



Debates

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Legislative Assembly for the ACT

TENTH ASSEMBLY

27 June 2023

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Tuesday, 27 June 2023

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

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

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

Absence of Clerk

Madam Speaker informed the Assembly that, due to the absence of the Clerk, the Acting Deputy Clerk would act as Clerk.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Lawder for this sitting week due to personal reasons.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 18

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (10.02): I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 18—*Inquiry into Modern Slavery Legislation Amendment Bill 2023*, dated 21 June 2023, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the 10th Assembly. The committee received 11 submissions and held a public hearing on 14 June 2023. The committee heard from: the ACT Human Rights Commission, the New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner, Ms David, the Special Minister of State and Ms Jo Clay.

The report makes four recommendations as part of its inquiry. While the committee supports the intent of the bill and does not preclude legislation being made in this space, the committee recommends that the Assembly does not pass the bill in its current form. In light of the evidence provided by the New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner and the findings from the McMillan review of the federal system, there is currently provision for changes that could be made in the interim to the existing arrangements to improve procurement practices relating to modern slavery. This could be through the creation of a collaborative oversight body from various ACT government agencies in the first instance.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank those who contributed to the committee's inquiry during the hearing and those who made a submission to the inquiry. I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.04): I want to speak briefly about the committee's report on my Modern Slavery Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I want to thank the committee and all the individuals and organisations who took the time to make a submission. It was a really short time frame, and there is a lot going on nationally in this context. It was really good to see that there was support for a strong legislative response in the ACT from The Freedom Hub, ACRATH, the Human Rights Commissioner, ACTCOSS, the Salvation Army, and the New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner, as well as many individuals.

It is a really active space at that moment. The Commonwealth has just funded the establishment of a federal anti-slavery commissioner, the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner was appointed last year, and there are moves in other jurisdictions like Victoria and Western Australia to ensure that modern slavery is not part of government supply chains. I am really looking forward to the ACT joining that movement.

I undertook writing this bill as a private member with help from many academics, advocacy organisations and national organisations who are working with survivors of modern slavery. We are living in difficult times. We have 50 million people worldwide living in conditions of modern slavery, which is more than at any point in human history, so we know we need to move on this, and that is one of the reasons we have a legislative response to modern slavery in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement.

The submissions were detailed and thoughtful. A lot of them made some excellent drafting comments and technical changes, and we are looking forward in our office to digging in, re-drafting and addressing those issues. It is really important that our response to modern slavery is educative and iterative. It is important that we have a good community conversation, and I am so pleased we had a committee inquiry to advance that—that was really good to see—and it is important that we have a bill that reflects all the inputs we have received, particularly from the New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner, who has some incredibly valuable insights for us after his first year in the job.

We are the third Australian jurisdiction taking a serious look at this problem, but there are probably another two who are about to jump on board, so we really need to make

sure that we have a good robust system here in the ACT that is genuinely delivering a good response. It is an issue that is above politics. I am really looking forward to working with my colleagues in the Canberra Liberals and ACT Labor to make sure that we have a strong and robust system that ensures our supply chains here in the ACT are not taking part in modern slavery and that we are genuinely making sure we do not have people living in conditions of modern slavery in our borders. We heard a lot of evidence during the inquiry that that is happening and we heard a lot of statements from the New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner, who receives whistleblower calls on a regular basis from every state and territory.

I would like to thank the committee and the secretariat for their work, and I would like to thank everybody who has taken part in this project so far.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Petitions

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Seniors—retirement villages—petitions 38-22 and 08-23

By **Mr Rattenbury**, Minister for Consumer Affairs, dated 8 June 2023, in response to petitions lodged by Mr Pettersson on 21 March 2023, concerning the establishment of an ACT Ombudsman for retirement villages.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 21 March 2023 about E-petitions E-PET-038-22 and E-PET-038-23 (Establishment of an ACT Ombudsman for Retirement Villages). I am providing this response on behalf of the ACT Government, as Minister for Consumer Affairs.

The ACT Government recognises that the timely and accessible resolution of disputes is important for residents of retirement villages, and that for many residents, more formal court and tribunal processes can be complex, costly and stressful.

For this reason, the ACT Government amended the *Retirement Villages Act 2012* in 2017 to enhance dispute resolution options for residents. This included the establishment of internal disputes committees, intended to assist in the timely and local resolution of disputes. In further recognition of this issue, in July 2019, the ACT Government also expanded the functions of the ACT Human Rights Commission, to include the ability to consider retirement village disputes.

On 22 March 2023, the Legislative Assembly passed a Resolution that requires the Government to investigate the establishment of an ACT retirement villages ombudsman that is non-adversarial and accessible, with the power to make binding decisions to resolve disputes between a resident of a retirement village

and the operator of the village. A copy of the Resolution can be found in Notice Paper 75 at the following link: <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/in-thechamber/chamber-documents>.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring access to justice for all members of the community, and to investigating the issues and concerns raised in both the Petition and the Assembly Resolution. An informed and considered response to the retirement villages ombudsman proposal will be provided through the Assembly Resolution process. The Assembly Resolution requires that this response is provided by the final sitting day in September.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Roads—Harrison—petition 41-22

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 9 June 2023, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Braddock on 21 March 2023, concerning road safety on Nullarbor Avenue in Harrison.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter regarding petition 41-22, lodged by Mr Andrew Braddock MLA, about road safety on Nullarbor Avenue in Harrison.

The determination of speed limits in the ACT is based on the classification of roads through a formal road hierarchy. This classification fundamentally relates to the predominant function of a road and to the extent it serves the two basic purposes of the road network – the movement of traffic and access to property.

Nullarbor Avenue has been designed and constructed as a major collector road with a desirable environmental capacity of 6,000 vehicles per day. Its predominant function is to provide a principal link between the arterial road network (Flemington Road and Well Station Drive) and the lower order residential streets within the suburb, as well as provide access to properties. The 60km/h speed limit is therefore an appropriate reflection of the functional requirements of this road. A 40km/h school zone and pedestrian crossing have been provided in the vicinity of the school and the playing fields to further provide a safe environment for pedestrians as well as other road users.

Notwithstanding the above, Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) has investigated the concerns raised regarding travelling volumes and speeds on Nullarbor Avenue. The most recent traffic surveys indicate the road carries approximately 2,742 vehicles per day travelling at an average speed of around 53 km/h in the vicinity of the residences near Well Station Drive, and 3,891 vehicles per day travelling at an average speed of around 46 km/h in the vicinity of the Harrison playing fields. These speeds are well within acceptable limits for the road environment.

The situation in Harrison raises broader issues about the designation of roads and safety standards across the road hierarchy in the ACT. The issue of road safety and safe speeds on certain collector roads that include adjacent facilities such as schools will be considered as part of the development of the next Road Safety Action Plan.

I am aware that some motorists speed on many ACT roads. Speeding is an enforcement issue best addressed by ACT Policing. I encourage constituents to report such behaviour to ACT Policing on 131 444 or to Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000, providing as much detail as possible. This information can assist ACT Policing in following up the matter.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Motion to take note of petitions

Motion (by **Madam Speaker**), pursuant to standing order 98A, agreed to:

That the responses so lodged be noted.

Bushfire preparedness—prescribed burning program 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) (10.08): I wish to bring to the Assembly's attention and acknowledge the ongoing work to protect the community from bushfires through the delivery of well-planned and executed prescribed burns.

Our memories of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and the Orroral Valley fire remain strong. The season had 391 declared fires, and the ACT's Namadgi National Park was heavily burnt. It was only recently that the road into Orroral Valley was reopened to the public. During the Orroral Valley fire alone, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service supplied 178 staff for a total of 895 shifts. When interstate deployments are included, the number shifts increased to almost 2,400. This is an extraordinary effort from both from our people in the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and from interstate colleagues. I am extremely proud of the hard work and resilience that was displayed. There were also 151 days of stand up due to high fire danger across the season. Of course, these numbers do not include the significant and very important effort provided through our valued volunteer brigades.

We have had three very wet years and the COVID-19 pandemic since Black Summer. However, there are predictions of a drying period associated with a possible El Nino season ahead. There is also the CSIRO prediction where temperatures will increase by an average of 1.5 degrees, occurring in the next five years. It is time to refocus and redouble our efforts on fire management.

In addition to their role in protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural environment, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service perform a critical role in reducing the risk of bushfires in the ACT. They are responsible for planning and delivering the prescribed burn program and for providing firefighting capacity in support of the Emergency Services Agency when bushfires occur. PCS has a unique role as the largest manager of land in the ACT and the largest permanent bushfire response team in the ACT.

Today, I will give the Assembly an insight into the level of planning, logistics and operational commitment required to deliver on the management of fire in our landscapes. I will provide an overview of the emerging priorities that PCS, as a land manager and bushfire-fighting resource, will need to address and adapt to in the face of climate change.

The ACT Parks and Conservation Service manages approximately 70 per cent of the ACT's land. This includes land to the north and to the west of Canberra that presents the most significant risk to life and property as well as critical ecological and cultural values and ecosystem services such as fresh water. The 10-year Regional Fire Management Plan prepared by PCS identifies the strategies and specific target areas for fire fuel management. This can be burning, physical removal, grazing, or chemical and mechanical treatment. Strategies and target areas are identified through modelling of a number of fire-run scenarios and associated estimates of the risk to life and property each run provides. Further assessment identifies risk to ecological and cultural values and the measures we need to put in place to address these.

The annual Bushfire Operations Plan, known as the BOP, is the annual program of work that delivers on strategies set out in the Regional Fire Management Plan. The annual autumn burn season represents the best window for implementing hazard reduction burns. The BOP proposes burns for the year based on what PCS can reasonably deliver in an average year. Finding an "average" year is increasingly difficult in the face of climate change.

The decision to burn comes down to careful assessment by fire behavioural analysts to ensure the right conditions are in place to maximise the desired effect of the burn and minimise the risk of escape, to ensure that public health risk is managed, particularly through smoke, and to ensure public notification as well. It is easy to fall behind on the annual program if conditions are too wet, too dry or too windy to proceed safely.

The 2023-24 autumn burning program is substantially complete following successive periods of suitable conditions in March and April. It is also important to note that the team was able to utilise a short window in January. This is almost unheard of in the ACT. The burns included a combination of large forest fuel reduction burns, the largest of which was on the Bullen Range. This also included complex burns in asset protection zones on the urban boundary and in open woodland and grassland, as well as ecological burns predominantly in offset reserves.

This season represented the first significant burning season since autumn in 2019, and there was a significant mobilisation of people and expertise within the agency. PCS used 685 people over 22 calendar days to deliver more than 20 burns. The busiest day was 25 April, with 64 staff involved in burning operations. The area of the burn program was approximately 1,000 hectares across many nature reserves. The burning program was an opportunity to provide valuable fire experience to recently trained staff.

The ACT Parks and Conservation Service is not immune from a national capacity shortfall following turnover post the 2019-20 fire season, the COVID-19 era and the loss of training opportunities during the three wet seasons following the fires. This included the introduction of 40 basic firefighters, emerging senior incident

controllers, divisional commanders, the leaders of fire response on the ground, and a host of incident management team and logistics support roles.

