, invigorate and populate the Gungahlin town centre. We should be looking at innovative ideas such as digital work hubs, innovation spaces and vertical aged care, as ways to create community and employment opportunities in the town centre. There is also no reason why vacant spaces in Gungahlin cannot be used immediately for the benefit of the community. Home-grown organisations such as Mill House Ventures and Canberra's many cooperatives already cultivate innovative employment opportunities that could utilise some of these empty retail and shopfronts.

But all of these measures do not address the key issue, which is getting that mix of residential and other uses right. This is something the Gungahlin community has consistently called for. The planning, transport and city services committee report supported the community in this view, recommending:

... apply a maximum number of residential dwellings and a minimum square metre requirement for commercial development permitted for each block to ensure that residential dwellings are not the primary or majority use.

I also made a similar point in my motion passed by this very Assembly on 2 June 2021, which stated:

... structuring all planned Gungahlin Town Centre land sales to ensure their primary purpose is employment generation, commercial and/or community facility use ...

Today's response lacks a commitment to changing that mix, so I will continue to stand up for Gungahlin residents to ensure we get this mix right, whether this be through future land sales or the indicative land release program, because together we can create a Gungahlin town centre that works for everyone.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Ms Lawder**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to:

Ms Lee for this sitting week for COVID reasons.

Mr Cain for 8 February 2022 for COVID reasons.

Mrs Jones for the period 8 February to 1 April 2022 for personal reasons.

Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill 2022

Dr Paterson, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.16): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I believe that today is a very important day in the ACT. I believe that there is some justice for survivors of sexual assault in this law reform that I am bringing to the Assembly today. For all the victim/survivors of sexual violence in the ACT, to every one of you, I am so sorry for what you have experienced and I am sorry for the burden, for the weight that you carry.

Scott Morrison talks about quiet Australians. There is an awful, sickening number of silent Australians—people, women, children—who have been subjected to sexual violence in our community. These silent Australians, silent Canberrans, mostly women, live with the trauma of their experiences on a daily basis and because of a plethora of reasons—personal, cultural, structural—these people stay silent.

In 10 months last year, from January to October, ACT Policing received 262 reports of sexual assault; 262 people in our community were subjected to some form of sexual violence. In a similar time frame, from July 2020 to June 21, 13 sexual offences went to trial in the Supreme Court of the ACT. Four had a guilty verdict.

Based on those figures, if you are a victim of sexual assault you have approximately a four per cent chance of going to trial and a one per cent likelihood of a guilty verdict. So the vast number of those 262 people that attended a police station in the last year walked back out into the community and live with the fact that they were raped, sexually assaulted, sexually violated, for the rest of their lives, with no justice.

Then what happens to those people, those women who never went to the police station, who perhaps were one of the thousands of calls that the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre receives each year? In our lovely, beautiful city that we all hold so dear to our hearts there is a deep undercurrent of violence, sexual violence, rape, that hurts us all that it exists. And that is why we must do all and everything we can to stop this.

The sick part of this discussion is that for every one of those 262 reports—or more—of sexual assault in our community there is a perpetrator. There are least 262 men in our community last year that raped, violated, assaulted someone. I am highly conscious of how uncomfortable the gendered nature of this is to talk about, but in 2020, 87 per cent of sexual assault victims in the ACT were women.

Further to this, in the ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse women, transgender women experience sexual assault at disproportionate rates to the rest of the community. These perpetrators, predominantly men, attack the most vulnerable people in our community, when they are most vulnerable, in the most violating way. That is why it is the job of all of us to stop this, to educate our community, our children, our young people, to take a stand when we see bad behaviour, to work as a community, a network, a friendship group, a family, to stop this violence.

We need to instil that consent to a sexual act is free and voluntary; consent is not presumed. Every person has the right to choose not to participate in a sexual act. A consensual sexual act involves ongoing mutual communication and decision-making between the people participating. This is not complicated. In every other part of our lives, ongoing mutual communication and decision-making are 101 of how we function as a society. That is why it is critically important that our justice system and our laws convict people who actively perpetrate such deep violence, such trauma, on victims.

It is why I stand here so proud today to present this bill. I am passionate about seeing justice for survivors of sexual violence in our ACT community. But I have to acknowledge here that a criminal justice response is not what every victim/survivor wants. My desire is to see a system that allows for survivors to make informed choices, to be supported, to be believed and, if they do decide to take legal action, then to have a system and a law that will provide fair and just outcomes. This pervasive silence needs to end.

In the ACT we have been on this journey of law reform for at least the past four years. In 2018 Ms Caroline Le Couteur introduced an amendment bill to the Legislative Assembly. A subsequent inquiry was conducted by the justice and community safety committee. The key recommendations from the committee's inquiry into the bill included that the ACT not consider or enact legislative change until the New South Wales Law Reform Commission inquiry into sexual offences was presented.

Further recommendations of the ACT committee's inquiry included that a definition of consent be based on the concept of free and voluntary agreement, that affirmative and communicative consent be considered for enactment into ACT law and that legislative change retain the fundamental presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

In 2018 the ACT government provided their response to the bill, noting agreement to the inquiry's recommendations, and also that there was a technical issue with the definition of consent as proposed and that there was a need for a substantial community education and awareness campaign.

Similarly to the ACT, New South Wales has been on a journey of sexual consent law reform since 2018. In May of that year the TV documentary *Four Corners* aired the very distressing story of Saxon Mullins and her lived experience of reporting sexual violence through the criminal justice system in New South Wales.

That same month, the Hon. Mark Speakman MP asked the New South Wales Law Reform Commission to conduct a review into consent in relation to sexual offences in New South Wales. That review culminated in a report presented to the New South Wales government in November 2020, followed by the government's response, which gave support and in-principle support for all 44 recommendations. The New South Wales government recommended the introduction of an affirmative model of consent, and late last year those provisions were passed in both houses of parliament in New South Wales.

Soon after being elected to this role in October 2020, I undertook a detailed review and stakeholder consultation to better understand the ACT's existing legislation, previously proposed legislation and barriers to it being passed, as well as other available evidence and research. In June 2021 I released an exposure draft bill for public comment. During this period I received 14 detailed written submissions. There was a wealth of social media and online commentary and I met with key stakeholders and survivors to discuss the provisions of the draft bill. Overwhelmingly, support was provided for the introduction of an affirmative model of consent. During the period of consultation I engaged with stakeholders about complex, sensitive and ethical considerations, particularly regarding the impact of the legislation on people with a disability and transgender people, to ensure that the bill is inclusive to their unique needs and considerations of these people in our community.

In March last year Minister Berry announced that the sexual assault prevention and response program would be established to bring together government and non-government experts to make recommendations to government about sexual assault reforms in the ACT, and a steering committee was established. I presented this bill to the steering committee for consideration.

On 6 December last year Ms Renee Leon, on behalf of the ACT Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee, presented the committee's final report to the ACT government. The committee's Working Group on Law Reform reviewed my draft bill carefully and, in their final report, gave support and also provided recommendations to strengthen the bill that I present today.

I want to talk just briefly about the provisions of this bill. The bill overcomes the key technical issue which prevented the ACT government from supporting the bill put forward in 2018. It retains the fundamental right of the accused person to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. It achieves this clearly by separating provisions about the definition of consent from fault elements.

The purpose of the proposed legislative amendments is to introduce a new statutory definition of consent, in line with community standards and expectations—one that is based on free, voluntary and informed agreement. The amended principles and meaning bring about a more nuanced definition of consent, shifting it from a position of non-consensual sexual activity being something that is presumed and that can be negated to something that is unassumed and that must be given. It is a communicative, or affirmative, model of consent.

The bill outlines the principles of consent—those being that consent is not presumed, that every person has the right to choose, or not, to participate in a sexual act, and that it involves ongoing and mutual communication and decision-making between the people participating. Secondly, the bill provides a meaning of consent: informed agreement that is freely and voluntarily given, which is communicated verbally or non-verbally by saying or doing something. The bill also clearly articulates a set of circumstances under which consent is deemed not to be given. This is a non-exhaustive list that has been updated from the current Crimes Act.

Finally, the bill introduces the concept of reasonable belief. The current legislation provides that an accused person is guilty of an offence if they know that another person does not consent to a sexual act or is reckless with that consent. These are subjective standards. This bill introduces the principle that any belief that an accused person may hold about another person's consent must be reasonable under all circumstances, according to an objective standard. In cases where an accused person does nothing to ascertain another person's consent, they will not be able to rely on the defence of genuinely but mistakenly having believed that the other person consented.

This bill offers improved protection and support for some of the most vulnerable and marginalised in our community. It will also help to support a cultural paradigm shift, a shift to one where would-be perpetrators would think again before committing an act of sexual violence—to a community that has an improved understanding about what constitutes healthy, respectful relationships. The proposed changes will help break down the stigma and shame that are often associated with sexual violence victimisation. Through this bill, greater clarity is provided to help victim/survivors to identify a matter of sexual assault and to feel confident in reporting it. The proposed legislation makes it very clear what consent is and what it is not.

Historically, sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape crimes are in the category of the least reported crimes, not least because of society's tendency to blame the victim/survivor. Victim/survivors often fear coming forward because the criminal justice system is often a traumatic and harrowing journey. They are often not believed. Many are asked how they contributed to the offence, or their actions, such as the clothes they were wearing, are analysed and judged and may be considered to have contributed to the assault.

I hope and anticipate that the changes introduced through this legislation will reduce the number of sexual assaults occurring in our community and encourage more people to come forward and report instances of sexual assault, to improve the experience of victim/survivors in the criminal justice system and make sexual violence easier to prosecute, to hold perpetrators to account through a greater number of successful prosecutions and to provide a framework and a basis for improved community education. These laws make it clear that as a community we expect people to actively seek consent and, importantly, that victim/survivors did not have an obligation to do or say anything to refuse consent.

