



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**3 MAY 2022**

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**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) (10.01): 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.

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Braddon Park—upgrades—petition 2-22**

*By Ms Lee, from 152 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: Braddon Park, a pocket park on Lowanna Street, has been neglected for many years and does not have facilities to encourage community use.

The Friends of Braddon Parks is a group of 100+ local residents that have noticed that the park is underutilised and infrastructure is inadequate. The usage of the park increased during the recent ACT lockdown period which highlighted the inadequacy of the facilities.

We believe that high density living requires adequate community facilities to make city living a lifestyle choice. There are currently no playgrounds in Braddon other than the one in Braddon Park which is in very poor condition.

We are calling on the Government to provide funding for a community-led upgrade of Braddon Park.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the Government to provide funding for a community-led upgrade of Braddon Park.

The following issues urgently need to be addressed in Braddon Park:

- Accessibility for the disabled with mobility issues;

- Adequate seating and adequate lighting;
- Outdoor fitness equipment;
- Play opportunities for children;
- Support of biodiversity for local wildlife.

In a recent survey 100% of respondents agreed that Braddon Park is in poor condition. The top 5 priorities of the community are:

1. upgrade playground to be more engaging and inclusive, including considerations for disabled people. (61 %)
2. Install better lighting. (55%)
3. Improve safety and accessibility of footpaths. (55%)
4. Provide more seating options, such as picnic tables. (52%)
5. Increase biodiversity, such as micro-forest. (49%)

### **Braddon Park—upgrades—petition 14-22**

*By Ms Lee, from 16 residents:*

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

Note that:

- Braddon Park, a pocket park on Lowanna Street has been neglected for many years and does not have facilities to encourage community use.

Recognise that:

- In a survey of residents, 100% of respondents agreed that Braddon Park is in poor condition;
- High density living in Braddon requires adequate community facilities to make city living a lifestyle choice.

*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 response**

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

#### **Auslan—petition 33-21**

By **Ms Davidson**, Minister for Disability, undated, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Lawder on 8 February 2022, concerning a proposed inquiry into the use of Auslan in the ACT.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 8 February 2022, regarding petition 33-21 – Auslan Rights, lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA, on Tuesday 8 February 2022.

The petition raises the concern Deaf Canberrans are being disadvantaged because the availability of services and information in Auslan is inadequate in the ACT.

DeafACT estimate there are currently 300 Deaf or Hard of Hearing people who communicate using Auslan in the ACT and surrounding region, which includes Queanbeyan, Goulburn, Yass and Cooma.

Ensuring government information and services are accessible and available in a variety of formats, including through the use of Auslan interpreting services, requires a whole of government approach. I observe the close working relationship developed by our Chief Minister and public officials through the course of the COVID pandemic with our local Auslan interpreters and understand there is recognition of the importance of their work across government. Progression of this work will need to be at a whole of government level and I understand the Community Services Directorate (CSD) are keen to support leadership by the CMTEDD Government Communications Unit in this work.

There is an identified shortage of certified interpreter level 3 Auslan Interpreters within the ACT. This shortage affects those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing from accessing services and supports on an equal basis as other members of the community. An appropriate mechanism to address the barriers to people becoming certified Auslan Interpreters may be through a future ACT Budget process.

With video remote interpreting (VRI) now becoming more accessible, the Canberra Deaf Community advise they do have better access to interpreters from all around Australia using computer conferencing technology and smartphone technology platforms. However, VRI is not always the appropriate method of access and interpreting face to face is often preferred and more appropriate. VRI can also be restricted by network quality and the costs associated with high data streaming. DeafACT advise the Canberra Deaf community need shop fronts and Health facilities with the necessary technology so that Deaf people can access VRI.

The ACT Government has commenced extensive consultations to inform the development of a ten-year Disability Strategy for the ACT. This work presents the opportunity to seek ideas and solutions from community on the ways that Auslan supports can be provided.

The new Disability Strategy will be co-designed by people with disability, government and the disability sector, with all consultations and forums led by people with disability. The ACT Government will hear from people with disability, families, carers, supporters and interested community members on how to create a more inclusive future for all Canberrans.

Consultations for the ACT Disability Strategy will provide an opportunity for people with disability, including the Deaf Community, to have a say on their priorities for the ACT Disability Strategy over the next 10 years.

ACT Government will build on the commitment under the ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019-29 First Action Plan, for government agencies to develop

Disability Action and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). DAIPs outline an agency's commitment to take action to improve inclusion in their facilities and services, including the provision of Auslan interpreting where it is necessary and appropriate.

The Government welcomes the referral of this petition to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, and the potential consideration by the Committee of the issues raised by the Canberra Deaf community.

### **Motion to take note of petitions**

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

That the responses so lodged be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Appointment of Acting Speaker**

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella) (10.04): For the information of members, pursuant to standing order 6A, the Acting Speaker appointed Mr Pettersson as Acting Speaker for the period 15 to 17 April 2022. I present:

Acting Speaker—Instrument of appointment—Mr Pettersson, dated 14 April 2022.

### **Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella) (10.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure in response to the resolution of the Assembly of 16 September 2021, which referred a proposed amendment to standing order 113A relating to question time to the committee for its consideration. The committee has discussed the proposed amendment, which would change how questions without notice are asked by the opposition. Instead of each member asking an individual question, the proposed amendment would allow the opposition as a group to ask up to nine principal questions.

The proposed amendment was again discussed in the Assembly on 5 April this year in a suspension of standing orders debate. The committee has determined that consideration of the amendment be included in the major review of all standing orders, which will commence in mid-2022 in accordance with the committee's terms of reference.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.05): I seek leave to make a brief statement in response.

Leave granted.

**MR HANSON:** Madam Speaker, again we have been stymied in our ability to do our job in this place. The reality is that this is a simple amendment to standing orders. No-one has raised any objection to it. The Greens seem to have had more positions than are fathomable on what they support or do not support on this. I now have correspondence from the Greens saying that they will support a change—they just want some sort of tick-off from the Clerk—in advance of a review of standing orders. So it is very unclear to me quite what the position is from the Greens, because the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure is saying it is going to be a comprehensive review. I now have correspondence via the opposition whip saying that the Greens pretty much do support this change; they just want to make sure that the Clerk is happy with it, as I understand. And let me assure you—and I have spoken with the Clerk about this—that this is a standing order that has played out in this Assembly for months, if not years, through COVID. It is not a surprise to anyone. It has been discussed in this place six or seven times. We have seen it play out in question time on numerous occasions.

So I have reached a little point of frustration because, first, I do not understand quite what the Greens' position is, other than, "We support it being debated but we do not support it. It has to go into a big review, but it does not have to be in a review." What is Mr Braddock's position on this? Maybe he can seek leave to tell us what his position is. I am growing somewhat frustrated, I must say, because all we are asking for is a simple change that reflects the operations of this place during COVID, that reflects the operations of this parliament and would be then consistent with every other parliament in Australia. No-one has raised with me any objection to this happening, but they will not do it.

I foreshadow that if this does not get up and is not at least debated—I will give you until the next sitting—then we will stop playing ball. If you are not going to support the opposition to do its job, we will stop supporting you to do your job. So good luck asking for leave for anything in this place, because we will not grant it. If you are not going to play ball with us—if you are not going to let us do our job, or at least have a debate in this place about it—why should we play ball? Why should we?—because if you are going to stop us doing our job, we will stop you doing yours and this place will become a mess.

Mr Rattenbury is going "Oh dear, oh dear!" because he used to be a firebrand about this sort of stuff back in the day, but now he is a minister and he wants the least effective questioning on him that he can get. They have changed their tune, haven't they? They have changed their tune. He was all for Latimer House principles and democracy. They all say that in the public, but when you are a minister under pressure like Ms Davidson is—and often Mr Rattenbury—the last thing you want is effective questioning from the opposition. They have changed their tune. I do not even know what it is because they are so confused about it, but I give you notice, Madam Speaker and members: if you want us to cooperate with you and make this a smooth-running parliament, we will have our debates—that is great; we will have different positions—but if you stop us from doing our job effectively we will do everything we can to stop you doing yours effectively, and this will be a far less effective parliament. So the ball is in your court.

**Mr Rattenbury:** We are at threats now, Jeremy, are we?

**MR HANSON:** I cannot understand you, sorry.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I cannot understand you either, but that has nothing to do with wearing a face mask!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** All right, members, I have delivered my 246A; we will move to the next item of business.

## **Commissioner of Standards—referral**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (10.09), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) Mr Davis has circulated a letter in the electorate regarding the Greens Federal election candidates;
- (b) that this letter uses Mr Davis' ACT Legislative Assembly contact details;
- (c) a letter to MLAs from the Clerk of the Assembly was circulated on 11 April 2022 regarding use of Assembly resources for federal campaigning; and
- (d) that using his Assembly contact details as part of federal electioneering is in breach of the Members' code of conduct; and

(2) calls on this Assembly to refer Mr Davis' actions to the Commissioner for Standards.

In this place, we talk a lot about integrity. We talk a lot about honesty and diligence. In fact, in the Code of Conduct for members of the Assembly it talks about these matters in some depth and also calls on members:

Within the first six months after an election for the Assembly, the Assembly shall reaffirm its commitment to the principles, obligations and aspirations of the Code of Conduct.

So everyone in this place, including Mr Davis, has affirmed their commitment to the Code of Conduct. Surely you would not affirm your commitment if you did not understand it and you were not going to apply it; yet it has been brought to my attention in the past day or so, by a member of the public, that Mr Davis has circulated a letter in the electorate strongly endorsing Greens federal candidates. On its own that is not an issue. We all do that to some degree. We all talk about our federal candidates. However, in this instance Mr Davis has included his ACT Legislative Assembly contact details on the letter.

I am sure I do not need to bring to your attention the fact that the Clerk circulated a letter on 11 April 2022—not that long ago—specifically drawing the attention of members to what is and is not acceptable during the federal election campaign in terms of the use of Assembly resources. It is quite specific:



Members should make only proper use of those public resources to which they have access, and should do so in a manner designed to make effective and efficient use of those resources.

Here we have a member who has included their ACT Legislative Assembly contact details in this letter on federal government issues, the federal government and a federal Greens party. If you receive this letter in your mailbox and you have a question or you want to talk to someone about it or you want to make a suggestion, where are you going to go? “It has a phone number here. I’m going to call that number,” which will be answered by either Mr Davis or one of his ACT Assembly staff sitting in a lovely climate-controlled building paid for by the ACT taxpayer, at a desk and with a chair paid for by the ACT taxpayer, with a telephone paid for by the ACT taxpayer. Mr Davis is meant to be using those resources for matters of the ACT Legislative Assembly, not to promote his federal counterparts. The email address is there, too. It is a different email address, but it is the ACT Legislative Assembly contact details, [davis@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:davis@parliament.act.gov.au). That is an Assembly-provided resource supported by Assembly staff, paid for by ACT taxpayers.

This is not an appropriate use of Assembly resources. This appears to be in direct contravention of the letter from the Clerk circulated on 11 April. This appears to be in direct contravention of the members’ Code of Conduct, which Mr Davis affirmed after he was elected here. This is an appalling use of Assembly resources. Saying that he did not know or was not sure shows an astounding level of contempt for this Assembly; that he has not paid any attention to this affirmation of the Code of Conduct; that he has not paid any attention to the letter from the Clerk circulated on 11 April; and that he feels he can do whatever he likes and then perhaps go, “I’m sorry; I didn’t know. I didn’t understand.”

Everyone here knows that ignorance is no excuse. Ignorance is no defence, especially after you have affirmed your understanding and agreement of the members’ Code of Conduct in this place, especially after the Clerk has specifically drawn these matters to your attention! This is an appalling use of Assembly resources, and that is why I am asking the Assembly today to refer this matter to the Commissioner for Standards. My colleagues and I believe that this is an appalling use of Assembly resources, but it is up to the Commissioner for Standards to investigate this matter and come up with a decision.

That is why I am calling on all of our colleagues here to refer this to the Commissioner for Standards. It is the appropriate place for this investigation to take place. If this does not get referred to the Commissioner for Standards, what does it say about the culture of Labor and the Greens? Where they are prepared to let this egregious misuse of Assembly resources take place, what does this say about their commitment to honesty, integrity, diligence, transparency and accountability? I am not going to answer that question; I am sure you all know what the answer is and what it will say about the members in this place if they do not support this motion calling on the Assembly to refer this matter to the Commissioner for Standards!

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (10.16): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion to the Assembly; genuinely I do. And at the very first instance I make an undertaking to the Assembly that I will refer myself to the Commissioner of Standards before the close

of business today because I am very comfortable and confident with the advice I received from the Clerk, with the advice I received from the Electoral Commissioner and with the due diligence that I undertook in order to ensure that correspondence that I make with my electorate is done in accordance with the members' Code of Conduct.

As the ACT Greens have always advocated—in this place and similar places—I am very comfortable with accountability and transparency for my decisions and for the decisions made of anybody else in this place. I would like to make a few assurances, though, to members present before the commissioner undertakes any inquiry. There were just a few mistruths in Ms Lawder's presentation, the first of which being that there was absolutely no use of Assembly resources in the preparation of the particular correspondence to which—

**Ms Lawder:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, it appears that Mr Davis has just accused me of mistruth which is, in effect, accusing me of lying. I ask him to withdraw.

**MR DAVIS:** Madam Speaker, I withdraw. I fear that perhaps my respected colleague and fellow member for Brindabella may not be aware of all of the facts of the matter as it pertains to correspondence that I engage in with my electorate. First of all, the letter was produced and paid for by the ACT Greens party. Second of all, it was distributed by volunteers of the ACT Greens Party, including myself. I have no shame, no guilt, nor embarrassment about the efforts that I have made to engage with my constituents, to use an opportunity to promote the federal Greens election candidates, to remind them that I serve in their name as a Greens member in this place, and to extend to my constituents the opportunity to contact me if they have any local issue that they wish to discuss, as is my responsibility as a local member.

This is not the first motion like this that we have seen from Ms Lawder in this relatively short Assembly term thus far. I am very comfortable with these motions being referred to the Commissioner of Standards and very comfortable with the Commissioner of Standards existing to do just that. But I stress that at all times I sought advice from the Clerk and from the Electoral Commissioner, that these letters were paid for and distributed by the ACT Greens and that I am not at all concerned that I took that opportunity to speak about the federal election and the Australian Greens candidates for the federal election. I also make sure that my constituents know who I am, what I do and how to contact me so that I can best serve them and support them and advocate for their interests in this Assembly.

I find it very troubling that this motion from Ms Lawder may seek to limit my capacity to do that. That would be very challenging from a fellow member for Brindabella indeed. So proud am I of having engaged in this correspondence and distributed it, I wonder if Ms Lawder saw it on my Facebook page, promoted by me. It was not like this was something I did in secret. It was not like this was something I wanted to hide from members of the opposition or from the community.

In fact, it was something I proudly promoted. I am proud to promote Kathryn Savery, the Greens candidate for Bean. I am proud to promote Dr Tjanara Goreng Goreng, the Greens candidate for the Senate. I am proud to work with them through the course of

the federal election campaign and introduce them to my constituents. And I will be prouder still if they are elected to serve the same constituency as I in the other place.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (10.21): Labor will not be supporting this referral today. Ms Lawder could have already made this referral to the Commissioner for Standards if she had thought there was a case that needed to be answered, and we would encourage her to do that in the future. But noting that Mr Davis is going to self-refer anyway, we just think this is a bit superfluous.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (10.21): Madam Speaker, I seek your advice regarding the standing orders in light of the comments that Ms Orr has just made. The standing orders indicate that anyone may make a complaint to the commissioner, via the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, about a member's compliance with the members' Code of Conduct or the rules relating to registration and declaration of interests and various other matters.

I am interested to get your advice on what the mechanism is. Ms Lawder has put a motion that calls on the Assembly to refer Mr Davis to the Commissioner for Standards. That is not a mechanism that sits in the standing orders. Here we can see the political reality of what has been done here, because, as Ms Orr has just pointed out, Ms Lawder could easily have written a letter to the Commissioner for Standards saying, "I am concerned about this. Can you have a look at it and see if Mr Davis has done the right thing?" That is how every other referral to the standards commissioners about this sort of matter has been done. That is how I recall it.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

Now Mr Hanson is sitting here making smart comments across the chamber. He may have an example that I cannot recall, and I look forward to him sharing that. But this is a political smear by Ms Lawder in the context of an election campaign. That is what this is about. She could easily have written to the standards commissioner and had this investigated, but, no, she wants to bring it to this chamber.

Madam Speaker, I conclude my remarks by seeking your advice on the validity of this motion and whether the Assembly has the power to refer to the Commissioner of Standard. The standing order does say that anyone may make a complaint, but I am interested in your advice on whether the Assembly can actually make that referral. If the Assembly is going to do it, who writes the letter and who characterises the nature of the complaint? Presumably, Madam Speaker, that would be you on behalf of the Assembly. I am not sure that you have the details of Ms Lawders allegations. Aside from making clear the nature of this political attack—that is not your job, that is my job—I would welcome your advice on the procedural soundness of this motion.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will come back with the advice, Mr Rattenbury, if I may.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.23): The reality is that this is an issue that does need to be referred to the standards commissioner. In response to Mr Rattenbury: it is pretty evident that if the Assembly decides something, that referral is always put through Madam Speaker. She would be the one that does it. It has a perfectly

legitimate place. We have often discussed matters with the standards commissioner. I remember debate in this place about Mr Milligan. Do you remember that one, earlier this term? I recall that debate playing out in here.

**Ms Lawder:** Ms Lee and Ms Burch—

**MR HANSON:** Ms Lee and Ms Burch, yes. There have been a number of times that these matters have been debated in the Assembly. And, the Greens members and the Labor members, from my recollection, have supported those.

As Mr Davis said, his letter was a Greens party letter. He said that it was the Greens; it has the Greens logo on it. He said that it was paid for by the Greens. He also said that its purpose was to promote the federal candidates. The purpose of the letter was to go out there and promote the federal candidates. That is fine, and Mr Davis is entitled to do that. The advice in the letter from the Clerk that we received in April, warned us about mixing the streams between what we do as politicians—as advocates for the Greens cause and the Liberal cause—and as MLAs. If Mr Davis had not put his office address on it, this would not be an issue. The problem is that he is in a situation where he is putting a letter out promoting, as he said in his own words here, federal candidates. He is electioneering for federal candidates; he has admitted that. It was paid for by the Greens. It was authorised by the Greens. The problem is that he is using his Assembly office, essentially, as his campaign office. If you look at this letter, and where it emanates from and who you have to contact by phone or by email, you see that it is his Assembly office.

The reality is that if you received this correspondence—I do not know how many thousands he has distributed—and you were going to respond to this letter, you would wonder who sent this letter: “Who is he? Where is it coming from?” It is very clear in this letter—no matter whether it is paid for and on on—that he is promoting federal candidates, and that the constituent who gets it will see that the address that is printed on it is: ACT Legislative Assembly, Canberra, ACT, 2601. It then has his parliamentary email and his parliamentary phone number. I assume he put his address on there because he wants people to contact him. Why else would you put your address on there? Either to say this is where this letter is coming from—

**Mr Davis:** Yes—

**MR HANSON:** other than to say, this is where the letter is coming from. That is a breach. He just said, “Yes,” Madam Speaker. I just said where this letter is coming from, and he said, “Yes.” He has said in this place that the purpose of the letter is to campaign to promote the federal candidates. And he said, “Yes, this letter comes from the ACT Assembly.” But it is all—

**Mr Davis:** Point of order. Madam Speaker, Mr Hanson has taken an interjection from me, and verbed me out of context. I said the letter came from me, not from my Legislative Assembly office.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, if somebody has a point of order, there is no commentary, so remain seated.

**MR DAVIS:** I ask Mr Hanson to withdraw.

**MR HANSON:** Well firstly, Madam Speaker, on the point of order, I think that what I said is quite right. His interjection reaffirmed what I was saying. But also, that is a debating point. He can seek leave to speak again, and he is welcome to, but there is no point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** This is a point of order; it is not a debate. There is no point of order. I ask everybody to be very mindful, firstly, of interjections and also how they conduct themselves through this debate.

**MR HANSON:** What we have seen play out here is, as Mr Davis has admitted, that the purpose of the letter was to promote federal candidates. So it is actually a campaign for federal candidates. And he said that, yes, it came from that address. When I said it, he interjected, but it is clear that that is what it is. Why else would you put an address on the letter? So people know who it has come from and if they want to contact them, they can. People would think, “Great, federal Greens. I am going to get on board with that. Who do I call? Who do I email? Mr Davis’s office.” So it is a problem. I think it is one that we need to address.

We are responding to this because it has come from advice from the Clerk. The Clerk gave us this letter that said not to mix the streams, and I think it is clear in this regard that Mr Davis has. If we were to agree that this matter should be referred, clearly that will be through the Speaker. But I think it behoves all of us to say, “Yes; we are going to uphold the rules of this place. The Clerk has given us advice; we are going to adhere to that and we will stand by that.” You cannot have, what Mr Davis seems to be saying through this debate, this sort of playing tricky with the rules.

He is defending his position. Are we going to agree that, yes, you can just ad-lib what the Clerk said—that you can try and bend the rules or try and twist the rules? Are we agreeing that you can try and take advantage of the rules. Surely members do not support that. Let’s back the Clerk up, here. The Clerk has given us advice based on the laws of the land. Let’s back up what the Clerk is saying. Let’s adhere to the rules and say, “Yes this is a problem, and we as an Assembly commit that we are not going to use our offices to campaign for the federal election.” So, I encourage you to support this so that, as an Assembly we can say, “Yes, this is something that we should not be doing,” and refer it.

Now, it would be for the Commissioner for Standards to determine whether there has been a breach, but in our view, the Clerk’s letter says and reconfirms that you do not use your office to campaign, and then Mr Davis says, in here, “Yes, the purpose of the letter was to promote the federal candidate.” He said that and the letter has his address on it. It directly says, “This is who it is from, and this is who you contact.” It is a problem, is it not? Let’s face it: it is a problem and as an Assembly we need to refer it, because that says quite clearly, “As an Assembly we will adhere to the rules, and we will not try and use our offices or the resources of the Assembly.” Mr Davis has got it wrong. He needs to admit that, not try to double down and obscure that. If he has got this wrong—

**Ms Clay:** He literally said he will self-refer. Are you listening?

**MR HANSON:** That is right. He has said he is going to refer himself. That is fine. I do not see why he would not support this motion if he were going to refer himself anyway. It would be odd if, as an Assembly, we would say that we would not support this motion if he were going to refer himself.

**Mr Davis:** Because I am just going to do what Ms Lawder could have done without the headline.

**MR HANSON:** Mr Davis continues to interject. I do not think he is helping himself or his cause by doing so. It is quite clear. We should all stick by the rules. We have had debates in here before about referrals to the Commissioner for Standards. I think it is important that we all reconfirm our adherence to the standing orders, to the Code of Conduct and the fact that we will comply. So I support Ms Lawder's motion today; I think that we all should. There is nothing to hide here. The Commissioner for Standards will hopefully do his job.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (10.31), in reply: The motion is quite clear. The motion refers to the fact that Mr Davis has included his Assembly contact details on the letter distributed throughout the electorate. I seek leave to table a copy of the letter to avoid any doubt as to what is included.

Leave granted.