I would like to acknowledge the crews from the ACT Rural Fire Service and the ACT Fire and Rescue crews in some of the burns. This collaboration brings broad benefits to all agencies and the individuals who participate, and it sets the foundations for improved collaboration and cooperation when a bushfire incident arises. PCS also participated in prescribed burning in New South Wales state forests to further our preparation and skillset and continue to build those vital cross-border relationships with our land management colleagues.

PCS has provided several staff to the current international deployment to Canada and stands ready to provide further ground crews over the next two months. Such deployments not only assist the receiving country but also build staff capability and experience through exposure to long campaign fires—an experience that can be hard to get in small jurisdictions like ours.

PCS continues to work to strengthen fire management capability across all elements—on the ground, in the Incident Management Team, and in the ability to plan and implement controlled burning. PCS is focused on more training, more deployments and further exercises with our partners in ESA and RFS to make sure we are working together effectively.

Predictions for the coming season indicate a dry and hot season starting early and finishing late, with a significant increase in the days of high fire danger requiring fire crews to be on standby. PCS stands ready and expects to be called on for interstate deployments to assist interstate colleagues and communities, just as those in other jurisdictions have done for us. All these demands and considerations mean that fatigue management becomes even more critical to ensuing staff wellbeing.

As our catchments dry out, PCS will accelerate the program of management of trails and repair and ongoing maintenance across almost 3,000 kilometres of the unsealed management trail network. PCS will also focus on fuel hazard assessment in areas burnt in 2019-20. Despite the intensity of the 2019-20 Orroral Valley fire, the rate of recovery and accumulation of fuel loads is ahead of expectations as a result of the La Niña induced rainfall since those fires. This needs to be incorporated in future planning.

The revised Strategic Bushfire Management Strategy, due in 2024, presents an opportunity for the ACT to address lessons learned from the 2019-20 fire season and focus on the fire as both a risk and a tool available to us as we adapt to climate change. PCS will continue to leverage national and local investment in science and research and will use fire modelling capability and planning frameworks to meet the climate adaptation challenge we face.

As responsible land managers, PCS recognises the need to better understand the critical enduring ecological values that must be maintained as we adapt to climate and the most effective ways of reducing the impacts of fire on those values. Our partnership with skilled and experienced scientists and policy officers in the Office of Nature Conservation area underpins PCS's ability to meet this challenge.

Climate change is likely to impact on the number and distribution of days available for prescribed burning and see an increase in the variety of available days across the years. PCS will continue to work collaboratively with the other areas to ensure that planning, approval and response times are flexible and that burning windows are able to be used as they become available. As fire inevitably becomes more frequent in a drying climate, PCS will need to prioritise fatigue management and minimise the health impacts of exposure to fire and smoke.

PCS will continue to prioritise cultural fire management as an expression of Ngunnawal cultural practice and utilise available traditional knowledge in managing ecological and fuel management outcomes. Ensuring regulations and policy frameworks that enable cultural burning is critical to its success for Ngunnawal people and the broader community.

In summary, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service plays a critical role in managing fire fuel across the ACT 365 days a year and works closely with the Rural Fire Service in fire policy, planning and response. The successful completion of the 2023 autumn burn program highlights the responsiveness and significant expertise held within PCS in fire behaviour, planning, logistics and operations, which are so necessary for operations of this size.

PCS continues to prioritise staff development and exposure to best practice nationally and internationally, maintaining a focus on leveraging science and research and bringing it into practice in ACT burn programs. PCS is working closely with the Office of Nature Conservation to ensure we are moving together on climate adaptation policy and practice and are bringing environmental objectives to the fore in all that we do.

PCS is reshaping its cultural burning program to focus on enabling cultural practice by the Ngunnawal community as its highest priority, and PCS is also working closely with the RFS in the preparation of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan version 5, due in 2024.

I commend the work of PCS in delivering this broad, complex and critical set of fire and land management activities to keep our community and staff safe and conserve key ecological values.

I present the following paper:

Outcome of 2023 Autumn Prescribed Burning Program—Ministerial statement,
27 June 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Calvary Hospital—transition Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.21): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on the northside hospital transition.

On 31 May 2023, the Assembly passed the Health Infrastructure Enabling Act 2023 following review by the scrutiny committee. This provided a path forward for a new billion-dollar hospital in Canberra's northside under a single network provider.

The passing of the bill enabled the ACT government to acquire the Calvary Public Hospital land and transition existing Calvary Public Hospital staff and assets to Canberra Health Services from 3 July. The day after the passing of legislation, Calvary lodged an action with the Supreme Court, which was heard by a full bench, including Chief Justice McCallum, on 7 June 2023.

While the legislation was enacted on 2 June 2023, the territory agreed to hold off on exercising some powers under the act until the matter was heard, which included sections 11 and 12 and parts of section 13 of the act. On 9 June 2023 the Supreme Court dismissed Calvary's application for an injunction to prevent the transition process and its challenge to the legislation, upholding the validity of the Health Infrastructure Enabling Act 2023.

While aspects of the transition were delayed by a week, the ACT government welcomed the outcome of the Supreme Court matter, which provided assurances for the Canberra community and the Calvary workforce. It was important that certainty was provided to everyone involved, particularly Calvary team members and patients.

Our main concern was that any further uncertainty would only cause distress for the workforce and the people of the ACT and surrounding region. While the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the act, the Health Infrastructure Enabling Regulation 2023 remains the subject of court proceedings. The ACT government has listened to concerns from Calvary Health Care, raised both directly and through the courts, regarding the regulation.

The ACT government has made some minor amendments to the Health Infrastructure Enabling Regulation 2023, which include provisions required in determining market value, the definition of dispute and to allow the court to ensure just terms. In light of the mutual decision between Calvary and the ACT government regarding Clare Holland House, which I will discuss further later, a clause has been omitted that excluded Clare Holland House from the transition.

Despite the legal challenges, the ACT government and Calvary Health Care have continued to work collaboratively during the transition of operators ahead of 3 July. On 13 June, Calvary Health Care announced that they would comply with the legislation in relation to the transition. On the same day, transition team members met with Calvary Health Care to discuss the plan for transition, which was an important step.

The plan covers the transition period, including the days before the date of acquisition. The transition team's focus is on the tasks critical to a safe handover of business ownership that ensure the workforce is supported and patient safety is maintained. Those activities include: ensuring staff are onboarded to Canberra Health Services and any gaps are managed; contracts or agreements for critical services are in place; team members are well informed regarding what is required of them, and systems are in place to support their work; ICT systems critical for service provision are in place and team members have necessary access; and necessary licenses for operating are in place.

While there has been, and remains, much to do before 3 July, it is important to note there is an array of activities that can be completed over the next 12 months. Over the past weeks, the territory's appointed senior executive for the transition has met almost daily with Calvary Health Care's appointed senior executive for the transition to focus on the critical activities required before 3 July.

An area of much interest, both in this Assembly and in the broader community, has been the future of Clare Holland House. Madam Speaker, following extensive discussions, the ACT government and Calvary Health Care have mutually agreed that the operation of Clare Holland House will transition to Canberra Health Services from 3 July.

The ACT government and Calvary have worked together to understand the complexities of Clare Holland House. There are substantial connections with the public hospital, including staffing and support services that have been established to support an integrated model. As such, it was agreed that access to public palliative care services in the territory is best supported by Clare Holland House remaining directly connected with the public hospital. This will ensure continuity of care for patients with life-limiting illness, and we believe it is in the best interests of patients, carers, families and the workforce to ensure the integrated model of care is preserved.

This model of care is highly valued by patients, families and staff. Both the ACT government and Calvary Health Care are committed to ensuring the ongoing delivery of this nation-leading care in a seamless way during the transition. The ACT government and Calvary will continue to work closely together to ensure a safe and smooth transition of Clare Holland House to Canberra Health Services on 3 July, and in the weeks following, recognising that the transition will continue beyond acquisition day.

I acknowledge that this has been a difficult decision for Calvary Health Care, which has been providing specialised palliative care services to Canberrans since 1995, with hospice services provided at Clare Holland House in Grevillea Park since 2001. I thank Calvary for the support and care they have provided to people with life-limiting illness in the ACT.

This has also been a difficult and anxious time for team members at Clare Holland House as well as their patients and the community. Our commitment to Clare Holland House team members is that they will be able to continue doing the same job in the same team with the same manager on the same pay and conditions.

Canberra Health Services will be working hard in the coming days to support staff, patients, carers and families by providing information and answering their questions.

All Clare Holland House team members are encouraged to make themselves known to the transition team as soon as possible. There will be two transition team members onsite from today, but team members can also visit the northside hospital website and complete an employee transition form, call the hotline or email the transition team.

As I have previously advised the Assembly, the ACT government aims to transition as many of the workforce as possible to Canberra Health Services, from both Calvary Public Hospital Bruce and Clare Holland House. We acknowledge their considerable skills and expertise, and we value the role that they play in delivering public health services. Staff, both past and present, have been incredibly committed to supporting the ACT community in times of joy and often in times of significant hardship. We recognise that commitment to the community, and we know that the current staff at Calvary Public Hospital and Clare Holland House remain committed to delivering compassionate, professional and high-quality public health care.

Madam Speaker, as of 26 June 2023, 1,512 employee transition forms had been received, equating to around 84 per cent of the estimated total workforce. After completing an employee transition form, a case manager from the transition team contacts the team member to discuss their individual circumstances. The team member then receives a letter of offer. As of 26 June, 910 letters of offer have been accepted by Calvary Public Hospital Bruce team members, and I have just received an update from the transition team saying we are now up to 1,610 forms completed and 1,015 letters of offer accepted.

While we are pleased with the number of team members who have completed an employee transition form and accepted their letters of offer, we encourage the remaining Calvary workforce to complete an employee transition form, which will allow the transition team to give them certainty sooner. For any Calvary team members who have received the letter of offer and contract, they now need to review the offer and complete the form embedded in the letter. Once they accept the offer, the transition team will let Calvary know that their employment will transition from 3 July.

The transition team stands ready to work with each individual team member. I want to reassure staff that they can continue to transition to Canberra Health Services after 3 July, but we encourage them to complete an employee transition form as soon as they are able. As I have previously advised, entitlements will be transferred, and conditions will be unchanged for most staff who are employed under the shared ACT public sector enterprise agreement arrangements and are eligible to be employed under the Public Sector Management Act. For those Calvary team members who have questions or concerns, they can continue to contact the transition team by phone or by email or they can visit our staff kiosks. Team members are also encouraged to attend joint workforce information sessions at Calvary Public Hospital.

Certainty and stability are vital for continuity of care. To that end, the transition team continues to assist the existing leadership at Calvary Public Hospital to transition to Canberra Health Services so they can continue to lead their teams post 3 July 2023.

I am pleased to let the Assembly know that the entire Calvary Public Hospital Bruce executive has agreed to transition to Canberra Health Services. This includes Dr Elaine Pretorious, Director of Medical Services at Calvary Public Hospital, who has agreed to transition across to Canberra Health Services and to lead the hospital post-acquisition as the general manager. Dr Pretorious will work closely with CEO Dave Peffer to ensure both hospitals continue to run smoothly.

For members of the public, not much will change for them from 3 July. They will continue to receive the same healthcare services at the hospital from the same doctors, nurses, and clinicians, but the hospital will have a different name. On 3 July 2023, the ACT government will be required to remove Calvary from the name of the public hospital. The hospital will be given the interim name North Canberra Hospital, while detailed plans commence for the construction of the new hospital.