As recommended by the committee inquiry and the ACT government in 2018, as well as the final report of the ACT government's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee in December last year, a strong community education program is critical to support the legislative reform—a holistic approach that incorporates community education about the nature and evidence of gender based violence and respectful relationships, together with targeted training for ACT Policing, legal practitioners and judiciary—and consent education in schools is needed.

Just last week in the New South Wales Law Society's online journal, Liz Snell of the Women's Legal Service in New South Wales said:

This training needs to be developed and delivered by sexual, domestic and family violence and abuse experts including people with lived experience, cultural safety experts, disability experts, non-binary, trans and gender diverse experts.

Accordingly, I welcome the important work being undertaken by Minister Berry in her facilitation and coordination of the ACT's sexual assault prevention and response program. I thank all those who have given their time and provided advice, expertise and feedback—all of which I have considered in great detail—and worked with legislative drafters to develop the most robust provisions to effect meaningful, positive change in the bill I am tabling today.

In closing, I would like to thank the many people and organisations who helped me on this journey to table this important piece of legislation: Victims of Crime Commissioner Ms Heidi Yates; Dr Vanita Parekh from the Canberra Hospital; Ms Chrystina Stanford of the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre; Mr Shane Drumgold, Director of Public Prosecutions; ACTCOSS; Meridian; A Gender Agenda; Advocacy for Inclusion; Women with Disabilities ACT; YWCA Canberra; DVCS; Dr Helen Watchirs, the ACT Human Rights Commissioner; Minister Yvette Berry; Minister Rattenbury; and my Labor and Greens colleagues. I also wish to thank Grace Tame, Saxon Mullins and Brittany Higgins for their support of this bill and for their tireless advocacy for change.

Finally, to victim/survivors, today will not change the past but, with every hope and with every intention I have, I introduce this bill with a view to changing the future.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**) adjourned to the next sitting.

COVID-19 pandemic—economic recovery

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.34): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Chief Minister has said a sharp “V-shaped recovery” would keep the ACT economy strong after the 2021 lockdown;
- (b) the outbreak of the Omicron-variant of COVID-19 has resulted in significant staff shortages across sectors, leaving many businesses unable to open and many Canberrans choosing to stay home; and
- (c) despite ongoing low-level restrictions and nation-leading vaccination rates, many small businesses are experiencing the crippling effects of a shadow lockdown;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the latest CommSec State of the States report and Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force report reveal the ACT is the second worst performing economy in the nation, has the second highest level of unemployment at 4.5 percent and recorded the second lowest retail spending in Australia (January 2022); and

- (b) SEEK's December 2021 Employment Report revealed the ACT had the second largest decline in jobs ads from the previous month;
- (3) expresses concern that:
 - (a) the Labor-Greens Government have not addressed concerns related to the ACT's job market; and
 - (b) Canberra's private sector will continue to suffer under this Government's excessive regulation, taxation and cost of doing business in the Territory; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) acknowledge the ACT is not experiencing a V-shaped economic recovery; and
 - (b) release an updated economic recovery plan by the next sitting week of 2022 to support small business through Omicron and future variants of COVID-19.

Paul Keating in the 1980s was fond of a theory called the J-curve, suggesting an initial fall in the Aussie dollar would create an upswing in the current account deficit. A graph of this would resemble the letter J. The J-curve failed to eventuate in the time predicted, with the late, great Senator John Button moved to remark, "I do not know who invented the bloody J-curve but, I tell you, it wasn't an Australian who learnt about the Australian economy."

From former Treasurer Keating, with his cherished J-curve, we move to ACT Treasurer and Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, who has presented us with his V-shaped recovery. Treasurer Barr has proclaimed a sharp, V-shaped recovery will keep the ACT economy strong after the 2021 lockdown. Madam Speaker, if you speak to struggling small business owners, which I do, they will echo Senator Button's remarks, passing judgement on a Labor-Greens government hopelessly out of touch with the small business sector that is on its knees.

It was in this place on 23 November that the Chief Minister and Treasurer enlightened the chamber with his V-shaped economic insights. In fact, the Chief Minister said:

We are already seeing signs of a V-shaped recovery that was anticipated as we emerge out of lockdown.

Tell that to our struggling small business sector. The problem is Mr Barr's V-shaped economic recovery is completely at odds with a raft of economic data, suggesting the ACT economy is anything but gangbusters.

Consider these recent economic reports: No 1, the latest CommSec *State of the States Report*, along with the *ABS Labour Force Report*, which reveal the ACT is the second worst performing economy in the nation; No 2, the two January reports also reveal the ACT has the second highest level of unemployment, at 4.5 per cent, and it recorded the second lowest retail spending in Australia; No 3, SEEK's December 2021 employment report revealed the ACT had the second largest decline in job ads from the previous month.

Finally, you only need to turn to page 3 of today's *Canberra Times* to read the more worrying economic news. A Canberra Business Chamber survey conducted this month has revealed that 72 per cent of 130 establishments report being worse off at the beginning of January 2022 than in early December 2021. The majority also said that the government's advice to work from home where possible has had a negative impact on them. The Chief Minister's delight in proclaiming our V-shaped recovery was not put to the small business in the survey; and I suspect that if it was, their responses may not be possible or suitable to print. Government spin is what has happened with these figures.

In an effort to assure Canberrans that all is well and the Chief Minister's V-shaped economy recovery is well on track, you only need to look at the Chief Minister's ministerial statement today to see the effort the government makes to paint a rosy picture when, for small business, it is anything but. The Chief Minister refers to the government's plan for creating and protecting good local jobs. But, as I have said countless times—and talk about stating the obvious—if you want to protect jobs, you need to protect small business.

Our Chief Minister refers to our economy bouncing back following the setbacks of the last two years. There is such a gulf here between the Chief Minister's rhetoric about V-shaped recoveries and the economy bouncing back, with the Canberra Business Chamber's survey revealing the overwhelming majority of businesses reporting worse conditions than just one month ago.

My final comment about the Chief Minister's ministerial statement would be to draw attention to the subheading "Business", where the Chief Minister devotes a massive two sentences to his government's agenda and achievements. That really is no surprise because, when it comes to small business, this government has no plan and no agenda. As we all know, the best that Business Minister Cheyne has is the discovery phase, with the critical talk of talking to business about how to talk to business.

Canberrans are smart and they can see what is going on. Whether it is their regular cafe with reduced staff and hours; their favourite yoga teacher struggling to keep afloat; or the local dry cleaning, personal training or florist business, our army of small businesses is struggling, with some saying that conditions are harder now than ever before. Gone are the days of the lunch rush for our cafes, bakeries and sandwich shops. There is no rush anymore, as so many Canberrans are making lunch at home. The situation is also bleak for our taxi, car hire and Uber drivers, with fewer people travelling and moving around town. Where is the support for this area of business?

Madam Speaker, you only need to look at the local media over the last two months to understand that many of Canberra's small businesses are in dire straits. A recent editorial in the *Canberra Weekly* stated:

At least two (small businesses) that I visit face imminent closure due to decreased patronage through no fault of their own. The pandemic has changed their customers' behaviour and few are returning—whether out of fear, the convenience of online options, or other reasons.

A RiotAct headline on 28 January read:

ACT businesses require more support or face closures.

The article spoke about the government extending a range of business supports but said that the Canberra business community says it is not enough to save many from closing permanently. That is my chief concern. What about the businesses facing closure? What is the government doing for them and their families?

I welcome the government extending the small business hardship scheme until the end of February and extending the food business registration fee waiver and the annual licence fee waiver for liquor licences for nightclubs, restaurants, cafes and bars. But the problem is that, for businesses, these fee waivers must be paid upfront before they can be reimbursed and it is at a time when these businesses are dealing with cashflow problems due to fixed expenses and reduced income. It is no surprise that many small businesses are saying the limited government support will not be enough to help them survive.

As I said, my question to the Labor-Greens government is: what are you doing to stave off the small business closures and how many businesses have already closed? That is why I am calling on the government to release an updated economy recovery plan to support business, to give them clear information and to give clarity to the business owners so that they can do their planning and understand what lies ahead.

It may seem obvious but the small businesses really struggling are those that rely on customers coming through the door: the cafes, the dry cleaners, florists, as I have mentioned, the personal trainers, yoga studios, boutique clothing stores. As Graham Catt from the Business Chamber has said:

Businesses are really hurting, particularly customer-facing businesses. People are dialling down their risk and not going out. They are not showing up and not spending.

The Hog's Breath Cafe at Woden shut its doors for the final time last week after 18 years of operating, with Stu Wiggins revealing that he has been looking hard at the books for the last six months. Mr Wiggins spoke about the toll the last two years had taken, the stress and uncertainty that all small business owners feel, and he said he got out before financial pressures got so bad that he could no longer meet his staff obligations. That is honourable.

Anthony Brierley from the Australian Hotels Association has revealed some hospitality venues suffered a massive 90 per cent downturn over December and January. It is worse than it has ever been, Mr Brierley has said. Mr Brierley's comments were echoed by small business managers, Richard and David Ho, at Majura Park. They said that business has never been more difficult. "It's just so quiet," they lamented. It is probably the most challenging time compared to the whole pandemic because ... it's hard to prepare."

At the Knox Cafe in Watson, general manager, Maddy Kreyll, reported that it had been super quiet and added:

It's disappointing because it should be alive and busy and this is normally the time when everyone is at their happiest but it's just not been like that.

King O'Malley's owner, Peter Barclay, summed up the feeling of many small business owners when he said:

Coffee shops, newsagents, drycleaners and retailers are struggling because the ACT government in particular has a new office building in Civic and very few people are working there.

As I said before, these are not just faceless buildings. They are people. They are families. They are Canberrans that own the businesses.