**MS LAWDER:** I present the following paper:

Letter from Mr Davis to constituents—Screen shot of Facebook post.

This is an opportunity for this Assembly, for every member of this Assembly, to demonstrate their tolerance, or lack of, for this type of behaviour—to demonstrate that they will set the highest possible levels of culture, of tone and of adherence to the rules. Instead, Madam Speaker, what we are seeing is a bit of a “we’re not going to support this” and talking about process. Mr Rattenbury went straight to process, not to the substance of the issue here. He did not try to defend Mr Davis in any way.

This is about setting a standard, a standard which is already set and which we have all agreed to in the code of conduct, a standard which is reaffirmed and reminded to us by the Clerk every time there is a federal election. Every time! If you do not understand it, you go and get advice.

Mr Davis tried to muddy the waters. There is no mention, no issue here, about who letterboxed it or who paid for it. The issue is the inclusion of the ACT Legislative Assembly contact details on this letter, in effect, using the ACT Legislative Assembly, where we are today, as a campaign office. Because if you have a question or a comment or a concern about this letter that has been circulated, that has been letterboxed in the community, who are you going to call? Who are you going to call? Ah, the contact details on the letter, which, as I have already said, uses this building, that office, the climate controlled office, the desk, the chair, the phone, the email and IT systems: the staff paid for to do ACT business. There is no mention in Mr Davis's

letter about “contact me about local issues”. “Local issues” does not appear in this letter. It is all about his federal counterparts with his ACT Legislative Assembly contact details. It is not about local issues. It is about campaigning from his office here in the Legislative Assembly.

Just imagine, Madam Speaker, the outrage if I or one of my colleagues had such a letter about Senator Seselja, for example, or one of our other candidates in the Assembly using our ACT Legislative Assembly contact details. Can you imagine how Labor and the Greens would go to town about this breach of the code of conduct, about this breach that is going right against the Clerk’s letter about—as Mr Hanson referred to it—the crossing of the streams?

In effect, what these members and this Assembly are saying, by not supporting this motion—not setting the tone and not saying “This is not perhaps right and we want the Commissioner for Standards to look at it”—is that any of us could do that. Is that really what you are saying—that any of us could use our ACT Legislative Assembly office to campaign using our Assembly details? This is not my understanding of the way in which we do—and should—operate!

That is why I am asking the Assembly to support the motion, to demonstrate that they want to have this looked at—whether the Commissioner for Standards will find one way or the other, but to remove any doubt. That would give an example to all of us as to what is or is not acceptable going forward. This is not what I understand to be in keeping with the ACT members of the Legislative Assembly code of conduct—which I quoted from earlier—that we all reaffirmed not long after we were elected, and which was reminded to us by the Clerk in the letter circulated on 11 April, making it quite clear what is and is not acceptable.

That is why I want the Commissioner for Standards to look at it. That is why this is an opportunity for the Assembly to say whether or not it feels it is appropriate—not judge Mr Davis, necessarily—that the Commissioner for Standards should look at this. This is an opportunity to set the highest possible standards. Isn’t it funny, Madam Speaker, that those who speak the most about integrity are often the ones that feel they can flout the rules and do whatever they see fit? I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**Mr Davis:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order.

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

**Mr Davis:** Ms Lawder’s motion asked for the issue to be referred to the Commissioner for Standards because, in her view, there is a question to be answered here. In her closing remarks, she sought to answer them, editorialising her inquiry that she would be asking for. I ask her to withdraw.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order, Mr Davis.

I have been given some advice. The Assembly granted leave. By granting leave you suspend standing orders and you suspend continuing resolution 5AA. If the motion

was passed, it would be up to the Speaker to transmit the resolution to the Commissioner for Standards. The commissioner no doubt would then approach Ms Lawder and Mr Davis about his considerations with regard to the matter and whether he would pursue it or not. Also, the overwhelming majority of referrals have been directly from a person through the Clerk or directly to the Commissioner for Standards. In days past, those referrals came through the Speaker. In the last Assembly that standing order was changed to make it go directly through the Clerk or directly to the Commissioner for Standards. I hope that provides some level of clarity.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **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) (10.39): I rise yet again to provide the Assembly with an update on the COVID-19 situation in the ACT and the actions taken by the government to protect the health and wellbeing of Canberrans.

Since my last update on 5 April 2022, the COVID-19 situation in the ACT has remained relatively stable and our public health teams have continued their preparations for the upcoming winter season. As always, I would like to thank Canberrans for their continued efforts to protect themselves and the people around them from COVID-19. Canberrans have been outstanding in adhering to the latest public health advice and practising COVID-smart behaviours. As a result, we are well placed in our transition to managing COVID-19 differently.

The COVID-19 situation across Australia has also remained relatively stable over the last month, and case numbers across most states appear to have reached a peak and begun to plateau. The ACT government will continue to work with other jurisdictions and consider advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, or AHPPC, as we move through the national plan to transition Australia's response to COVID-19 and into the winter season.

Here in the ACT, as at 8 pm on 1 May, there have been a total of 105,739 cases since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. There are 5,725 active cases, with 66 COVID patients admitted to hospital, two of whom are in intensive care. Sadly, there have been 52 deaths since the start of the pandemic and the ACT government expresses its sincere condolences to the families and loved ones of these individuals. As at 9 am on 2 May, the ACT has conducted 994,339 negative tests, and there are 1,748 individuals who have declared as household contacts in the ACT.

As I have previously noted, positive rapid antigen test results for COVID-19 have been collected by ACT Health since 8 January 2022, through the introduction of an online rapid antigen test declaration form that members of the public are asked to complete if they test positive on a RAT. All RAT declarations, including those with limited demographic information, have been included in ACT Health's daily COVID-19 case counts from 8 January.



During routine data cleaning work conducted by ACT Health in April, 846 incomplete RAT declaration forms were identified and removed from the cumulative ACT COVID-19 cases total. These incomplete forms contained limited demographic information and/or the legal declaration had not been completed. Records with insufficient demographic information including name, date of birth and phone number were removed by ACT Health as these records could not uniquely identify an individual. With this limited information, ACT Health was unable to determine if the person had already completed a RAT declaration, nor contact the person for case processing and therefore could not apply their standard business rules, such as confirming if the person had, in fact, sought a confirmatory PCR test.

In addition, records were removed because individuals did not complete the legal declaration section in the RAT form. There are three components to the legal declaration including stating that the person has tested positive to COVID-19 in a RAT test or interstate PCR test, acknowledging that the information collected by ACT Health may be shared with other government agencies, and declaring that the information provided is correct to the best of the person's knowledge.

Madam Speaker, the ACT's world-leading COVID-19 vaccination program continues to provide Canberrans with good protection from the risks of COVID-19. I am pleased to report that in the ACT 80.7 per cent of five to 11-year-olds have been vaccinated with a first dose of the vaccine, and currently, 65.2 per cent are up-to-date with their vaccination, having received a second dose; 97 per cent of all Canberrans aged five years and older have now completed their primary vaccination course; and 75.1 per cent of eligible Canberrans, those 16 and older, have now received a booster or third dose.

Following approval by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, we have also begun providing second booster doses, or winter doses, to eligible Canberrans. These additional booster doses will ensure that people at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are as protected as possible as we head into the winter season. This includes people aged 65 and over, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over, residents of aged or disability care settings, and people aged 16 and over who are immunocompromised. As of 1 May, 13,451 eligible Canberrans have received their second booster dose. I encourage everyone who is eligible to come forward to boost their protection against COVID-19.

I would also like to take the opportunity to encourage Canberrans to get their flu vaccination. Flu vaccines will be particularly important this year, as it is expected that fewer public health restrictions and the return of international arrivals will drive an increase in flu and other respiratory illnesses this winter. Influenza can be deadly. I strongly encourage Canberrans to protect themselves, their families and their community by getting their flu vaccination.

Canberra Health Services are experiencing a high demand across their health facilities while facing staff shortages due to COVID-19, other illnesses and approved leave. To boost resources in more acute areas, including the emergency department, some changes to less acute services have been made. This includes, from 26 April, the AIS

arena COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic has been reduced to operate between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm seven days a week. There were 143 vaccination appointments that needed to be changed and the ACT Health bookings team has contacted all affected patients. The AIS vaccination clinic will continue to offer a walk-in service during opening hours.

Madam Speaker, the ACT government's equity to access program also continues to make a vital contribution to our vaccination program. The program ensures that every member of our community can be vaccinated and protected against COVID-19, regardless of their personal circumstances. The equity to access program was scheduled to wind up at the end of April 2022, but we are now looking at an extension to 30 June. In 2022, the equity to access program has administered a total of 879 COVID-19 vaccine doses through a combination of in-reach vaccinations to homebound individuals and pop-up clinics arranged through non-government partner organisations. Of these, 53 have been winter, or second, booster doses; and 506 have been first booster doses.

In the past month, suburban pop-up clinics have taken place in dispersed locations throughout Canberra including Lyneham, Charnwood, Kambah and Turner. In addition, the equity to access program provides opportunistic vaccinations across the ACT's public and private hospital network to inpatients who are not up to date with their vaccinations.

Canberra Health Services also collaborates internally with services such as mental health teams to provide home visits to some community members for a COVID-19 vaccination. The program has also been providing in-reach vaccinations to the Alexander Maconochie Centre and Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

Canberra Health Services has also partnered with Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to deliver a needle phobia clinic. The needle phobia clinic is for community members who have a severe needle phobia and are unable to receive a vaccination through mainstream clinics or primary care. The clinic has been in operation since December 2021 and has vaccinated 17 people with at least one dose, with 15 of these having received a second dose and three people booked to receive boosters by the end of April 2022. The clinic also provides an avenue for patients to receive other vaccinations, or blood tests to monitor their health, while under sedation for their COVID-19 vaccinations that they would otherwise be unable to access.

I want to thank the staff working to provide this important service. Many of the people accessing this clinic have had traumatic experiences during previous vaccination attempts. The feedback we have received tells us that being able to access this dedicated service has had an enormous impact on these individuals' health and wellbeing.

Madam Speaker, on 31 March, AHPPC published its statement on winter season preparedness. The statement recommended that any changes to TTIQ requirements, or test, trace, isolate and quarantine, should only be made following the anticipated peak of the current Omicron BA.2 variant. The commonwealth Chief Medical Officer subsequently advised the federal Minister for Health that Australia has reached the

peak of the Omicron BA.2 wave and that, therefore, it would be an appropriate time for jurisdictions to change the way close contacts—that is, household contacts—are managed.

The ACT Chief Health Officer considered this advice in the context of the ACT's epidemiological situation and advised the ACT government that such changes could be implemented here in the ACT. As a result, on 21 April, the ACT government announced changes to TTIQ requirements, including the management of household contacts, in line with the advice of AHPPC and to align with New South Wales and Victoria wherever possible.

With effect from 11.59 pm on 26 April, household contacts are no longer required to complete a mandatory quarantine period provided they comply with certain risk mitigation requirements for a period of seven days from the last time someone in the household tested positive for COVID-19, with the date of collection of the test regarded as day zero.

A household contact is now required to: advise ACT Health that they are a household contact by completing a COVID-19 online declaration form; wear a face mask in all indoor spaces when outside of the home, if aged 12 years and over; work or study from home, where it is practical to do so, and where it suits the employer and employee; and notify their employer and/or educational facility that they are a household contact. This will assist employers and educational facilities to determine whether the household contact can work or study from home or can attend the facility following an assessment of risks in accordance with work health and safety obligations.

If it is not practical to work or study from home, and there is mutual agreement to attend work or study, the contact must undertake COVID-19 testing and return a negative result in the 24 hours prior to returning to work or study and then every 48 hours if ongoing attendance is required. If needing to attend a gathering that is unavoidable, they must have returned a negative COVID-19 test result in the 24 hours prior to attending. Finally, household contacts must not enter a high-risk setting such as an aged-care facility or hospital unless they reside there or need care, noting that high-risk settings can consider granting exemptions from this requirement.

Household contacts are also expected to practise COVID-smart behaviours and, as much as possible, avoid attending crowded places, spending prolonged periods of time in indoor spaces with others and interacting with people who are at higher risk of severe illness. Any household contacts who are symptomatic or cannot comply with the risk mitigation requirements will be required to quarantine for seven days.

The ACT government acknowledges that quarantine requirements have resulted in workforce pressures in many workplaces and businesses. We hope that these changes will ease those pressures and assist Canberra businesses to return to normal operations in a safe and considered way. It is also our hope that these changes will reduce the burden of quarantine on families and individuals, improving the wellbeing of Canberrans.

It is important, however, for the community to still be conscious that household contacts continue to be at greatest risk of developing COVID-19 compared with other people in the community. Canberrans should therefore continue to do everything they can to minimise their movement within the community and exposure to others, particularly those at highest risk of severe disease, if they are household contacts. Workplaces and businesses also need to ensure that they put in place appropriate work health and safety protocols if there is mutual agreement for an employee who is a household contact to return to the workplace.

It is important to note that all asymptomatic household contacts will be allowed to temporarily leave quarantine to vote in the federal election on 21 May. However, they must wear a face mask and return a negative RAT result in the 24 hours prior to attending a polling place.

There are currently no changes to isolation requirements for confirmed COVID-19 cases. Individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 must continue to isolate for seven days. Once recovered, they do not need to isolate, quarantine or test for 12 weeks from their date of clearance. ACT Health does advise recovered cases to still stay at home if they develop any respiratory illness symptoms during the 12-week period to avoid transmission of other viruses, particularly as we head into winter.

In addition, from 11.59 pm on 29 April, the ACT government removed quarantine requirements for unvaccinated international travellers intending to travel to the ACT. It should be noted, however, that these travellers may still be required to seek approval from their port of entry to onward travel to the ACT as not all jurisdictions have removed quarantine requirements for unvaccinated international travellers. All international travellers are still strongly encouraged to get a COVID-19 test within 24 hours of arrival in Australia if they intend to travel to the ACT.

Madam Speaker, the ACT government has also made changes to COVID-19 risk mitigation requirements within schools and early childhood education and care settings for the start of term 2. From 11.59 pm on 25 April, the requirement for face masks to be worn in indoor spaces at schools and early childhood education and care settings was removed from the public health direction.

It is still recommended that masks be worn by adults and students in years 7 to 12 when in small indoor settings, excluding general classroom settings, where physical distancing is not possible, when required to do so through a public health direction or when otherwise required by employers as part of work health and safety arrangements.

Staff and visitors to school sites will no longer need to check in using the Check In CBR app under a public health direction. Schools and ECECs are asked to continue displaying their QR codes for voluntary use and for use by event organisers who hire school facilities where there is a requirement for Check In CBR to be used.

School systems and independent schools and ECECs now need to consider the potential implications of these changes and review their COVID-safety measures. In

regard to ACT public schools, the Deputy Chief Minister announced that they would maintain term 1 restrictions for the first two weeks of term 2 to enable appropriate planning and consultation to take place.

The standing exemption for essential workers has been revoked due to the changes in the management of household contacts, which permits individuals to attend their workplace under similar requirements previously outlined in the standing exemption.

However, for the sake of the public record, I note that, prior to these changes, the ACT had extended the essential worker standing exemption for household contacts to federal election workers. This included any person employed or engaged on behalf of the Australian Electoral Commission to perform functions of election delivery. The updated standing exemption commenced from midday on 14 April. This was in addition to previously exempted workers in food and grocery support, freight and transport, veterinary services, community pharmacy and national security.

A temporary exemption was also issued to the Canberra Airport from 6 am on 14 April until 11.59 pm on 25 April. This temporary exemption covered security workers and airline check-in and baggage workers and reflected the workforce pressures being experienced at the Canberra Airport at a time of increased demand for services over the school holidays, Easter and Anzac Day long weekend.

Madam Speaker, for an increasing number of Canberrans, COVID-19 can lead to debilitating symptoms that last for months after the initial infection has subsided. For some people, this can include fatigue, poor sleep, reduced respiratory capacity and very reduced exercise tolerance. These symptoms can impact a person's ability to return to work, exercise and engage in social activities and family commitments.

The recently opened post-COVID recovery clinic at the University of Canberra Hospital is taking an individualised approach to assisting patients with symptoms impacting on their daily lives more than 12 weeks after contracting the virus. Eligible patients are aged 16 and over and considered clinically stable and appropriate to undertake a physical rehabilitation program having identified achievable, time appropriate rehabilitation goals.

These patients can seek a referral from their GP and are then supported through a specialist rehabilitation program run by an interprofessional team, seeing a rehab medicine specialist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, exercise physiologist and social worker. Most patients also have a respiratory assessment through the department of respiratory and sleep medicine at Canberra Hospital. There is significant ongoing collaboration between the respiratory team and the team at the post-COVID recovery clinic.

The rehabilitation is provided at UCH with an option for home-based functional rehabilitation if needed. The rehabilitation pathway may include one-on-one therapy; group therapy, including pulmonary rehabilitation; self-management education; and telehealth interventions. This clinic is playing an important role to help Canberrans return to their pre-COVID activities and live a full and happy life.

The Chief Health Officer has provided me with her 25th and 26th 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 team in the 30 days to 6 April and up until 2 May.

In her report of 2 May, the Chief Health Officer has advised the government that she intends to revoke the public health directions that require vaccination for workers in the health care and education settings in the ACT from 11.59 pm on 13 May. The revocation of these vaccination requirements is based on updated advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee on mandatory vaccination for high-risk settings, which no longer extends to workers in health care settings and does not recommend mandatory vaccination for education workers.

The Chief Health Officer is also satisfied that the high level of vaccination coverage across the eligible population aged five years and over has reduced the risk of outbreaks and poor health outcomes in primary schools and early childhood education and care settings. Vaccination requirements will still be in effect for workers in aged care, disability and other care as the risk of outbreaks and severe illness among people they care for remains high. This approach is also consistent with the national advice. The Chief Health Officer will continue to monitor the need for vaccination for these workers to ensure our public health directions remain proportionate.

Madam Speaker, the health and wellbeing of our community remains of the utmost importance and the ACT government will continue to provide Canberrans with up-to-date public health advice as we head into winter. While we acknowledge that changes to test, trace, isolate and quarantine will likely lead to an increase in cases in the community, these changes will assist businesses and workplaces that have experienced significant staff shortages and will improve the wellbeing of individuals who become household contacts.

The ACT's nation-leading vaccination coverage and continued compliance with public health advice puts us in a great position to be able to tackle the winter season, and the challenges this may bring. I present the following papers:

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

Chief Health Officer Report 25—April 2022, dated 8 April 2022.

Chief Health Officer Report 26—May 2022, dated 2 May 2022.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)—ACT Government response—Update—Ministerial statement, 3 May 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Education—Set up for Success early learning program 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) (11.00): Today I am providing an update to the Legislative Assembly on the phase 1 implementation plan for Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT.

Every child deserves a great education and the life chances that flow from it. Education has the potential to drastically alter life trajectories for the better. The investment we make in the education of children and young people is incredibly important and deeply rewarding. The ACT government launched Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT in August 2020.

Set up for Success is a nation-leading plan for early childhood education in the ACT and was developed following targeted consultation with educators, early childhood experts, children and families. It is based on overwhelming national and international evidence about the benefits of quality early learning.

Early learning is about setting children up to thrive. Every child starts life with a different set of circumstances that impact on their development in their critical early years. Improving access to high quality early childhood education that is affordable is central to achieving this, as is partnering with community and health services to ensure that the unique needs of each child are met.

When children participate in quality early learning, they are more likely to have a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue on to further education, and fully participate in employment and community life as adults.

I was privileged to work with early childhood stakeholders to develop Set up for Success, and the government continues to work with these stakeholders to implement this strategy. Most importantly, we continue to work with children and families directly. Hearing the voices of young people is a core part of developing and implementing Set up for Success. I am grateful to everyone who has been, and continues to be, a part of delivering this strategy. I thank you all.

As part of the commitment to provide a holistic educational pathway for children from their early years until they turn 18, Set up for Success aligns with the Future of Education: An ACT Education Strategy for the Next 10 Years. The Future of Education is delivering an education system that supports all children and young people to overcome barriers and to succeed.

Today I wish to present to the Assembly an update on the key achievements under the Set up for Success phase 1 implementation plan. The implementation plan affirms the ACT government's ongoing commitment to the foundations of Set up for Success, developed in partnership with the community.

The government is currently delivering on the first phase of its commitment to providing universal access to free quality early childhood education for all three-year-olds, by providing up to 500 places for priority children—those who need it most—to access two days per week of free, quality early learning. Up to 100 places are also available for three-year-old children in Koori preschools, to provide a culturally safe and supportive early learning experience.

This government is committed to providing one day a week of free, quality early education for all three-year-olds in the ACT by 2024. This commitment is being implemented in phases, starting with children who will benefit the most. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that, as at 13 April 2022, 431 priority three-year-olds have been referred into the initiative. Since the initiative commenced, 353 children have accepted a place in a partnering early childhood education and care service; 43 children have been referred and placement processes are underway; 35 children did not accept a place in the initiative but instead engaged in alternative pathways or moved from the ACT prior to commencement; 147 children are currently accessing early childhood education and care through the initiative; and 205 children have transitioned out of the initiative since it commenced in 2020, primarily due to starting four-year-old preschool.

Last October, the ACT government announced an \$11.9 million package of investment towards delivering initiatives in phase 1 of Set up for Success. This funding is to ensure that this important work progresses and provides support to the early childhood education and care sector, as the community adapts to the realities of living with COVID-19.

Early childhood educators work incredibly hard, and it is important that everyone in the community understands the incredible value of this work. This government wants to make sure that educators are valued, and that the system reflects this. The implementation plan outlines the initiatives of phase 1 and connects to the four foundations of Set up for Success.

Through the fair start for every child foundation, the government is moving to providing children with access to quality early childhood education that supports positive outcomes across their life, working towards providing two years of quality early childhood education prior to formal school for all children in the ACT, and providing culturally safe, relevant and supportive learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

As part of the commitment to ensuring equity of access, the government has employed two early childhood community coordinators to further strengthen relationships with priority families, and support early childhood education and care services and warm referrers across the ACT. Two early years engagement officers have also been employed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to connect with child and family centres, Koori preschools and schools.

Through the valuing educators, values children foundation, the government is delivering 12 more early childhood teacher degree scholarships to encourage more



people to do an early childhood degree; equipping educators with the skills to support children with diverse needs and experiences, including delivering a suite of resources in trauma responsive practice; delivering more professional learning, coaching and mentoring opportunities; and recognising the important contribution of the sector's workforce, which also forms part of this government's commitment towards gender equity and the ACT Women's Plan 2016-26.

We are currently progressing legislative reform work to recognise early childhood education in the Education Act 2004, and developing an ACT-specific early childhood education and care workforce strategy to support a sustainable and supported ECEC workforce here in the territory.

Through the every child has a story foundation, the government is designing systemic supports for ACT-wide transitions to support collaborative approaches between early childhood education and care services and schools, which help share the knowledge of a child's story; and fostering inclusive environments that embrace diversity so that all children feel safe and valued.

The government has delivered preschool pathways resources for families to help them support their child's smooth transition to preschool in 2022, and has employed four dedicated preschool pathways partners to work with ECECs and government preschools to provide coaching and mentoring supports for educators in transitions and inclusive education practices for children with additional needs.