Consultation with the community, stakeholders and, importantly, team members, will continue later this year as part of the detailed infrastructure planning for the building of the new northside hospital. It is important that while we build a new hospital for Canberra's northside, we continue to invest in capacity at North Canberra Hospital and to work with clinical leaders to ensure they can keep delivering quality health care for the growing northside population.

In the 2023-24 ACT budget, the ACT government has committed to invest more than \$1 billion for the design and construction of a new northside hospital on the Bruce campus. The budget has also committed \$14.3 million to boost resourcing for North Canberra Hospital. This will ensure more allied health and weekend staffing to better coordinate care in the emergency department, as well as supporting four additional inpatient beds.

Consolidating our public hospitals to create a single network will allow us to better coordinate our health services. It means we can distribute resources effectively, strengthen the capacity of our workforce, plan infrastructure on a territory-wide basis and improve health outcomes for all Canberrans. This will benefit every aspect of our public hospitals, from our maternity and paediatric services to our emergency departments.

I quote Dr Sam Scanlan, the clinical director of Canberra Hospital emergency department, who recently sat down with Dave Peffer and Dr Mike Hall from Calvary Public Hospital:

The benefit for the two emergency departments is aligning all our policies and procedures, sharing information, making it much more streamlined between the two EDs. It really gives us an opportunity to rationalise and redefine what the two EDs do and potentially look at different patient groups that may be directed to one or the other department. It should also mean that the transfer of patients between the two departments should be much smoother.

Another key benefit of a single network provider is that the quality of care will be consistent in our public hospitals. As Dr Mike Hall, the clinical director of Calvary Public Hospital emergency department, recently said:

People's care shouldn't be partly defined by which side of the lake you are turning up to a hospital for. There should be the same quality, the same protocols, the same teaching and training regardless of where they come.

In closing, I wanted to take a moment to reiterate that Calvary Health Care will continue to be an important partner in the delivery of healthcare services across the ACT through its private hospitals and aged-care facilities. While this has been a difficult and challenging time for Calvary Health Care, the ACT government is committed to maintaining a good relationship with Calvary as a valued partner in the delivery of healthcare services in the ACT.

The transition team continues to work towards the acquisition date of 3 July. I am confident that Calvary Health Care and the transition team will continue to work together, cooperate and do all things reasonably necessary to ensure the safe and orderly transition of the operation of the public hospital to Canberra Health Services, while ensuring continuity of care.

I thank the Calvary team for the work and collaboration to date. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to provide an update to the Assembly on this transition.

I present the following paper:

Northside hospital transition—Ministerial statement, 27 June 2023

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) (10.34): I thank Minister Stephen-Smith for her update on the North Canberra Hospital transition.

Calvary Public Hospital staff and patient welfare have remained at the forefront of my mind throughout the transition period. I recognise that change can be challenging, and I know that Canberra Health Services have been working extremely hard to ensure a smooth and safe transition of services, with the aim of minimising disruption for staff, patients and carers as much as possible.

A dedicated transition email address and phone hotline which operates seven days a week is available for staff who have concerns or questions about what this transition will mean for them. If additional assistance is needed, a dedicated case manager can be provided. CHS have also been facilitating information sessions, running the onsite information kiosk and ensuring printed information is available to enable staff to be appropriately informed about the transition and what this means for them. We respect and value staff and know that this transition will be most effective if we listen to their advice and draw upon their expertise. From 3 July, CHS has organised for EAP to be onsite to continue working with staff to determine what staff want and need.

CHS will continue to ensure that staff feel heard and have the opportunity to help shape the future of the North Canberra Hospital service by telling us what they really

value about their workplace and what needs improvement. We know Calvary Public Hospital is a community, and it is important to us that we retain the things most important to the people who work there.

For the staff impacted by the news that the operation of Clare Holland House will transition to Canberra Health Services from 3 July, I want to reassure you that the ACT government's commitment to you is that you will be supported to do the same job, in the same team, with the same manager, in the same place. As indicated by Minister Stephen-Smith, the transition team will be on site at Clare Holland House this week and they are there to support you. I know you have had less time to think about what this change means for you and that has an impact on how you feel. I also know that every staff member at Calvary Public Hospital and Clare Holland House care deeply about the care they give to patients and their families, and we are here to support you in continuing to do that and to look out for each other.

We know that a safe workplace and a positive culture underpin great patient care. CHS have been working hard to improve workplace culture over recent years and this work will continue. CHS is an organisation and a workforce that welcomes new team members with open arms.

As Minister for Mental Health, I am pleased to say that more than 84 per cent of staff at Calvary Public Hospital have completed the form to transition their employment to Canberra Health Services, including highly skilled and caring members of the mental health workforce at Calvary Public Hospital. This tells me that staff are supportive of the transition and feel they can continue to do what they do best, caring for the health needs of our people of Canberra.

There are a few mental health services adjacent to the Calvary Public Hospital campus which are not impacted by the North Canberra Hospital transition process. This includes Gawanggal Mental Health Unit, which is delivered by CHS; the Cottage, which is delivered by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service at CHS; and Arcadia House drug and alcohol rehabilitation service, operated by Directions Health Services. These services will continue as they have been operating. Further, Calvary's private mental health facilities will remain under the ownership and management of Calvary, including Hyson Green, Calvary Bruce Private Hospital and the Calvary Consulting Clinic.

Our mental health services landscape in the ACT will always include a mix of service providers, including ACT government, private sector and non-government organisations. This includes wellbeing and prevention services, primary care providers, ongoing care for chronic health conditions and acute care. Some of those services will be delivered in the community and some will be delivered in hospitals.

In fact, in this year's budget, I have secured funding for: mental health services delivered by CHS on the hospital campus in Woden; as well as improving the experience for people in need of emergency mental health care at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce; at the eating disorder residential treatment centre, now being constructed in Coombs; in the community with our PACER team; the Youth Aware of Mental Health program delivered in our high schools; the Stepping Stones youth mental health program delivered by CatholicCare; and the WOKE program for youth mental health at University of Canberra.

Madam Speaker, a single public hospital network provider in Canberra Health Services will serve our community well as we continue to grow. The investment of more than \$1 billion in the new North Canberra Hospital, for which consultation with the community will continue later this year, means that now is the right time to make this change.

I remain committed to supporting staff and patients so that this change can be made as smoothly as possible for the benefit of future health outcomes for our whole community. I would like to thank all the staff at Calvary and Clare Holland House for their hard work and the excellent care they provide every day. I will continue to work hard to ensure our health care staff have all the support they need and that people receiving health care have continuity and quality care as we develop a hospital network that serves our community well into the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Building—embedded utilities networks—update Ministerial statement

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (10.40): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the review of the embedded networks in the ACT in this Assembly and provide an update in response to the motion.

The review is a requirement of a resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly on 18 October 2022 that called on the ACT government to conduct a review, with regard to assessing whether the following reforms are appropriate: a ban on new embedded networks; further regulation of embedded network providers; and further consumer protections for embedded network users. The resolution further requested that the ACT government report back to this Assembly on this matter by 30 June this year.

Embedded networks are private utility networks that are connected to a distribution or transmission network through a parent connection point and serve multiple customers at child connection points. Common examples of embedded networks include shopping centres, retirement villages, apartment complexes and caravan parks.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of embedded networks in the ACT, with the residential apartment market being the primary driver of growth. This reflects a shift towards higher-density living, together with the evolution of a favourable business model associated with installing and operating embedded networks. Embedded networks are established during the construction of an apartment building, often with the electricity retailer negotiating low establishment charges with the developer and may cover electricity metering and hot water utilities.

Some consumers have raised the issue of anti-competitive practices from embedded network providers, as they have received notification of significant electricity price increases. Upon investigation, customers have found that it is very difficult to extract themselves from an embedded network or to even access better pricing through offers made by their own retailer. Barriers to changing retailers in an embedded network

include restrictive contract arrangements, costs associated with the replacement of existing metering infrastructure and a reluctance by other electricity retailers to take on customers in an existing embedded network. The current arrangements for many embedded networks in the ACT mean that customers have little alternative other than to accept the electricity prices set by their embedded network retailer, which precludes them from being able to access more competitive pricing elsewhere.

Following a competitive procurement process that commenced in November 2022, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate contracted Aurecon Australasia Proprietary Limited to undertake a review of embedded networks in the ACT using the motion passed in this Assembly as the basis for its investigations. Aurecon has reported back to the government and has presented 21 recommendations to address the key risks associated with embedded networks while ensuring the benefits are fairly accrued to the end customer. These recommendations are far reaching and include: amending current legislation to remove the exemption status of embedded network providers; introducing pricing reform for embedded networks; strengthening the visibility and understanding of embedded networks for residents; and engaging with national bodies on national review and reform processes. These recommendations affect multiple ACT government departments and will require a comprehensive, coordinated and considered approach from government to determine the best path forward.

I have instructed the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to lead and prepare a government response to the issues raised in the review for government consideration. It is critical that we ensure ACT residents have equal and appropriate consumer protections. It should be noted that these reforms are complex and are unlikely to be implemented in the short-term, and I would refer to the Victorian government's current reform process that aims to have its embedded network reforms completed by 2027. We look to benefit from the experience of the Victorian and New South Wales governments and expedite processes where it is feasible to do so.

As we progress towards a more sustainable city, we need to ensure Canberrans living in new and existing residential apartment developments can get access to the same competitive retail offers and consumer protections that are available to other Canberrans.

Madam Speaker, I commend this review to the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

Review of Embedded Networks in the ACT—

Final Report, dated 12 May 2023.

Embedded Utilities networks—Assembly Resolution of 18 October 2022—
Government response—Ministerial statement, 27 June 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent:

- (1) any business before the Assembly at 5 pm on Tuesday 27 June 2023 being interrupted to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024;
- (2) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5 pm on 27 June 2023, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5 pm to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024;
- (3) at 5 pm on Thursday 29 June 2023, the order of the day for the resumption of debate on the question that the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024; be agreed to in principle, being called on notwithstanding any business before the Assembly;
- (4) debate on any motion before the Assembly at the time of interruption being adjourned until the adjournment questions in relation to the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024 are determined; and
- (5) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5 pm on 29 June 2023, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5 pm to allow resumption of debate on the question that the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024; be agreed to in principle.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 31

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.46): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 31, dated 20 June 2023, 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 31 contains the committee's comments on six pieces of subordinate legislation and proposed amendments to five bills. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee Report 8

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (10.47): I present the following report:

Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee—
Report 8—*Inquiry into Housing and Rental Affordability*, dated 22 June 2023,
together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I wish to make a brief statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality relating to its inquiry into housing and rental affordability. This is the eighth report of this committee. The committee's report makes two findings and four recommendations.

A key finding was that, due to a lack of sufficient evidence, the committee was unable to determine whether a vacancy tax would reduce the number of vacant properties in the ACT. Notwithstanding this, the committee recommends that the ACT government support a greater diversity in housing density types; consider ways to improve more public, social and affordable housing; invest in increased promotion of the affordable land tax concession scheme; and explore regulatory and policy solutions to address the impact short-term accommodation is having on long-term rental price and supply.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who participated in or assisted with the inquiry. I also thank the other members of the committee, Ms Orr and Mr Davis, and all of the committee staff who have helped out with this report over time. I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (10.48): I rise to speak to the report of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality on housing and rental Affordability. Australia is in a housing crisis, and the ACT is not immune. This housing crisis disproportionately impacts the more than 31 per cent of Canberra households that rent. One-quarter of renters last census were in rental stress, paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent.