The Chief Minister's trumpeted V-shape recovery has not happened, and I call on the Treasurer to acknowledge that. If the Chief Minister took seriously the dire situation facing Canberra's struggling small businesses, he would come clean and admit that the small business sector is experiencing no V-shaped recovery and, if he respected our hardworking small business community and their importance to our economy, he would respond to my call and prepare an updated economic recovery plan to support small business so that they can plan the path forward.

As Tim Manning from ARC Cafe has said:

We're just trying to adjust and plan for what is coming through the door and the likelihood for more people to be around or less people to be around."

Graeme Katz echoed Mr Manning's call when he commented:

If the pathway of the ACT public service is a pathway of remove working hubs ... the sooner we can see that plan and the sooner businesses can understand how that might impact them, and also where the opportunities may be for businesses, the better off they'll be.

In his ministerial statement today, the Chief Minister said:

We live in a time of great uncertainty.

The ACT small business community also endures a climate of great confusion thanks to this incompetent government. As we know, many of our Canberra small businesses are mum-and-dad family businesses, and their businesses are dying.

A cafe owner I met recently is a former tradie. He said that business was woeful. He was not celebrating any V-shaped economic recovery. No-one is, except this out-of-touch Labor-Greens government.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (3.47): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes:

- (a) a ‘V-shaped recovery’ in the economy was observed following the conclusion of the ACT lockdown in October 2021, noting that there were different impacts across different industries;
- (b) the global emergence of the Omicron-variant of COVID-19 in late November 2021 has resulted in:
 - (i) significant staff shortages across sectors, leaving some businesses being closed for a period of time; and
 - (ii) some Canberrans choosing to stay home more than usual; and
- (c) despite limited ongoing restrictions and nation-leading vaccination rates, some small businesses are experiencing the effects of intermittent periods of lower than usual consumer confidence;

(2) further notes:

- (a) despite the pandemic, retail trade figures have grown each year from \$6.14 billion in 2019, to \$6.67 billion in 2020 and \$6.78 billion in 2021;
- (b) through the pandemic, the ACT has had one of the strongest performing labour markets of any jurisdiction around the country looking at single touch payroll, job vacancies, payroll tax receipts, and the labour force survey;
- (c) for 2020-21, ABS data shows the ACT had a 5.8 percent increase in the number of businesses, the largest growth in any State or Territory;
- (d) ABS retail trade turnover in the ACT increased by 19.2 percent in the month of November 2021 to \$616 million, the highest monthly outcome ever recorded and higher than its three-year average of \$542 million, and this record spend was sustained through December with \$596.6 million spent at ACT businesses during the month;
- (e) ABS retail sales data for the December quarter shows the ACT had a 12.4 percent rise, led by spending in discretionary industries and well ahead of the national average;
- (f) over the course of the pandemic, the ACT Government has provided almost half a billion dollars in support to local businesses, including direct financial support to almost 12 000 local businesses; and
- (g) despite the Commonwealth Treasurer announcing an end to emergency support, the ACT Government believes some support for businesses is still required and has extended:
 - (i) the closing date of the Small Business Hardship Scheme from 31 January to 28 February;
 - (ii) the food business registration fee waiver from 31 March to 30 June;

- (iii) the annual licence fee waiver for liquor licences (effectively a 50 percent fee reduction) from 31 March to 30 June for nightclub, restaurant and café, bar, general, catering special and club liquor licences; and
 - (iv) \$500 000 for a second round of Amp It Up! later in 2022; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue to assess and monitor the level of support being provided to businesses impacted by ongoing restrictions; and
 - (b) continue to encourage Canberrans to support local small businesses.

A healthy economy is predicated on a healthy community. The ACT government has always recognised this and continues to underpin our strong economic recovery with the quality of our public health response. We had a difficult period during lockdown—there is no denying that—and I especially acknowledge the impact on our hardworking small businesses. This is exactly why we provided significant direct financial support to over 12,000 businesses—the single largest initiative in the most recent budget. This support was designed and developed in consultation with the business community, to get us through while we kept our community as safe as possible from the deadly variant, and while we undertook a concerted, efficient and successful vaccination campaign.

We expected a V-shaped recovery as we emerged from the lockdown and, despite what Ms Castley would have you believe, we did observe this. Community confidence was high, thanks to the management of the pandemic and our nation-leading vaccination rates, and there was pent-up consumer demand. Ms Castley seems to forget that there was no Omicron variant when we emerged from lockdown. We saw that confidence and that pent-up demand translate to spending. The opposition consistently ignores facts that do not fit their narrative, but we owe it to this place to paint an accurate picture of what has happened.

ABS retail trade turnover in the ACT increased by 19.2 per cent in the month of November 2021 to \$616 million in that month alone. This was the highest monthly outcome ever recorded, and higher than its three-year average of \$542 million. This record spend was sustained through December, with \$596.6 million spent at ACT businesses during the month. ABS retail sales data for the December quarter shows that the ACT had a 12.4 per cent rise, led by spending in discretionary industries, and well ahead of the national average—discretionary industries like our local cafes and our local restaurants. The only industry to see a fall in retail sales was food retailing—our supermarkets.

Unemployment did not skyrocket in December, nor was it at a record high, as Ms Castley somehow claimed in a media release today, which, regrettably, some media outlets published without proper scrutiny. Ms Castley's erroneous framing of the data is reckless and unbecoming of a shadow minister. The ACT has consistently had one of the strongest-performing labour markets of any jurisdiction during the pandemic. A month does not make a trend, and the ACT generally experiences greater variability in the rate, due to a smaller sample size than other jurisdictions. What is

clear when we are talking about unemployment is that we are talking about very low unemployment numbers right across the country. That includes in the ACT.

The emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, which, again, did not exist when we emerged from lockdown, has meant the last few months have been far from what Canberrans, and especially our small business community, had hoped for. We have seen significant rates of community transmission and, sadly, since we last met in this place I believe there are 16 more Canberrans who have lost their lives due to COVID-19. This rate of transmission necessitated some changes, which are proportionate and balance the risk to our hospital system with the need for businesses to service our community and employ Canberrans. Our approach reintroduced some baseline public health measures, but we also reduced the time in which people needed to isolate, and our contact definitions were changed.

I want to acknowledge the way in which our small business community responded to this, as they have consistently over the past two years in complying with the evolving public health directions in a rapidly changing environment. For businesses like nightclubs, whose core business was sharply impeded by the measures, the ACT government is continuing to provide tailored support. We have continued to engage with the business community and sector leaders both one-on-one and in round tables, while the commonwealth federal Liberal government Treasurer has announced the end of support. It is from our engagement that we recently announced—as Ms Castley acknowledged—extending the closing date of the small business hardship scheme; extending the food business registration fee waiver; extending the annual licence fee waiver for liquor licences; and another half a million dollars for a second round of Amp It Up! later in 2022.

I do want to acknowledge that we have seen a number of businesses close over the two years of the pandemic, including some high-profile businesses in the past month. I am sorry to see these businesses go and we, of course, wish them all the best in their future endeavours. Some were Canberra institutions and have a very firm place in Canberrans' hearts, with plenty of fantastic memories, but, of course, businesses rise and fall regardless of pandemics. I acknowledge that several of the businesses which have closed have done so because it was the right time for them.

For the 2020-21 financial year, the ABS data shows that the ACT had a 5.8 per cent increase in the number of businesses here—the largest percentage growth of any state or territory. This illustrates the underlying strength of the Canberra economy. The signs of a strong recovery are there, but I acknowledge that it has been a bumpy month for businesses who have had to deal with RAT shortages, staff shortages and a cautious community, in addition to it being the summer holidays. It is understandable that the community has been cautious when we have been dealing with very rapidly changing circumstances. People respond differently. When there is significant change, it makes sense that the community wants to see, perhaps, what the effects of these changes are, and it is worth reflecting just how much has changed in the past six weeks.

I acknowledge the Canberra Business Chamber's survey. I commend the chamber for conducting the survey and for sharing it with us. There is no denying it; it is true that

it has been a tough period for businesses in a pandemic where things change and can be uncertain. We have been responding to different waves over two years, and this is a period that has felt particularly uncertain, and I think the survey and the responses to it reflect that. I will note that there are limitations to the survey and that there is not a breakdown of which types of businesses provided which responses, nor the geographic regions that were surveyed, and that 130 businesses out of 32,000 is a small sample size. If we borrow from how Ms Castley usually likes to describe participation, she would say that 99.6 per cent of businesses did not participate in the survey. However, I value hearing from the Business Chamber and their efforts in this space to capture some of the sentiment; and I appreciate all of those who took the time to fill in the survey and especially the qualitative feedback which, again, I note was varied.

It has been tough, and different industries have been affected in different ways. The consumer confidence will return because it is underpinned by the quality of our public health response. Our schools are back, and we are constantly reviewing our public health measures. We have been leveraging our own channels in the ACT government and partnering with a range of local media outlets to provide support for local small businesses. There are ways the community can support their favourite local small businesses in a way that suits them but still sees the businesses benefit from cash flow: budgeting an extra takeaway meal each week or each fortnight; buying a gift voucher on payday from a local business for use at a later date; or ordering a piece of art or merchandise from a local arts practitioner.

While the ACT government's pandemic response remains our main priority, we will concurrently continue our work to make Canberra a great place to do business. We have a strong work program to support this, which the opposition should know, as it is no secret. Ms Castley has just claimed that she does not, and I am concerned to learn that, but I will give her the benefit of the doubt that she has only said this to suit the narrative.

The year 2022 will see the implementation of the automatic mutual recognition for a wide range of occupations. Having interstate licences automatically recognised will aid in the smooth movement of talent to Canberra's businesses. Our workforce attraction grants are still open, designed to assist local businesses to join forces to deliver new projects and strategies to attract the workforce that they need to recover from the pandemic and grow. In the coming months the Better Regulation Taskforce will report to government on its findings from its extensive industry engagement and it will set forward the work program for legislative and regulatory reform. The task force has concluded some valuable early reform work, in collaboration with Procurement ACT, aimed at assisting businesses to understand ACT government procurement and how to go about bidding for these opportunities. I look forward to having more to say about that soon.