A pilot has begun for an approach to effective transitions for priority three-year-old children into four-year-old preschool. This pilot will inform the development of a territory-wide transitions methodology and framework to minimise the impact of transitions on children and families and give continuity to the work and relationships formed by early childhood educators.

Through the working together for children foundation, the government is building stronger system connections to help community services to connect with families through a "no wrong door" approach; embedding communities of kinship and care into Koori preschool by valuing the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and considering how the ACT's planning decisions can reflect the needs of children in the territory's growing communities.

The key achievements I have outlined today represent the success so far in implementing the first phase of this 10-year strategy. The impacts of phase 1 will be evaluated and measured to understand the progress made, and to inform phases 2 and 3.

Set up for Success is helping to create an accessible and equitable early childhood education system, where the workforce is valued and supported to mature and excel, where children transition seamlessly between settings that welcome them warmly, and where systems wrap around children and families. This strategy provides a clear and evidence-based road map to get us there.

I want to conclude by again thanking all of those who have been a part of developing this strategy and who are contributing to the implementation of phase 1. Early childhood education is one of the most powerful levers that exist for building and strengthening an equitable, inclusive and connected community. Contributing to Set up for Success is contributing to this kind of community. I present the following paper:

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT—Phase One Implementation Plan—Ministerial statement, Tuesday, 3 May 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **High-risk weather season—summary 2021-22 Ministerial statement**

**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) (11.10): I rise today to provide the Assembly and the community with a summary of the 2021-22 high-risk weather season for bushfires and storms. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the ACT Emergency Services Agency—ESA—and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service—PCS—for their collaborative efforts in preparing for and protecting the ACT community during the 2021-22 high-risk weather season.

Although it proved to be another challenging season, filled with diverse incidents ranging from storm response to COVID-19 operations, Canberra remained well informed and protected, thanks to the dedication of our hardworking volunteers and staff. I would like to pass on my sincere gratitude to all of those involved in keeping the Canberra community safe.

The Australian government Bureau of Meteorology declared a La Niña alert for the 2021-22 summer period. Much like last year, it has been a very wet season, with higher than average rainfall, and our community, personnel and volunteers have overcome some significant challenges resulting from increased storm activity.

With above-average rainfall and cooler conditions this season, the risks from heatwave and bushfire to the ACT were deemed “average” in comparison to historic records. While increased rainfall events reduced the overall risk of forest fire ignitions over the summer months, the rapid growth in grasslands and intermediate hot days meant that the risk of grass fires was still prevalent in the ACT community.

While the wet weather conditions decreased the risk of grass and forest fires within the ACT, the dedication and hard work of ACT Rural Fire Service volunteers and

supporting services to remain prepared and ready throughout the season meant that the community was safe and well protected against this risk.

As a result of the great work done by rural landholders, land managers and PCS, through slashing, physical removal and grazing, the risk of grass fires was also substantially reduced. I would like to commend the community for their diligence in undertaking preparedness activities and completing their emergency survival plans.

The ACT State Emergency Service has supported the Canberra community through another hazardous storm season driven by the La Niña climate. The 2021-22 storm season saw ACT SES respond to over 4,000 requests for assistance calls. Notably, the northern region of Canberra was hit with a severe weather event on Monday, 3 January 2022, which required a coordinated response from across the ACT government. This extreme weather event saw our emergency service volunteers and staff respond to more than 1,000 requests for assistance over the following week.

Our ACT SES personnel were supported by volunteers and staff from across the ESA, including from ACT Fire & Rescue and the ACT Rural Fire Service, as well as support from ACT Policing, New South Wales State Emergency Service, Evoenergy, PCS, and Transport Canberra and City Services, to respond to jobs that included leaking roofs, minor flooding and securing areas where trees had fallen on cars and homes.

I would like to extend a special thankyou to our jurisdictional counterpart colleagues from New South Wales SES for their assistance during this severe weather event. I am pleased to advise that we were able to return that level of support and help strengthen the cross-border relationship even further by providing ground and incident management support to assist in the flood recovery efforts across New South Wales this season.

Particularly throughout March 2022, a number of ESA task forces, including members from across the agency, were deployed into New South Wales. Ground support activities consisted of temporary roof repairs, sandbagging, tree operations and water inundation, enabling local New South Wales SES crews to gain some much-needed rest in a region that continues to be impacted by heavy rainfall and flooding.

Incident Management Team specialists from the ESA provided critical functional roles, including planning, public information, mapping and incident control. Additionally, there were deployments of the specialist intelligence-gathering helicopter for aerial support and intelligence. A huge thankyou to all of the volunteers that take time out of their personal lives to help not only their community but communities across Australia. You are an outstanding reflection of the agency and the giving nature of Australians.

With La Niña expected to persist well into autumn, we are anticipating above-average rainfall and below-normal fire potential to continue into the cooler months. This is a timely reminder to all Canberrans that, although the period of heightened storm activity has ended, storms can happen all year round. It is important to remain prepared and know what to do if you become affected by a storm by ensuring that

your gutters are clear, preparing a survival plan kit and understanding the risks associated with your area.

The ACT government has made considerable investments in advancing the use of technology to support our preparedness and response to natural hazards. As I have highlighted to members previously, recent technological investments include the installation of fire detection cameras on all four of the ACT fire towers; the trial of automated rain gauge alerting for potential flash flooding in Sullivans Creek; and the introduction of an ESA radio positioning platform which improves the safety of our frontline personnel by allowing real-time viewing of the location of any radio user who has activated the emergency duress button.

Many of Canberra's streams are in urbanised catchments and stream water levels can rise in a matter of minutes, giving little warning of the impending danger to lives and property. ACT Healthy Waterways, in partnership with ESA, ACT SES and the ACT Data Analysis Centre, are trialling a flash flood warning capability for the ACT.

Using the existing rainfall gauges and streamflow gauges across the ACT, the new capabilities within the ACT data lake are being used to provide an automated alerting service for ACT SES based on rainfall intensity and stream level changes. ACT government and the Bureau of Meteorology have numerous rain gauges in and around built-up areas across the ACT. The data from these rain gauges may be used to assist ACT SES and other government agencies make rapid operational decisions and increase the visibility of flash flood events as they happen to ensure that the Canberra community are prepared and safe.

In relation to aerial capability, the ACT, through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, contracted one light helicopter with specialist intelligence-gathering capability and two medium helicopters to provide dedicated aerial firefighting services to the ACT for the 2021-22 bushfire season. The use of the SIG helicopter for the season provided a valuable asset in the early detection and confirmation of active fires.

The high definition and infrared camera on board allows imagery to be streamed into the ESA incident management room in real time, providing critical fire line and hotspot information. This significantly enhances bushfire fighting operations and flood recovery efforts by allowing key decision-makers to better understand the extent of situations as they unfold. The SIG assisted New South Wales SES in the recent storm and flood events, providing data on flood level impacts and damage assessments.

Through its annual bushfire operations plan, PCS scheduled activities to manage fire fuels across the territory's parks and reserves, including prescribed burns, fire trail maintenance, vegetation control, stock grazing in grassy areas, and grass slashing. Thanks to the ongoing work and commitment of our fantastic PCS team, a number of these activities have been completed, noting that many scheduled burns were disrupted due to wet weather.

Prescribed burns can only be delivered under particularly favourable weather conditions to ensure both crew and public safety, but also to ensure that the desired

reduction in the fire fuels takes place. If conditions are too wet, too windy or too dry and hot, prescribed burning cannot be carried out. It is also important to consider the clear expert consensus that, while hazard reduction burns are a part of the toolkit, they are having less of an impact on reducing fire risk, especially as climate change makes seasonal conditions more extreme.

The ESA engaged in extensive preparedness and readiness activity in preparation for the 2021-22 bushfire and storm season. The ESA worked hard to increase community awareness through the “Be Emergency Ready” campaign. The campaign utilised a digital-first approach to engage with the Canberra community, as face-to-face engagements were reduced due to COVID-19 limitations.

As a result of the campaign, there were more than 37,000 visits to the Be Emergency Ready page on the ESA website. Additionally, 4,000 emergency survival plans, fact sheets and other emergency preparedness material were downloaded from the ESA website throughout the season. ESA also distributed the emergency survival plan discussion guide in the November 2021 *Our Canberra* printed newsletter, delivering important preparedness information to over 203,838 households.

The ESA continues to keep the community informed about all hazards through a number of platforms, including social media, radio, television and print media. The ESA’s social media channels have seen over 827,000 engagements since September 2021, and more than 86 alerts and warnings have been issued by the agency.

The government is acutely aware of the threat that natural hazards present to our city. Just reflecting on the last few years alone and the level of severity linked with extreme weather events, I would like to highlight the importance of continuing to make the investments needed to deal with this as our city grows.

To enable the government to target these investments, it is important that we continually seek information and knowledge from our experts. In this regard, I will be looking to the Multi-Hazard Advisory Council for contemporary advice on how to best prepare for and respond to emergencies using a multi-hazard approach, moving forward.

Although the high-risk weather season has officially come to an end, it is important to remember that emergencies can happen anywhere, anytime and without warning. Be emergency ready all year round by preparing a survival plan and kit, and understanding the risks associated with your area. I encourage all Canberrans to learn more about how they can be emergency ready by visiting [esa.act.gov.au](http://esa.act.gov.au).

I am consistently impressed with the adaptability of our volunteers and our personnel. Their ability to maintain operational readiness whilst responding to dynamic and unprecedented incidents is a true testament to their collaborative approach, community spirit and dedication.

Once again, thank you to all of our volunteers and staff across government for their unwavering commitment to prioritising the safety of Canberrans and our community. I present the following paper:

2021-22 High-Risk Weather Season (Bushfire and Storm)—Summary—  
Ministerial statement, Tuesday, 3 May 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.23): I would like to echo Minister Gentleman's thanks to our emergency services staff and volunteers, led by the ACT SES, for their work in supporting our west Belconnen community in the aftermath of the 3 January supercell storm.

It is not just in the moment of the emergency that ACT government is there for people in our community during an extreme weather event. The clean-up from this storm required a response from TCCS and ACT Parks and Conservation to literally thousands of calls for help. With power outages, there were many households who needed emergency relief.

ACT government established a community information hub in Higgins from 5 to 9 January, providing charging stations for electronic devices; ice for eskies; help to dispose of food waste; showers and washer-dryers; and connection to local food pantries and the Canberra Relief Network food and hygiene hampers and information.

What we have learned through past events such as the 2019-20 bushfires and public health restrictions in 2020 and 2021 informed the Community Services Directorate's response in January 2022.

I would also like to note that the supercell storm of January 2022 came in the wake of more than two years of government and community sector support for those people in our community most impacted by bushfires, smoke, hail and the ongoing COVID pandemic. Over a period of years, these events have barely left a moment to draw breath between disasters. Our entire community is exhausted, and that includes frontline workers in health, community services, emergency services and city services. In the midst of all of this, they have still found time to support our New South Wales neighbours through the recent floods, and they are thinking ahead to the next high-risk weather season.

I would like to thank all of the staff and volunteers at Community Services Directorate and VolunteeringACT for their emergency relief work in January 2022. These extreme weather events are distressing, and we will see more of these in our future as a result of climate change. But we are taking every opportunity to learn from these experiences so that we can work together as a community to protect those most at risk and reduce the impact on all of us.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Housing ACT—application process Ministerial statement**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.25): I rise today to update the Assembly on work happening at Housing ACT to enhance and improve their gateway services through the re-imagining gateway services project. This project is part of a series of major systems improvement projects that Housing ACT is implementing, and has now been further informed by lessons learned through the COVID pandemic lockdown.

Gateway Services is the public face of Housing ACT. This is where people go to access information regarding public and community housing, and to apply for public and community housing. Applying for public housing and completing all of the necessary paperwork can often be confusing and stressful. We understand that many people go through this process while also experiencing the stress of housing insecurity.

Gateway Services do an incredible job of responding to 23,000 presentations to the central access point at Nature Conservation House, located in Belconnen, each year, assessing 1,800 applications per year and preparing applications for the multidisciplinary panel which helps identify those applications that need to be given the highest priority.

During lockdown, Housing ACT's central access point had to make rapid adjustments to be able to continue services to existing housing tenants and to continue assessing new applications. In order to do this, Housing ACT continued to service the public through maintaining minimum staffing numbers on the floor; implementing successful working from home protocols; messaging changed arrangements through social media and other communication channels; and ensuring that the public had access to various forms of contact with Housing ACT staff. The central access point and other operational areas in Housing ACT remained open throughout the period.

Of course, the impacts of the pandemic have not stopped. The impacts of COVID-19 and increases to the cost of rent across Canberra mean that more people in our community need to access public housing for the provision of safe and affordable housing.

I want to acknowledge and thank Housing ACT staff who are still being impacted themselves by the pandemic. As is the case with many workplaces now, Housing ACT are dealing with a regular number of staff needing to take time off work to recover from having COVID or care for loved ones in the same situation. I am proud of how hard they have continued to work, not only to keep normal services going but to deliver on major reform projects to improve Housing's services to the community.

This re-imagining gateway services project is one of those important reforms and improvements. It will make the process of applying for public housing simpler and more efficient for people, as well as supporting good decision-making within Housing ACT.

At the moment, attending Housing ACT in Belconnen in person or sending in forms and supporting documents by email are the only way to apply for public and community housing. Attending Housing ACT in Belconnen in person can be difficult for some people, particularly those with mobility issues or who live in other parts of Canberra. Currently, throughout the application process, gathering all of the required documentation and providing it in person can result in multiple visits or multiple emails to Housing ACT.

This project will transform the Housing ACT application process. It will provide the option of applying online, including being able to upload the necessary documents. Housing ACT's research to identify the value of this change was affirmed through the pandemic, which demonstrated the importance of offering people more ways to apply for public and community housing, including a fully online process. We know that about a third of people who apply for housing would benefit from the option of being able to fully apply online.

Having an online application process will therefore significantly help some people to apply for public housing more easily. But I want to be really clear that Housing ACT will continue to provide its normal face-to-face services, because they are vital for many people who are not in a position to use online application processes. By providing the online application process, it will help to reduce the number of people who need to travel to Belconnen, which will, in turn, help Housing ACT staff to service those who do come to see them so that they can apply more easily and efficiently in person.

For those people able to use the online application process, it will allow them to be able to tell their story once and update their circumstances relevant to their application as they change, online. For example, this might include when they have a change in employment or the number of people in their household needing public housing.

The online application process will also assist Housing ACT to free up capacity to assist those still needing to keep their application up to date via phone, email and face-to-face contact. Together, these changes will help Housing ACT to have the most up-to-date information from people applying for housing assistance, and be able to identify and respond to a person's circumstances and needs more quickly.

The changes to the application process for housing are also being matched by work behind the scenes to improve digital record keeping. Together, these changes will improve the transparency of the application, assessment, and the allocation process for public housing. This project will therefore support Housing ACT staff to deliver services which are trauma informed so that clients only have to tell their story once throughout the application and the assessment process.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly about the importance of this re-imagining gateway services project. It is a core component of this government delivering two of the strategic goals of the 2018 Housing Strategy. Firstly, it helps to achieve part of goal number 3, strengthening social housing assistance, as this includes developing a new service delivery approach, client portal and online services.



Furthermore, this project responds to goal 2, reducing homelessness. Housing ACT will work with the homelessness and housing sector and Housing ACT clients to test ideas and be responsive to the input and feedback that they receive from the community as they continue through this project.

The re-imagining gateway services project will also deliver on the objectives of the model social landlord framework, which are to create a consistent client journey; provide information that is clear and easily understood; and systems to better inform clients on the status and the progress of their applications. This includes a timely notification system so that they can make more informed decisions on options available to them.

I am pleased to say that the benefit from improvements delivered through this project will also extend to the hardworking and dedicated staff of Housing ACT and include enhanced decision-making tools and processes. These enhanced processes will provide foundations for a continuous improvement focus to how Housing ACT staff are inducted and trained to provide more effective and efficient support to public housing tenants and applicants.

I am pleased to be able to inform the Assembly of this work, and look forward to working with Housing ACT tenants and the community sector as this policy work progresses and these changes are implemented. I look forward to updating the Assembly later in the year when the project results are live. I present the following paper:

Improving the public housing application process—Ministerial statement, Tuesday, 3 May 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (11.35): Mr Assistant Speaker, I am delighted finally to hear of a positive project of this nature occurring within Housing ACT to improve procedures and processes for all involved in what we know is a failing government department. And do not take my word for it; listen to all of the tenants who contact my office and that of others on a very regular basis.

Everything connected with housing—public and social housing, housing affordability, rental affordability—is a disaster under this Labor-Greens government. The rest of the country should take note of this, because this is what you get, Mr Assistant Speaker, when you put the left in charge of these matters. This is what you get: it is a disaster.

Now that we have two housing ministers, we could easily be forgiven for expecting much more, but it continues to be a disaster. But there is some optimism with these announcements today. We are aware that the need for social housing is growing. This is evident, with the waiting list now sitting at over 3,000 applicants.

Mr Assistant Speaker, you could be forgiven for believing that the government has, in the past, gone to great measures to make it as difficult to apply for public housing as it could possibly be—to put many speed bumps in place. It would be interesting to see, if the process were easier, what that waiting list would be like. Waiting times for standard housing are over four years. For high needs it is almost three, and for priority it is almost one year. I repeat: almost one year for priority.

To add to this pressure of finding social housing for over 3,000 applications, the internal transfer list for current tenants who are in unsuitable housing is over a thousand, with the standard waiting list at almost four years.

When some of the people on these waiting lists contact me, they say, “I’ve been driving around. I’m on this waiting list; I keep on writing. Can you write to the minister?” I say, “We can have a crack, but it’s a long list.” They drive around and they tell us about the vacant housing properties that they drive past month after month, and you can understand their frustration.

The need is growing, and that has been elaborated by the minister, even in this speech today. As Minister Vassarotti said, throughout an application process alone, multiple documents are required, which can result in multiple visits and emails, and some of the hard-copy documents and emails, certainly based on the feedback that we get, seem to get lost in the system. I know that the minister would have had the same feedback, and that is frustrating. It is frustrating for tenants who need to constantly provide the same documents. I certainly hope that this new system, when it is in place, will alleviate those problems.

It is great to hear that, over three years in to the 2018 Housing Strategy, goal number 3, including developing a new service delivery approach, client portal and online services, is finally taking shape. It is a deep disappointment that it has taken this long to get to this stage when, for years, applications could have gone online to help assist Housing ACT and applicants.

Hopefully, bringing Housing ACT online means that there will be fewer cases of lost paperwork, and for clients to need to submit documents only once and have better and more instant notifications. The Canberra Liberals hope that, by bringing Housing ACT applications and more online, it will include better responsiveness by Housing ACT to let applicants know where their application sits and what they have been approved for.

We hope that there will be an opportunity to provide easier reviews to be completed and an improved tracking system. Further, this announcement of digital record keeping finally brings Housing ACT into the 21st century, like most other government departments—less room for missing paperwork due to human error and better accountability for all.

We welcome this announcement; but we hope that, throughout the process, there is more communication, more accountability, and certainly a better system for implementing this than, for argument’s sake, for the rental rebate system project.

Although we applauded the concept, there were some major failures in its implementation, in the early stages, which resulted in a fair bit of pain for a number of individuals.

I truly hope that this project will improve the Housing ACT system and not further exacerbate the broken system that is currently Housing ACT. So many applicants and tenants are fed up with the system and want answers. I hope that this announcement today brings some optimism to many of those people who are frustrated.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Planning—age-friendly city plan Ministerial statement**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.40): I am honoured to rise in this Assembly today to provide an update on the work progressed under the Age-Friendly City Plan. Two years ago, the Age-Friendly City Plan was launched. This followed significant engagement to determine and outline priorities for action, through a large-scale survey and a series of community workshops over 2019.

I am having one of those nice moments that I have every now and then where I get to talk about work that is progressing on things that I used to follow while I was in the community sector.

The Age-Friendly City Plan is the product of a shared vision and ambition of the Canberra community and ACT government. It is founded in and charts our continuing progress on the ACT government's longstanding commitment to older Canberrans, which includes being accepted as a member of the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities in 2011.

At this halfway mark, the plan provides the ACT government with a touchstone for collaboration, engagement and accountability for older Canberrans across directorates. As part of the ACT government's commitment to older people, articulated in this plan, I welcome the opportunity to table the annual progress report in the Assembly today and make this annual ministerial statement.

This reporting covers the period of January to December 2021. I will now provide a summary of progress against each of the four focus areas. A full progress report update against each action will be made available on the Community Services Directorate website. Of the plan's 33 actions, I am delighted to report that 11 actions are complete, 19 are in progress, two are on hold and one is yet to commence.

The first of the four focus areas of the plan is Involved, Connected and Valued. This centres on fostering the active involvement and participation of older Canberrans, with the recognition that these individuals bring experience, wisdom and resources to enrich and strengthen our communities. In relation to actions identified in the plan, I am pleased to report the following.

When it comes to voice, representation and engagement, 33 per cent of YourSay panellists are over the age of 55, which is five per cent over and above the census population statistic from 2016 of 28 per cent. Older Canberrans are also regularly featured in ACT government communications, particularly in relation to COVID-19, and the achievements of older Canberrans are celebrated through the Chief Minister's Gold Awards, which recognise long-term contributions to the ACT.

In June of 2021 the ACT government worked with the community and local business in Weston Creek to hold a panel and expo for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day to raise awareness of supports and pathways available for older people in our community who may be experiencing abuse.

The ACT government is pleased to support grassroots intergenerational initiatives through the ACT Children's Week Committee and the ACT seniors grants, including the intergenerational penpal project and the combining of seniors and children's gymnastics classes.

We know that volunteering is a critical avenue for older people to contribute to the common good and participate in our community. The ACT government is providing volunteering opportunities for older Canberrans, in particular through the City Presentation Volunteer Program for Urban Parks and Places, and Domestic Animal Services.

In fact, people over the age of 61 have proved to be the most dedicated and consistent group of volunteers. The Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate has also commenced the TCCS volunteers gateway, making it easier for people to sign up for volunteering, especially those who require extra assistance.

Within the ACT public service, employees over the age of 60 make up nine per cent of the workforce. The ACT public service approach to flexible work is supporting older people to continue to work more flexibly and/or transition to retirement in a way that suits the individual.

Work on a refresh and update to the wellbeing dashboard, as part of the wellbeing indicators, to best understand and report on the experiences of older Canberrans, is scheduled to get underway this year. I also look forward to the recommencement of work on a campaign to enhance employment opportunities for older Canberrans among local business, which has been on hold to allow further consideration in light of COVID-related impacts on workforce and business.

The second focus area—Safe, Secure and Free from Abuse—relates to ensuring that older Canberrans can live free from discrimination, abuse and violence, and exploitation. In relation to actions identified here, the following action was completed in 2021. Amendments were passed in the Courts and Other Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2021 and are now in effect. These amendments give the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal additional powers to provide compensation and other remedies for the misuse of substitute decision-making powers. This means a separate action no longer needs to be pursued through the Supreme Court.

The following actions under focus area 2 are progressing. Significant interjurisdictional work is underway to harmonise enduring power of attorney laws in order to establish a national register of EPoAs. Data has been collected on the attitudes and perceptions of older Canberrans, particularly in relation to COVID-19, to inform work across the ACT government. And materials to enhance the awareness of ageism within the ACT public service are under development and due for release this year.