There is not a single property listed in the ACT's private rental market that is affordable for someone on JobSeeker or a pension. Meanwhile, as of 5 June, the social housing wait list sits at 3,159 applicants. Canberra has the second highest median rent, at \$674 per week, overtaken by Sydney only in the last quarter. Even for prosperous home owners, Canberra is the second most expensive city in which to purchase a house or a unit.

The ACT's rental vacancy rate currently sits at around two per cent, while a healthy rate is considered to be at around three per cent. This does not even include properties that are intentionally left vacant. The vacancy rate only includes properties that have been advertised for rent for three weeks. It does not include newly built homes that

have not been advertised for rent. It does not include empty homes owned by foreign investors. It does not include homes that are used for short-term rentals like Airbnb and it does not include empty shops.

There are a number of factors that have created the perfect storm, where wealthy people are rewarded for treating housing exclusively as a commodity. Being a housing investor is now profitable even if you are not renting your property out. Capital gains tax discounts and negative gearing have rigged the system in favour of these people. It is inexcusable that people are sleeping in their cars. It is inexcusable that people are sleeping on the street. And it is inexcusable that many people will not have a safe and secure home until they reach the front of the long housing wait list, a wait list more than 3,100 applicants long, while at the same time there are empty properties scattered throughout our city.

The ACT Greens took a bold policy commitment to the 2020 ACT election. We said we believed that in Canberra there should be a home for all. We believe housing is a fundamental human right and a necessity for a healthy and happy life. We refuse to let property profiteering get in the way of that ambition.

This inquiry was born out of a motion I put to this Assembly in March of 2022 requesting that an Assembly committee investigate the efficacy of a vacancy tax. The idea is simple: incentivise the more efficient use of properties by implementing a tax on those left vacant for extended periods of time without a good explanation, encouraging people to utilise those homes. This can apply to both commercial and residential properties.

When I tabled this motion in March of last year, suburbs throughout the ACT were littered with empty shops, particularly in my electorate of Brindabella. Local shopping centres like those in Richardson and Monash that were once thriving hubs for people living in the area are now derelict, abandoned and a blight on those communities. Some local shops have sat empty for almost a decade, impacting the vibrancy and livability of suburbs in my community. Those shops still sit empty today, as developers land bank or wait for planning codes to change, or while multiple development applications go rejected. Empty residential properties throughout our city could and should be homes for people to live in. As said by Better Renting in their submission to this inquiry:

When people are going homeless, or struggling to afford their homes, the presence of vacant potential homes in the ACT is an insult.

Vacancy taxes have been used as a tool to address housing supply challenges around the world. In Melbourne, a vacancy residential land tax implemented by a Labor government has been in place since 2018, putting a one per cent tax on the capital improved value of inner Melbourne properties that are empty for more than six months. A federal vacancy property tax, in the form of an annual vacancy fee, has been in place since 2017 to encourage foreign owners of residential properties to put their homes on the long-term rental market.

Similar schemes exist in France, Scotland, Ireland, South Korea, Washington DC, Seattle, Vancouver and Toronto. In Canada, the vacancy tax also applies to short-term

rental properties. Between 2018 and 2020 the Vancouver vacancy tax raised \$231 million in revenue, while the reported number of vacant properties decreased by more than 25 per cent as owners sold, rented or moved into their once vacant homes.

In Victoria, the Greens have recently secured a commitment from the Labor government to consider implementing taxes on short-term vacancies and extending taxes on vacant properties. In Queensland last year, the Greens proposed a five per cent empty homes levy on the capital improved value of properties vacant for more than six out of 12 months. In 2019, the New South Wales Labor opposition included a similar policy in their election platform.

The conclusion of this inquiry, unfortunately, is that there is insufficient evidence to determine the number of vacant properties in the ACT and that the committee is therefore unable to determine whether a vacancy tax is the best policy mechanism to reduce the number of vacant properties in the ACT. This is despite evidence presented to the committee by the ACT government that there were 2,397 residential sites with below average water consumption in the year to February 2022, equalling 2.1 per cent of all dwellings. If unusually low electricity is also used as a measure of empty properties, the number increases to almost 6,000 homes, or 3.1 per cent of all dwellings. The widely reported figures of census night in 2021 showed that 6.6 per cent of ACT dwellings were unoccupied that evening.

While these methodologies may be imperfect, they do give us some indication of the potential scale of this problem. I regret that the committee has placed this issue in the too-hard basket. I strongly encourage the ACT government to consider collecting better data to accurately determine the number of vacant properties in the ACT. The committee heard evidence that a vacancy tax may not be the most pressing solution to the ACT's housing crisis, but when you are in a crisis you do everything to address the problem and you do it all at once. It speaks to the glass half full mentality of policy and political debate in this country that if we are to solve a crisis we should pick one good solution, usually the low-hanging fruit, and stick with it, even if there are five other policy solutions that would help improve the situation.

Nobody is saying that a vacancy tax would be the silver bullet. Nobody is saying that regulating short-term rental accommodation would fix the housing crisis overnight. But if we did both things while we bought and built more social and public housing and we did it faster, if we further improved our renters' rights and built more affordable housing in the ACT, I think we would have a very different situation than we have right now.

In March 2023 my resolution passed in this Assembly and it called on the ACT government to investigate the negative impacts of short-term rentals on the price and supply of long-term rentals. Estimates suggest that up to 1,000 entire properties could be exclusively on the short-term rental market in the ACT. That is 1,000 properties that could and should be providing stable homes for people. Coincidentally, it is the same number that the Chief Minister has suggested would bring the ACT's residential vacancy rate back to a healthy three per cent.

Short-term rental accommodation around the country is being increasingly targeted for restricting the supply of long-term rentals and pushing up prices. Only a week ago,

Hobart city council voted to double rates for short-term rentals and vacant residential land. Brisbane City Council, led by the Liberal National Party, this month also announced that it would raise rates on short-term rentals. Byron Bay council, in April, tightened restrictions on short-term rentals from 90 days to 60 days per year to encourage properties in their locality to return to the long-term rental market. Even the federal Labor housing minister said on the weekend that short-term rental accommodation was a challenge for housing supply and that “there is no doubt that they are having some impact”.

The short-term rental industry is practically begging to be regulated. Airbnb is pushing for a state-wide framework in Queensland to govern the short-term rental sector, saying that this would include a state-wide regulation system and a code of conduct for Queensland. An Airbnb representative said on *The Project* on 2 June:

We are so keen to get state-wide regulation like we have in New South Wales and Tasmania so the government has a really clear, transparent and accurate look at the entire industry.

The reality of limiting short-term rentals is likely setting in, with Airbnb’s recent pivot towards Airbnb rooms instead of entire homes—a laughable concept, were that not the entire origin of the website. Unfortunately, the majority of properties listed for short-term rental, to date, are entire homes, not rooms as originally intended. This comes full circle, returning Airbnb to the type of service originally provided when the company began. Airbnb even said they would absolutely survive if they went to a room-only renting platform.

This committee report recommends that the ACT government explore regulatory and policy solutions to address the negative local impacts of short-term rentals on the supply and price of long-term rentals here in the ACT. The committee recommended that the ACT government find ways to provide more public, private and affordable housing. I have been working towards this consistently since I was elected, alongside my Greens colleagues, continuing the legacy of Greens MLAs past who have championed renters’ rights and innovative solutions to this housing crisis.

Just this year we secured better renters’ rights by eliminating no-cause evictions and prohibiting solicited rent bidding. We established the first and second rental relief funds. We secured record funding for homelessness services and we made sure affordable housing was included in the government’s proposed build to rent prospectus. In May 2023, I called on the ACT government to establish a rental ombudsman to ensure that every renter in the ACT has their rights protected, to help all parties to a tenancy agreement resolve simple disputes quickly, and to help all parties understand their rights and obligations under ACT rental law.

Private rental markets have a role to play, but we cannot ignore the drastic need for more public housing. Let’s go back to that public housing wait list. There are more than 3,100 people who need us, every one of us in this room, to help them have a safe and secure home. They come to us, the government landlord, as a last resort, and we can and must do everything that we can do to help them. The cost of living inquiry, which I chaired, recommended that the ACT government find new ways to deliver its Parliamentary and Governing Agreement target to build 400 new public houses

by 2025. It also recommended that the government speed up the demolition and construction of new properties and ensure that public housing stock is never in decline at any one time.

The housing and rental affordability inquiry heard from a number of witnesses and submissions that planning reform is a key solution to increasing housing supply. Eighty-one per cent of residential land in the ACT is classified as residential zone 1, meaning only single, detached homes can be built on those blocks. A huge amount of land could be unlocked through progressive zoning reform. My Greens colleagues and I consistently call on the ACT government to find ways of delivering more missing middle housing, including medium-density units, townhouses and apartments. More high-density housing is also needed in appropriate locations throughout our city.

The Greens support an 80-20 urban infill policy. Currently, we have not even been meeting our 70-30 target. We do not have unlimited land to build more houses. The Greens will not sacrifice our beautiful environment, the bush capital, and our protected ecosystems to endless urban sprawl. We do not need to. Demand for housing is shifting as lifestyles change. We want to solve the housing crisis while building a better city for the future, and clever planning is crucial for this. This committee also recommends that the ACT government support a more diverse range of medium and high-density housing, including three and four-bedroom apartments and townhouses for a diversity of families and lifestyles.

In 2013, rental properties made up 27 per cent of all residential properties in the ACT. Fast-forward a decade and we have introduced a progressive land tax system and we now have some of the strongest renters' rights in the country. The number of rentals grew by 52 per cent in the last decade. They now make up an even greater proportion of total residential properties in the territory than they used to, at 31 per cent, up from 27 per cent. This is either the same number of landlords owning more properties or more people deciding to become landlords in the ACT. Either way it tells me the same story—that the ACT is an attractive place to invest in property and become a landlord, despite our strong renters' rights and despite the Canberra Liberals consistently putting the blame for the housing crisis on renters' rights and on land tax. Neither of those claims is true. In fact, peer reviewed research published in January this year shows that the ACT's land tax reforms have seen an increase of 5.4 per cent in the proportion of residential properties that are purchased by first home buyers. If land tax is such a financial imposition, I have got good news for Canberra's landlords: there is an easy way to get out of it.

The ACT government provides a land tax exemption for landlords who rent their property through a community housing provider for less than 75 per cent of market rate. This inquiry heard evidence that the scheme should be explored beyond the existing 250 eligible properties. While uptake of this exemption offer is growing, it is yet to reach capacity. In the last quarter of 2022-23 only 142 properties were a part of the scheme. The value of Canberra's landlords to subscribe to this program demonstrates clearly that it is more profitable to pay land tax while charging market rent than it is to provide affordable homes to Canberrans. Success is a wait list for this program. I fully support the committee's recommendation that the government invest in increased promotion of the affordable land tax concession scheme, including specifically putting it on landlords' land tax notices. We need the government to

ensure that privately owned properties are part of the solution to the housing crisis and not a contributor to it. We have got to ensure that privately owned properties support small businesses that cater to community leads and help support thriving local communities.