Earlier this morning the Chief Minister detailed the diverse economic platform we had created in this city prior to the pandemic, the resilience of the business community we have extensively supported over the past two years, and our focus on ensuring that we continue to grow this community. We have the right settings in place to ensure a strong economic recovery as we drive towards full employment. We will continue to

invest in the industries which are the engines that drive employment growth in the ACT, and we will focus on rebuilding our tourism and our events sectors as the international border opens again to foreign tourists. We will do all of this in partnership with businesses as we continue to diversify our economy and work towards 250,000 jobs by 2025.

The opposition's seizing on one month's data to suit their own narrative—not to mention misrepresenting that data—does not paint the full picture. In fact, it seems that the opposition is set on talking the economy down through its insistence of picking at data rather than making any analytical effort. The full picture of our business community is one which is resilient and supportive, has consistently strong growth, and will benefit from the restoration of community confidence. The ACT government will continue to support this community while championing the opportunities of doing business in Canberra. I commend the amendment to the chamber.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.59): I welcome this opportunity to discuss the important matters raised in Ms Castley's motion today. On behalf of the ACT Greens, the first thing I want to do is to acknowledge that the pandemic and the resulting lockdown and various other public health safety measures have caused hardship for many people and many businesses in the ACT. Small businesses, which are the subject of this particular motion, of course, have not been immune from this as for some businesses the combination of fewer customers, lockdown restrictions and staffing changes, as the dynamics of employment change and staff got sick or have had to isolate—that combination of things or varying versions of it—has been extremely trying. Clearly, some small businesses in the ACT are feeling the strain of the ongoing pandemic and a surge of cases that have come with the Omicron variant.

The Greens appreciate the ACT's small businesses. They provide the goods and services that we rely on. They are driven by hardworking Canberrans. They provide employment, and for many Canberrans they represent their prosperity and their dreams. The poll data released yesterday by the Canberra Business Chamber, Property Council, Hotels Association and Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum showed that Canberra businesses are very concerned about their business situation at the moment. Some 85 per cent have been impacted by staff shortages. Most are more concerned about the impact of COVID on the wider economy than they were in December 2021, just a few months ago.

One important factor to think about when considering the economic challenges faced in the ACT and the difficulties faced by business is that the ACT has taken a strong and science-based response to COVID, in terms of implementing public health measures. This has included lockdown restrictions, which, of course, impact on economic activity. This is one of the wicked challenges presented by the virus: the need to balance issues such as public health and economic activity. We are compelled and obliged to take precautionary measures, such as lockdown and other restrictions, as an essential public health response. These measures have helped keep our ACT citizens safe from the worst impacts of the virus.

The ACT has taken a very effective approach to the pandemic, based on the best medical evidence, and this is supported by our community. It is a dreadful side effect of this health response, though, that this does negatively impact businesses and livelihoods and economic activity generally. This is one of the defining challenges that this virus has presented to decision-makers: how do we weigh up these competing interests? Is it reasonable to restrict economic activities so severely as we seek to protect the population's health? We have seen decision-makers grappling with this right across the world, and they have landed in different places along the spectrum, which I will come back to.

The Greens support the strong health-based approach to the pandemic that we have pursued in the ACT. This government has taken a sound and thoughtful approach, guided by the best advice from our public servants and our experts. Of course, we would not endorse restrictions being in place for longer than they are required, based on the evidence. But, unfortunately, they have been required, and we support this government for doing what is necessary to protect the health of our population. Imposing these restrictions on business means that it is reasonable to support business through these difficult times, and I believe that the ACT government has been very attentive to the needs to business and the struggles they are facing in this very strange and unprecedented period of upheaval.

I noted that Ms Castley's remarks were bereft of any reflection on the circumstances we find ourselves in, in early 2022. There is undoubtedly fear and uncertainty in the community, and there has been a lot of talk, in the shadow of lockdown, of people not going out because they are uncertain about the situation that we find ourselves in in Australia as a result of the Omicron wave. But I heard no reflection by Ms Castley of the decisions led by the New South Wales Premier, championed by the Prime Minister, that we should open up as quickly as possible, remove many restrictions and go for broke. That is the ideological position that was adopted by key leaders in this country, which, I think it is fair to reflect, have driven the Omicron wave and have created a lot of the fear and uncertainty that our community is now experiencing. I think it is worth reflecting on that because we could have, potentially, had a lot better summer if we had not been so desperate to open up and get going as quickly as possible.

Members would have heard as well, during the Chief Minister's economic update this morning, that the economy and business remains a focus for the government, going forward. The economic recovery and creating and protecting local jobs are front and centre. On that note, the *Canberra Times* this morning also quoted me, on behalf of the Greens, advocating that this economic recovery focuses on and assists vulnerable cohorts in our community who are too often left behind and who, in many ways, had their already difficult circumstances exacerbated by the pandemic. That is something that the Greens will certainly be advocating for across all our roles, both inside cabinet and out, as we progress through 2022 and look at the ongoing recovery efforts that will be needed to assist our community.

That is one of the reasons many of the incentives that the government has provided are not just business related. There are a range of supports designed to assist people

who, for example, have lost their jobs and were facing eviction from rental accommodation. I put in place a rental eviction moratorium and also an emergency support fund. My Greens colleague Minister Vassarotti announced increased funding for emergency hotel accommodation for people facing homelessness due to the pandemic. My other cabinet colleague Minister Davidson announced \$260,000 for mental health support and the provision of food hampers to families and people in need due to COVID lockdown. These are really important government interventions to help the vulnerable people in our city at risk of being left behind.

In relation to business support, though—which, of course, is our focus today—there are many measures that the government has taken to assist businesses. This is a very testing time for small businesses, and it is right that the government offer appropriate supports. As Minister Cheyne has already outlined, the government has provided a range of supports over the length of the pandemic. These include almost half a billion dollars in support to local businesses, including direct financial support; a small business hardship scheme, which reimburses businesses for costs incurred for electricity, gas and rates paid in the second half of 2021; and commercial vehicle registration for all of 2021, up to the value of \$10,000 per business. That scheme has now been extended.

We have seen the waiver of annual licence fees for liquor licences for nightclub, restaurant, cafe, bar, general catering, special and club liquor licences. We have had grants to support live gigs and the night-time economy and assistance to small-to-medium live music venues, to recover from the pandemic through the Amp It Up! scheme managed by Minister Cheyne. Commercial tenants facing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic also benefited from the commercial leases declaration designed to protect them from unfair eviction. These are significant support measures which have been appreciated by business and have made a crucial difference to supporting them through this period.

Ms Castley's motion has presented a motion as if the ACT economy is in dire straits, but it seems to me that that is not an accurate or fair picture of the situation. This makes it hard to agree to the text as presented. Let me reflect on a couple of points in the detail. I note that Ms Castley says that the SEEK employment report shows that the ACT had the second largest decline in job ads from the previous month. A broader snapshot of employment data provides a better picture. The January SEEK job data is also out, and that shows that ACT job ads are up almost three per cent since December. It also shows job ads are up 12.2 per cent compared to January 2021, and 15.5 per cent since January 2019.

As Minister Cheyne pointed out, the ACT has also had a strongly performing labour market and the largest growth in the country when it comes to the number of businesses. Ms Castley's motion cites low retail spending in the ACT from earlier data. Since then, though, the most recent retail spending figures have been released, which have not been referenced. The new ABS data shows that, across Australia, retail sales volumes rose a record 8.2 per cent in the December quarter 2021. That was the strongest quarterly rise on record. Specifically in the ACT, the rise in retail sales was 12.4 per cent, a figure obviously above the national average.

As a Green, I add that we do not want our economic prosperity to be forever linked to increasing consumption—there is a whole exciting and sustainable world of green economics out there for us to explore—but for the purposes of this debate and the immediate economic situation, those retail sales figures do have a positive hue. Moving forward through this pandemic, the government needs to continue to support businesses and stay attuned to their needs, especially as the situation continues to change and evolve. It is the case, I think, that there are some sectors that may need particular help, whereas other parts of the business landscape are doing well or perhaps even better during the pandemic.

We want to target support where it is most needed. We have all heard, for example, of situations where businesses that were doing fine—in fact, businesses such as Harvey Norman were doing remarkably well—received pandemic payments from the federal government and just added it to their already increasing profits. It is clear that some sectors have done very well out of the pandemic—their particular lines of business have been services in great demand during this period—but it is also true that there are those who find it very difficult. That is where we need to think very carefully about our targeting and where the support is needed. I do not think sweeping statements that business is hurting get us very far in trying to think about the right policy response and the right level of support in the complicated and unprecedented period of time that we find ourselves in. On that note, we in the government have been working hard to identify and work with the sectors which have particular needs in the pandemic. An example in my own portfolio is the club sector, where I am having specific and regular meetings with the representative associations to discuss the particular issues that are impacting on that sector and thinking about where particular responses might be needed.

I will conclude my remarks today by simply noting that the Greens will be supporting Minister Cheyne's amendment to this motion, which adds a fuller picture of the economic landscape and describes more accurately the government's response to the challenges faced by business.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (4.11): There is a gendered aspect to the economic impacts of the past two years, and it continues trends that we have been seeing in the ACT for 30 years. Women are disproportionately represented in low-paid industries with high rates of casualisation—retail, hospitality, tourism and the arts, and care work. It has been a continuation of what happened to ACT women in the labour force during the 1991-92 recession, the 2002 dot-com bubble burst and the 2009 GFC.

What we saw in the 1991-92 recession was a shift for women from full-time to part-time work, which means that the real indicator of labour force impact on women became underemployment, not unemployment. Unemployment has not been higher than underemployment for women in the ACT for more than four consecutive months since September 1992. Finding enough hours of paid work has become a bigger problem than finding work at all. The difference between underemployment and unemployment for ACT women has been even higher during the pandemic than it was in any of the previous economic downturns that I have mentioned. ABS labour force

data released in January 2022 shows that the difference was 2.9 times higher during the April 2020 lockdown and 2.6 times higher during the August 2021 lockdown.