The third focus area of the plan—Information, Services and Supports which Embrace Diversity—sees efforts to ensure that older Canberrans have access to information and supports to promote wellbeing, active participation and independence. This also recognises the need for supports to be responsive to individual circumstances and affirming of older Canberrans' equal right to choice and control over their lives. Achievements in this focus area include people with dementia and their carers benefiting from enhanced dementia-friendly design principles and access at the Belconnen Access Canberra service centre and the Canberra Museum and Gallery.

The new Belconnen service centre was opened to the public on 17 January 2022. This centre was designed using feedback from the community, including Dementia Australia. I am pleased to advise that Dementia Australia reviewed the centre and praised the design of the new centre, providing the following feedback:

I greatly commend Access Canberra on designing a well-considered centre with many features to ensure it is dementia friendly.

Access Canberra have begun a training program for all service centre staff working on the front line, in partnership with Dementia Australia.

Canberra Museum and Gallery is upgrading the access ramp leading to its open collections gallery, due for completion in 2022. I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank Ms Lawder for bringing a motion to this Assembly last April to ensure close tracking of this action in the Age-Friendly City Plan.

The Re-envisioning Older Persons Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT Strategy 2022-26 has been drafted through consultation with the community and via a working group. And the older persons mental health community team model has undergone an extensive review to ensure that mental health services are meeting the needs of older people experiencing mental illness.

The Home Library Service has continued to ensure access to our crucial library services for people who face additional challenges in getting to libraries, particularly in light of the impact of COVID-19. It is something that I had a lot of feedback about from our community throughout last year.

The Mystery Box initiative, which started as a trial in 2020, continued with gusto in 2021, serving 1,700 people. Libraries ACT pivoted their bilingual story times, which have an intergenerational component, to move online as a result of the impacts of COVID-19. May I also congratulate COTA ACT and Libraries ACT on their joint online event in recognition of Grandparents Day last year.

The ACT government is pleased to be working collaboratively with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing to identify opportunities to support and promote regional community hubs, with a particular focus on the social inclusion and participation of older Canberrans. Options to undertake targeted promotion of the Nature Prescriptions Program are currently being actively explored.

The fourth and final focus area of the plan, A City for all Ages, centres on our city's infrastructure, such as transport, pathways and open spaces, and enabling older Canberrans to be active and involved. This also considers access to appropriate and affordable housing for older Canberrans. Within this focus area, older residents in Reid, Scullin, O'Connor and Chifley, and their visitors, will benefit from over \$2 million in age-friendly suburb upgrades over the next four years. Upgrades are informed by the input of older residents and support their activity and connectivity.

An innovative Street Forestry Program pilot tested how best to engage with residents to increase the uptake of street trees in low tree canopy areas and at locations vulnerable to urban heat. Given that older people are particularly at risk of heat stress, the urban forest and vegetation volume are critical to improving older people's comfort, social experience and participation.

Public transport familiarisation days are also opening up the world for older people in our community.

Accessible housing remains a priority under the ACT Housing Strategy Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program. At least 1,000 existing public housing properties will be renewed and at least 260 new dwellings added. As far as practical and where site conditions permit, all new properties are designed and constructed to AS 4299's class C adaptable standard or Livable Housing Australia's gold level.

In addition, the Ningulangu—meaning “belonging to home and place”—housing initiative will provide five two-bedroom units for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older persons in Dickson. This is the third development targeting this group. The online seniors card form introduced in 2020 has enhanced access to this initiative, with a total of 15,512 applications received since inception and a total of 7,245 new card holders in 2021.

The ACT government is committed to the need to scope on-demand and flexible bus services for Canberrans. I would just like to note that this is point 21.3 in appendix 4 of the parliamentary and governing agreement: “Scope on-demand and flexibus services to make it easier for people with mobility issues”. Flexible or non-fixed route services, including last mile, flexible and on-demand services, are critical to deliver a transport system that provides for the access and mobility needs of all Canberrans and are essential to complementing the connected service design of a modern public transport network.

Transport Canberra currently provides a popular flexible transport service using the special needs transport bus fleet's spare capacity during the non-peak service hours in the middle of the day. We know how much Canberrans value the accessibility that this

provides them and we are committed to improving the service. In this year's budget we invested \$1.4 million to both continue the current flexible bus service and undertake an evaluation of the program, including a feasibility study into a new on-demand model of delivery, with the addition of a booking app. This will ensure that we provide a service that continues to meet the diverse needs of our community.

Earlier I mentioned that it has been two years since the Age-Friendly City Plan's launch. Indeed, the life of this plan has coincided with and tracked the impact of COVID-19 in the ACT. In 2021 the ACT government responded to the needs of older people throughout the COVID pandemic through tailored and specific information sessions on COVID-19 measures, including vaccination for organisations representing and working with older Canberrans; emergency food relief for those in crisis and support for individuals in quarantine; close work with homelessness sector partners to continue to deliver essential services to vulnerable members of our community, including older Canberrans; free public transport for members of the public travelling to an ACT government mass vaccination clinic; and the Libraries ACT digital helpline to assist customers with online membership, e-resource access, basic computer problems and advice on the smart, safe and responsible use of digital tools.

The Age-Friendly City Plan is more than the sum of its 33 actions. This plan is a critical statement of commitments by the ACT government to older people in our community. To this end, broader work of the ACT government that has supported older people in 2021 includes funding through the Technology Upgrade Fund Grants Program and the Community Connections Grants Program to support digital skills training for older Canberrans, seniors' exercise programs and web upgrades for community organisations to increase ease and accessibility for older people.

The Demonstration Housing Project has delivered and tested innovative housing typologies that are not possible under current planning rules. One of the main aims of the development is to better facilitate ageing in place, which is critical in preventing and reducing premature entry to residential care.

The ACT government has provided funding to Palliative Care ACT to open Leo's Place, a proof-of-concept non-clinical facility that provides overnight and day respite for patients with a life-limiting illness in a pleasant, home-like environment. This allows carers to have a short break, reducing carer isolation and fatigue.

Waste initiatives include bulky waste collections, which make it easier for older Canberrans to remove larger waste items from their properties, and the continuation of bin assistance, an initiative to take bins to the kerbside for collection for people with chronic illness, frail age or disability.

I am grateful for the advice and feedback of key stakeholders such as COTA ACT, seniors centres, ADACAS, and Carers ACT, to name just a few, to ensure that the voices and views of older people are front and centre. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing for their considered, active and engaged representation and advice on a broad range of matters. Their follow-up and engagement in the Age-Friendly City Plan is commendable.

At the halfway mark of the Age-Friendly City Plan, I am pleased to report considerable progress. I am also cognisant of the work required to continue to fulfil our objectives and ensure that older people are included, respected, valued and engaged in the life of this city.

I present the following papers:

Age-Friendly City Plan—

Action Status Update (Second Progress Report), January 2021-December 2021.

Second progress report—Ministerial statement, Tuesday, 3 May 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 15**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.55): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 15, dated 27 April 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 CAIN:** Scrutiny report No 15 contains the committee's comments on four bills, 20 pieces of subordinate legislation, one government response and one private member's response. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

### **Report 5**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.56): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Inquiry into Family Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2022*, dated 14 April 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

**MR CAIN:** I speak in my capacity as chair of this committee and on behalf of the committee. This is the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and



Community Safety, tabled out of session on 14 April 2022. The Family Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 introduces amendments to introduce higher maximum penalties for certain offences when committed in the context of family violence and makes procedural changes to improve access to justice for victim-survivors.

Family violence issues are serious and complex and there must be an effective response to deter and respond to offences, as well as improved access to justice for victim-survivors. The report recommends that the Assembly pass the bill with recommendations, including that the ACT government review aspects of longer sentences and update the Assembly in two years after the commencement of the act.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this inquiry. I thank the other committee members, Deputy Chair Dr Paterson and member Mr Braddock, for their cooperation and conduct. I commend this report to the Assembly.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (11.57): I wish to talk very briefly on this bill, specifically about two key matters, the first being the change of name for the offence of “a sexual relationship with a child or young person under special care” to “a persistent sexual abuse of a child or young person under special care”. I also want to make a few points about the aggravated offence scheme and the introduction of higher maximum penalties for certain offences.

The Family Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 will bring about significant reform for an important issue affecting too many Canberrans, and one which many victim-survivors find it incredibly difficult to report on. Too often, the criminal justice system compounds the trauma of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. We need to continually reduce the barriers for victim-survivors to come forward, to enable them to report the violence, and to provide appropriate support mechanisms and hold perpetrators to account.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the 2021 Australian of the Year, Ms Grace Tame, and the work of the Grace Tame Foundation. It is in large part due to Ms Tame’s continued advocacy, and that of her foundation, that the amendment is being made, through this bill, to change the name of the offence.

The term “relationship” implies consent and diminishes the real nature of the offence: the sexual grooming and assault of a young person, often vulnerable and impressionable. I wish to thank the Attorney-General for listening and taking heed of Ms Tame’s call in November last year for this reform. The speed with which it has occurred speaks volumes about the importance of this bill.

The second point I want to touch upon that came through the inquiry was that the bill introduces an aggravated offence scheme to introduce higher maximum penalties for certain offences relating to family and domestic violence. The introduction of higher maximum penalties recognises the serious long-term impacts of family and domestic violence, and the trauma caused to victim-survivors.

It will be incredibly important that we monitor the impacts of these new offence provisions to ensure that legislation is producing its intended outcomes: to deter family violence and to stop offences from occurring in the first place, to appropriately hold to account those who are found guilty of such crimes, but to also ensure that the penalties prevent reoffending, enable rehabilitation and offer pathways for restorative justice. We must ensure that these new provisions are enforced consistently and appropriately.

There is a risk that these penalties may have the unintended consequence of inappropriately leading to the increased incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I also think we need to remain vigilant to the impacts of the legislation on community correction orders and the use of restorative justice practices in the ACT.

The bill includes provision for a review of the Family Violence Act every three years. This provides a clear opportunity to monitor its effects throughout this period. I also intend to use my opportunity during estimates and annual reports hearings to monitor the impacts and outcomes of this legislation.

I would also like to remind members that tomorrow is domestic and family violence remembrance day. There will be a vigil held outside the Assembly at 6 o'clock tomorrow evening to remember the victims of family and domestic violence around the country.

I wish to thank my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, and all the people and organisations who provided submissions or appeared as witnesses to the inquiry into the bill. I look forward to the ACT being a safer place for our whole community, with an end to family and domestic violence. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (12.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I rise to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality. Members will recall that on 24 March 2022 the Assembly passed a resolution requesting that the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality consider inquiring into housing and rental affordability in the ACT.

At a private meeting on 14 April 2022 the committee resolved to conduct the inquiry. The committee will inquire and report on:

- (a) causes of vacancies in residential and commercial properties;
- (b) current economic and regulatory settings for addressing residential and non-residential property vacancy in the ACT;

- (c) whether these settings may contribute to the number of vacant properties in the ACT, specifically:
  - i. an evaluation of settings contributing to vacancies in residential, high density and suburban properties;
  - ii. an evaluation of settings contributing to vacancies in commercial and industrial properties;
- (d) how reducing residential property vacancy could support housing and rental availability and affordability in the ACT;
- (e) how reducing non-residential property vacancy could support improved economic outcomes in the ACT;
- (f) whether additional economic and regulatory settings such as a vacancy tax should be considered; and
- (g) any other related matters.

The committee will today call for public submissions.

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (12.03): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I rise 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 2021, 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 was close of business on 13 May 2022. The committee has again extended the deadline for submissions, now due on 28 October 2022.

**Sitting suspended from 12.05 to 2.00 pm.**

### **Questions without notice** **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. The *Canberra Times* yesterday reported your announcement of an inquiry into Dhulwa mental health facility and that Matthew Daniel from the nurses' union is seriously concerned that a nurse could lose their life on the job. You announced an independent inquiry, but you have not released any terms of reference, nor revealed who will conduct the inquiry, nor how long it will take. Minister, when will you release the terms of reference? How

long will the inquiry be? When will it report? Will you commit to implementing its recommendations?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I thank you for the question. We are currently working through all of those details with the ANMF because we want to make sure that the nurses' voices are heard and that the inquiry that is run addresses the concerns that the nurses brought to us. I will provide updates as they are decided.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, will there be public hearings, and what will you be doing to protect nurses who fear speaking out about conditions at Dhulwa?

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I have said previously, there will be the opportunity for hearing submissions and for the nurses to be able to engage in that inquiry, which will be independently chaired. That will all be covered in the terms of reference, which we are working through with the ANMF right now.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you share Mr Daniel's serious concern that a nurse could lose their life on the job at Dhulwa?

**MS DAVIDSON:** It is always a very serious concern when people are experiencing safety issues in their workplace. That is why we are going to be holding this inquiry, which will be independently chaired and will have inputs from WorkSafe ACT, the Human Rights Commission and an independent clinical review. So we are doing absolutely everything we can to address those concerns.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the Canberra Liberals share the union's serious concerns for the safety of nurses at Dhulwa mental health facility. Have you increased security at Dhulwa to protect nurses since 5 April, when the union launched its public campaign, and do security staff have the power to step in and protect nurses?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for the question. We have made a number of changes to improve security and safety at Dhulwa, over a period of years, but also to address the specific circumstances that occurred during February, when there was an increase in incidents. It is also really important to make sure that the nurses are able to be part of the conversation about any changes in their workplace. That is why we are engaging with the ANMF and why CHS are working with WorkSafe ACT to make sure that any improvements that can be identified are able to be implemented quickly.

**MS CASTLEY:** How will Dhulwa nurses be protected while the inquiry is underway, and if attacks continue will you close the facility?

**MS DAVIDSON:** It is really important that everyone feels safe, supported and confident at work. Dhulwa is a mental health facility that is providing care and support for people with some of the most complex mental health conditions in the ACT. This means that the way that we provide care and keep staff safe at work will be different to other workplaces around the ACT. That commitment to a safe workplace

for everyone is something that we take very seriously, so we are continuing to work with staff, the ANMF, WorkSafe ACT, the Human Rights Commission and clinical experts to deliver the best clinical practice for patients and a safe workplace. That means that when we can identify possible areas for improvement, we do that quickly.

There has been significant work over a period of years to reduce occupational violence across the whole of Canberra Health Services, including at Dhulwa. While this has resulted in an ongoing reduction in incidents of occupational violence, we did see some specific circumstances in February that resulted in a particularly high number of incidents and we are continuing to address safety issues as they are raised by the nurses. I would encourage them to put in a RiskMan report if there is anything that they can see that is worrying them about their safety at work.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what is your plan to attract nurses to work in mental health, given the events at Dhulwa?

**MS DAVIDSON:** There is extensive work underway within Canberra Health Services to attract and retain some fantastic staff, including across all of our mental health facilities. I note that we had great success in attracting people from outside the ACT to come here to work in Ward 12B when that was opened, our new subacute ward. That work has been quite helpful in increasing the number of mental health nurses who are working in the ACT. The nurse and midwife ratios that have been implemented across Canberra Health Services are also helping to provide opportunities for more people to work in our fantastic services.

### **Lake Tuggeranong—recreational fishing**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the minister for city services, and it relates to recreational fishing around Lake Tuggeranong. Minister, as you are aware, I recently surveyed almost 500 of my constituents on issues pertaining to Lake Tuggeranong, particularly about the government's plan for the foreshore upgrades. Interestingly, people took advantage of the free form box, and a lot of people wanted to talk to me specifically about recreational fishing around the lake. Can you outline for the Assembly what work is being done to ensure that recreational fishing does not come at the cost of people's ability to enjoy the lake amenity?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. This is probably something that fits into other ministers' portfolio areas, but I can talk specifically about TCCS's involvement in helping to manage our waterways, and particularly the urban open space that surrounds them as well.

There are a number of water bodies in the ACT that we have to manage, including Lake Tuggeranong. We are consulting with Lake Tuggeranong residents at the moment about what upgrades they would like to see around the foreshore, to get a better understanding of what the priorities are, if there are conflict points around the lake for different recreational uses, and what capital improvements can be made right around the lake, not just around the Tuggeranong town centre, to ensure that we can continue to enhance the use of this asset into the future. If there are some specific things that Mr Davis wants to raise—I know he has provided some feedback and

passed on the views of residents, and we are hearing that through the ACT government's consultations as well—then he can do so specifically in relation to fishing.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, what interventions specifically have TCCS taken on the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore underneath the Soward Way bypass, where most of the recreational fishing takes place?

**MR STEEL:** I will take that on notice.

**MS CLAY:** Minister I wonder if you have heard any similar representations about Lake Ginninderra?

**MR STEEL:** I do not believe that there is a Soward Way overpass on Lake Ginninderra, so I do not think we would have heard about the same issues.

### **Health—post-COVID recovery clinic**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, you recently announced the opening of a post-COVID recovery clinic here in the ACT. Can you please update the Assembly on what this means for the Canberra community?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The post-COVID recovery clinic is an excellent initiative, providing a person-centred interprofessional health service for Canberrans who are experiencing post-COVID conditions.

As I described in my statement this morning, long COVID can deeply affect a person's life, from ongoing lung issues to extreme fatigue and a myriad of other symptoms. I recently spoke with a patient who has started attending the post-COVID recovery clinic, and they described not being able to walk up the stairs in their own home and brain fog after having COVID. I am sure many of us have heard about these very real symptoms after someone we know or, indeed, members themselves have had COVID-19.

Madam Speaker, when a person cannot manage their day-to-day activities or participate in the things that they enjoy this can have further knock-on effects to their health and wellbeing. That is why the team at the University of Canberra Hospital started work on a health service that could support Canberrans through this time.

The post-COVID recovery clinic is a nation-leading innovation that is supporting our community. The interprofessional team works through individualised specialist rehabilitation programs for each patient and ensures good links with other specialist health services to provide a network for patients as they continue their recovery from COVID-19.

The post-COVID recovery clinic team is also undertaking research with the University of Canberra, investigating long-COVID care. This research will contribute to further innovations in our public health system here in the ACT and, indeed, across

the nation and potentially around the world now and into the future. This post-COVID recovery clinic is a great example of how we are supporting Canberrans through the pandemic from an individual to a community level.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how is this health service ensuring good health outcomes for Canberrans with a long-COVID diagnosis?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. While most people who contract COVID-19 in our community, of course, will not experience significant post-COVID conditions, we know that quite a few may still be struggling to recover more than 12 weeks after their acute illness. The pioneering post-COVID recovery clinic at the University of Canberra Hospital will be a port of call for those who need additional support during this time.

Currently, the clinic operates every second Tuesday at UCH, with new patients triaged according to the severity of their ongoing symptoms. The clinic is accessed through referrals from primary care and specialists working with individual patients following their acute COVID-19 illness. Patients are provided with, as I said, individualised rehabilitation that will incorporate group and individual therapy.

An example of goals that health professionals and a patient might work through is returning to the same level of physical activity that they were doing prior to having COVID. A COVID-specific therapy group will also run twice a week, with as many as 12 existing patients attending this group therapy at any given time.

The post-COVID recovery clinic team includes a range of health professionals, including medical and allied health professionals, who work collaboratively to support patients to recover. The team is also ensuring good access for patients to other services such as psychology, dietetics and speech pathology, depending on the individual's symptoms and needs.

Madam Speaker, we expect that this service will be vital in helping those experiencing long COVID. Canberrans who had COVID more than 12 weeks ago and who are struggling to return to their activities should speak to their GP, their nurse practitioner or their specialist about options for recovery, including getting a referral to the excellent team at the post-COVID recovery clinic.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how does the post-COVID recovery clinic and our other ACT government health services reflect the ACT's pandemic response?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. The past two years have been an incredibly difficult time for our community. The ACT government has responded to these challenges and continues to respond to the impacts of COVID-19. Our approach has always been to protect the health and wellbeing of Canberrans and we have continually adapted as we learn more about COVID-19 and experience its impact on the community.

The nation-leading post-COVID recovery clinic is another example of the innovative way the ACT government and its health services have responded. The clinic sits

alongside our responses to vaccination, testing, the supported COVID Care@Home program, the Garran COVID-19 clinic and, of course, our hardworking acute services, who have continued to deliver for our community.

The ACT, of course, has led the way with our vaccination program. The COVID Care@Home program has been critical in the reduction of COVID-19-related presentations to the emergency department by managing patients with COVID treatments early and involving GPs to assist with ongoing care.

Our incredible clinicians have also been among the first to deliver new treatments to people who are identified as being at risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19 and, of course, those treatments continue to evolve as well. The nurse-led Garran COVID-19 clinic provides a walk-in service for people who have contracted COVID-19 and who require support for their symptoms or for other non-life-threatening health conditions while they have COVID.

It is an incredibly difficult time for our health system and it has been tremendously hard on our teams throughout the pandemic. I hear from Canberrans all the time how grateful they are to everyone across the health system because every day they come to work and provide innovative approaches to health care for our community.

The post-COVID recovery clinic is a fantastic nation-leading demonstration of this commitment, ensuring that Canberrans have the right supports in place for their recovery from this virus.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MRS KIKKERT:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Information you provided in response to questions on notice reveal that there were 136 violent incidents at Dhulwa mental health facility in 2019-20; that there were 109 in 2020-21; and that in just seven months, from July last year to the beginning of February, there have already been 79 violent events. Minister, how many more attacks have there been on Dhulwa nurses since February this year?

**MS DAVIDSON:** There has been significant work over a period of years to try and reduce occupational violence across the whole of Canberra Health Services, and that includes Dhulwa. I mentioned earlier that there were quite specific circumstances that occurred during February that resulted in a particularly high number of incidents, but during March we had five incidents of occupational violence at Dhulwa. As at 28 April for that month we had nine. That is significantly reduced from what occurred during February, and is much closer to the range of one to five incidents that occurred each month from July through to January. I hope that provides some information for you.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, what extra safety measures have you put in place to protect Dhulwa nurses from being attacked on the job today?



**MS DAVIDSON:** I have talked previously about some of the things that have been implemented to improve safety at Dhulwa, and I can provide some more details on notice if you wish. These things that we are putting in place are things that are being done in conversation with WorkSafe ACT and with the ANMF, and we will continue to look at ways that that can be improved. It is very important that any changes that are being made in the workplace are being done with the nurses involved and engaged in that work, and that is what we are endeavouring to do.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what do you say to Dhulwa nurses who are still afraid to go to work today and tomorrow?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I am very pleased that we are able to work on this inquiry that will be independently chaired in consultation with the ANMF to make sure that the terms of reference reflect what they are looking for out of that inquiry. As I have said many times, it is really important that decision-making on any inquiry that addresses the concerns the nurses have raised must be done by working together with their union. We can always achieve more by—

**Ms Castley:** I have a point of order. I was not asking about the inquiry. I asked about what you have done for today and tomorrow while we are waiting for the inquiry?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Davidson, to the point of that question.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Yes, thank you. While I have been briefed by Canberra Health Services on what was happening during February, it was really important to me that I also heard directly from the nurses and understood what they were experiencing in their workplace and what they were asking for in terms of change. So on Wednesday 30 March I welcomed a group of around a dozen nurses together with their ANMF representatives to talk to me about what they were experiencing at work and what they would like me to do about it. I committed to get back to them with some conversations about what kind of process we could put into place. I am very pleased that we were able to have that conversation with the ANMF and with the nurses last week, and I went back out there to their workplace to have that conversation with them in their work site to make sure that what we were planning on doing was headed in the right direction.