The ACT government's projections put Tuggeranong in 2060 as having a smaller population than today, shrinking from 20 per cent of the ACT's population to only 11 per cent. It is our responsibility to change that trajectory. So many people in my electorate mourn the loss of the community hub that is their local shops. While the rest of the ACT thrives in the coming decades, I will not let Tuggeranong be left behind. We deserve better than that.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (11.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing.

In my role as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing, I wish to table a corrigendum to the report on our inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT. I present the following paper:

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 10—Inquiry into Abortion and Reproductive Choice in the ACT—Corrigendum, dated 21 June 2023.

The committee released its report on 18 April this year. On 24 April, the committee received correspondence from Martin Bowles, the National CEO of Calvary Health Care Pty Ltd. As a result, the committee instigated a review of our report and determined that the report did not accurately reflect the evidence of Tamara as part of her submission to the inquiry. As a consequence of its review, the committee agreed to issue this corrigendum, which comprises amendments to the report's chapter concerning Calvary Public Hospital Bruce.

Specifically, the corrigendum notes that a Canberra patient who made a submission to the committee's inquiry was not directly refused post-miscarriage care by Calvary Public Hospital Bruce. Instead it was the patient's specialist who advised her that Calvary would not perform the necessary post-miscarriage procedure because her case was not an emergency.

This amendment to the report does not denote a change to the committee's recommendation that Calvary Public Hospital Bruce should provide full reproductive health services in accordance with human rights. In fact, the corrigendum includes additional evidence concerning the limitations on reproductive healthcare services that Calvary Public Hospital Bruce provide.

The committee wishes to emphasise that the corrigendum to the report reflects the mis-framing of Tamara's evidence. The fault by no means lies with the evidence provided by Tamara in her submission.

We received 52 submissions to our inquiry. There was significant evidence to support the understanding that reproductive health is a basic human right. This is the premise of the report. This is scaffolded by evidence, and our recommendations remain.

Courts Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Mr Rattenbury, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.06): I present the Courts Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 together with its explanatory statement, including its Human Rights compatibility statement:

Explanatory statement to the Bill, incorporating a compatibility statement, pursuant to section 37 of the *Human Rights Act 2004*.

I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Courts Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 to the Assembly. The bill makes changes to the Court Procedures Act 2004, the Supreme Court Act 1933 and the Magistrates Court Act 1930, and makes consequential amendments to other legislation, to improve the efficiency of the ACT courts' operations, structures and processes, making it quicker and easier for people to access justice. Enhancing the efficiency of our ACT courts will support greater flexibility in allocation of court resources and improve the court's capacity to serve the community in a more efficient way. The bill increases flexibility in the allocation of court resources and pursues greater equity within the courts by removing the associate judge position, known as 'master', which will be replaced with the appointment of a sixth resident judge on the ACT Supreme Court.

The role of the associate judge was originally introduced as a more junior judicial role that would predominantly preside over interlocutory work and some other civil matters. However, over the years since the introduction of the role, the jurisdiction of the associate judge has widened significantly, such that it is now very close to that of a resident judge.

The associate judge's role was expanded through amendments to the Supreme Court Act in 1988 and 1991, and with the introduction of the Court Procedure Rules in 2006. The associate judge now exercises the same inherent civil jurisdiction of a single judge of the Supreme Court. Moreover, the associate judge was given jurisdiction in some criminal matters through amendments made in 2009, 2017 and 2018. Appeal processes also changed in 2015 so that appeals of decisions by associate judges were treated in the same way as appeals of decisions of a single resident judge.

While the scope of jurisdiction of associate and resident judges has become quite similar over time, there remains a small scope of criminal matters that resident judges are able to hear which an associate judge cannot. By replacing the associate judge position with a sixth resident judge, the bill facilitates a greater increase in listing flexibility and efficiency, as all Supreme Court judges would be able to hear all types of matters.

In addition to this measure, the bill extends the maximum term of acting judges from 12 months to two years. Currently, it is common for acting judges in the ACT Supreme Court to be reappointed over consecutive years for a series of one-year terms. As acting judges step in on an as-needs basis to cover cases when resident judges are unavailable, the extension of their terms of appointment will lead to greater efficiencies and support continuity of access to court resources.

The bill further improves the function of the ACT's courts and protects judicial independence by clarifying immunity provisions for magistrates. The provisions relating to the immunity of magistrates have remained substantially unchanged since November 1930. The bill clarifies the immunity provisions to provide greater certainty on the scope and application of immunity to magistrates. The amendment will also extend immunity to registrars and deputy registrars when they exercise court functions that have been delegated to them. The amendment will better support independence in judicial decision-making and bring the ACT's approach to magisterial immunity in line with other jurisdictions in Australia.

Another change that will enhance access to justice for the ACT community and that will align the ACT with other Australian jurisdictions is the measure regarding non-party costs orders. Currently, there is a law that prohibits ACT courts from making costs orders against a non-party to a proceeding, except under certain prescribed circumstances. The ACT is the only Australian jurisdiction to have this restriction. This can result in inequities and denial of justice to parties who are otherwise rightly entitled to receive costs.

The bill will enable the rule-making committee to make rules to enable the courts to order costs against non-parties to proceedings, where it is in the interests of justice to do so. The scope of this power will be appropriately limited by established common law principles that apply to making costs orders against non-parties.

Improvements to the ACT courts' structures and processes made under this bill will facilitate greater efficiencies for court officers, court users and the public sector, and enable the courts to better serve the Canberra community.

Our conventions of representative democracy and responsible government are strengthened by a robustly defended right of access to justice, and efficiently administered by the judicial system. This bill serves as an important function in ensuring that our justice system will be effective and sustainable into the future by increasing the flexibility associated with court functions and processes. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Water Resources Amendment Bill 2023

Debate resumed from 29 March 2023, on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.12): I rise to speak briefly on the Water Resources Amendment Bill 2023. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Water Resources Act 2007 to clarify administrative responsibilities for water resource management and the role of the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group within the ACT water sector governance arrangements. It is pretty exciting stuff.

These clarifications will assist in establishing the Office of Water, a dedicated water management body in the ACT. It is my understanding that the amendments outlined in this bill will make the Director-General of Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development, or the future equivalent, responsible for water policy functions; will see the Environment Protection Authority retain responsibility for regulatory functions, including upholding licence conditions; and will clarify the role of the coordination group within the ACT water sector governance arrangements.

My colleague and shadow minister for water, Nicole Lawder, is incredibly passionate—sometimes she is a little too passionate!—about improving water quality in our lakes and waterways. In her discussion booklet launched earlier this year, one of the foundations of her new approach to improving water quality was ensuring that the Office of Water has genuine teeth through appropriate resourcing, and that the authority would be the single point of contact on water quality in the ACT. For far too long we have seen millions of dollars allocated to water quality projects, but the mismanagement of these assets and the failure to maintain them have seen their worth effectively and literally go down the drain.

This bill today clarifies who is responsible for several water management matters. However, the Canberra Liberals look forward to hearing more about the role of the Office of Water and how it will be resourced. We are also eager to hear exactly how separate directorates and government bodies will improve how they interact with one another on water management issues.

I would like to thank the directorate and the minister's staff for facilitating a briefing with Ms Lawder and her office on this bill in May. The Canberra Liberals will not be opposing this bill today.

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) (11.15): I rise today to speak in support of the Water Resources Amendment Bill brought forward by Minister Rattenbury. The Water Resources Amendment Bill proposes administrative changes to strengthen the foundational governance arrangements for water management in the ACT.

The arrangements are founded on a thorough review of water governance arrangements that was conducted through a participatory process that involved all ACT directorates with water management responsibilities and Icon Water.

The purpose of the bill is to clarify the administrative responsibilities for water resource management policy and regulatory function. The proposed amendments provide the Office of Water with the operating framework required to support a holistic and coordinated approach to water policy and program that is required to strengthen the ACT's water security. For example, the responsibility for keeping the state and condition of the ACT's water resources under review is most effectively delivered by an agency with technical capability to conduct this work and the policy responsibility to respond.

The bill makes no material change to the functions and powers under the act that currently exist. The ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group continues to provide an important forum for bringing together diverse stakeholders to facilitate regional collaboration. The bill also includes amendments that expand the value that this group may provide to government by enabling both the minister for water and the territory's water policy agency to request their advice on water catchment management matters.

Changes to the group's membership reflect the value of independent advice to government. The bill has been drafted to remove prescription and allow for membership adaptability. A changed membership make-up from time to time may be necessary to better address the matters being considered. I know the opinions of this group are highly valued by government and I appreciate their input into the complex work of catchment management.

We also know that our water comes from Namadgi National Park and the Australian Alps, which make up a large, complex catchment environment for our region. It is vital that these sensitive ecosystems are protected from invasive species and climate change. Here in the ACT, we have done important work to restore sphagnum moss and bogs in Namadgi, which are an important part of the catchment system. Covering around 740 hectares of the ACT, the bogs and fens ecological community is a series of unique wetlands defined by an underlying layer of peat that often hosts critical sphagnum moss species. For example, the Ginini Flats Wetland Complex listed under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the most significant intact sphagnum bog and fen community in the Australian Alps.

The ACT government is currently finalising the draft action plan for high country bogs and fens. Protecting these unique ecosystems will be vital in ensuring our catchment is healthy into the future. This work is being done separately to this bill, but it is important to consider the interconnectedness of our catchment system and of the environmental areas generally.

The ACT government is continuing delivery against its commitments in the parliamentary and governing agreement. Establishing the Office of Water and amendments to the Water Resources Act deliver on our commitment to consider the best administrative arrangements to manage new water programs and provide a holistic and coordinated approach to water programs and policy. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.19), in reply: The establishment of the Office of Water late last year delivers on the commitment made in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. The government committed to consider the best administrative arrangements to manage new water programs and provide a holistic and coordinated approach to water programs and policy and has implemented changes to improve water governance. The Office of Water has the lead on water policy, planning and governance reforms to improve coordination, accountability and the capability of the ACT water sector.

The Water Resources Act 2007 instructs both policy and regulatory functions, including waters resource management and monitoring responsibilities, environmental flow provisions, order licensing requirements and penalties for water related offences. The act is currently administered by the Environment Protection Authority.

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Water Resources Act to clarify administrative responsibilities for water resource management policy and regulatory function. The amendments in the bill make the Director-General of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate responsible for water policy functions; ensure the Environment Protection Authority retains responsibility for regulatory functions, including upholding licence conditions; and clarifies the role of the ACT and Region Catchment Coordination Group within ACT water safety governance arrangements.

The bill makes no material change to the functions and powers under the act that currently exists. Instead, it seeks to make changes to the distribution of administrative responsibility of those functions. Currently the policy functions are delegated by the Environment Protection Authority to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

Clearly delineating the functions in legislation enhances accountability by providing clarity and transparency on roles and responsibilities. The bill retains the Environment Protection Authority's responsibilities for regulatory functions—that is, to regulate the use of the resource.

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate becomes responsible for water policy functions. This includes keeping the state and condition of the water resources of the territory under review; leading and coordinating planning and policy development for the water resources of the territory; and compiling, maintaining and reporting information about the water resources of the territory.

The directorate also becomes responsible for the policy work required to inform water management areas, quantification of available water in areas and the reasonable amounts of water disallowable instruments. This policy work will support the Environment Protection Authority in administering water access entitlements and inform compliance.