The key to understanding why it has been even worse for women during the pandemic is not just about retail, hospitality and tourism jobs having their hours cut; it is also about the impact of unpaid work. The labour force participation rate for women in the ACT dropped to 66.4 per cent in August 2021—similar to where it was in April 2020. This has an impact on the unemployment rate, which counts people in the labour force who are looking for work, but it does bounce back when restrictions ease and community transmission rates drop, and people feel safer to go out to restaurants or shops again. In December 2020, it rose to 71.3 per cent from 65.4 per cent in May 2020. I am confident it will rise again, inversely to community transmission rates of COVID-19.

If you are not looking for work because you have to juggle support for children studying at home or very young children who cannot go to early childhood education, support family with health conditions or older family members who are in isolation and provide emotional support for everyone in your household who is working from home or experiencing social isolation or financial stress, opting out of the labour force makes sense. We saw many of those women return to the labour force when restrictions eased at the end of 2021.

It is important that when we talk about economic recovery, we also talk about how we reduce the unpaid work of women in our community, and reduce community transmission of the virus so that people in the community feel safe to go out again. These things support women returning to work. This is why the ACT government is supporting parents to feel safer about children returning to school. It is also why the ACT government is supplying rapid antigen tests to in-home disability support and aged-care workers, reducing the risk that people will cancel their care services and keeping people at risk safe and well. It is why we worked so hard to become the most vaccinated city in the world, reducing transmission and making it easier for more people to go out in the community with confidence.

This ACT government also provides support to people experiencing difficulty, literally putting food on the table during this pandemic through the Canberra Relief Network and supporting local community food relief services. We also invested an additional nine per cent in mental health in the last budget, including support for community mental health supports such as the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre and Parentline, and the launch of MindMap and additional resources for mental health services in the community, because we know that this has been a hard two years for Canberrans, particularly for young people, and for parents who talk to me about how hard it is balancing home schooling and work from home.

It is important to note that the decisions made by the commonwealth government and the New South Wales government have an impact on the ACT economy. JobKeeper and the higher rate of JobSeeker had a very noticeable impact on labour force participation rates for ACT women in 2020 compared to 2021, and on the demand for food relief services. The push to open up fast in New South Wales has driven a shocking rise in COVID cases over this summer, forcing those most at risk from

COVID into a hidden lockdown here in the ACT. I am confident that we will see ongoing improvement in economic activity, but, more importantly, there will be ongoing improvement in social connection and community resilience and wellbeing as COVID cases decrease in the community.

This is why we must continue to reduce community transmission through vaccination and boosters and through reasonable public health regulations that support those most at risk in our community, including by providing rapid antigen tests to in-home disability support and aged-care workers and to NGOs providing essential services such as domestic and family violence crisis services and homelessness; and support community food relief services; and resource mental health and wellbeing. That is why I support Minister Cheyne’s amendment.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.16): I ask the ministers to refer to CommSec—I think it is page 5—and google the ABS data, but I am not going to bat back and forth on the figures. The fact is that my motion here today is calling on the government to release an updated economic recovery plan. Now, I am not asking them to give business more money. The government has done that. I am asking for a plan—for a vision—which is what the business owners want.

Let us review some of the feedback I spoke about earlier. What did we hear? “It is dire.” “It is woeful.” “It is just so quiet.” “It has never been worse.” “The sooner we can see a plan, the better off business will be.” That is what this motion is about. It is not about a thanks-for-the-memories sentiment and, “We are sorry; some businesses are just going to deal with closures because of the pandemic.” It is about vision and planning. I do not know how many times I have managed to say that in these last few seconds, but that is the sentiment of my motion today.

I would love the Chief Minister and Minister Cheyne to chat to the businesses—not all of them, of course; there are thousands—and ask the business owners they grab their coffees from, “How are things going? How is the V-shaped recovery going?” I would use those words with them. I am sure that they would look at you with a blank face.

So, in closing, I would like to remind the Assembly again that my motion is about future planning for business in Canberra. I am disappointed they are not going to get that today.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 4

Mr Braddock	Ms Orr	Ms Castley
Ms Burch	Dr Paterson	Mr Hanson
Ms Cheyne	Mr Pettersson	Mrs Kikkert
Ms Davidson	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Parton
Mr Gentleman		

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Housing—affordability

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Council of Social Service indicated in a media release on 25 January this year that “This year’s ROGS highlights that the ACT Government’s current housing policies are failing to address the ongoing crisis”;
- (b) the number of public housing dwellings in the ACT continues to fall and is below the number in 2012 (10 950) with the waitlist growing;
- (c) dwelling condition has continued to decline with the amount of properties at an acceptable standard dropping from 80.2 percent to 73.4 percent for those without a disability;
- (d) customer satisfaction rating has dropped from 29.6 percent very satisfied in 2018 to only 19.3 percent very satisfied in 2021;
- (e) there are 164 fewer households in social housing in the ACT in 2021 compared to 2020, and this number is lower than a decade ago in 2012 (11 328) and its peak at 11 435 households in 2017;
- (f) more than 30 percent of clients who approached homelessness services with a need for accommodation did not have their needs met; and
- (g) the Government is neglecting those who are most vulnerable in the community and the lack of action is apparent; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) urgently review the implementation of its housing strategy;
- (b) release the details and exact timeline of the delivery of all commitments in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement which includes 400 additional public houses and 600 affordable rental dwellings;
- (c) allow Community Housing Providers (CHPs) to address the shortfall of affordable homes through access to affordable land, rezoning to allow development by CHPs and rates exemptions; and
- (d) report back to this Assembly by 31 March 2022.

Here we are again, standing in front of you, Madam Speaker, with colleagues on both sides of the chamber talking about the public and social housing crisis here in the ACT. I do not know how it is that members of the CLAG—the coalition of Labor and the Greens—can keep on trotting out publicly, as we are about to see again this afternoon from Ms Berry, that they are dealing with this. They say, “It’s okay; we are dealing with this. It’s all under control. It’s someone else’s fault and we are dealing with it.” How is it that the Greens housing minister can genuinely continue to suggest

with a straight face that she is ending homelessness? She is ending it! She is providing homes for everyone—there will be homes for all!

This government continues to state that everything is good in housing and, indeed, that it keeps improving—and it does not. It is not correct. All of the feedback and—more importantly, when it comes to this motion—all of the government reports state otherwise. After the release of the ROGS report last month it was evident again that everything is not okay with social and public housing. The ACT Council of Social Service released media on 25 January that could well have been written by me—it could have come from my office—and it highlighted the significant crisis occurring and the failings of this government in housing policy.

The great Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope wrote a particularly cutting article about this massive failure in *CityNews* in December. He got all these quotes from the government's own budget announcements over the last six or seven years. Every single one of them was trumpeting this amazing injection of funds and what a great thing they are doing in public housing, saying, "We're spending all this money," and "We're the best in the country." Every single year for six or seven years they have trumpeted their commitment to the public housing space.

Mr Stanhope says:

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the ACT's population was 367,985 in June 2011 and that it increased to 432,380 in June 2020. Therefore, while the population increased by more than 63,000 people, on the data available to us, it appears that public housing stock in Canberra has declined, in that same period, by 874 dwellings.

The real decline here is staggering. We have seen the number of public housing dwellings continue to drop to a point that is now below the 2012 figure. The wait list continues to grow. I have some figures that I will refer to later on, but the wait list continues to grow and the steady decline is continuously defended by saying that the growth and renewal strategy is going to fix that. "The growth and renewal strategy is going to look at it. Next year there will be some good figures." If that was the case, surely the amount of knockdown-rebuilds to multi-unit complexes and sales of Housing ACT properties would prove this and the numbers would have moved in the right direction, but they have not. Once again, the figures contradict what the government is saying.

My office, and many others in this place, are inundated with complaints around maintenance, property condition and properties not fitting the needs of constituents, yet I am always faced with the minister stating that constituents are very happy: "There is not a problem here." The ROGS report clearly stated otherwise, with a steady decline in dwelling condition, and with properties in good condition dropping from 80.2 per cent in 2018 to 73.4 per cent in 2021. It is in black and white.

In my first few weeks back this year I have written seven letters relating to housing placements and lengthy wait times and the growth and renewal strategy, with a further five on maintenance concerns. In this term I have lost count of the number of letters to

housing ministers highlighting the failures in the system and the lack of support that tenants face. Further to this, there are those who are facing potential homelessness, or who are already sleeping rough, and they genuinely lack support. For those who approach homelessness services in the ACT, more than 30 per cent are not having their needs met.

I will concede that there has been some movement in this space from a funding perspective, but there certainly needed to be because OneLink cannot accommodate everyone, and the long wait list for OneLink is evidence of this. I am told by constituents that they are often told, “We are really sorry, but we cannot help. We do not have anything for you,” which no person who contacts that service wants to hear. Then there is the issue of those who fall under the single father category, where there is little to no help available. Single mothers have more options here in Canberra, yet men escaping domestic violence and those who are single fathers cannot access the same help as women. I think their plight is extremely important.

Is this government doing all it can to ensure that there is enough to support those most vulnerable, or are they hiding under excuses and pushing the blame elsewhere? This government continues to neglect those in our community who are the most vulnerable and who desperately need their assistance. These reports continue to highlight the problem, and the lack of action is obvious. The housing strategy needs urgent review to ensure that it is effective and improving the problem, and not making it worse. Again, you do not have to listen to us on it; these calls are coming loudly from the ACT Council of Social Service and a stack of other people within the sector. I think the reality is that we would be hearing more and more from those in the sector if they were not genuinely concerned about the fear of some sort of retribution, because there is a long track record of this government bullying any individual or organisation that dares to tell the truth and speak out against them.