While that is all happening, we are continuing to engage with WorkSafe ACT, and to engage the ANMF in those conversations as well, to address the immediate safety issues that they are experiencing.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the nurses union say that the situation at Dhulwa mental health facility has not changed since they first raised safety concerns four years ago, in 2018. The *Canberra Times* has reported that in 2018 several nurses were punched in the face and kicked in the head during multiple assaults by a patient, which ACT Policing investigated. Minister,

when did your directorate or Canberra Health Services first inform you about problems at Dhulwa and what did you do?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I receive regular briefs on what is happening across a number of our mental health facilities in Canberra, including Dhulwa. We were being briefed about what was occurring during February. You are talking about some events that occurred during 2018. A significant amount of work has occurred over the last few years to reduce occupational violence in Dhulwa, as well as across all our Canberra health services. That has resulted in significant reductions in incidents of occupational violence across our mental health facilities. It is very important that that work continues engaging with the unions and with the nurses as well as with clinical experts—

**Mr Hanson:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Point of order. Ms Davidson, resume your seat.

**Mr Hanson:** The question, which was specific, was: when was she first informed about the problems at Dhulwa? What was the date she was first informed and what action did she take? What did she do at that point?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** To those points of the question, Ms Davidson.

**MS DAVIDSON:** I was trying to answer two elements there, one of which was about things that occurred in 2018, which was a little bit before my time here, and at the same time addressing what was happening specifically during February. I am hoping that the answer I provided addresses both of those elements.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, when were you first informed by the nurses union about their safety concerns at Dhulwa and what did you do?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I was very happy to have had some meetings with the ANMF prior to the events that happened in February. When I first came into this position they began to engage with me, and I very much appreciated that. I was informed by the union of their concerns during February and March. We had a number of conversations about what their nurses were experiencing and what kind of process we would need to go through to address that.

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The question asked what she did. She said she had conversations. She was informed of the problems. The question goes to what did she do? Did she do anything? Yes or no?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I can't direct the minister to answer. She still has over a minute left. Ms Davidson, you have the floor. Continue.

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I was saying earlier, on Wednesday, 30 March I welcomed a group of around a dozen nurses, along with their ANMF representatives, to talk me through their experiences at work. As I have said before, as a community sector worker and as friend I have listened to the experiences of nurses and midwives about

workplace safety and culture for many years. But every time that I listen to a nurse talking about what a hard day at work is really like—it is really hard—and it does hit home that we ask a lot of our healthcare workers—

**Mr Hanson:** But what did you do? You're not there to be their friend, Minister.

**MS DAVIDSON:** I am talking about things that I had done before I came here, just to let you know that this is not completely new to me. I committed to follow through on that discussion early the next week with a conversation about what kind of review process we could undertake and made a call to the ANMF on Tuesday, 5 April—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS DAVIDSON:** You asked me what I have done. I am telling you what I have done.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Don't respond to the interjections, Ms Davidson. That would be my advice.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Okay. We followed up with a phone call to continue that conversation, then an email request for a further meeting to discuss what kind of inquiry would meet the needs of the nurses and how it should function.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why hasn't there been an independent inquiry into Dhulwa since it opened, almost five years ago?

**MS DAVIDSON:** There are actually a number of reviews already underway, including an external review of incidents during February 2022 that is being undertaken by members of New South Wales Forensic Mental Health; a review by the Human Rights Commission that was initiated in February 2021, to which Canberra Health Services have provided information; and a review of the Mental Health (Secure Facilities) Act 2016, which commenced in February 2020, by a consultant engaged by the ACT Health Directorate; as well as WorkSafe ACT's current work that began in April 2022. I am very pleased that the inquiry into Dhulwa that we have announced will review its legislative, clinical and governance frameworks to ensure that the facility is operating under best practice, in a safe environment for all workers and patients, and will be able to draw together what is happening in all of those other pieces of work.

### **Education—languages action plan**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, in December 2021 the government released a report into the implementation and outcomes of the *ACT Multicultural Framework 2015-2020 Second Action Plan*. This report stated that “the Education Directorate has developed a draft languages action plan for consultation”. Can you please provide an update about the plan and the time line for the consultation process?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, there is a draft ACT languages action plan and a position paper, which has been developed as a result of the motion in the Assembly last year. The ACT languages action plan is designed to address those systemic issues that have been impacting on a school's capacity to deliver languages. Once we have cleared the final draft of that plan, we will begin consultations within the community to finalise that plan.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Is there a time line for that consultation process?

**MS BERRY:** Not at this point in time.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, can you detail how native language speakers in the Canberra community have been consulted on the development of language education in schools?

**MS BERRY:** I will have to take the detail of that question on notice. Some of that work might have been done with Tara Cheyne in her role as Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I will take that question on notice and provide some more detail to the member.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. The Canberra Liberals have been told that Dhulwa nurses fear for their safety and that five Dhulwa nurses were on workcover due to being physically assaulted. Minister, how many Dhulwa nurses are currently on workcover leave and for what reasons?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for the question. I will take that on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, how do you respond to the fact that so many of our mental health nurses are on workcover leave due to being physically assaulted on the job?

**MS DAVIDSON:** This is why it is so important that we are working with their union on the terms of reference for the inquiry and selecting the right independent chair to make sure that the long-term future of Dhulwa sees our Canberra community and our nurses at Dhulwa able to have the best clinical care and a safe workplace. I will be keeping everyone updated as the work progresses.

Our work, in collaboration with the ANMF, to improve workplace safety will not end with the commencement of the inquiry. I have heard what the nurses have been saying about needing their skills and experience to be valued and for staff to be engaged in decision-making about how to operationalise any recommendations for change in their workplace.

For that reason, a task force to oversee the implementation of the recommendations will be stood up by Canberra Health Services and I would very much welcome the ANMF's participation in that task force as a key voice for the staff.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, how do the number of Dhulwa nurses on workcover compare to the figures for those nurses at the adult mental health unit in the Canberra Hospital?

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

### **Motor vehicles—licences and registration**

**MS ORR:** My question is directed to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, what is the ACT government doing to help Canberrans remember important payments and avoid fines for driving without a valid licence or in an unregistered vehicle?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the question. Remembering important payments can be difficult for all of us at times, and I am pleased to be able to say that following a successful trial in September 2021, Access Canberra has extended its SMS reminder service. The trial sent payment reminders for driver licence renewals, and the expanded service will now also send SMS reminders for motor vehicle registration renewals as well as traffic and parking infringements.

Expanding the service is another example of how Access Canberra is continually improving its services for the Canberra community. These SMS reminders will reduce the risk of Canberrans being fined for driving without a valid licence or in an unregistered vehicle, or facing a late fee for late payment of an infringement notice. SMS reminders will be sent automatically to a driver's nominated mobile number two days prior to the expiry of a licence or registration, and two days prior to the due date of an infringement. Canberrans can confirm or update their mobile numbers at [ACT.gov.au/updateyourrego](https://ACT.gov.au/updateyourrego) to ensure they receive these important reminders.

**MS ORR:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, what impact did the September 2021 trial of SMS reminders have?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the question. We all lead busy lives, and the September 2021 trial of the SMS reminders for driver licence renewals demonstrated the utility of this service for Canberrans. During the trial the number of licence holders that renewed on the date of expiry increased by almost 25 per cent compared with the same time in 2018 and 2019. Renewals on the date of expiry increased by more than 50 per cent compared with the same month in 2020, although that month's renewal numbers were likely down as a result of COVID-19. Approximately 50 per cent of the 341,487 ACT driver licence holders have provided their mobile number to Access Canberra but, as I mentioned in my earlier response, Canberrans can confirm or update their mobile number at [ACT.gov.au/updateyourrego](https://ACT.gov.au/updateyourrego) to ensure that they are able to receive these important SMS reminders.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what other innovative digital technology is Access Canberra using to improve its service delivery and customer service experience.

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. Access Canberra is committed to continual improvement of services for the Canberra community and has recently implemented a range of new and innovative digital services which further enhance the customer service experience. Access Canberra has worked hard in recent years to make more than 400 transactions available online, but there are still a number of transactions—a small number—which require attendance in person at a service centre—for example, where a photo is required.

To assist customers in planning their visit to a service centre the Access Canberra website now shows live wait times for its service centres available via the home page. Customers are also no longer required to wait in line at the service centre. Upon arrival, customers will be greeted by one of our friendly and knowledgeable concierge team, who will assist them to join the virtual queue, meaning they can support a nearby local business by grabbing a coffee or doing some shopping while they wait. Customers receive a text message when their turn is approaching, inviting them to return to the service centre.

I would also like to take this opportunity to give a shout-out to the team at Access Canberra who have worked hard behind the scenes during lockdown to implement the e-conveyancing for the ACT, allowing most property transactions to occur remotely. Since the implementation last year, the ACT has seen the highest take-up of e-conveyancing of any jurisdiction.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MR CAIN:** My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety. Minister, as you are aware, WorkSafe ACT has issued an improvement and prohibition notice at Dhulwa mental health facility. This morning, on radio, nurses union secretary Matthew Daniel said that work health and safety representatives had not been engaged about these notices. Mr Daniel called for Canberra Health Services to sit down with Dhulwa work health and safety reps today to work on solutions. He also said that an external work health and safety expert should be called to Dhulwa to advise on immediate problems. Minister, why haven't Dhulwa work health and safety reps been engaged, and will you order that this happen today?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Cain for the question. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on matters that are being considered by the independent authority at the moment, but I will certainly have a think about how I could provide more information to Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, will you order that an external health and safety expert be called to Dhulwa to advise on immediate problems?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No. It is a matter where, as the independent authority is investigating, I will look to their response to that investigation.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, have you spoken or met with anyone at Dhulwa—work health and safety reps—and what have they told you about the situation?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No.

**Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. In question time on 6 April, speaking about the nursing union’s call for an urgent inquiry into the Dhulwa mental health facility, you said you were “listening” to their concerns and added:

He has got my number: call me maybe.

Minister, was the “he” you referred to the union’s ACT branch secretary, Matthew Daniel, and how do you explain such a flippant remark referencing a Carly Rae Jepsen pop song?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I thank you for noting my excellent taste in music. I am very pleased that I was able to have the conversation with the ANMF last week, and that we were able to go out to the Dhulwa worksite and meet with the nurses together to confirm that what we were talking about doing was heading in the direction that they wanted to go.

As I have said many times, it is very important that, if we are going to be working through this situation and setting up an inquiry that is independently chaired, that is done with the union and with the nurses involved, and I am very appreciative of this ongoing engagement—

**Ms Castley:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Davidson, resume your seat. There is a point of order.

**Ms Castley:** My point of order is that it is not about what she is doing with regard to the inquiry; it is about how she explains such a flippant remark about Mr Daniel. It is as simple as that.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think there is a point of order. I cannot direct you as to how you answer, but I believe you need to go to that.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you. I believe I have covered some of the chronology of the phone and email conversations and meetings in my previous answers. Thank you for the question.

**MR PARTON:** Have you apologised, Minister, to Mr Daniel and Dhulwa nurses for your dismissive remark? If not, why not?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I have been very busy having conversations with the ANMF about the terms of reference for the inquiry and who would be an appropriate independent chair for that inquiry, and that is where the process needs to be.

**Mr Hanson:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order. Ms Davidson, resume your seat.

**Mr Hanson:** The question was very specific—whether she has apologised for what was clearly a dismissive and flippant remark. Has she apologised? Yes or no?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, you know that there is no point of order. I am not going to direct the minister to give a yes or no answer. Ms Davidson, you have the floor.

**MS DAVIDSON:** It is very important that the conversations that I am having with the ANMF—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, there is no need for snide interjections.

**MS DAVIDSON:** continue in the constructive manner in which we have been conducting them, in order to address the concerns of the nurses at Dhulwa. I thank the staff at Dhulwa for sharing their experiences with me, in all their honesty and rawness. I also thank the ANMF for being willing to engage with us on how we can make real and lasting change, as well as addressing the immediate concerns.

**Ms Castley:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Davidson, resume your seat.

**Ms Castley:** The question is not about the ongoing conversation; it is referencing a previous comment that the minister made in question time. Our question is: has she apologised? If not, why not? That is all it is.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order because your colleague has also raised it, and was seeking a yes or no answer. You have the floor for the remaining 30 seconds, Ms Davidson.

**MS DAVIDSON:** I think I have addressed the chronology of the conversations that I have had and the detail of the topics of those conversations in my previous answers.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why did you make light of such a serious safety issue where nurses have been assaulted and made afraid of going to work?

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I have addressed in my previous answers, the number of conversations that have been had with the ANMF and with the nurses at Dhulwa and the frequency with which we have engaged demonstrate that we are working through a very difficult situation in a collaborative and constructive manner.

### **Environment—Healthy Waterways project**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the minister for water. Minister, I was really pleased to see your recent announcement of \$14 million of funding for the Healthy Waterways



program, which includes construction of new wetlands and other structures in Belconnen. How many healthy Waterway projects will we see in Belconnen from this funding and where will they be?

**MR RATTENBURY:** This is a really important injection of money to continue the Healthy Waterways programs to make our lakes cleaner and particularly to seek to tackle blue-green algae. There are 13 sites across the ACT that are proposed to be worked on under this program and two of those are in the Belconnen area.

The first stage of some of these projects will be community consultation. The research that has been done by the government and by the staff who are experts in these areas has identified the locations. Clearly, some of these are quite substantial projects and we want to make sure that there is community support for them as well. The consultation will determine whether the project goes ahead as planned or whether the proposal is adjusted to address any of the issues that are raised by the community during those discussions.

The two sites in Belconnen are an area of Kippax Creek in Holt, where a solar pump is planned to be installed and a bioretention swale, and a proposed subsurface wetland at Belconnen oval. The proposed wetland at Belconnen oval is subject to community acceptance, to be tested by community consultation that will actively seek out what people's views are on the project and whether the design that is currently proposed by the government is one that they think is right or whether there is scope for further adjustment.

One of the fortunate things for Belconnen is that Lake Ginninderra is the least affected by blue-green algal blooms. That is why the bulk of these projects have been developed in the Tuggeranong catchment for Lake Tuggeranong, but we are keen to make sure that we continue to also look out for the health of Lake Ginninderra. That is why these infrastructure projects are going ahead in that area.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, will any of this funding go to stormwater drains or other infrastructure to stop leaves from washing into Lake Ginninderra?

**MR RATTENBURY:** The issue of leaves flowing into the lakes is very important. The research work that has been done, particularly on Lake Tuggeranong, has identified that leaves flowing into the lakes are a significant source of the nutrients that are then available for recruitment by the algae. Gross pollutant traps and grates or drains can be an effective way to stop larger items from flowing into the lakes. However, they do require ongoing maintenance to remove leaf litter and the rubbish that accumulates in them. While they are a useful tool, we also need to look at how we can prevent leaf litter from getting to that point in the first place.

As members may be aware, the government runs the H2OK campaign to raise awareness about water quality and encourage residents to avoid polluting waterways or contaminating the stormwater. We also have a project being tested at the moment, a pilot program called the "leaf collective", which is testing approaches to encouraging community involvement in collecting leaf litter from gutters before it can wash into the lakes.

As I touched on earlier, the research for Lake Tuggeranong has particularly identified that even eucalypt leaves sitting in the gutters can release nutrients that flow right through the system and into the lake. What we are trying to do is look further upstream. Whilst gross pollutant traps are part of our response, overall there are opportunities to intercept some of the nutrients before they even get down anywhere near the lakes or some of those urban ponds.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, of the \$14 million announced, what specific investments are being made in Lake Tuggeranong?

**MR RATTENBURY:** As I indicated earlier, the bulk of the investment is actually in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment. Significant research work has been undertaken through a fantastic partnership with the University of Canberra, who have really looked at Lake Tuggeranong in far greater detail than has ever been done before. It has given us really improved insights and understanding into the dynamics in the lakes. The history of them, of course, is that they were set up as pollutant traps. That was how they were designed in the early days. With changing community expectations, that has proven to be a problem. We are seeking to make them more amenable.

There are a number of programs across the Tuggeranong catchment. They are particularly looking at getting upstream, higher into the catchment, so things such as bioretention swales and the naturalisation of creek lines. But they are also looking at some of the ovals in Tuggeranong where it has been identified that excess fertiliser can flow off those community sporting ovals into the drains and also provide those nutrients into lakes.

There are a number of projects across Lake Tuggeranong and the Tuggeranong catchment. Similar to my earlier remarks about the Belconnen area, as those projects get developed, there will be a range of community consultations so that we are working with the local community. There is a fantastic community contribution in Tuggeranong. We want to make sure that those partnerships are strong and the community understand why the projects have been put where they are, why they are being designed that way and whether they have any comments on the design before we proceed to construction.

### **Suburban Land Agency—Coombs and Wright**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is for the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, can you please provide an update on the Suburban Land Agency's work to improve public spaces in Coombs and Wright?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question and for her continued engagement as a local member in her community for improvements in this space. The government has been working hard to ensure that all of the land sales that it makes deliver great results for the community. The Coombs and Wright project is a key result of that work, and I am pleased to say that the Suburban Land Agency is working to secure building partners who will be able to deliver on these high expectations.

Delivering the Coombs and Wright village will see a range of improvements, including: the realignment of Steve Irwin and Fred Daly avenues; additional tree planting; a pedestrian zone on Beecroft Street; upgrades to the Coombs park adjacent to the Coombs and Wright village to include toilets and a pavilion; and the construction of a community centre to be transferred to ACT Property Group.

While that work is underway and will be delivered in the next year, there are more immediate benefits from the Suburban Land Agency's work in Coombs. Works are continuing around the Coombs play space, with an official opening planned for Spring 2022. The play space is designed as an all aged adventure and nature area. It will include slides, towers, an all-abilities swing, barbecue tables and shade sails. On site currently, the earthworks and shaping of the site have been completed, with the installation of some of the playground equipment. I am pleased to hear that parents and families are in great anticipation of the finalisation of this work and are already planning for their visit.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, how were the views of Coombs and Wright residents reflected in the SLA's work?

**MS BERRY:** This has been a really important part of this work. Both of these improvement projects have been the result of extensive consultation with Coombs and Wright residents. In 2021, the Suburban Land Agency spoke to residents to shape its release method for the mixed use and community zoned blocks in the area. A community panel was established and many options were put forward. YourSay as well as the Molonglo Valley forum were engaged to assist the community with providing its views.

Following all of that work to learn about the residents' views, the Suburban Land Agency set up a two-stage tender process for the relevant blocks. The first stage of that process was to identify builders who would be suitable to deliver on the community's need. This stage is complete. The SLA is currently working through competitive tenders for those sites and expects to finalise the process later this year.

The Coombs play space was also the result of thorough consultation through YourSay. Designs were put to the community and changes were incorporated to reflect the feedback. When the Coombs play space opens this year, it will offer the amenities that residents have told us that they want to see in their neighbourhood.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how is the SLA's approach to Coombs and Wright being used in other neighbourhoods across Canberra?

**MS BERRY:** As the minister responsible for the ACT Government's Suburban Land Agency, I have been really proud to lead this work and improved consultation and communication with all of our neighbourhood projects, including those at Coombs and Wright. I want to acknowledge the team at the Suburban Land Agency for their continued commitment to good consultation and communication to build spaces where people want to live. Just two examples of community led design in other parts of the city are the Belconnen town centre project as well as ongoing consultation on the Gungahlin town centre.

In the Belconnen town centre, a place design brief shaped the tender process for releasing multiple sites. When that package is released through tender, Belconnen residents can be confident that it will deliver on their expectations.

The creation of a place design concept for the Gungahlin town centre is currently underway. A standing community panel has been established and will inform both Planning and SLA work to deliver land releases that meet the needs of the Gungahlin residents. This detailed design and consultation work gives the government an opportunity to showcase everything that we can deliver through our land development program.

When it comes to land, it is not all about profit. It is about building stronger communities—building suburbs where people want to live. We will keep working with all the tools that we have available to deliver fantastic neighbourhoods that meet Canberrans' needs and give them the amenity and the life experiences that they need.

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

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice Lake Tuggeranong—recreational fishing**

**MR STEEL:** Earlier in question time Mr Davis asked me about whether the government was aware of any issues around the Soward Way overpass over Lake Tuggeranong. I have been informed that there are two related issues that have been raised with the government. One is in relation to illegal parking by fishers around the lake foreshore, where non-permitted vehicle access has been found. A non-permitted access point to the lake foreshore near Soward Way has also been found near a construction site. I am informed that TCCS will be installing physical barriers to deter access at that location.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Further to my answer to Ms Castley in question time, and for clarity, I have met with the ANMF and their members. I do engage with all unions to ensure that I hear from them and their members.

## **Papers**

**Madam Speaker** presented the following papers:

Bills referred to Committees, pursuant to resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended—

Correspondence—Bills—Not inquired into—

Domestic Violence Agencies Amendment Bill 2022—from the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing, dated 28 April 2022.

Education Amendment Bill 2022—from the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, dated 28 April 2022.

Fair Trading and Other Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022—from the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 13 April 2022.

Radiation Protection Amendment Bill 2022—from the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing, dated 28 April 2022.

Standing order 191—Amendments—Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2), dated 11 April 2022.

**Mr Gentleman** presented the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act—Pursuant to section 13—Annual Reports—2021—Canberra Institute of Technology, dated 25 March 2022.

COVID-19 Emergency Response Act—pursuant to subsection 3(3)—COVID-19 Measures—Report No 14—Reporting period 1 January - 31 March 2022.

### **COVID-19 Emergency Response Act—report 14**

**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) (2.52): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

COVID-19 Emergency Response Act—pursuant to subsection 3(3)—COVID-19 Measures—Report No 14—Reporting period 1 January - 31 March 2022.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Lawder**) adjourned to the next sitting.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—annual report 2021**

**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) (2.53): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act—Pursuant to section 13—Annual Reports—2021—Canberra Institute of Technology.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Lee (Leader of the Opposition) for today's sitting due to illness.

## Employment—conditions and entitlements

**MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (2.54):** I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) over two million Australians are employed casually, representing around one in five Australian workers;
- (b) people working in casualised work are some of the most economically vulnerable in our community;
- (c) certain occupations and industries are highly insecure and workers in these industries do not usually have access to sick and carer's pay;
- (d) sick and carer's pay provides financial security and protects workers wellbeing when they are unable to attend work;
- (e) the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the dangers to workers and our workplaces when insecure workers feel compelled, for financial reasons, to attend work whilst sick; and
- (f) the Victorian Government has recently announced it will introduce the Victorian Sick Pay Guarantee to provide up to five paid sick days for casual workers per year;

(2) acknowledges the work of the ACT Government to:

- (a) better protect workers by legislating a labour hire licensing scheme that has promoted responsible practices in the labour hire services industry;
- (b) utilise its purchasing power to improve standards in certain industries through the Secure Local Jobs Code;
- (c) implement and expand the portable long service leave scheme to ensure that workers in transient industries are able to access this workplace entitlement;
- (d) protect workers who lost their job in the COVID-19 pandemic with the Jobs for Canberrans initiative; and
- (e) establish the Secure Employment Framework to support the transition from insecure work arrangements to permanency within the ACT public sector; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) continue to materially improve the working conditions of ACT residents; and
- (b) investigate providing sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers who work in industries that do not usually have access to sick and carer's pay. This investigative work should be undertaken in consultation with relevant trade unions and other stakeholders.