The bill also amends part 3 of the act, which relates to the environmental flow guideline. Responsibility for approval of the guideline sits with me, but the preparation of the guidelines and associated consultation will now become the responsibility of the director-general and, ultimately, the Office of Water.

The bill also clarifies roles and responsibilities in relation to water resource assessment and investigations. The director-general becomes responsible for surface and groundwater baseline monitoring. This monitoring is a key contributor to the objective evidence necessary to inform decisions on managing water quality and quantity both today and in the future. The Environment Protection Authority retains responsibility for regulatory water resource investigation.

The bill augments the function of the ACT and Region Catchment Coordination Group. This group was established as an interjurisdictional and regional collaboration body under the act in August 2015. I commend the ongoing work of this group and recognise the valuable contribution they continue to make by bringing together diverse stakeholders to provide expert advice.

To further support evidence-based decision-making, the bill adds a provision which allows the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction to direct the group to provide advice about a state of water catchment management matter. This provides an adaptive approach to addressing evolving catchment matters outside of the group's business-as-usual activities.

The bill makes consequential amendments to the Water Resources Regulation 2007, the Utilities Act 2000 and the Environment Protection Act 1997. These are minor in nature and, in part, ensure relevant agencies share information both with the Environment Protection Authority and the director-general.

In drafting the bill, targeted consultation was conducted internally with affected ACT government directorates, in particular the Environment Protection Authority within Access Canberra, as well as with the Chair of the ACT and Region Catchment Coordination Group.

This bill makes no material changes to the functions and powers that currently exist but instead makes changes in the act to administrative responsibilities to clarify function. It does, however, broadly provide the operating framework for the Office of Water, as required by the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, and delivers the legal platform to support a holistic and coordinated approach to water policy.

On that basis, I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Transport Canberra and City Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Debate resumed from 21 September 2022, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.25): I rise to speak on the Transport Canberra and City Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This omnibus bill amends legislation, including the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2020, the Litter Act 2004, the Magistrates Court (Litter Infringement Notices) Regulation 2004, the Plastic Reduction Act 2021, the Veterinary Practice Act 2018 and the Veterinary Regulation 2018.

The amendments made to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2020 are intended to update and give clarity to the governance arrangements of both the ACT Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority and Canberra Memorial Parks. These amendments include clarifying that the CEO of the ACT Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority may serve as a member of the ACT Public Service and the Authority Governing Board simultaneously; allowing the unique identifying number of a burial or cremation to be provided to an applicant as soon as practically possible rather than at the application stage, when it is sometimes unavailable; allowing funeral directors or undertakers to apply for booking information, in addition to the family members, as a third party representing the family; requiring only the day of cremation to be provided rather than the time of cremation, which may vary; and requiring the personal information of a family member who collects cremated remains to be recorded on a secure electronic database rather than on a publicly searchable database.

The amendments to the Litter Act 2004 are intended to clarify existing legislation surrounding litter and illegal dumping and include clarifying that the dumping of materials must be done in accordance with waste management facility requirements—so that facility users are not unintentionally breaching any laws if they are following facility signage—and making the wording of vehicle load securing offences a little clearer.

There is also a minor technical amendment to schedule 1 of the Magistrates Court (Litter Infringement Notices) Regulation 2004. An amendment to the Plastic Reduction Act 2021 replaces reference to “compostable plastic bags” with “compostable plastic products”. This replaces an old definition carried over from repealed legislation. It does not expand the scope of what can be regulated under the plastics ban, which I think is important. Section 37 also has a minor technical amendment to a previously incorrectly referenced section.

The amendments to the Veterinary Practice Act 2018 are intended to update the governance arrangements of the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board. They update the list of restricted acts of veterinary science, as set out in the Veterinary Practice Regulation 2018, to ensure that the proper treatment of animals, a restricted act of veterinary science, can be carried out only by a registered veterinary practitioner.

These amendments now include allowing membership of the veterinary board to include residents of the ACT’s surrounding region, as determined on a case-by-case basis, with ACT-based applicants given priority; allowing the vet board to meet quorum requirements if the president and deputy president cannot attend due to leave or a conflict-of-interest exclusion; and restricting the following acts of veterinary science: tooth cleaning, scaling and polishing of teeth below gum line on animals other than horses; use of power tools for equine dental work; insertion of a tube into

the oesophagus or stomach of a horse; bovine ultrasound pregnancy diagnosis; artificial insemination of horses; live animal tissue sample collection; ovary removal; sterilisation by flank and dropped ovary cattle splaying; and certifying animal disease status.

There are a lot of things I have learned when looking at this bill.

To summarise, the aim of the Transport Canberra and City Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 is to update legislation on cemeteries and crematoria; litter and plastic reduction; and veterinary practice. It also provides clarity and corrections to existing legislation. Most of it is of very little interest to most people but it is important stuff.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the directorate officials and the minister's staff for providing Ms Lawder and her office with a briefing on this bill in May. I close by saying that the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill today.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.30): The ACT Greens are happy to support this bill. I thank my colleagues Ms Lawder, and Mr Parton in her absence, for giving us such a comprehensive outline of what is in the bill. I was very pleased to receive a briefing on the contents of this bill. It all looks eminently sensible and straightforward. It is based on a great deal of operational information and customer and Canberran feedback, and we are pleased to see these sensible amendments progressing.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (11.31), in reply: I am pleased to conclude debate on the Transport Canberra and City Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 in the Assembly today. It is an omnibus bill that makes a range of minor and technical amendments to legislation underpinning the operations of the cemeteries and crematoria, veterinary practitioners, litter and illegal dumping compliance and plastic reduction legislation. This bill amends four acts: the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act, the Litter Act, the Veterinary Practice Act and the Plastic Reduction Act.

Amendments to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act make technical corrections relating to the application for burials and cremations, protect personal information when ashes are collected by family members, and formalise the position of the Chief Executive Officer for the ACT Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority as a member of the ACT Public Service. These are amendments being brought forward to ensure that the act reflects current practice and ensure better support for families when managing the death of a loved one.

Amendments to the Litter Act will help to clarify the intent of a range of litter and illegal dumping offences relating to depositing waste at management facilities and securing loads on vehicles. These changes ensure continued best practice.

The Veterinary Practice Act is being amended to refine the administrative arrangements for the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board and to update the list of restricted acts of veterinary science included in subordinate legislation. These amendments are being made to update the legislation and regulation to reflect current best practice and to support animal welfare by making sure that only registered vets are permitted to undertake some restricted acts, as defined by the act.

Lastly, the Plastic Reduction Act 2021 is being amended to align the definition of “compostable plastics” with the rest of the legislation and with Australian Standards.

The work of Transport Canberra and City Services supports the lives of every single Canberran every day; and the amendments in the bill provide more clarity and consistency in the legislative foundation for these services, giving the community confidence that our laws are practical and translate to operations on the ground.

I thank members for their contribution in the chamber today and I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 11.34 am to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Education—school funding

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, I refer to correspondence from an ACT high school principal to parents. I will quote from the letter: “Some classes may be combined. Some students may learn online, usually in the library. On some days, students may have supervised lessons in the playground. Students may work independently or participate in activities such as watching a movie or playing board games, and excursions may be postponed or cancelled.” Minister, how will the educational impact of your failure to provide proper resources and structured learning be measured, and will you make the results public?

MS BERRY: I am not completely sure of the letter that Mr Hanson has read from today or the context in which it is written. I am assuming it is a public school and that it relates to the shortage in the teacher workforce. He has given me a nod. At the start of this year, the Education Directorate wrote to our schools to explain that, given that covid still had a long tail and there were still covid cases in the community, and combined with the flu season coming up, it was likely that schools would face staffing work shortages. The Education Directorate has worked really closely with individual schools to make sure that they can access their own relief staff but also to put in a method of teaching where there are staff shortages, where it will mean that teaching will not be provided in the same way that it normally is. So schools are arranging their teaching rosters and communicating with parents and school communities about what that might look like for the short term so that education can still continue. However, it will continue in a different way.

MR HANSON: Minister, is it really acceptable that high school students will be watching movies or playing board games instead of learning?

MS BERRY: These are short-term measures that need to be taken as a result of the covid and flu season that the ACT is experiencing and it means that sometimes in our school communities there will be a shortage of teachers, where they cannot be replaced. So, for the short term, teachers manage a system of school and education for students until the school teaching workforce can be returned.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, regardless of the winter flu season, is this not just a symptom of there being not nearly enough teachers or resources in our schools?

MS BERRY: While Ms Kikkert is correct that there is a teaching workforce shortage in the ACT and in the country, it is something that education ministers across the country are working on to ensure that we can continue to recruit but also maintain the numbers of teachers within our workforce. Actually, the ACT government has provided an enterprise bargaining agreement to the teachers in our ACT public schools which provides the highest wages in the country and also commits to some of the workforce and workload challenges, working closely with teachers and their union to ensure that the workplace for existing teachers remains the best that it can possibly be, but also making sure that they recruit people from other states and territories or countries who want to come to work in the ACT, knowing that they will be the highest paid.

Canberra Health Services—outpatient waiting lists

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. The Auditor-General's performance audit report into Operation Reboot noted that the initial budget submission from ACT Health sought to rollover around \$30 million due to an underspend from the 2019-2020 budget. Subsequently, CHS underspent \$2.2 million from the allocated \$3.5 million and failed to deliver almost 60 per cent of the appointments promised.

In a recent pre-budget announcement you promised to deliver 2,500 more outpatient appointments each year. Similarly, ACT Health and CHS only spent \$96 million out of \$186 million for their capital works program expenditure 2022-23 as at 31 March 2023.

How many initiatives in the 2023-24 budget are from rolled-over funds due to underspends in the 2022-23 budget?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think across all of my portfolios there are one or two initiatives that include some funding that has been rolled over. Primarily, that is in the Community Services Directorate's space. Ms Castley, I would point out, has collated a lot of different pieces of information, so it is hard to understand the point of her question.

What I would point out in relation to the outpatients and Operation Reboot is that the additional outpatients were more than 6,000 additional outpatient appointments that were delivered. One of the points that the Auditor-General made was that we needed a

sustainable response to increasing outpatients. CHS was already working on that alongside the Operation Reboot response. This very significant commitment that we have made in the budget to increase outpatients by 2,500 per year for the first two years and then 5,000 a year thereafter reflects that type of sustainable approach—exactly as the Auditor-General was talking about.

MS CASTLEY: I will go back to my initial question, and that was: how many initiatives in the 2023-24 budget are rolled over from funds due to underspend of this current budget?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Probably the Treasurer was groaning in response to my first question, because the budget has not been delivered yet! Ms Castley is asking me of the detail of measures that have not, in fact, been yet announced in the budget. It would probably be expected that I would not be able to be in a position to answer those questions. I would encourage her to wait until 5 pm, when the budget is delivered, and read the budget papers for herself.

MR CAIN: Minister, why have you continually failed to meet your own budget promises, and why have you underspent on your initiatives?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of Mr Cain's question.

Housing—debt to commonwealth

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Chief Minister, the ACT's historic public housing debt to the federal government still sits at a whopping \$90 million. Information provided by your office shows that repayments made this month for the 2022-23 financial year totalled \$12 million, including \$8 million in principal repayments and \$4 million in interest, reducing the total debt to \$82 million by 30 June this year. Last year this Assembly unanimously passed my motion calling on the federal government to waive the historic debt and for the ACT government to invest savings from debt forgiveness into public housing. Chief Minister, is the ACT government continuing to make representations to the federal government to waive the ACT's historic public housing debt and what is the outcome of these representations?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Davis for the question and his interest in this matter. We do of course, as he has indicated in the preamble to the question, continue to pay the debt down. This issue was much more egregious when—

Mr Parton: When the other side was in!