If the government can outline the exact details and time line of the commitments it made in the parliamentary and governing agreement, including exactly when the 400 additional public houses and 600 affordable rental dwellings would be built, that would be appreciated by all—certainly by me, certainly by ACTCOSS, and certainly by all those waiting. If the government cannot commit to those extra homes, they should at least allow the community housing providers who are calling out to help address the shortfall. The government can and should be doing more.

I was asked on the radio this morning by both Bayliss and Cenatiempo about what genuine chance there is that this motion will succeed in its original form. I honestly responded by saying that I thought it was a very faint hope. I said that I thought there was as much chance of it getting up as there was of the convoy protesters overthrowing the parliament today. Obviously, that is not an outcome that we are looking for, but I was hoping that we could get a positive outcome on this one.

We have seen the amendment, so we know that the government is saying no to this motion. We know that it is has basically been a knockdown-rebuild into Labor-Greens propaganda. Those members are not only rejecting this MLA’s motion; they are rejecting the ACT Council of Social Service and rejecting the thousands who are on waiting lists. They are rejecting the thousands who are experiencing problems with

the maintenance of their public accommodation. They are also rejecting the thousands who are being squeezed out of the private rental market and have nowhere to go. If they reject this motion, they are rejecting the vulnerable Canberrans who they are supposed to represent.

It is all well and good for members to march in here and spout ideological mantras. It is all well and good for people to come into this chamber and throw grenades at the Prime Minister, but if members do not have the heart to genuinely improve the lives of people who cannot put a roof over their heads and who are in genuine rental stress, then I think those ideological words are very cheap. What a bizarre scenario it is that the vulnerable people in this space have only one genuine voice in this place, and it is coming from the so-called conservative party. Thank you.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (4.31): I move the following amendment to the motion:

Omit all text after “notes”, substitute:

- “(a) there is a housing affordability crisis unfolding across the OECD, including in Australia. The ACT is not immune from this;
 - (b) higher-than-average incomes can hide the challenges lower-income families can face in the private rental market;
 - (c) the strong ACT Government commitment to public housing and continued investment in the growth and renewal of public housing with \$100 million committed in the 2021-2022 ACT Budget;
 - (d) while Report on Government Services data shows stock numbers fluctuate year on year, growth and renewal of public housing is not achieved in a linear process as tenants move out, homes are renewed and built, construction completed and new tenants move in;
 - (e) to improve dwelling condition so tenants have safe and secure homes to live in, the ACT Government committed \$80 million in the 2021-2022 Budget to boost public housing maintenance; and
 - (f) to assist clients of homelessness services with a need for accommodation, the ACT Government has committed to increase specialist homelessness services with over \$10 million invested over the last two budgets; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue to implement and review the implementation of the ACT Housing Strategy;
 - (b) deliver all housing commitments in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement which includes 400 additional public houses and 600 affordable rental dwellings; and
 - (c) implement actions under the Housing Strategy to support Community Housing Providers to support the delivery of affordable housing.”.

Thank you, Mr Parton, for bringing this important issue to the Assembly today. Ms Vassarotti and I are always very keen to talk about the housing crisis in this country and here in the ACT. In fact, we regularly lobby our colleagues on the hill to make sure that we can get additional supports from them for those here in the ACT.

I would suggest to Mr Parton and the Canberra Liberals that perhaps they could do the same and lobby their colleagues in the Australian government on a number of things. I have a few ideas here. They could lobby to waive the historic ACT housing debt held by the commonwealth, to enable savings to be directed into more public housing. We could develop a national housing and homelessness strategy. We could actually have one—a national plan. They could lobby to support the Community Housing Industry Association’s social housing and renovation program. They could lobby to have the federal government reform tax settings, which currently benefit property investors over first home buyers and renters. They could recognise that housing affordability is actually a national issue and increase funding to all states and territories through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, and they could lobby the federal government to increase commonwealth rental assistance.

We will not hold our breath for the Canberra Liberals to take action and to lobby their colleagues on the hill. But here in the ACT we will continue to develop, reform and consider new and innovative ways to address the housing crisis, from which we are not immune. We are doing that through our housing strategy. It is not a secret, and the time frames are very clear. They are very clear in the parliamentary agreement and they are very clear in the strategy: we will deliver 400 new homes and we will renew a thousand homes.

I remind everybody that we would have a thousand more public housing properties if the Canberra Liberals had not sold off a thousand properties that are now privately owned dwellings in the ACT. This is the—

Mr Parton: Is that this century or last century?

MS BERRY: It does not matter when it happened; it happened. Those are the facts of the matter. One thousand public housing properties were sold off and are now privately owned in the ACT community.

I was very interested to hear Mr Parton talking about how he was the greatest champion of public housing in the ACT. This has always been quite amusing to me, particularly when I have had, in the last 12 months, 15 representations from the Canberra Liberals actually opposing public housing being built. There have been 15 representations from the Canberra Liberals in the last 12 months opposing public housing.

Do not forget that, in the last renewal program, Madam Speaker, the Canberra Liberals, including Mr Parton, were front and centre in opposing new housing being built in the suburbs—brand-new homes that best suit the needs of our tenants now and into the future. The Canberra Liberals opposed it, and they whipped the community into a frenzy to oppose public housing and to oppose public tenants moving into their

neighbourhoods. These are the people most in need in our community, and they were encouraging people to turn their backs on them in the suburbs.

I cannot help myself; I find it amusing when Mr Parton comes in here and talks about being the greatest champion of public housing and public housing tenants. Over the last four years, including the last 12 months, and well before he got here, the Canberra Liberals have had a history that says something entirely different to the position that he is trying to put to people here in the Assembly today.

With respect to public housing being a priority for the ACT Labor Party, with the support of the Greens political party we have absolutely put our money where our mouth is and we are delivering. We delivered 1,288 new public housing homes for people in the last government and now we will be building another 1,000 new homes, replacing old, unsustainable, unsuitable dwellings for public housing tenants and increasing our stock by another 400 dwellings.

The growth and renewal of public housing is not a linear process. Mr Parton knows that, and I think he understands it. First, when we are building new homes, you have to demolish the old home; you then build the new home. Sometimes, along the way, there will be a temporary reduction in public housing.

Mr Parton: For 10 years.

MS BERRY: A temporary reduction in public housing. Mr Parton knows that because I think he can do the maths himself and work out how that puzzle is being worked out. It is a puzzle that is being built along the way, and a lot of process goes into it. Front and centre of all of that is making sure that our tenants get a home that suits their needs so that they have the dignity of living in a beautiful new home in a suburb or area where they live—unless the Canberra Liberals write 15 letters to me and say, “Except here. Except in this particular area or this suburb.” That is when it becomes a problem. At a point in time, yes, there will be smaller numbers of public housing as we move through the renewal program.

We also saw a significant boost in the maintenance budget for public housing. \$80 million is being committed to repairs and maintenance, upgrades to kitchens and bathroom modifications, and upgrades for homes needing disability modifications and security improvements. This has seen a significant uplift in the maintenance works across the portfolio—and, as part of that, supporting our local industries as well. In addition to growing Canberra’s public housing, this budget investment sees existing public housing maintained so that tenants can enjoy and live comfortably in their own homes.

The housing strategy is due for a review at the halfway point of its implementation. That is not anything new. It is not something that we would not have done along the way. It was never meant to be something that was merely ink on paper that we would tick off along the way. Of course, circumstances will change. We have seen the circumstances change around housing affordability within the last two years in this country, and the ACT is not immune to that. But we are continuing to do the work to deliver the strategy, and to achieve affordable housing outcomes. I will continue to

deliver the outcomes of the strategy, as we all work together to make sure that Canberrans, regardless of their backgrounds, regardless of where they want to live, regardless of their means in life, have safe, secure and affordable homes to live in.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (4.39): I rise today to speak in support of Ms Berry's amendment to Mr Parton's motion on housing and homelessness issues.

I would like to thank Mr Parton for continuing to highlight the important issue of housing affordability and homelessness, giving Minister Berry and me the opportunity to affirm why housing is a priority for this government, and how we are responding. I suggest that all parties in the Assembly are actually on a unity ticket when it comes to our deep concern about the state of housing affordability and the need to eliminate homelessness. To effectively act on our shared concern to drive real change, we all need to have a clear understanding about what actions are under the control of the ACT government and what requires national action.

As has previously been put on the record in this Assembly, there is significant work underway by government and community partners to address housing affordability and homelessness; then there are factors that sit beyond the ACT government's control. As much as I would wish it, these are issues that will not be solved by a single action; they require sustained action.

Today's motion is largely in response to the latest *Report on Government Services*, known as ROGS, that provides an imperfect but nevertheless useful national dataset on housing affordability and homelessness issues, where the ACT sits in relation to other jurisdictions, and the picture of change over time. This report is contextualised with updated information on community needs.

This year's ROGS once again highlights that people on the lowest incomes are facing the worst impacts from the turbocharged housing market that is impacting countries across the OECD. It highlights that the demand for housing as part of capital wealth accumulation cannot be addressed by simple solutions such as just increasing land supply. It shows that while the ACT government should and will continue to increase our stock of public and community housing, without changes to federal taxes and concessions affecting housing the market will continue to overheat. Further, as my colleague Minister Berry rightly pointed out, when it comes to building more affordable housing, the ACT government are doing our part and lifting our response.

We continue to have the highest proportion of social and public housing, and we are adding 400 more. But we cannot achieve what is needed when the federal partner has vacated the field. The Morrison government are simply not providing anywhere near the level of leadership, funding or policy reform required so that states and territories can partner with them to quickly and effectively address the housing crisis.

This ROGS demonstrates that our allocation process is highly targeted and is providing homes to those in greatest need, including people who are experiencing

homelessness, escaping domestic and family violence, in unhealthy and inappropriate living conditions, and for whom housing costs are unaffordable.