The nature of work and our workplaces is changing; employers are increasingly turning to casual workers to fill roles that should be permanent. As a result, casual work has become endemic in our society. More people are spending longer employed

as casuals, without access to the workplace rights and benefits that come with permanency. Casual workers are not entitled to the same dignity, respect and access to leave that other workers are. When casual workers are sick, they either show up to work or they lose their day's pay.

Some in this place, and outside of it, will undoubtedly argue that this is how casual workers want it. They will argue that the lack of sick pay is by design and that casual workers do not need sick pay because they get casual loadings and they can choose what days and hours they work. This is not the case. Casual workers are, more often than not, some of the most economically vulnerable members of our community, people who cannot afford to go without a pay cheque or who cannot forgo the casual loading to make ends meet.

As a result of rampant casualisation in our workplaces, many people employed as casuals could, and should, be given permanent work. They work the same hours every week but, unlike their permanent co-workers, they cannot access paid leave. Under the current system of casualisation, workers in industries like retail, cleaning, security, aged care and hospitality will likely never gain access to sick and carer's leave because casualisation is the new business model of these industries. Now, more than ever, this issue is present in our daily lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inherent flaws in our system. People employed as casuals could not afford to miss a shift. We saw, time and again, that workers were so desperate to earn an income that they would avoid getting tested when they were unwell for fear of testing positive to COVID. When workers had rent to pay and children to feed, they simply could not afford to take a day off. They either came to work and risked infecting their co-workers or they risked missing rent and having no groceries that week.

This system is fundamentally flawed and something needs to change. Introducing sick and carer's pay for casuals and contract workers does not fix the problem of casualisation, but it does give relief to those employed casually that will be able to access sick and carer's pay. They will be able to afford to call in sick. The difference that this would make to people's lives cannot be overestimated.

Like many in this place, I have been employed casually in the past. I know that having sick pay would have made a huge difference in my life. Like most casual workers before COVID became what it is today, I would attend work if I was feeling a bit under the weather. I did not think the risk to others was that bad. I knew that I could not afford to miss one of my few shifts for the week. This is the case for countless casuals. The wider impact on public health is not front and centre when you have bills to pay. COVID has demonstrated the scale of the impact that coming to work sick can have on other employees, customers and the business as a whole.

The ACT government has worked hard for many years to try and improve the lives and conditions of working people in this city, particularly those in transient or unstable industries. The introduction of the Labour Hire Licensing Scheme has helped to ensure rights and conditions for labour hire workers. This scheme has helped to protect these vulnerable workers in unstable and often poor working conditions by

ensuring that labour hire providers meet a suitable person test and have a history of compliance with workplace laws. The ACT government has leveraged its purchasing power in order to improve the standards in some industries through the Secure Local Jobs Code.

The ACT government has used its purchasing power to support businesses that do the right thing by their workers. This has meant a fairer and more ethical procurement process in the ACT, supporting good employer behaviour and ensuring that workers in certain industries are better protected. The ACT government has also stepped up during times when our community has most needed it. The Jobs for Canberrans program during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the early days, successfully provided employment for those who had lost work during COVID and were ineligible for support.

Again, the ACT government has supported workers through the portable long service leave scheme. Workers who work in contract industries, like cleaning, would almost never work for the same company for seven years. And now they do not need to. They can accrue long service leave even if they move between employers. This is the kind of forward-thinking policy that we do in the ACT and that we should pursue, changing the way we do things to keep up with modern employment patterns.

The ACT government has also taken a strong position on the privatisation and outsourcing of public sector jobs. They can and should be performed by the ACT public service. This has also allowed those employed in temporary and casual positions to transition to permanent work. Through this program, the ACT government has recognised that casualisation and insecure work are problems in our community that need to be addressed.

Today I am calling on the government to take the next step. Casualisation has become so prevalent and damaging to our community that we cannot continue with the status quo. If the commonwealth government will not act, then states and territories should. We have seen the power of sick pay programs through the COVID pandemic. We have even seen both the commonwealth and state and territory governments provide payments to sick workers. We have seen that this is achievable.

We should step up and protect casual workers. That is why I am calling on the ACT government to investigate providing sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers. Casual workers keep our city going. They work in our cafes and restaurants, supermarkets and food delivery. They work in retail, aged care and cleaning. They are an essential part of our city and they deserve to be treated with respect. But right now, these workers are often the most exploited, often overworked, often underpaid and often working in the worst conditions. These are the frontline workers, essential to the operation of our city and our economy; yet when they get sick, they cannot even get a day off with pay.

Casual workers are highly concentrated in certain industries: security, aged care, food services, retail and cleaning. These industries operate on a model of employing people casually in order to avoid the workplace benefits that come with being a permanent employee. The workers are often paid the bare minimum. Sometimes—even worse—



they are victims of wage theft. Many of these workers are employed in these industries for a long time. How long should workers need to work in these industries without access to paid sick leave? If you work in hospitality, cleaning, security, should you never be able to access a paid sick day?

I think it is also worth acknowledging the potential benefits that exist for employers of casual staff. We all know that staff turnover within casualised industries is incredibly high. Burnout from being understaffed and overworked is common. I have heard countless stories of it. If workers are given the chance to recover from illness, rather than having to work through it, this may lead to better productivity in the workplace; generally speaking, a happier workplace; and, most importantly, it will certainly reduce workplace transmission.

The Victorian state government has taken the Australian-first step of introducing a trial of sick pay for casuals and contract workers outside of the COVID-19 programs. I genuinely look forward to seeing how this trial goes, and the benefits—hopefully, the benefits—that this has for workers.

I believe that every worker in our city deserves to have access to sick and carer's pay. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we have all seen the impacts on both workers and their employers when this is not the case. No worker should have to choose between their health or a day's pay, which is why I am calling on the government to investigate this sensible and equitable solution.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (3.03): I speak to Mr Pettersson's motion, but I also move the amendment circulated in my name.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** So you wish to move the amendment now?

**MR CAIN:** I do so, sir. Thank you.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I would note to members that we are discussing the amendment that has "revised" written on the top of it: "revised 03/05/22". So you are moving that amendment now?

**MR CAIN:** That is correct, Mr Deputy Speaker. I move:

Omit part (3) and substitute:

- “(3) calls on the ACT Government to continue to materially improve the working conditions of ACT residents;
- (4) requests that the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality consider investigating the impact of the provision of sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers who work in industries that do not usually have access to sick and carer's pay;
- (5) requests the Committee to consider investigating;
  - (a) the current working conditions in the ACT for casual and contract workers;

- (b) the provision of sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers who work in industries that do not usually have access to sick and carer's pay; and
  - (c) any other related matters; and
- (6) requests the Committee, should it inquire, to determine a reporting date based on the Committee's capacity."

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for clarifying that it is the version with "revised" at the top, with my signature and the date. I want to thank the members from the other side for alerting me to some wording issues that gave me no concern with respect to the substance of my amendment. It does remind me of my days in tax litigation, where sometimes things would settle on the steps of the court as one was wandering in. In this case, things seem to have settled on the floor of the house.

Mr Pettersson has spoken to this motion. It is an important part of the ACT economy for proper consideration, in my opinion, to look at the provision of sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers. It is my understanding—and we will obviously hear from the other members of this house—that there is support for my amendment. It is my opinion that the motion as it currently stands does lack a comprehensive approach to employment and information on who will be conducting, partaking in or taking recommendations from an internal government investigation.

It is apparent during the COVID pandemic that every worker, irrespective of their employment standing, requires financial security to protect and provide for themselves and their loved ones. It is interesting that the motion has come from the backbench. I would have thought that the minister himself, having such a concern about the workplace environment, would have moved this on his own, but that being the case, here we are.

Investigating the provision of sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers needs to be done through a suitable and fair channel, especially one that is open to community consultation and with open opportunities for submissions and the opportunity for public discussion. Unsurprisingly, I am suggesting through my amendment, the revised amendment, that the best way for this to happen on such an impactful part of our economy is through an inquiry by the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality.

I encourage members to support this amendment and to see a more open inquiry undertaken, subject to the committee's discretion. It would be a much fairer and effective way for all affected stakeholders to express their views. An internal government inquiry is really in the hands of the department and the cabinet, and it is not necessarily always clear to what degree stakeholders have been consulted or, indeed, which stakeholders have been consulted.

A committee inquiry will put all that out in the open. By moving this amendment, I encourage the standing committee to take this on as a serious matter. We are approaching a period in our economy where we are almost in our new normal. We are almost in our new normal, following the COVID restrictions. To assist business and

workers to find their appropriate and fair manner of relationship in this new normal, I think a committee inquiry is the best way to go about that.

I do want to point out something that I have been hearing from business representatives, and that is to be cautious about laying new legislative schemes, new arrangements, new compliance obligations on the business community until they have really had an opportunity to be fully re-established. We are still in a period of partial restrictions. Obviously, we all look forward to when we are back in our new normal of freedom of movement and association, taking common-sense measures to deal with any COVID-related outbreak. I have been hearing that the business community would like some time and some fresh air to get adjusted to the impact of this last two-year period.

In some cases those businesses are no longer operating, and that is a great sadness for the Canberra Liberals. Others have found new ways to do their business, found new ways to deal with where their employees and their contractors and their casuals work and interact with the service they deliver as individuals. Working from home is an obvious example of that, particularly for professional services and the public service.

I want to encourage the members on this floor to support the amendment, to urge an inquiry by the committee, in the wording as stated in the amendment. I speak in support of my amendment and encourage others to support it as well. Thank you.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.09):** I am pleased to make a few remarks in support of my colleague Mr Cain's amendment to refer this motion to the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality.

In his motion, Labor backbencher Mr Pettersson calls on the government—his government—to “continue to materially improve the working conditions of ACT residents”. He wants the government to examine providing sick and carer's pay for casual and contract workers. Mr Pettersson adds that this work should be done in consultation with relevant trade unions and other stakeholders. There is no mention of small business! What about consulting small businesses, who are the ones employing our casual and contract workers? But we should not be surprised that there is no mention of small business, that there is no mention of consulting small businesses and understanding the impact that it may have on them, because this Labor-Greens government has never prioritised small business.

What a turn-up it would be if a Labor MLA were to introduce a motion to continue to materially improve the conditions of ACT small businesses. This Labor-Greens government never seems to get that supporting small business and helping them to succeed is also good for their staff, because employers are in a better position to retain and employ more workers. A committee is the appropriate place for this motion to be thoroughly examined, with a particular focus on how this change would impact small business.

Small businesses do not get a guernsey today from Mr Pettersson, but, as I said, that comes as no surprise. The Canberra Liberals will continue to stand up for small

business day after day, to ensure that their needs and concerns are heard and addressed and that the issues that affect them are thoroughly examined.

**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) (3.12): I thank Mr Pettersson for his motion today. It is an important motion. As I have said in the Assembly before, this Labor government believes that all workers deserve to be treated with respect, to be paid fairly, to have their workplace rights upheld and to go home safely to their families and friends at the end of every day. We have worked every day to make this happen. That is why we are here. That is what we do.

The government is proud of its long history of protecting the rights of territory workers. I am pleased that we are not the only government in Australia looking to improve workplace conditions for people in insecure work. As highlighted by Mr Pettersson, the Victorian government's sick pay guarantee pilot scheme would provide casual and contract workers with a guarantee that they will receive sick pay when they need to take time off when they are sick or when they need to care for loved ones.

The scheme will directly benefit working people, giving them time in their personal lives to be well and to care for their families. The principles of rest and personal time are enshrined in the labour movement's fight for the eight-hour day. This motion today continues the fight for workers' rights and for personal time as well. We also know that having sick people at work is bad for everybody else. It is bad for workplaces, bad for workers and bad for the economy. This paid sick leave scheme is the kind of forward-looking industrial relations policy that could narrow the gap between secure and insecure work in the country.

In recent years, the ACT government has been actively legislating to re-calibrate the ACT's industrial relations system to enshrine workers' rights and hold businesses to account. For example, the ACT Secure Local Jobs package was legislated by the government in 2018, with the Secure Local Jobs Code commencing operation in January 2019.

The government created the code to ensure that ACT government contracts for labour are only awarded to employers who obey the law, pay their taxes, prioritise local secure employment and do not commit wage theft.

Also, in May 2021, the government introduced a new licensing scheme for labour hire providers that will better protect vulnerable workers and promote responsible practices in the labour hire services industry. The intent of this scheme is to encourage responsible practices in the ACT labour hire industry to ensure that labour hire businesses operating in the ACT meet their workplace obligations and responsibilities to their workers. The scheme creates a framework that is effective in preventing and responding to noncompliance with workplace standards in the labour hire industry.

It should also be noted that, although it is not a recent initiative, the territory has nation-leading portable long service leave schemes in building and construction industry, the contract cleaning industry, the community sector and the security industry. These schemes benefit potentially insecure and vulnerable workers by allowing them to transfer from employer to employer without losing the service already accrued within the covered industry.

Our debate today is the beginning of a very interesting and very important discussion on the rights of casual workers. Over the coming months we will look at how we can continue that fight. We will look to work with Mr Pettersson, with the union movement and with other stakeholders, Ms Castley, to work out how schemes could operate in the ACT. There are a number of ways it could work. It could run like an insurance scheme or it could run through the operation of a levy. The government will explore all of these options as the Victorian pilot is underway.

The Victorian sick pay guarantee scheme is only in the pilot stage and will operate for two years, starting this year. Although I believe that the Victorian scheme will be a successful scheme and create a blueprint for similar options in the future, I feel that it is prudent to consider the outcomes of the Victorian pilot before finalising a similar approach for the territory.

I do not believe that this government's commitment to improving workers' rights can be questioned or challenged, but it can always be improved. The motion from Mr Pettersson today does this. Both he and I are proud union members and proud members of a Labor Party that has shown throughout its history that we will stand up for working people. All territory workers and the community at large can be assured that this government will continue to do all it can to uphold these values and protect their rights.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.17): Job insecurity is rife. Without a secure job, it can be hard to plan your life, pay the bills, get a home or even stay healthy. For decades successive federal governments have grovelled to big corporations, with little regard for workers, leaving too many people in lowly paid, insecure and unfulfilling work. Long-term job security is a distant memory, while insecure work flourishes and billionaires increase their profits as working people have experienced the slowest sustained wage growth since the Great Depression.

Australians are both overworked and underworked simultaneously. Underemployment overtook unemployment in 2003 and has not looked back since. At the same time many full-time workers want to work fewer hours. Unemployment and underemployment are too high, especially for young people, which my colleague Mr Davis will talk about further.

Secure employment is also increasingly unobtainable, with employers allowed to hire workers as indefinite casuals or on rolling contracts, without any genuine obligation to provide long-term job security. We need to change our laws to tackle rising job insecurity and ensure that casuals and independent contractors are not used to undermine job security. It is time to outlaw insecure work and establish a legislated presumption in favour of ongoing employment.

People deserve more than jobs that pay low wages, that do not offer enough hours and that are insecure, unfulfilling and in many cases dangerous. People need greater control over the hours and arrangements for their work, especially as the pandemic changes the way that many people work. We need to give workers and unions enforceable rights to create a better work-life balance for people.

The unequal impact of insecure jobs should also be remembered. Women are more likely to be working in low-paid, insecure jobs, all whilst having more unpaid family or caring responsibilities, and are still paid a lot less than men. The same goes for migrant and refugee communities, and young people as well.

During the pandemic people in insecure jobs lost work eight times faster than those in permanent jobs. During the pandemic it was shown that people in insecure jobs struggled to protect their own health against COVID. It was shown time and again that those in insecure jobs were required to undertake risky behaviour because they had no other choice. Those living not just from pay cheque to pay cheque but from day to day or shift to shift had no economic choice. This economic imperative, established by decades of casualisation, put their health at risk, the health of their loved ones at risk, and the health of the wider community at risk.

This is not just specific to COVID. There are many infectious diseases that are spread as a result of workers not being supported to stay home, recover and avoid contact with others. Flu, colds and other contagious diseases spread faster and further across our workforces, across our community, when workers do not feel supported to stay home. Those infections can range from minor to severe, as they spread far and wide, seeking out our most vulnerable.

Who else here has appreciated a change in workplace culture where people are celebrated when they decide to stay home when they are actually sick? That is one good change arising from COVID, but it only works when there is paid personal leave in place. Personal leave is not a benefit to the worker; it is a benefit to the employer and to public health.

We need to rewrite our labour laws to protect and improve the lives of working people. We need to rewrite our labour laws to reduce inequality in society. We need to rewrite our labour laws to help protect the health of our workers, our workplaces and our communities.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (3.21): As Mr Braddock flagged, I rise to speak on this motion, particularly as it pertains to my responsibilities as the ACT Greens spokesperson for young people. I thank Mr Pettersson very much for bringing this timely and important motion to the Assembly.

Young people have overwhelmingly borne the brunt of the past two years of this COVID-19 pandemic. But even before this, we have seen the past decade of Liberal-National federal government policy reducing the quality of working conditions for casual workers incrementally and destructively. These two things are intrinsically linked. All workers, no matter what generation, are negatively affected by

being part of an over-casualised workforce. But it is no secret that young people make up a large majority of the casualised workforce here in the ACT and, more broadly, throughout Australia.

In 2021 the ACT Young Workers Centre delivered their report into the level of insecure work facing young people here in the ACT. They found that 43 per cent of 18 to 25-year-olds are earning less than \$400 per week. To put that into perspective, rents in student accommodation at either the Australian National University or the University of Canberra start from \$250 per week. It is widely accepted that spending any more than 30 per cent of your income on rent is considered an indication of housing stress. So for these young people, rent is making up 62 per cent of their income. For many young people in this city, this rental cost, high rates of casualisation, stagnating wages and increasing inflation are simply untenable.

More than this, the Young Workers Centre report found that 37 per cent of young people do not have work rosters that they can predict and plan their lives around. We speak a lot about the financial implications of a casualised workforce, but it actually provides flexibility to employers that is so great that casual workers, particularly vulnerable young people, can be considered perennially and permanently on call and available at the beck and call of the bosses.

It is clear that the nature of casualised work more broadly in this country presents a systemic problem for the provision of workers' rights, and young people should be afforded the right to reasonable working conditions. This motion is a step in the right direction to ensure that this ACT government continues to lead the nation on workers' rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn to our attention the importance of sick leave. It is important to stress that sick leave is important not only for managing your own health but, as this pandemic has shown us, for protecting the health and wellbeing of your colleagues and your community.

It benefits no-one in our community to have casual employees, particularly front-facing staff in the retail and hospitality sector, feeling compelled to work while they are sick, in order to ensure that they can pay their bills and put food on the table. In a country as wealthy as ours, workers should never have to choose between putting food on the table and being able to recover from sickness.

Young people have worked incredibly hard throughout this pandemic. Young people have kept your local fast food restaurant running around the clock. Young people have kept your grocery aisles stocked. Young people dispensed often-lifesaving medications at your local pharmacy. While we stayed at home, an over-casualised workforce, made up predominantly of young people, worked hard to keep us fed, keep us healthy and keep us safe, often whilst subjecting themselves to much higher risk of infection with COVID-19.

It is imperative that this government, and all governments who seek to claim the mantle of the nation's most progressive government—yes, I am looking at you,

Victoria!—must earnestly investigate the provision of sick and carer’s pay for casual workers.

It is nothing short of bizarre that we have continued to look at this as acceptable. We are a wealthy country. During the pandemic the wealth of Australia’s billionaires grew at an eye-watering 25 per cent, to a record high of \$357 billion. By contrast, you could run this government and this city for many years on the combined wealth that Australian billionaires have accrued over the last year.

In addition, it is worth noting that one in three big corporations in this country pay no tax—not a little tax but no tax; zero dollars. But according to our federal coalition Liberal-National government, these young people do not deserve the support of sick pay and sick leave. Let it be known that these billionaires are not the product of hard work; they are the product of policy failure.

As we approach this federal election, young people will have a choice. They can support a political establishment that will continue to casualise their work, hike up their university fees, tinker around the edges of the housing crisis and subject them to income support payments below the Henderson poverty line; or young people can seek out parties and candidates who will support wiping student debt, raising income support to \$88 a day, including dental and mental health care as part of Medicare, and strengthening workplace rights. As you might expect, Mr Deputy Speaker, I know candidates and I know a party who have policies to support young people on all of these issues.

I commend Mr Pettersson’s motion. I commend him for his continued advocacy for working people in the territory. The Greens are pleased to support the motion.

**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) (3.27): I am very pleased to speak on this very exciting motion in the Assembly today. I acknowledge and welcome Mr Pettersson’s contribution through this motion. What an amazing thing it would be if we were successful in the ACT in providing sick leave benefits for these casual workers. This would be absolutely life changing for the thousands of mostly low-paid, young, marginalised, often women and people with English as a second language. It would be life changing for them.

It will make a huge difference to all businesses as well, because turnover is bad for businesses. When you can retain employees for longer periods of time, when they are valued, respected and paid appropriately, that is good for business, and that is what would be delivered if it was able to be achieved in the ACT. It is something to be absolutely celebrated.

It is perfectly timed, after the May Day long weekend, following celebrations of union wins over decades and past generations—the eight-hour day, annual leave, public holiday rates and leave, and so much more. It is a day that is dedicated to the working class, encouraging those of us who enjoy the rights that we enjoy today to



acknowledge that they were fought for by workers in the past, including our parents and grandparents. It is important that we remind ourselves and others that these things did not come for free; that they came from the work and the fight of unions and workers in the past.

I want to segue briefly to the federal parliament and electioneering over the last couple of weeks. I was pleased to see an announcement—Mr Davis referred to this, and I think Mr Braddock did as well—around gender inequality in wages for women in the workforce. I was pleased to see, as part of the election commitments by the hopefully future Albanese Labor government, working towards improved gender equality within two sectors that are dominated by women—early childhood education and aged care, as well as disability support.

This announcement gives hope to those workers who have worked for decades, caring, nurturing and providing early childhood education for young people in our community so that the rest of us can go to work. They have been underpaid. When you compare their wages, qualifications and expectations to that of a male with similar qualifications and expectations, their pay can be up to 10 per cent less.

I am pleased that the federal Labor Party has made this commitment to help the Fair Work Commission to understand the issues around wage equity for women workers in these sectors that I have referred to, and particularly that it supports that there should be an equal remuneration principle to help guide that work.

In the past there was never any support from the federal coalition to lift wages. In fact, they opposed it when it was raised within the Fair Work Commission previously, and those workers lost that case. They lost the case for improved wages and conditions for the absolutely vital work—we have certainly seen that through this COVID-19 pandemic—that early childhood educators and others have done to ensure that the rest of us can continue to return to work.

When I was younger I worked for eight years in hospitality. I know very well—and, sadly, can remember very well—what happens when you are unwell, when you have insecurity in the hours that you work each week, because you need to take sick leave or, in some cases, when you are punished for taking sick leave and do not get your rostered shifts for the next week.

Something like this will make such a huge difference to young people's lives, and to those marginalised people that I referred to previously in my speech today. I think that we should be celebrating that in this Assembly, every single one of us, because this is a win-win for everyone—for workers, for businesses and for our whole community, when we improve the rights and workplace conditions of people who are already experiencing low wages and uncertainty in their work.