MR BARR: when interest rates—

Mr Parton: When the other side was in!

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton you have made your point.

MR BARR: when interest rates were lower. The current interest rate reflects largely the government's current cost of borrowing so there is not a significant financial

advantage for us in swapping the debt at this point in time. Were it to be waived then that would reduce the territory's net debt by the equivalent of the waiver amount but obviously, as Mr Davis indicated in the preamble, we would then be committed to spending the money anyway, which at the moment would be borrowed, and borrowed at about 4 and a half percent. I think there is an issue of principle and I support the thrust of the question. Yes, we are continuing to engage with the commonwealth but the wind-fall gain moment, if you like, of a lower interest rate has now passed. That does not mean that there is not value in having the debt waived. We would then commit to spending the money, and the interest payments that we would not have to make, on public housing. Of course, there have been some subsequent announcements in relation to commonwealth support for the territory to build more public housing, which I suspect Mr Davis might touch on in follow up questions.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, was the ACT's \$90 million escrow public housing debt raised with the Prime Minister when he announced giving us \$50 million for public housing, particularly as that \$50 million was due to land in our bank account just as we gave the federal government \$12 million.

MR BARR: I did give some consideration to effectively doing a debt swap; not taking \$50 million in cash and just seeking it as a reduction in the total level of the debt. That would have meant though that we would add nothing to the housing stock, so we just use the \$50 million to reduce our debt. I do not think this is an outcome that would have met the intent of the Prime Minister's allocation of funding to the states and territories, or indeed what I think is a collective view in this place, that we should be spending more money on public housing. So I welcome the fact that the commonwealth government is giving the states and territories more money. Our commitment is to spend that money now rather than focus on debt reduction. There will be a time and place for debt reduction, but right now, if given the choice Mr Davis, I think we should spend \$50 million on building more public housing not paying down debt.

MS CLAY: What plans do you have for spending the new \$50 million received under the Social Housing Accelerator?

MR BARR: Thank you Ms Clay for the question. The requirement is that first ministers bring back to the next national cabinet meeting, which is scheduled either for late August or early September, our implementation plan to expend the funds over the coming two fiscal years. Our cabinet has determined that the Deputy Chief Minister as Minister for Housing will prepare that plan for me to take to that national cabinet meeting. It is our intent to spend it in accordance with the terms under which it was granted to the territory and that is to grow the social housing stock.

Canberra Health Services—outpatient waiting lists

MS CASTLEY: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. In response to a *Canberra Weekly* story on the Auditor-General's scathing comments on Operation Reboot, a CHS spokesperson said:

It is important not to underestimate just how challenging the COVID-19 environment was in the peak of the pandemic.

In the report the Auditor-General said that CHS asserted that risks were identified, such as “the potential impact of COVID-19 on the achievement of the initiative’s stated targets”. Yet no risk management plan was developed to mitigate these risks. Minister, were you aware of the lack of planning behind Operation Reboot and, if so, were you surprised that only 43.8 per cent of the promised appointments were delivered?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not know that that is a fair characterisation of it. As I have indicated, more than 6,000 additional outpatient appointments were achieved as a result of this program. While the target was for 14,000, this result, in itself, demonstrated a significant amount of additional work that was undertaken during a time of substantial pressure on the health system. This was not the only element of this initiative. This initiative also resulted in us delivering more than 15,300 elective surgeries overall, which was far and away the highest number of elective surgeries that had been delivered in a single year—the next highest being at that time 14,015 elective surgeries. So there was a significant increase in elective surgeries and a significant increase in outpatients.

It is true that Canberra Health Services tried some different models to try to deliver a substantial additional boost in outpatients. Some of those things were not as successful as they had hoped they would be when they undertook the planning. One of the lessons learned, as the Auditor-General has indicated, is that we need to really invest in sustainably growing outpatients within Canberra Health Services. That is exactly what we are doing in this budget.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how can you claim that the pandemic was the reason that you failed to deliver your budget promise when you did not complete a risk management plan to mitigate those risks?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The pandemic was an unpredictable period of time when things changed rapidly and regularly over a period of years. This program was highly successful in delivering additional elective surgeries and additional outpatients’ appointments in 2020-21 to make up for some of the challenges that had been experienced earlier in the pandemic in 2019-20.

As I said, Canberra Health Services looked at some different ways of doing things and some of those proved not to be as successful as we had hoped. It is important, when you are addressing the challenges of a pandemic, to explore all options to ensure that Canberrans can get the health care they need. Lessons have been learned. The Auditor-General’s recommendations—and I think there are only a couple—will absolutely be taken on board and will inform future work.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how many initiatives from the health and wellbeing portfolio in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 budgets did not have a project implementation plan or risk management plan?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. Part of the budget process is that there does need to be an implementation plan for all of the budget measures that are brought forward. That includes an assessment of risks as well. It is part of the standard process for developing a business case for the budget.

Budget 2023-2024—ACT Policing

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, can you advise the Assembly of what funding the ACT government has provided to ACT Policing as part of the 2023-24 ACT budget?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Dr Paterson—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, Mr Barr just made a big hoo-ha about the fact that they can't answer questions because it is in the budget, and he has just been asked about the budget.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please. I take the drift of your point of order. Mr Gentleman, go only to what is already in the public domain.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank Dr Paterson for her interest in the safety of all Canberrans. You would be aware, of course, that I attended the Winchester Police Centre, alongside the Chief Minister and the Chief Police Officer, on Monday of last week to announce this government's record commitment to ACT Policing. Building on the 60 additional personnel provided through the 2019-20 budget, the ACT government has continued its commitment to enhance community safety by investing over \$107 million in ACT Policing over the next five years.

This represents the largest single investment ever made in ACT Policing. The substantial commitment will enable the commencement of an additional annual recruit course for the next five years, further fortifying the ranks of ACT Policing, and allowing for the recruitment of an additional 126 police officers and professional staff over the next five years. This investment in our police—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, the question has been asked.

MR GENTLEMAN: will allow for continued funding for the fixated lone-actor grievance-fuelled violence, or FLAG, assessment team. The FLAG team assists with the identification of individuals who present fixated threats to government officials and the ACT community. The FLAG capacity addresses a critical gap at the intersection of law enforcement and health, and seeks to engage in early intervention in high-risk FLAG cases by providing a therapeutic approach to risk management or at-risk individuals in the community. That capability incorporates— *(Time expired.)*

DR PATERSON: Minister, in addition to the record investment in ACT Policing, has the ACT government provided any further funding to enhance ACT Policing as part of this budget?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, we did announce this, too, last Monday, as part of the record investment. The government has provided capital funding to upgrade or

replace critical end-of-life infrastructure assets at ACT Policing sites to ensure that they remain operational. It has also provided funds to develop a strategic asset management plan for all ACT Policing facilities. That asset management plan is needed to improve visibility of the current asset condition, and identify and prioritise asset upgrades and costs, so that ACT police facilities can continue to be maintained and deliver an appropriate level of service to the ACT community.

As part of the budget, the government will be conducting feasibility studies into the relocation of the Winchester Police Centre and the city police station, as well as Policing infrastructure needs in the Woden and Molonglo areas. Funding provided will also see an increase in supporting resources such as vehicles, body-worn cameras and other operational equipment.

By bolstering police numbers and equipping them with the necessary resources, police will be able to be more proactive, attend a greater range of incidents and respond in a timely manner.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR GENTLEMAN: Of course, the challenge will be for Mr Hanson to vote for this in the budget later on.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what investment has the ACT government made in our other emergency services?

MADAM SPEAKER: Again, within the public domain, Minister Gentleman.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, enough.

MR GENTLEMAN: We have already announced quite a bit of funding in this budget process for a new emergency services station—one in Molonglo Valley, in order to service their growing population. It builds on the government's history of investing in our emergency services.

The government has invested \$30.16 million over four years to continue to implement the ACT Ambulance Service comprehensive, modernised and sustainable service plan. Through this investment, new staff have been employed—extended care paramedics, and intensive care paramedics specialised in treating bariatric patients—two ambulance vehicles have been purchased and crewed, along with five other vehicles, as well as more resources provided for ACTAS clinical governance and education units. This builds on the \$15.2 million provided to ACTAS in the 2021-22 budget to begin its modernisation reform agenda.

Housing—rental affordability

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in the context of the recent federal debate about rent controls, the federal housing minister, Julie Collins, absolutely slammed the ACT's rent controls on ABC's *Insiders* on Sunday morning. She said:

... the evidence shows that it reduces supply significantly by up to 15%. The other thing that it shows is the quality of the stock diminishes over time.

The federal Labor minister closed by saying:

... I will look at the data and the evidence and it shows that this approach doesn't work.

Chief Minister, given your focus on cost of living this week, why is your government pursuing rental policies which significantly diminish both supply and the quality of stock and that will, in the long term, increase rents and homelessness?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Parton for the question. I was watching *Insiders*, and I agree with the points that Minister Collins made in relation to the risks associated with both of those kinds of regulatory interventions in the absence of a supply-side focus.

The point that I made when I was on Radio National yesterday morning was that, in combination with a focus on increasing supply, appropriate regulatory safeguards can address the issues that the minister raised, which are legitimate. So what you need is not policy in isolation but policy in harmony.

Mr Hanson: This was specifically about the ACT policy.

MR BARR: Mr Hanson, you are—

MADAM SPEAKER: A serious interjector, yes. Members, can we remain silent while a member is on the floor providing an answer to a question.

MR BARR: In short, the increased supply, which has seen the number of rental dwellings in the territory increase by around 50 per cent over the last decade and rental properties move from 26 per cent of the housing stock in the ACT to 31 per cent of the housing stock, demonstrates a supply-side solution.

Alongside that, we have put in place minimum standards and a form of rent control at a maximum rental increase—not a rent freeze; a regulated rent control that knocks the rough edges off egregious rent increases. When combined with supply-side interventions, it is a good and effective policy mix.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, is the federal Labor housing minister wrong when she strongly asserts that rent control policies will reduce supply?

MR BARR: The evidence in the ACT is that, if you maintain a supply-first approach, which is what we have been doing, combined with other regulatory interventions—

Mr Parton: Madam Speaker, on a point of order on relevance. The question was very specific. It was whether Mr Barr is therefore asserting that the federal minister is wrong. I ask that he be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The point that both Mr Parton and Mr Hanson fail to understand is that policy is more than just one measure; it is a combination of a number of measures.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: If you could remain quiet for even a nanosecond. I know it is against every instinct in your body, Mr Hanson, but, if you could just remain quiet—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members will be warned very soon!

MR BARR: Supply, supply, supply, supply, supply—they are the top five priorities. Beyond that, regulatory intervention to knock the rough edges off the top of the market, to stop landlords egregiously increasing rent beyond a reasonable level, combined with minimum rental standards form an effective policy that is holistic.

I know that both these two, Mr Hanson and Mr Parton, struggle to think beyond one idea. That is very clear in almost everything they put in the public arena on this and many other topics.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: The serial interjector over there cannot even go 90 seconds without spouting rubbish.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, can you rule out a two-year rent freeze as suggested by your Greens cabinet colleagues?