It also highlights some significant challenges. While there has always been significant demand for social housing, the last two years have seen unprecedented events, particularly the COVID pandemic and the associated lockdowns, that have created significant pressures on the system, with many people impacted by economic shocks, health shocks and increased financial pressure. It has also created some delay in our ability to deliver more public housing, with construction shutdowns and significant supply issues.

The ROGS data provides important information regarding the situation in relation to homelessness services in the ACT. The report reflects the increasingly complex needs of people who are engaging with services and identifies that there are people who do not get all of the services they need. It is pleasing, however, to see that only four per cent of clients were not provided with any service they needed. This result has significantly improved from 13.5 per cent in the previous year.

Since February last year our government has committed more than \$12 million in addition to the more than \$25 million that is provided annually to support people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Here in the ACT we are really proud of the work that we have undertaken with our community partners on the central homelessness intake service. This makes the quality of our reporting very high, and we are confident that we are accurately identifying how our services need to expand and change to meet community needs.

Through the 2020 lockdown we worked with community partners to stand up new services and ensure that everyone had access to accommodation. In February's budget we continued to support these new services, including Winter Lodge for men and MacKillop House for women with or without children, and to expand the Axial Housing program for rough sleepers, providing a housing first for this group of people with very complex needs.

In the 2021-22 budget we have also announced an additional \$8 million in funds to provide a base increase to specialist homelessness services, representing a nine per cent increase in real terms—the first in many years.

Responding to the 2021 lockdowns, we moved quickly to ensure that there was emergency accommodation for individuals and families who needed it. With interstate borders shut, isolation requirements and increased pressure coming from the stressful event, this need was significant. I would like to thank OneLink, specialist homelessness services and hotel providers who assisted us in ensuring that everyone had an offer of somewhere safe to stay.

Following this, we have continued to work with community partners to ensure that more resources can be provided to support people with complex needs. I am pleased that we are embedding mental health support into some of our rough sleeper outreach services. This has all been possible through an additional investment of more than

\$2½ million, and I look forward to providing further details regarding this investment in the near future.

Minister Berry and I are now engaging with our community partners to reflect on the system as it is currently operating, and to see what improvements we can make to reach our collective vision for eliminating homelessness. This is a deep engagement which has at its core a commitment to co-design our response in a manner that respects and harnesses the collective wisdom of the organisations and individuals who are dedicating their professional lives to addressing homelessness. Through this process we will build on our current investments, and we will fully deliver on our commitment to invest an additional \$18 million into the specialist homelessness sector, and ensure that this investment makes the biggest difference and changes the lives of people who are experiencing homelessness.

I note that Mr Parton's motion also highlights the role that our community housing sector can play in responding to the issue of housing affordability. I wholeheartedly agree. I thank community housing and acknowledge the significant contribution that they already make, as well as how we can work together in the future.

On the topic of contribution, given our shared unity ticket on the need to address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis, here is where you can help, Mr Parton. I would welcome the opportunity to draft a letter from all three parties in this Assembly to the Prime Minister, the federal Treasurer and the Minister for Housing, asking them to meet our financial commitment and ambition to fix the affordable housing crisis.

A simple first step would be for the federal government to forgive the historic public housing debt with which they have saddled states and territories for several decades. Think of what we could do if there was an immediate \$120 million injection of funding. Think of what we could achieve if the federal government would take up its responsibilities and help our government to provide more affordable housing and work together to end homelessness once and for all.

Housing stress and homelessness are a scourge on our city. They are issues that are deeply distressing and need action, The scale of this action means that the ACT government cannot solve this on its own. We do need the federal government to act. I believe that this is an issue on which we can have a tripartisan approach. I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly, and I thank Minister Berry for her amendment. I look forward to us all working together on this issue in the future.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (4.49): I thank Mr Parton for bringing the motion to the Assembly today. I wish to speak in support of the comments made by my colleagues Minister Berry and Minister Vassarotti.

I grew up in ACT public housing. In fact, for the majority of my life, the ACT government has been my landlord. This issue of housing and the ACT government's responsibility to be an ethical landlord is deeply personal to me, knowing what it is like to be a tenant of the territory. I understand what it is like to experience housing stress and homelessness. I have lived through the day-to-day anxieties that insecure

housing places upon people and families in our city. I am grateful that our community and our government are committed to the principles of social justice and that the efficient and affordable provision of public housing is an ongoing top priority for our government.

Our laser-like focus on housing, as Minister Vassarotti has described it, is one of the many reasons why I chose to first join, represent and subsequently become elected as an ACT Greens representative. We went to the last territory election with an incredibly ambitious plan for a home for all. It is bold. Mr Parton holds us to account to that commitment regularly, and I thank him for that. It was ambitious and it was supported by many in the electorate. I am proud of what that says about our party, our values and the things we choose to prioritise in this place and in our negotiations with ACT Labor.

We sought to build on, and were able to secure commitments in our parliamentary and governing agreement to, the policy prioritisation of public housing. Our plan includes building and buying 400 public housing dwellings over this term—a commitment which saw a doubling of the existing housing targets. The centrality of housing to the parliamentary and governing agreement reflects the commitments of our two governing parties to provide housing for all.

Addressing issues of housing insecurity is essential to meeting the basic needs of Canberrans and addressing other social inequalities. Increasing Canberra's public housing stock and improving the services provided to our tenants is core to the ACT Greens' vision for building a just and equitable city.

As Minister Vassarotti pointed out, since February last year the government has made financial commitments of more than \$12 million, in addition to the more than \$25 million provided annually to support people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These issues are even more pertinent presently, considering the social and economic costs of the pandemic, which we know have stoked existing inequalities.

As we have begun to recover from the economic crisis of COVID-19, economists and housing experts from around the country and across the political spectrum have been clear that investing in social housing is great for economic stimulus, job creation and, most importantly, providing homes. This includes increased housing stress and materials and labour shortages which are playing out across the housing market and impacting upon our capacity to build houses as quickly as we need to.

For all that the ACT Greens and ACT Labor in government are criticised, at least we are honest about the full breadth of policy challenges that face us in this space; clear on the areas for which we are responsible; articulating a clear plan for what we will do about our share of the burden; and prepared to effectively criticise and call out those who are not pulling their weight. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Canberra Liberals, who are simply unprepared—ideologically, pathologically and personally—to hold their own political party to account for their policy failures.

We know that economists and housing experts across the political spectrum are united in saying that the current framework of negative gearing and capital gains tax

concessions is blocking hundreds of thousands of people from the housing market. This continues to have flow-on effects for rental affordability in the private market and the waiting lists for those waiting for public housing. These are two immediate policy changes that the federal government could enact that would put downward pressure on house prices across the market and across the country.

Why I find it so frustrating, Madam Speaker, is that I, unlike Mr Parton, do not question his personal commitment to ending homelessness. I will not come in here and, for a cheap political headline, use words like “heartless”, “gutless” and “lack of care”. I will not say that. I am not—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR DAVIS: I will stand by that. I do not question that not one of the 25 members in this place gets any joy out of seeing those in our community suffering from housing stress. I know there are many people in this space who, through the course of their life, or people that they love, have experienced housing stress.

What I continue to find so frustrating, and that I imagine many in the community find so frustrating, is that until each and every one of the members of this place and other similar places is prepared to be honest about the full policy complexity of the challenge, and while they continue to isolate their conversations, their criticisms and their commentary to areas where they can capitalise or seek to capitalise on making a political argument, they are taking the electorate for granted. You are not being intellectually honest with people when you are trying to articulate the problem.

Do I think we are building enough houses? No, because I wanted to build a thousand. It was all over my flyers when I ran for election for this place. But our two-party government is one of compromise, and we are building 400. I am incredibly proud of that because I am proud of the 400 families for whom that will provide secure, long-term housing. I am proud of the hard work that Minister Berry and Minister Vassarotti, as the ministers responsible in government for delivering this reform, have done to achieve that.

I am also proud that my colleagues in the federal parliament continue to advocate for immediate policy changes to negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions. I would strongly encourage all members of the opposition to take up Minister Vassarotti on her offer to sign that letter and to make it very clear to your federal colleagues that you demand change in the policy space federally.

Until you do that, the Canberra community must know that you cannot be taken seriously on the question of housing affordability. You are picking and choosing your numbers, picking and choosing your evidence, and picking and choosing your talking points to make a political point. It is unhelpful, and we would really appreciate your constructive help.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.57): I was not going to speak to this motion, but I want to respond to some of the comments that were made by Mr Davis. He said, “Name-calling is not helpful.” Then he said, “You are all pathological and not

honest.” If he wants a civil debate, that is great, but he cannot then say, “You’re all pathological and you’re not honest.” Have it one way or the other.

It is an interesting debate. Mr Davis, in his defence of this, is trying to blame the federal government. Ms Vassarotti and Mr Davis said that the big problem here is negative gearing. He said it blocks thousands from the housing market. It is an interesting question because there are a lot of people that use negative gearing. Without it, I think there would be a significant shortfall in the number of people investing in properties that then are rented.

I notice that on the register of pecuniary interests Mr Davis and Mr Rattenbury both have investment properties. If Mr Davis is going to say that it is a terrible policy to have negative gearing and that the people who use negative gearing are blocking thousands from entering the housing market, I think it would be useful to clarify that they have not in any sense, at any time, used negative gearing on their property. If you are going to come in here and say, “This is what’s causing the problem; we rail against it,” you should not be negative gearing and calling people and the Canberra Liberals pathological.