Again I congratulate Mr Pettersson on bringing this motion to the Assembly. I look forward to hearing the submissions that are made to the committee, should the motion be passed today. I particularly look forward to the engagement of everybody who wants every single young person, marginalised person, young woman, and person with English as a second language to get a decent crack at happiness because they

have a decent wage and they are protected when they are sick and unable to work. I congratulate Mr Pettersson on bringing this motion to the Assembly.

**MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (3.32):** I would like to start by thanking all members for their contributions. It was, without doubt, an entirely positive debate in this place. It is reassuring for all residents of this city that no member came in here and attacked casual workers, or called them greedy or entitled for potentially wanting something a little bit better. Instead this was a positive discussion and debate, and for that I am very pleased, and proud of this Assembly.

Mr Cain spoke about the amendment which he has circulated. I am comfortable with it; I think it is fine. I spend far too much of my time in this place sitting in committee meetings and conducting inquiries, but I do know the benefit of them. They are a good way to bring a community along with this place on a policy journey.

I genuinely look forward to the committee process. I have no doubt that the response will be overwhelmingly positive and that the submissions received will help to shape a scheme that suits Canberra. Whilst the Victorian government have announced their trial and outlined the provisions that they think work for Victoria, what the ACT needs will probably be different. In many ways we are similar, but we are not the same as Victoria.

Ms Castley in her remarks made a few cutting observations, and I will cop them on the chin. There was a minor slight to other stakeholders, and for that I do apologise. However, what I will not go past is the one-sided nature of the attack. Comrade Cain in his amendment is similarly focused on the workers. I do not want to out you to your colleagues, Mr Cain, but I feel that you could have really added some spice to your paragraph (3). There is always next time.

In doing some research for this motion, I looked at the history of sick pay in this country. Perchance, it was 100 years ago that the industrial awards of this country included sick pay for the first time—100 years ago. It is a long time. I am not even close to 100 years old, so the idea of getting the whole way to 100 seems like, quite literally, a lifetime away. It is quite remarkable, and it led me to reflect on how we got here. One hundred years ago, the trade union movement won its campaign to get sick pay included into the industrial awards of this country. Yet here we are today having a conversation about how workers do not have access to sick pay. Something has gone wrong along the way. I am somewhat hopeful and optimistic that this country, through its industrial laws, will find its way, and working people will rightfully expect to have these working conditions that have been hard fought for over such a long time.

In closing, I would like to thank all members once again for their contributions. I look forward to the committee inquiry.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Australian Public Service—consultants and contractors**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.37), by leave: On behalf of Ms Lee, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the announcement made by the Labor Senator for the ACT, Katy Gallagher, to cut \$3 billion from Australian Public Service contractor and consultant jobs if Labor is elected;
  - (b) the majority of these jobs are in Canberra;
  - (c) these Canberra jobs have been called “wasteful spending” by the Australian Labor Party;
  - (d) they will be replaced by only \$500 million in front line jobs, mostly outside Canberra; and
  - (e) this would equate to the loss of thousands of highly skilled jobs in Canberra, and billions of dollars cut from the ACT economy;
- (2) writes to the Leader of the Australian Labor Party defending Canberra jobs in the public and private sectors;
- (3) calls on the Federal Opposition to drop the policy of massive job cuts in Canberra; and
- (4) condemns ACT Labor Senator Katy Gallagher for proposing a \$3 billion hit to Canberra jobs, and the ACT economy.

This is a pretty simple, straightforward motion. I would think, based on the form of this place, that if those opposite are going to be consistent when it comes to the matter of job cuts being mooted by federal political parties then they should be supporting my motion. The plan that has been announced by Senator Gallagher and the Labor Party federally—and bear in mind that they are ahead in the polls, apparently, and on 21 May might form government; this is not some random hypothetical—is to remove from the forward estimates \$3 billion worth of jobs from Canberra.

These are currently jobs which employ real Canberrans, with real families, doing very important work in the federal government supporting the APS, working in departments across Defence, Treasury, Finance and Industry. Anywhere you go in the federal government you will find these people working hard and diligently, but what we know is that the Labor Party want to sack them.

How many they want to sack is a little difficult to estimate: \$3 billion worth of jobs. Because they have not identified specifically who they are after in terms of whether they are sacking people from defence or they are sacking people from other portfolios, it is a little difficult to quantify that number. If you were to spitball and say an average salary of \$150,000 a year, \$3 billion over four years, you are talking in the order of 5,000 people. So you are talking about 5,000 people out there in Canberra going to work—doing a great job, I would add, for Australia—and a Labor federal government is going to sack them. We do not know which ones. I think the reality is that about one in every four are going to lose their job.

As part of that policy announcement the Labor Party said that, in lieu of the \$3 billion here for principally the sorts of jobs doing policy work in federal departments, they will replace that with \$500 million worth of public service positions, mostly in front-line service provider jobs—NDIA, Centrelink and so on. The bulk of those jobs will not be in Canberra. They are in the regions.

Can you imagine—and I can imagine it because I have lived this—where a federal political party says, “We’re going to rip \$3 billion worth of jobs, about 5,000 jobs”—tell me what the figure is, please—“out of Canberra and we will replace that with about a fifth of that but not in Canberra”? Can you imagine what would be happening from those opposite if that announcement had been made by the federal coalition? I think you would see a very different reaction.

In many ways, this has been a test. It has been a test for the Labor Party to see whether they are going to stand up for Canberra, stand up for Canberrans, real Canberrans out there that have jobs, and stand up for our economy—and \$3 billion over four years is not an insignificant amount—or whether they are just going to back the federal Labor Party, which is what they are doing. They are siding with the people that want to cut \$3 billion out of our economy. They are siding with the people that want to cut in the order of perhaps 5,000 jobs out of Canberra.

The Labor Party make much of the fact that they want to see wage increases. We all do. So why then are they going to sack a lot of these people who normally are in well-paid positions here in Canberra and replace them with people who are, generally speaking, on front-line, lower paid positions out in the regions? It goes against everything they come in here and bleat about. They are always in here talking about these issues. I am a big fan of jobs in Canberra, let me tell you, and I do not support a single job cut being made. I will stand against and I will speak against anyone that is cutting jobs in Canberra, and we have in this place, but we do not pick a side. Here in the Canberra Liberals we will stand up for Canberra jobs, but what you see from those opposite is that Labor job cuts are good. If it was the coalition doing it, it would be bad.

It is pretty disgraceful from this ACT government that Mr Barr is just letting this go through to the keeper, because he knows it is the best thing for Albo and the best thing for Katy and the other Labor candidates perhaps locally to support them and their chances because it might play well out in marginal electorates somewhere else. They know that they have three pretty safe seats here. They do not have to worry about that, do they, Mr Deputy Speaker? They can treat the ACT electorate with contempt. That is what they are doing here by taking \$3 billion out of Canberra jobs and replacing that with a fifth of those jobs, or thereabouts, not in Canberra. If that is not contempt for the ACT public, for this electorate, I do not know what is.

Now, where have the Labor Party been on this? Where have they been locally? Where is Mr Barr and his confected outrage that we see when it is job cuts that have been made by the federal government? Where are they? What this motion says, and it is pretty straightforward, is “call it out”. Do we support Canberra jobs or not? And \$3 billion out of our economy, do we support that happening or not? It is clear that

what we have seen from this government, this coalition government, is that they will back their Labor mates on the hill before they back Canberrans, before they back our economy and before they back jobs.

The question was asked of me this morning about people who have retired and gone back in the public service as a contractor because they are 54/11s. I am sure Mr Gentleman would know many of these people. Under this policy, are you going to sack them all? If you are a 54/11 and you are now working as a contractor back in the public service, are you going to be sacked? Or is it only one in four of those people that is going to be sacked? That is based on the rough numbers I have. Which one in four of those people is going to be sacked? That is what the policy is.

It is very important that we do not fall for the Labor line, which is, “Oh no, we’re just taking people out of contracting and putting them back in the public service.” That is not what is happening here. As far as I can estimate, only a fifth of the jobs, or thereabouts, are not in Canberra. As I said, these are often, as the announcement says, front-line service providers rather than people that do policy work in the departments.

I note that there is an amendment coming around, so I assume this has the support of the Labor Party and the Greens. They are going to back their federal colleagues rather than back Canberra jobs and people working as contractors here in Canberra. They talk about a decade of cuts, privatisations and outsourcing. It is pretty interesting because when the cuts were mooted back in 2012-13, there was a Senate estimates and Dr David Tune, who was the head of the finance department then, presented evidence. You can actually read about it if you go online and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Canberra Times*. You can actually go to the *Hansard* itself. What it shows is that those jobs were already embedded by the Labor Party as voluntary redundancies regardless, without the money there to pay for the redundancies.

Although there was lots of talk a while back about a reduction in the size of the public service and so on, the Labor Party actually did it by stealth when they were still in government. They embedded those job cuts. Dr David Tune was the head of the finance department. You can shake your heads as much as you like, but I can get you a copy of the *Hansard*, if you like. You can read the articles. They are in the *Canberra Times* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. That is the reality.

I note that proposed amendment from Labor talks about Greens policies, so I assume this has got the loving support of their Greens colleagues as well. It calls on the federal coalition to drop their policy of massive job cuts in Canberra. How ironic. It is not the government that is doing that. This is a motion that is talking about the reality, not just the spin—it is not just a spin from this mob—that this is \$3 billion worth of job cuts from the federal Labor Party, not from the coalition.

I think there is a myth out there. There are many myths and I am going to work hard to dispel them. “With the Labor Party it is all about jobs”. Well, it is not, and the policy makes that very clear. You cannot replace \$3 billion in Canberra with \$500 million, predominantly in the regions, without cutting thousands of jobs in Canberra. If someone would like to explain how that policy can do it otherwise, how that magic works, I am all ears. It cannot.

In fact, when you read Ms Orr's proposed amendment, it is clear that she does not go to the substance of what I am saying or what the Labor Party's policy is. It is just a bunch of inaccuracies and fear and smear about what is happening, relying on the sorts of lines that get put out regularly from Labor Party headquarters. The consequence is that if the Labor Party is elected on 21 May, thousands of Canberrans are going to lose their jobs. It seems to me that the Labor Party does not care, because they are contractors. The Labor Party sees two classes of worker. One is the APS worker that they can try and entice into the union. I love them; I think they are great. We will support the APS. My wife is in the APS and I have many friends in the APS.

Equally, the Liberal Party values contractors, people who may have previously been in the APS or in Defence, while working and providing a valuable service to the federal government. But it is clear from this policy and it is clear from the actions of those here today that the Labor Party sees two classes of citizens and two classes of jobs. They want to sack you if you are a contractor and they will not be replacing you. That is what the Labor Party is going to do. I condemn it. I think we should all condemn it. We should all be working to make sure that \$3 billion does not get ripped out of our economy. We should all be working to make sure that thousands of jobs are not lost in Canberra, whether they are APS workers or whether they are contractors.

If the policy announcement had been, "We're going to swap these hardworking people one for one; we're just going to put them in the public service; we're going to go along and say, 'You're currently employed as a contractor; we're now going to employ you as a public service servant,' that would be okay. That is a different policy announcement. But that is not what the policy announcement was.

The policy announcement was to sack them: pure and simple; that is what it was. They are trying to put it out there, "No, it's about augmenting the public service." No, it is not; not in Canberra, not for those thousands of people currently employed as contractors. They will be sacked, unless they want to move to Dubbo, or perhaps Armidale. There was much criticism when a small public service element of a department was moved to Armidale. I agree; it should not have been. I fully support the fact that that and other public service belong in Canberra. There is much to be said about that.

Why is it that when Labor proposes, essentially, sacking a whole bunch of Canberrans and redirecting them and saying, "Well, okay, you can go and work for the NDIA or you can go and work for Centrelink out in Dubbo, Armidale or somewhere else," you lot are cheering it? You lot are applauding that policy. You think it is great. Well, I do not. I think it should be condemned. I think it should be called out for what it is. I must say I am disappointed that, once again, you are backing your Labor mates on the hill as opposed to Canberrans right here in our city.

**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) (3.51): This motion shows the desperation of Zed and his Canberra Liberals. They have been in opposition now in Canberra for 20 years and, as we have heard on

the radio this morning, Mr Assistant Speaker, if they keep coming up with motions like this, they will be in opposition for another 20 years.

Senator Seselja is so desperate he is now running his campaign through his puppets in the Legislative Assembly. Because that is all it is: a front for Zed to have his say in the Assembly he no longer sits in. The motion is insulting to hardworking public servants. Supporting it is indefensible, much like the coalition government's policy on the Australian public service has been indefensible. They have cut jobs, underfunded jobs, and they have destroyed the capability of the public service.

You have to ask: why are Ms Lee, Mr Hanson and the Canberra Liberals defending the indefensible? The only explanation is that their overlord Zed has told them to. The policy that federal Labor has announced is good policy. It is backed by Senator Gallagher, who has worked extremely hard for Canberrans as both their senator and their former Chief Minister. The Canberra Liberals are threatened by her because, unlike Zed, she represents her constituents. Labor believes the public service has a crucial role to play in serving our community and helping to shape the future of our nation.

The public service has an essential role in designing and delivering services for the public good and in developing policy solutions to the challenges the nation faces, both now and into the future. Labor is committed to building a stronger public service that delivers better outcomes for the community, delivers frank and fearless advice to government, acts as a model employer and contributes to building a fairer and more inclusive Australia.

Labor will work constructively with the public service and unions to rebuild an effective public sector with fair and equitable conditions of employment and job security, where the commonwealth acts as a model employer and restores the ability of workers to genuinely bargain. Labor's policies will improve efficiency in the APS, end the years of wasteful spending and boost jobs in service delivery to ensure Australians are able to access high-quality services when and where they need them.

A federal Labor government will be good for Canberra. It will contribute to the life and the economy of our city and ensure it grows into the future. It is going to take time, effort and a lot of resources to fix the damage caused by the Liberal's policy. Another three years of the coalition government will be disastrous for our city and for our nation, especially for working people. This motion today is a stark reminder of how damaging a Canberra Liberal government would be. The motion from Ms Lee and now from Mr Hanson is more fiction than fact. I know this, and hardworking Canberrans know it too.

But let us talk about some of the facts. Under Senator Seselja's tenure, Canberra has lost over 5,000 jobs from the federal public service, jobs that supported local small and medium businesses. Thousands more jobs have been sent out of this city, jobs that could have supported local businesses. They were sent through the decentralisation plan that was championed by Barnaby Joyce and supported by Zed. Senator Seselja chose to support Deputy Prime Minister Joyce instead of Canberrans and their jobs.

Jobs have been lost because of outsourcing to consultants based in Sydney and Melbourne. The federal government have spent billions of taxpayers' dollars on the outsourcing of public sector jobs. In 2020 alone, the Liberals' spending on some of the biggest international consultancy firms was over \$1 billion. The world's two largest strategy consulting firms, McKinsey and Boston, were the greatest beneficiaries of the coalition government's recent increase in outsourcing, each more than doubling their 2019 takings from the Australian taxpayer.

The billions of dollars in profits that these companies make does not support our city. And, contrary to the claims of the Canberra Liberals, this money leaves our city and does not support our economy. The coalition government could have used this \$1 billion to create 12,000 public service jobs—12,000 jobs for this city, the heart of the public service! Zed and his government colleagues instead gave this money to huge multinationals. They should be ashamed, and the Canberra Liberals should be ashamed of the fact that they are defending this.

Taxpayer money is being wasted on consultants. For example, the commonwealth health department spent over \$600,000 on a contract with a global consultancy firm. For this \$600,000, Australian taxpayers received “no specific advice”. All that was received from this contract was an eight-page summary of publicly available data. There is transparency and accountability when public servants do the work. The coalition government's contracts with consultants are shrouded in secrecy.

Public service jobs are secure jobs. They support families and businesses in our city. We need a public service that can be strong and capable into the future. The pandemic has shown this, but we already knew it too. That is why for 20 years the progressive ACT Labor government has grown and supported our own public service.

The ACT government has an insecure work task force, and we are developing a secure employment framework. We have a union encouragement policy, and we engage in good faith when it comes to enterprise bargaining. We have a suite of policies designed to support our workforce, including leave provisions and flexible work arrangements. For those doing business with government, we also have a secure local jobs code and a labour hire licensing scheme. We have a strong and independent workplace safety regulator that ensures all workers in the ACT can get home safely every day.

We know that Zed and the Canberra Liberals hate these progressive policies. The Canberra Liberals have voted against these policies whenever they could. The Canberra Liberals have voted against increasing public service funding for several years. This includes funding for front-line workers such as police, nurses and teachers. Zed's Liberals have also voted against funding for workplace safety measures and against supporting the ACT's workplace safety regulator.

We know that the Canberra Liberals are all talk and no action when it comes to jobs in this city. But now it seems that they have even run out of talk. They have had to turn to one of their most conservative members, one who has not sat in this place for several years, for policy ideas. Well, how embarrassing, and what a terrible idea this is!



The motion is an affront to public servants in our territory. Ms Lee needs to stop the pretence that she is a moderate and instead admit that she is an acolyte of Zed's right-wing conservatives. It is clear that Zed's Canberra Liberals want to implement radical industrial relations policies that will harm Canberrans and deliver more insecure jobs. The ACT government will not support this stunt and instead will be supporting Ms Orr's proposed amendment, which highlights the harm Zed has done to the public service and to our city.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (4.00): I move:

Omit all text after 'That this Assembly' and substitute:

“(1) notes:

- (a) the announcement made by the Labor Senator for the ACT, Katy Gallagher, on a genuine strategy to address the rapid increase in expenditure by the Morrison Government on the outsourcing of public service work to private consultants, contractors and labour hire firms, to do the work previously done more cost-effectively by public servants. The policy announced will rebuild capability, restore skills and improve job security back in the Australian Public Service after nearly a decade of cuts, privatisation and outsourcing;
- (b) the Coalition have cut 5 000 jobs from the Australian Public Service in Canberra as part of their decentralisation agenda, harming the capability of APS agencies;
- (c) the infamous and detrimental move of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from Canberra to Armidale by Barnaby Joyce in 2016;
- (d) in the six years after coming to Government in 2013, the current Coalition Government cut more than 12 000 jobs from the Australian Public Service, driving away long term governance and policy expertise and increasing workloads for remaining public servants;
- (e) Australian Public Servants have endured a decade of real wage cuts and arbitrary caps on wage increases through the current Coalition Government's flawed and unfair approach to Enterprise Bargaining, and this has a flow on impact on the ACT economy;
- (f) the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of a strong capable public sector to deliver outcomes for the community;
- (g) that Senator Gallagher and the Australian Labor Party have a policy of real wage increases and genuine negotiations with union members and their representatives, this will benefit both Australian Public Servants and the ACT economy. Labor's plan includes a strategic reinvestment of nearly \$500 million as part of the first phase of rebuilding capability in the public service – including 1,080 new secure frontline service delivery jobs at Services Australia, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the National Disability Insurance Agency which will improve the delivery of services to Australians; and
- (h) that the Australian Greens have a policy to revitalise the Australian Public Service by restoring the number of public service jobs to match 2012

- levels; lift public sector wages by 4% p/a over the next four years to pull wages up across the private sectors; and limit outsourcing to labour hire firms and the big four accountancy firms to 7.5% of the agency's budget;
- (2) calls on the Speaker on behalf of the Legislative Assembly to write to the Leaders of the Australian Labor Party, The Australian Greens, the Federal Liberal Party and the National Party noting the Assembly's support for the creation of a strong Australian Public Service and secure public sector jobs;
  - (3) calls on the Federal Coalition to drop their policy of massive job cuts in Canberra; and
  - (4) commends both the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Greens on their policies of developing and strengthening the Australian Public Service and supporting policy frameworks that will provide a pathway to secure employment."

The motion moved by Mr Hanson on behalf of Ms Lee this afternoon is astounding for both its misconstruing of Labor Party policy and its clear opposition to providing secure jobs and a well-resourced Australian public service. The plan that has been presented by the Australian Labor Party to bring the skills and workers that provide critical government services to the community back into direct government employment is a good, commendable plan.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, the coalition government had cut more than 12,000 jobs from the APS. This has led to severe damage to the capacity and capability of the public service to provide the critical functions for which it exists. While also cutting front-line jobs and agency funding, the coalition has also implemented a rapid increase in wasteful expenditure on private external labour.

This includes not only contracts with the big four consultancy firms to provide services but also an extreme level of reliance on labour hire firms to provide general labour for the public service. This essentially means paying a company to recruit an employee who does ongoing APS work full time, but the labour hire company gets a fee for every hour they work and they often get paid less than a directly employed APS employee would. This not only costs more, but these workers are technically employed on a casual basis and have no job security; they do not get sick leave and they do not get annual leave and they are generally treated as not as equal. The National Disability Insurance Agency is one of the agencies most impacted by this kind of employment system and this is one of the factors that leads to the extreme staff turnover in the agency, as staff will leave if they can find a permanent position in another area.

The Labor plan put forward in this election is to stop this kind of unfair and wasteful method of employing public servants. The plan will see many of these labour hire employees able to transition into secure employment within the APS. This does not mean cuts to jobs in Canberra; this means more secure, fair and direct employment for the public servants who do excellent work within the territory. The claim by Ms Lee in her motion that this will all lead to job cuts and skills loss for Canberra is not only ridiculous but also disingenuous. The opposition knows very well what the proposal by Labor actually is and the opposition is merely behaving as a mouthpiece for the desperate panicking of a Liberal senator who thinks he is going to lose his job.

The coalition have a well-known and horrific track record with their treatment of the public service and their disdain for the ACT. They have an official policy of decentralisation of the APS away from Canberra, and there have been over 5,000 APS jobs lost from the territory since they took office in 2013. Barnaby Joyce gave the best example of this bungled policy with his attempt to move the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to Armidale in 2016. With little consultation, no planning and no forward thinking, Mr Joyce unilaterally announced the move, which was clearly aimed at shoring up his own electoral prospects in the seat of New England.

Mr Assistant Speaker, many of the staff were unable or unwilling to move to Armidale. They ended up staying in Canberra anyway. The costs of the move for the APVMA also blew out and the performance of the agency was reported to have suffered extreme drops due to staff and morale issues. This is the government that Ms Lee is attempting to prop up with her motion today.

Not only have the coalition government been cutting the APS and moving those employees that they can away from Canberra but also they have been failing to bargain in good faith with employees and their union representatives and have even imposed an arbitrary cap on salary increases. Federal public servants have endured nearly a decade of real wage cuts under this disrespectful government.

I have direct personal experience of this campaign against the rights and pay of federal public servants. I was one of them in 2014 when my agency was bargaining for the next enterprise agreement. It was very clear then and it remains very clear now that investing in the public service and building capability and respecting the role of public servants to provide frank and fearless advice is not a priority for the federal coalition government.

As members will be able to see in the amendment to Ms Lee's motion that I have moved today, which has been circulated, my amendment corrects Ms Lee's assertions and notes some of the more positive policies that Senator Gallagher and the Australian Labor Party have put forward at this current federal election. They are good, fair policies which will not only benefit individual current and potential public servants and the public service as a whole but also benefit the ACT economy.

The original motion was nothing more than a politicking on behalf of Zed Seselja, who is clearly panicking about losing his seat. The Canberra Liberals do not actually care about the welfare or job security of Canberra's thousands of public service workers and have demonstrated that through this cheap attempt at point scoring. My amendment to Ms Lee's motion brings the motion into reality, and I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.05): I would like to begin by acknowledging the value of the Australian public service, the jobs that it has and the value that it brings to the Canberra economy and community. Like many Canberrans, I have spent decades of my life working in the public service. As such, I understand the importance of these jobs not just to Canberrans' prosperity but to their wellbeing. I am bemused that we have seen in the past week a Liberal senator campaigning on local

government issues, whilst we see the Leader of the Opposition wanting to talk about federal government issues. Perhaps the two might like to arrange a job swap.

I wholeheartedly reject Ms Lee's equation of the outsourced consulting contractor with the labour hire work of the APS. Whilst all involve a person working at a desk who goes home to their family and loved ones at the end of the day, they are very different things. The coalition's habitual expansion of private industry into the purview of the APS has been damaging not only to the workers in the APS but also to the service delivery and outcomes of the APS.

In October of 2021 the Senate released its *Second interim report: insecurity in publicly-funded jobs*. This report explicitly linked the increase in contracting and consulting with worse outcomes for workers. Workers in these jobs have lower career progression, are subject to worse conditions and are more vulnerable to job loss. Not only are these arrangements bad for workers but they are bad for the government as well. To quote directly from the report:

While the agencies have highlighted that external and casual workers are cheaper and easier to hire and fire, labour hire companies and outsourced service providers have been allowed to pillage the public purse for excessive profit margins, meaning not only is the Australian public receiving a degraded quality of service, they are also paying more for it.

Who wins from these contracts and consultancies? It is not the workers. It is not the government agencies. It is the major private corporations and the politicians they back. In 2021 alone, the government spent \$850 million on contracts with the big four of Deloitte, KPMG, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and EY, and well over \$1 billion in contracts outsourcing what should have been public sector work. That money could have employed 12,000 APS staff. It does not go without note that the very same big four contractors which the coalition have been eager to award contracts to have become the largest sources of political donations in Australia, collectively donating more than \$5.6 million over the past decade.

I wish to draw your attention to the recent decentralisation of public sector jobs and how Canberran workers and the Canberra economy have been particularly affected. The coalition's ideological commitment to having more public servants in regional areas has, in effect, been a policy of moving public sector jobs to anywhere but Canberra. This policy unfairly targets public service agencies, Canberra and Canberrans. It is part of a political project on the part of the coalition, rather than thoughtful, evidence-based policy. It has been demonstrated that decentralisation projects have gutted agencies of precious knowledge and skills, dramatically slashing agency performance. It has also been criticised by experienced and leading bureaucrats. It impacts Canberra and its economy. It impacts Canberrans, creating job uncertainty, impacting career progression and skills development.

The Greens have set out a comprehensive policy to tackle the issue of consultancies and contracting, while strengthening the APS and the people who work within it. Our policy includes restoring the number of public service jobs to 2012 levels over a four-year period, which will lead to an increase in the APS to over 153,000 people; lifting public sector wages by four per cent per annum over the next four years to pull

up wages across multiple sectors; limiting outsourcing to labour hire firms and the big four; allowing public servants to participate in public debate and run for election, so as to be part of our active democracy; protecting public service whistleblowers; requiring public sector agencies to address their gender pay gap; and championing diverse and inclusive employment through targeted APS workforce strategies. This will mean more people in the public sector to help meet the education, housing, health, social security, environmental protection and infrastructure needs of our country.

This initiative complements policies to increase funding in public science, health and research organisations, invest in public energy, manufacturing and housing and establish a greener Australia. After restoring staffing levels, the Greens will then increase the size of the public service at the same rate as the population grows. Australia needs its public service to always be ready to deliver essential services to the community and to help drive the transition to a clean economy with a sustainable future. In order to build an effective and responsive public service with the skills and capabilities to meet the Australian people's needs, we need to return to insourcing and bring an end to the incessant outsourcing that has plagued the APS. For these reasons I support Ms Orr's amendment to Ms Lee's motion.

**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) (4.11): Ms Lee's motion, through Mr Hanson, shows the opposition's serious lack of understanding. It always has had this lack of understanding when it comes to the Australian public service. The APS is integral to the nation and to our city. It literally shapes our future. I am a proud former federal public servant. Indeed, it is the reason that I moved to this city. I know that several of my Labor colleagues are proud former federal public servants too. I can attest to the professionalism, the diligence, the hard work and the care of that workforce.

I also want to recognise that there can be a role for consultants and consulting firms. This might be where the expertise does not exist, where extra support might be needed, or for surge capacity perhaps. There can be legitimate reasons. Consulting firms are employers and can support jobs growth. But we need to be crystal clear about what has been happening here over the past decade and what the Liberals are seeking to perpetuate.

The federal government has an ideological obsession with a culture of cuts to the APS. Jobs have been cut but the work has not stopped. Work has still needed to be done, but instead it has been outsourced to private corporations, hollowing out the expertise of our public service. This is done at a significant cost—taxpayer cost, the cost to efficiency, the cost to long-term governance and the cost to policy know-how. And, together with a decade of real wage cuts and arbitrary caps on wage increases, it has come at the cost of impacting the economic security of our public servants.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the APS and the Canberra economy which the opposition never seem to get. I do not know if it is wilful or if they just really do not get it. Either way, they should try a bit harder. Withdrawing investment in the APS, hollowing out the expertise of the APS, undermining our workforces, attacking

Canberra, impacts our economy and it impacts our small businesses. Perhaps Ms Castley should take note.

I support Ms Orr's comprehensive amendment, and I support it because I want to see a federal government that invests in the APS. A federal government that invests in our APS is one that supports our city, its growth and its future. I commend the amendment to the chamber.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.14): I will speak to the amendment and close the debate. I thank members for their contributions. I actually agree with some of the rhetoric in the speeches. I do not want to see fragmentation. I do not want to see cuts to jobs. The problem is that that is what the Labor Party policy actually does. Even though they are arguing motherhood statements, the Labor Party and the Greens are actually arguing something that is not the reality of the policy. The policy, as I have said ad nauseum, is \$3 billion of job cuts, principally in Canberra, and \$500 million, about a sixth of the money, and maybe a fifth of the jobs—someone has to quantify that—will be in frontline positions in the NDIS and so on. I imagine there will be a bunch of them in Armidale. The irony!

The Labor Party and the Greens, in supporting this policy, in supporting job cuts, are supporting a weakening of federal departments and are arguing for fragmentation, because that is where these 1,000 jobs will go, by necessity. It will be untenable, unless they are going to augment the NDIS and Centrelink by 1,000 people here in Canberra. That is clearly not the policy; they are going to Armidale and Dubbo—to wherever they may be.

It is ironic as well that Mr Gentleman, who trots out the same old lines, would talk about staff cuts and not having enough staff to do the job. This government has created the worst teacher shortage—a critical shortage—in the history of the ACT! There is a crisis. They are so short that not only is it affecting educational outcomes but we have had to shut schools down because they are so violent. It is not me saying this; it is the union. The teachers union has said that there is a critical shortage. Whose watch is this on? Mr Gentleman's. He is hardly one to lecture about staff when his government has created that.

In question time today we heard about staff and the nurses union saying they feared for their lives when going to work under this ACT government. What about the police union saying they are spread so thin that their members are stressed and they cannot do their job? I will not be lectured by an ACT government that has created a crisis across so many areas of its own local government by driving staff shortages. Those are not my words; that is coming from the unions. You can read what the AEU, the police association and the nurses union have had to say about this government.

When it comes to job cuts federally, I do not want to see a single job cut in the public service. Let me put that on the record. My colleagues and I are very strong supporters of the Australian public service. That does not mean we have to hate contractors. Unfortunately, that is the Labor Party position. We are happy to say that public servants are vital to what we do here in this nation. We support them, we commend them and we stand with them. It does not mean that you have to hate contractors, and

that is what you see from the Labor Party, from their Senate candidates and what they are spruiking in their positions.

The fact is they say things that are simply an attempt to rewrite history. What I refer to there is the actual cuts that happened under the Rudd government to the federal public service. At the end of the Rudd-Gillard fiasco, they were running out of money, because, like all Labor governments, they had spent it all, and they enforced redundancies. Senator Wong, when she became a shadow minister, thought that she had a good attack point here and questioned the head of the finance department, Mr Tune, about this. This is what was said:

The advice that the government has received is that, over the forward estimates, the funding profile that you determined—

this was the former Labor government—

translated into 8,819 fewer Public Service jobs, and that that reduction combined with another 846 jobs from so-called more efficient management structures and 4,808 jobs through the additional efficiency dividend to 2.25 per cent takes the total reduction in public sector staff to 14,473—as a result of decisions that you made—

as in Senator Wong—

before the last election—that were never publicly disclosed.

There you have it, Mr Assistant Speaker. As much as we hear from those opposite, “We’ll always stand by the public service; we’ll never cut those jobs,” the Secretary to the Department of Finance put on the record in a Senate hearing that the Labor Party, the last time they were in government, by stealth, cut over 14,000 public service jobs. It is in *Hansard*. You can look at it in the media as well. I will not be lectured to by a party that, last time they were in government, cut thousands of public service jobs by stealth.

At least this time, I suppose, they are being honest about it. They are saying, “We don’t like contractors. We want to sack you. We want to sack thousands of you.” At least they are being honest. Last time they cut public servants by stealth—14,700 of them! Shame! I do not want them to cut \$3 billion of contractors’ jobs, thousands of contractors’ jobs, but at least this time they are being honest about it. At least we can commend them for that, I suppose. Seemingly, to use their language, with these other jobs that they are creating in the APS out in the regions. the Labor Party would describe that as pork-barrelling. I am not because I think they are important jobs, and I support the creation of jobs to provide those services.

Mr Braddock talked about public servants going home to their families and loved ones, as public servants do, after their day’s work. Good. I agree that that is what they do, but so do contractors. Contractors have families, too. Contractors go home to their families. Contractors have loved ones. Contractors have to put a meal on the table. Contractors have to pay their mortgage. What we know is that about 4,000 or 5,000 of

them will struggle to do that, unless they move to Armidale, or wherever the Labor Party moves these jobs to.

Obviously, I will not support the amendment, because it is full of inaccuracies. It hides the fact that last time that the Labor Party were in government they cut 14,700 jobs by stealth. They embedded it in budgets and did not tell anyone. This is an anti-contractor policy. We in the Liberal Party support the APS. Let me say that the Canberra Liberals will never support job cuts to the APS. We will not. We always support a strong Australian public service.

Equally, we support the augmentation of that, the support of that, by a strong contractor workforce, which is in contrast to the view of those opposite. Shame on them for not standing up to a policy that will cut so many jobs. Do not listen to the rhetoric. They will have you believe that this is just transferring contractors over to public servants. It is not. If that is what the policy was, it would be a whole different debate, and I would not be standing here today. But that is not the policy. That is not what we are debating. What we are seeing here today is a cutting of jobs and, whether they are public servants or whether they are contractors, I would not be supporting it. This is cutting jobs. I do not support cutting jobs in Canberra. I do not want to see jobs cut in Canberra.

By opposing this motion today, by moving this disingenuous amendment, you are actually supporting job cuts in Canberra. That is the reality of the Labor Party policy, like it or not. There may be benefits in the region, in Centrelink somewhere or in the NDIA. Good; that is great. But the reality is that you are cutting \$3 billion of jobs, with the bulk of that in Canberra. How can any of you support that? How can you walk out of this place and say that you support jobs in Canberra and that you support our economy?

The reality is that that is your rhetoric. The reality is that you do not, and we know that, because when we look at your government and what you deliver, it is a critical teacher shortage, a critical police shortage and violence that our nurses have to confront every day.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 7

Mr Braddock  
Ms Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Ms Davidson  
Mr Davis  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Orr

Dr Paterson  
Mr Pettersson  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Stephen-Smith  
Ms Vassarotti

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Kikkert  
Ms Lawder  
Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton



Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### **Charnwood—community garden**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (4.28): Autumn is a wonderful time of year in Canberra. Non-native trees erupt into garlands of scarlet and gold leaves, providing visual warmth to balance the arrival of shorter days and cooler temperatures. Jackets and jumpers come out of cupboards, and thoughts turn to crackling fires and the comfort of hearty, home-cooked meals. Autumn is also the time when many fruits and vegetables are ready for harvest—an ideal time, therefore, to visit a community garden.

I rise today to thank convenor Teresa Rose and the Charnwood Community Garden Committee for inviting me to join them and many garden members this past Sunday afternoon in celebrating the completion of their new shelter. This event was an opportunity to thank those who had helped construct the shelter by working on the building and attendant landscaping, as well as business owners and community members who gave discounts on construction materials or made financial donations.

The Charnwood Community Garden was established in the 1980s and is one of the largest in Canberra, with 45 different plots. Membership reflects a wide range of both ages and cultural backgrounds, resulting in a diverse array of fruits and vegies that are grown. Plots are maintained by individual members, but of course a community garden is a gathering place where both expertise and tastes are shared.

The end result is obviously good for the environment and very good for families. Research has found numerous benefits to growing, cooking and eating one's own food, especially when done as a family or as part of a community. These benefits include improved health and nutrition; decreased use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; improved mental health; and better academic performance at school.

Children who understand where produce comes from and how to make it grow often enjoy a wider variety of healthy foods and better understand the importance of protecting and caring for landscapes. Being able to grow one's own fruit and veg certainly helps during this difficult time of inflation and disruption to supply chains.

I am grateful for the concept of community gardens and for the existence of two such gardens in my electorate of Ginninderra, with one in Cook, in addition to the one in Charnwood. I would be grateful to see more community gardens and also the

resources needed to help more families become self-reliant by successfully learning to grow their own food.

Lastly, I would also like to thank Charnwood Community Garden member Xing Hua for sharing with me some of his delicious bok choy on Sunday. Thank you.

### **Kambah—heritage walk**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.31): I would like to talk a little bit today about the suburb of Kambah, with a population of 14,900 people across 11 square kilometres and a quietly growing number of small businesses. There were 736 as at 30 June 2020.

On Sunday I had the great pleasure of going on a heritage walk through Kambah, with Mr Davis. It was a wonderful exploration of the suburb's history, with highlights that included the Kambah woolshed and the Urambi Hills Nature Reserve, both of which are on the west part of Kambah.

But there are many interesting things to see on the east side of Drakeford Drive, and I would just like to point out a few of them today. These include the very popular Mannheim Cafe, as well as the Kambah Village Shopping Centre, where the Davidsons had their first pizza shop many years ago. It is now a great place to find vinyl records, home-brew gear, supplies for keeping reptiles, board games, and also one of my very favourite *Big Issue* vendors in Canberra, Grace.

There are 15 playgrounds on the east side of Kambah, which is two more than on the west side. When you have a house full of energetic kids, a playground that you can actually walk to from home is very helpful. There is also the ACT Model Car Racing Club track, and the Mount Taylor trails, as well as the Tuggeranong Tornadoes Little Athletics club, which has been developing skills and having fun for more than 40 years.

There are lots and lots of great things to do to keep everyone physically active on the east side. There is also some beautiful artwork that is visible if you are going up Athllon Drive. It is on Morrison Circuit. It is called "Because of her, we can" and depicts Aboriginal women.

Kambah is divided by Drakeford Drive, with the east side of Drakeford falling within the Murrumbidgee electorate and the west side in Brindabella, but it was never meant to be divided. It was supposed to be connected socially and geographically with green areas and reserves for the residents to walk or ride through. I must give thanks to Louise, who was at Sunday's heritage walk, for telling me about this.

The "Davo caucus" are always united and work well together—despite Drakeford Drive—on everything from local sports facilities to the best dance moves at community events. Despite that Drakeford Drive separator, we are very happy to be representing Kambah together. The Davo caucus agenda's number one point of agreement will always be: "How good is Kambah?" Thank you.

### **Ginninderra electorate—IT industry**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.34): Recently I was honoured to take a tour of the highly impressive NEXTDC C1 Data Centre in Bruce, in my electorate of Ginninderra. Hearing from legal counsel Timothy Butler and the NEXTDC team about their high-end, smart IT service operations was an enjoyable and fascinating experience.

It was exciting to see a leading Australian technology company with a nationwide network establish itself in my electorate, bringing jobs, services and opportunities to Belconnen and the ACT. A smart IT industry should be a focus for the future of Canberra's employment environment. Working with Canberra's established public sector and emerging private sector presents a plethora of opportunities for smart industries to thrive here.

The success of the NEXTDC C1 Data Centre serves as a shining testament to the opportunity that the ACT has to capitalise on our capital status. Canberra is a natural hub for extraordinary people. Our cultural institutions, top-ranked universities and highly educated population attract the best and brightest across this nation and around the world; but, unfortunately, we struggle to retain many of them.

We must unlock the value of private sector jobs and economic growth in the ACT and continue to advocate for the removal of burdensome red tape, which all too often scares off highly skilled graduates and job seekers. How fantastic, for example, would it be for a University of Canberra IT graduate or ANU graduate to cross Haydon Drive and work in smart IT for a company like NEXTDC? To inspire young people to stay in Canberra, to be part of exciting, new, emerging industries, we need to ensure that the young people have a chance to start a career in Canberra in industries like smart IT that will set them up for a fulfilling professional life and ready to serve our society for the future.

The advent of COVID, of course, has shaken the model of office-based employment to its very foundation. Remote work is increasingly looking to be the future of work for millions of Australians. Digital and data literacy should be a focus for Canberra as the prevalence of IT solutions will increasingly impact every industry. Smart IT will be a key to this transition and it is vital that Canberra stays ahead of the game to ensure economic resilience and a futureproofed job market.

I wish Tim and the C1 team at NEXTDC all the best for their business and look forward to seeing many more smart IT businesses and highly skilled professionals realise the strong potential of Canberra as a destination for next-generation industries. Thank you.

### **Kambah—heritage walk**

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (4.37): I rise, as the vice-president and secretary of the "Davo caucus" in this Assembly, to respond to my esteemed colleague Minister Davidson's remarks as a fellow member for Kambah. Yes, of course it was a great travesty, I think, when the Electoral Commission, in its wisdom, chose to divide the

suburb of Kambah up into two electorates, with the east side served well by my colleague Minister Davidson and me taking on the west side.

It feels appropriate, Madam Speaker, given my history with the west side of Kambah, that, while Minister Davidson speaks fondly of the east side, I have to tell you what is going on on the west side. You see, I was born and raised in Tuggeranong. I grew up on the west side. It was a bit of a novelty, as a student at the former Kambah High School, whether or not you came from the east side or the west side. Which group of friends you might have had at school, which side of the school hall or canteen you sat on depended on it. It was very parochial, very territorial. So I bring that defence for the west side into the chamber this afternoon.

One thing that I was particularly interested to hear in Minister Davidson's remarks, because she is of course the data nerd of this Assembly—or, at the very least, of our party room—is that there are two more playgrounds on the east side of Kambah than there are on the west side. If that is true and if anybody in Minister Steel's office is listening, be assured that that will insist on a letter from my office in the coming hours. I suspect I will not be able to go home without getting on top of that. The idea that the east is beating the west on anything, Madam Speaker, has gotten my attention.

In all seriousness, it was a pleasure to attend the heritage walk led by Kambah community locals, including Glenn and Louise, who showed us the rich history of the area of Kambah, the Urambi Hills and the beautiful housing estate on Crozier Circuit that we are all familiar with.

But, I will say, as a member for Brindabella and an active supporter of the west side of Kambah, that as good as the Mannheim Cafe is, Minister Davidson, as good as it is, you will not find a better coffee in Kambah than at the Lazzari Bros' at the Carleton Street shops. The great thing about going to the Lazzari Bros' at the Carleton Street shops is that it also means you can pick up gifts from Bewitched giftware and then get a pizza from Little Theo's, so it really is a one-stop shop for all your Kambah needs. I can strongly recommend it.

In my work with Ms Lawder and Mr Pettersson we have recently had the privilege of going to the Namadgi School on a guided tour, as part of our work on the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion. It is a tremendous school, and it was a real privilege to see this wonderful public education institution on the grounds of the former Kambah High School.

Madam Speaker, you have heard the story a million times over, so I will not bore you again, but my relationship to that school site and that school community is probably what led me to a stumbling block of decisions that now means I am here and get to annoy you with my wares—or at least annoy nine of you with my wares—so I have a lot of affinity for the Namadgi School and the fantastic things that are happening there.

It is worth noting that the Kambah community did not enjoy being split up between two electorates, Murrumbidgee and Brindabella respectively. And while Minister Davidson and I make an effort to work hard and meet regularly to discuss issues

relevant to our shared constituency of Kambah, it is fair to say that Kambah hopes one day to be reunited as one whole community, served in one electorate.

That, of course, means that I would have to take back everything I have just said, should the Electoral Commissioner one day, in their wisdom, decide to include east Kambah in the electorate of Brindabella. Were that to happen, I would simply need to co-opt all of the wonderful things Minister Davidson has had to say today, because that may very well be, all things considered, an area of town that we Brindabella members may have the privilege of representing in the future. But until such time, Minister Davidson is keeping the seat very warm. Thank you.

### **Professor Don Aitkin AO—tribute**

**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) (4.41): I rise to pay tribute to the late Professor Don Aitkin AO, former Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra from 1991 to 2002, and long-serving former Chair of the ACT Cultural Facilities Corporation.

Don, who passed away in April this year, had a long-lasting impact on the arts and the cultural sector in Canberra, with nearly a decade as the Chair of the Cultural Facilities Corporation from 2002 to 2011. Don was known for his inspirational leadership, his deep understanding of the cultural sector and his detailed knowledge of Canberra's heritage.

He was instrumental in bringing the Nolan Collection to CMAG, in raising the profile of our ACT historic places and in telling the story of Canberra. He was also a vocal and longstanding advocate for the expansion of Canberra Theatre. Don was widely acknowledged for his deep recognition of the importance of arts and culture in the lives of both individuals and the community.

As Chair of the CFC he was generous with his time, his intellect and his personal resources. At the conclusion of his service on the CFC board, Don was recognised with the establishment of the Don Aitkin Awards, which are provided each year to members of staff and volunteers who have made an outstanding contribution to the mission of the CFC. Thirty-three people have received a Don Aitkin award over the past decade.

Don was deeply committed to the role of Canberra as both the national capital and a vibrant community of people. He was passionate about our city's history and had grand visions for our future. He believed in the importance of arts and culture both in enriching the lives of individuals and in ensuring that our city is a vibrant, diverse and rewarding place to live. He firmly believed that everyone is inherently creative and should be given the opportunity to explore their creative potential, and to participate in cultural experiences.

Don's PhD from ANU in 1964 was followed by a postdoctoral fellowship at Oxford, a social research position at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and then a

research fellowship at the ANU. He was the foundation Professor of Politics at Macquarie University in the 1970s and returned to the ANU in 1980 as Professor of Political Science.

He was highly influential in the evolution of national policies for research and higher education in Australia from the mid-1980s, as the inaugural Chairman of the Australian Research Grants Committee, and as a member of the Australian Science and Technology Council, and Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University. He was also Chair of the National Capital Authority and was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1998.

Don was also a prolific author of non-fiction books and essays, fiction novels, media articles and a widely-read blog which he was still contributing to until late last year, including a series of heartbreaking reflections on ageing, loss and dementia as he watched his beloved wife Beverley live with dementia and pass away early last year.

To every end, Don was articulate, he was inspiring, and generous with his time and with his ideas. He was a truly great Canberran whose legacy will be felt both in the ACT and indeed in the nation for a very long time to come.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 4.46 pm.**