At the same time, if it is the case that Mr Davis and maybe Mr Rattenbury are negatively gearing—the very policy that they say is blocking thousands from the housing market—it would be extraordinary. I hope that is not the case. I hope that Mr Davis can stand up here and say, “No, I rail against negative gearing. I think it is terrible that it blocks thousands and that is why my property at no stage has been negatively geared, and nor has Mr Rattenbury’s.” If he is not able to say that then it would be extraordinary. Should he come into this place and say, “The whole problem here is negative gearing; negative gearing is blocking thousands from entering the housing market,” it would be extraordinary, wouldn’t it, Madam Speaker, if the only two people using negative gearing and taking advantage of that tax benefit were Mr Davis and Mr Rattenbury? I would hope that that is not the case and I would hope that Mr Davis can reassure us that it is not the case.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.00): What a pathetic but predictable response from the minister in this amendment to the motion. I was always of the belief that we would see a knockdown-rebuild here and that the new version would just be another piece of Labor-Greens propaganda, and that is the case. Despite the ACTCOSS report—the ACTCOSS report would suggest that the current ACT housing strategy is failing—Minister Berry’s amendment basically says what every single amendment that she ever brings forward in this place says. It just says, “There’s nothing to see here. We’re doing a great job and we will continue doing it exactly the way that we have been doing it up till now.” The biggest reason we are in this space is that once, in another century, there was some property sold.

In rejecting this motion, the government have absolutely rejected me, as is the way in partisan politics—and I do not take that personally—and they have also absolutely rejected the ACT Council of Social Service. They have rejected every single person on the public housing waiting list in the ACT. How many people is that? As of the latest data I have, it is 2,992 applicants. That does not mean 2,992 people. That means 2,992 applicants—families, couples, individuals. That list has grown by 500

applications in the last 18 months, which is 20 per cent or thereabouts. We all know that thousands of others have either left or they have just given up. The ACTCOSS media release says:

... (ACTCOSS) has called on the ACT Government to urgently review the implementation of its housing strategy and improve community oversight following today's release of a national report that shows major failings—

major failings—

in the ACT Government's policy to address the Territory's housing crisis.

It is not a Liberal release; it is the ACTCOSS release. ACTCOSS are of the belief that the ACT government is failing in this space. ACTCOSS did not refer to a crisis engulfing the OECD. Federal leaders are mentioned briefly in the ACTCOSS release, but the ACTCOSS release is very clearly about things that are in the control of this Assembly. There are many things that are not in the control of this Assembly.

The amendment states that the *Report on Government Services* data shows that stock numbers fluctuate year on year and growth and renewal of public housing is not achieved in a linear process. I can clearly give you a linear process on this, because the line from 2012 until now is very clear. It is a line that is going down. Again, the minister said in her speech that there will be certain moments in time when the dwelling numbers are going down. They have been going down for a decade. Irrespective of tenants moving in and out and homes being built, the number of public housing dwellings continues to steadily fall, despite these virtuous announcements and every budget suggesting that it is going to increase. God help the Greens and Labor if, indeed, we get to the end of all this and somehow those new dwellings have not been delivered, because, wow, that is going to be embarrassing, isn't it? Let us all hope—and I certainly hope—that they can be delivered.

I just wanted to say to Greens members who have not been here for as long as me that there was a time when, with a motion like this, I would have engaged with Caroline Le Couteur. Do I miss Caroline. Caroline was a real Green, Madam Speaker. I could have gone to Caroline and we would have discussed this motion. We would probably have come up with some things that we both agreed on. Ms Le Couteur had a backbone and she would perhaps have said, "Yes, I'm going to support you on this," and we might have got some movement.

This crossbench, of course, is not a crossbench at all. I think earlier in the day I heard Mr Rattenbury say on a number of occasions, "We, the government." There is no crossbench in here and I wish they would stop masquerading as if that is the case. Very clearly, based on the words, I do not think we will be supporting your amendment, Ms Berry.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 4

Ms Berry	Ms Orr	Ms Castley
Mr Braddock	Dr Paterson	Mr Hanson
Ms Burch	Mr Pettersson	Mrs Kikkert
Mr Davis	Ms Vassarotti	Mr Parton
Mr Gentleman		

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Environment—ACT Environment Awards

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (5.08): Today I rise to speak about the ACT Environment Awards. These awards are given to those who have made a significant contribution to the protection of our environment in various ways, including but not limited to organised community campaigns, volunteering, political advocacy, research and science. Winners of these awards are selected by an independent panel.

The Conservation Council and the local environment community celebrated the 2021 ACT Environment Awards on 14 December last year. I was delighted to attend and announce the awards at the online event. I would also like to acknowledge my colleague Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA, who joined me at the awards.

There were three award winners. The winner of the first, the Moira and John Rowland Young Environmentalist of the Year, open to those up to 28 years of age, was Jessica Fordyce. Jessica works with the Canberra Region Joint Organisation to lead a food rescue and donation project in the council regions surrounding the ACT. The project aims to prevent discarded food from supermarkets ending up in landfill. Instead, Jessica helps to build successful, ongoing relationships between supermarkets and charities to ensure that this food reaches the hands of those who need it most. She is now scoping out potential for a similar project here in the ACT. Congratulations, Jessica. It was particularly special that Moira and John's daughter attended the event and spoke about her parents' love of Canberra's environment.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and effort of the other nominee for this award, Annika Reynolds.

The second award, the ACT Environmentalist of the Year for 2021, was awarded to John Ive. John has dedicated over 40 years to developing, demonstrating and promoting the importance of environmental enhancement for achieving agricultural production objectives on his family's property. John has increased native vegetation and conservation areas, excluding domestic livestock from more than 30 per cent of the property, and conserving key ecosystems within the region, both on his property and in neighbouring areas. Congratulations, John.

I would also like to acknowledge the other nominees for this award, Millie Sutherland Saines, Jean Casburn, Dr Brook Clinton, Kirsty Young, Dr Don Fletcher, Dr Janet Salisbury, and Linda Groom, who received a highly commendable certificate for her integral role in the campaign to protect Kosciuszko National Park from the impacts of introduced horses. Congratulations to you all.

I know that there were many deserving groups for the last award, Conservation Council Member Group of the Year, but the recipient for 2021 was 350 Canberra. 350 Canberra has been active since 2014, working to promote climate action through their divestment, StopAdani, Artivism and Fridays4Future campaigns. The group consists entirely of volunteers who have met weekly since 2014. Their main focus is to slow the extraction and burning of fossil fuels until the fossil fuel industry is replaced with renewables and other energy industries. Congratulations to 350 Canberra and all of your members.

All of the winners and nominees for the ACT Environment Awards 2021 showed great dedication and commitment to protecting our environment. It is wonderful to be able to acknowledge their significant efforts which make such a difference. But they are not alone. I would also like to acknowledge the important work of many hundreds of other people who also volunteer their time, effort and expertise to preserve our precious environment here in the ACT. This may be individually or as part of a friends group, land group or other association. Without their valuable efforts to pull up weeds, pick up litter, plant trees, preserve paths, count and monitor wildlife and many more tasks—without these significant efforts by so many—our environment would be much poorer and less diverse. Thank you all for making such a difference.

Mr Victor Marillanca—Ohtli Award

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.13): I rise to speak briefly this evening to recognise the recent incredible recognition that a well-known community member, volunteer, supporter and friend to many in this place, Mr Victor Marillanca, recently received.

On 30 November 2021 Victor received the Ohtli Award. This is an annual award from the Mexican government, administered through its Department of Foreign Affairs, which recognises the contribution that a citizen not living in Mexico has made in giving assistance to Mexican nationals or promoting Mexican culture. The Ohtli Award is the highest honour granted by the Mexican government to those individuals

abroad who have dedicated their lives to improving the wellbeing of Mexicans and other Latinos.

Ohtli symbolises “path” or “road”—essentially providing a pathway for others. Victor is the first Canberran ever to have received the award, and he is in the company of the likes of Eva Longoria.

Victor, for those who do not know, first arrived in Canberra as a refugee from Chile in 1975 and, almost immediately, despite having come from incredibly difficult circumstances, he began the voluntary work that has become synonymous with his name, establishing the first Spanish language program on Community Radio 2XXFM, *Coneccion Latinoamericano*, or *Latin American Connection*. Victor has maintained his passion for this incredible service for more than 45 years. During that 45 years he also became the first Spanish-speaking justice of the peace. That was 42 years ago.

Victor was a founding member of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum and he continues to serve as an ACT Multicultural Honorary Ambassador with the ACT government. He has been instrumental in connecting Latin America to business, sports and cultural opportunities here in Canberra, including, of course, the National Multicultural Festival, and in providing significant diplomatic support.

I have barely scratched the surface of Victor’s contribution to Australian and Latin American communities and, of course, the Canberra community, and the deepening ties that he has helped to create between us. This is clearly worthy recognition, and I know that I and other members in this place are delighted that he has received such high recognition.

Melba—play spaces

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.16): I want to take a moment to mention the SMILE Melba petition. We saw the government response on that project come through earlier today. On 8 November last year a Legislative Assembly petition with 251 signatures, an alternative e-petition with 185 signatures and a regular paper petition with 95 signatures, totalling 531 all up, were tabled in the Assembly. Today we heard a response about those.

I am a bit disappointed that it is not being implemented by the government at the moment. That petition came to this Assembly from locals. It brought a really creative solution to a local problem. We have an under-utilised bit of land in Melba, next to the school. We have a real need for an all-abilities playground there. We have a lot of kids and parents who want this, and a lot of people who are really enthusiastic. There was a marvellous barbecue. There was a beautiful project design. There was a Facebook group. There were a lot of people talking on the radio about this. There was a real buzz about it.

It is important that we listen to the community when they bring these ideas to us. They know best what works well in their neighbourhoods. This proposal had such grassroots support and such visionary work behind it. Tim, Hector and the Belconnen

Community Council have all been working really hard on this, and a lot of locals have come along. It is a cracker.

I understand that this is not in the short-term program of works at the moment. I am really eager to continue working with Tim, Hector and the Melba community, SMILE and all Canberrans who want to see an increase in all-abilities play spaces around our city. I am hoping we can still develop a pathway forward to get this project off the ground and get more of these community projects up in our neighbourhoods.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.18 pm.