MR BARR: I do not think there is evidence to support a need for a two-year rent freeze. Why would you lock in at the top of the market when rents are falling? Rents are falling in the ACT. I believe a supply-led solution—first, second, third, fourth and fifth—together with the regulatory regime we have in place now is the right policy approach. So I am not pursuing a two-year rent freeze.

Development—Bluetts Block

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, you made a decision to approve an exemption for an environmental impact statement for the deferred area next to Bluetts Block and the Western Edge investigation area. Nature does not stick to blocks and sections and suburbs, and this deferred area has the same environmental values as Bluetts Block. We have heard you speak repeatedly about conducting full environmental studies across the entire Western Edge, and there 59 submissions from the community raising concerns about the exemption before you granted it. Can you tell me why you approved an exemption for a full environmental impact statement for the deferred area?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Going straight to the answer, it is because the work had been done on the environmental impact on that particular area. I think it is important that we be clear about what we are talking about here. The area referred to as Bluetts Block, which is of Ms Clay's most concern, is rural blocks 402 and 403 in Stromlo. Adjacent to these blocks is the one I granted the exemption for: block 12, section 1, Denman Prospect. On 10 December 2021, an EIS exemption application was lodged for an estate development plan, or an EDP, on block 12, section 1, Denman Prospect. That proposed approximately 850 single and multi-unit dwellings, a primary school site also, recreational areas, a bushfire protection zone, and associated infrastructure works as well. The proposal is for urban development within an area of land that was identified in the Molonglo Valley stage 2 EIS exemption as requiring further investigations. This area is known as the deferred area. The current EIS exemption application has been submitted because urban development is now proposed to extend into that deferred area.

In accordance with section 2(11) of the act, the proponent lodged an application for that EIS exemption on the basis that sufficient information was available from previous recent studies to understand the environmental impacts of the proposal, and the application was referred to the mandatory entities, including the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. The EIS exemption was publicly notified between 17 December 2021 and 10 February 2022. Fifty-nine public representations were received on the application and, on 2 December 2022, Capital Development submitted the revised EIS exemption application that addressed entity and public comments. So I decided to grant that for the definitive— (*Time expired.*)

MS CLAY: The development application stage, which is the next stage of the process, will not delve into the details of environmental concerns. Is that correct?

MR GENTLEMAN: The EIS exemption assessment process is now complete. That allows the proponent to submit a development application to the Planning and Land Authority to be assessed in the impact trap. The information gathered in the EIS exemption process will be used to inform assessment of any development applications submitted to the authority for that proposal.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how will community concerns about the environmental impacts be addressed through the remainder of the process?

MR GENTLEMAN: Once the DA is lodged, or the public is notified for 15 working days, that provides an opportunity for the community to comment on the detailed design of the proposal, and the DA will refer to entities as well to provide comments on the application. There will be no direct impacts to the previous blocks that we have talked about—blocks 402 and 403—and indirect impacts have been considered in the environmental impact assessment. No work is proposed within the high-value woodland adjacent to block 403, to the north, and works would be a minimum of 75 metres from the boundary of block 403. Granting this exemption will allow for more than 800 new homes to be built in Denman Prospect. I am confident that this revised EIS strikes the right balance between building more homes and protecting the natural environment.

Budget 2023-2024—health workforce

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you please outline how the 2023-24 budget delivers on the government's commitment to significantly increase the number of health professionals in Canberra's public health services?

MADAM SPEAKER: Again, Ms Stephen-Smith, to what is in the public domain.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank Mr Pettersson for the question and for his ongoing commitment to public health services and the dedicated workforce that delivers them.

As announced this week, this budget builds on our enviable record in investment supporting our health workforce this term of government. As you know, we committed before the last election to deliver an additional 400 frontline healthcare workers this term of government as part of our comprehensive health plan; something those opposite did not have then and certainly do not have now. We delivered on that commitment two years ahead of schedule. This budget will build on that success, delivering 80 more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals in 2023-24; meaning that since the 2021 budget, more than 570 new health professional positions will have been created by the end of 2023-24.

We are continuing to invest in long-term planning for our health workforce, alongside increased training and support, as well as enhanced career pathways with a key focus on improving the safety and wellbeing of health workers. By investing in our health workforce conditions, our hospitals and our healthcare facilities, we are supporting working conditions and environments that will attract health professionals to Canberra and that will retain our current workforce.

Last Tuesday, the Chief Minister and I were joined by one of our dedicated junior medical officers, Dr Sheraz Majoka, as we discussed a substantial packet of investments and our commitment to deliver an enhanced experience for these wonderful professionals. It was heartening not just to hear the AMA's support but also to hear from Dr Majoka about his experience and how the \$8.57 million investment will make a real difference to him, his colleagues and, ultimately, to Canberrans. This investment is part of a \$28 million workforce package, because on this side of the chamber, we know that we also need to invest in the health workforce, their aspirations and their wellbeing.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, can you please outline how these investments ensure the ACT government is delivering high quality health care for the Canberra community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary and his focus on our track record of substantial investments across our hospital and health system.

Of course, last week I also had the pleasure of spending time with the paediatric team at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children as I announced a \$43.6 million package of public hospital investment in the 2023-24 budget. This package includes

boosts to the north Canberra hospital: delivering more beds and increased support in the emergency department; increased investment in specialist outpatient appointments; and funding to recover from the significant impact of the Calvary theatre fire that is still impacting elective surgery capacity across the territory. Headlining this package was the significant expansion in paediatric services at the Canberra Hospital campus. This investment underlines our ongoing investments in successive budgets, like last year's boost to community paediatrics, and the significant increase in allied health at Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

The 2023-24 budget will deliver a significant boost to paediatric hospital services, including establishing a new paediatric "hospital in the home" program to ensure the ACT's children can be safely cared for at home when they need acute care but do not need to be in hospital. This program will also strengthen the role of GPs in shared care arrangements, further supporting care closer to home for children and young people.

The funding will also help to upskill paediatric and emergency department staff in preparation for the opening of the critical services building, and processes within the department will also be improved to ensure patient and family-centred care is better coordinated. In addition, the existing paediatric weight management program will be expanded to reduce waitlists and waiting times and increase quality of life for young people. Of course, these investments continue the government's work to deliver on our comprehensive plan for the health system.

MS ORR: Minister, how does this funding build upon the investments you have made in healthcare services for the ACT community in previous budgets?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. The 2023-24 budget will continue the work that the government has been undertaking since the 2020 election, and, indeed, prior to that. The government took a comprehensive plan to the election setting out an ambitious agenda, and we have been delivering on it ever since.

As members would well know, the government committed to delivering the critical services building at Canberra Hospital, where the opposition were going to go back to the drawing board. This is, so far, the largest health infrastructure project ever undertaken by the ACT government, and as we move to open this state-of-the-art facility next year, we are investing more than \$122 million in staffing and resources to ensure that our frontline staff are able to deliver the world-class care to Canberrans where and when they need it.

This investment will deliver an additional operating theatre at the Canberra Hospital campus, more medical imaging staffing, more allied health staffing and, critically, a significant boost to our wards people, who will ensure our growing number of frontline doctors, nurses and allied health professionals are able to focus on delivering the care Canberrans need. This investment is a down payment on ensuring that as our public hospital teams prepare to operationalise this significant expansion in capacity, they are well supported by the government to focus on what matters most.

This budget also continues our focus on progressing another election commitment: a new northside hospital. The 2023-24 budget will continue the work we have already been undertaking through previous budgets. This investment of more than \$1 billion

will ultimately overtake the critical services building as the largest single health infrastructure project ever undertaken and is critical to futureproof our hospital system. The government took a commitment to the last election to continue the planning and design work for a new northside hospital to be ready for construction mid-decade, and this budget will deliver. The work we have undertaken in the past couple of months in this place also supports this initiative.

The government is delivering on its plan for Canberrans, and the budget that the Chief Minister and Treasurer will table this evening— *(Time expired.)*

Crime—youth

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, in answer to a question dated 24 May 2023, you provided me a list of the 10 highest serial youth offenders on bail over the last two years. Over two years, the number one serial youth offender on bail allegedly committed 57 offences; number two committed 48 offences; number 3 was 44 offences; number 4 was 33 offences; number 5 was 25 offences; number 6 committed 24 offences; offender number 7 committed 23 offences; number 8 committed 22 offences; and numbers 9 and 10 tied at 20 offences. Averaged out, our number one serial youth offender was committing an offence every 12 days. Attorney, how have you let youth offences get to these astounding levels?

MR RATTENBURY: I reject the premise of Mrs Kikkert's question and the assertion she makes. The government has been very focused in these areas and we are looking at developing a range of programs through the reforms to the minimum age of criminal responsibility that particularly target addressing young people who are involved in the criminal justice system. It is important to note that those statistics Mrs Kikkert has cited apply to young people up to the age of 18. There is a range of factors here but clearly the premise that we simply do it like we have always done it and seek to address this problem by locking up young offenders or changing bail presumptions is not the answer. The answer is to seek to intervene in a way that changes the trajectory of these young people's lives and addresses the factors that see them involved in repeat criminal offences along the lines that Mrs Kikkert has described.

MRS KIKKERT: Attorney, what are the three top programs you are talking about to address these issues? Just three!

MADAM SPEAKER: You have asked the question, Mrs Kikkert.

MR RATTENBURY: I am trying to understand exactly what Mrs Kikkert is talking about, whether she is talking about the new reforms that are coming through or whether we are talking about existing programs. I am happy to provide her with a detailed list on notice.

MR CAIN: Attorney, how does your government's failure to rehabilitate these youth impact community safety?

MR RATTENBURY: This is a concern for community safety. It is why the government is targeting the issue of recidivism, because we know there is a small cohort of people in the ACT who are involved in a significant amount of the criminal activity that takes place in the ACT. That is why we are investing in these spaces, because every time you put somebody on a different path that means they are not repeat offending, we are making our community safer and that is the government's objective.

Acton—proposed fire station

MR MILLIGAN: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, in June of 2019 you promised Canberrans two new fire stations. On Friday, 16 June you again announced the building of the Molonglo fire station, but there was no mention of the long-awaited Acton station. Land and money for this project were budgeted for in previous budgets.

In August of 2020 you announced that it would cost an estimated \$45 million. The Acton fire station was to be completed by 2021 and operational by 2022. Construction was part of the ACT government's COVID-19 local jobs and economic recovery plan. Yet, every time I drive past the site on the corner of Parkes Way and Clunies Ross Street, as do many other Canberrans, the site is still empty and not a single sod of soil has been turned. Minister, when will this station be built?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. It is an important one, as we move forward, providing better accommodation for ACTAS staff across the ACT. We do this in a planned way. The Acton station has been slightly delayed, due to some planning issues and some delivery issues. We are recruiting more staff as we go forward, to ensure that the stations are equipped. I expect the construction to begin very shortly.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I expect construction to start very shortly. The tender has been let. We should see it operational in the not too distant future.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how much can Canberrans expect to be spent on this new building and, with the delay of this building being completed, how much additional cost is required?

MR GENTLEMAN: I gave the cost of the building in an answer to the Assembly last year. I will look for that figure again for Mr Milligan and look for any costs associated with any delay.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you still focus on local jobs for local people to build the Acton fire station?

MR GENTLEMAN: We have a policy of secure local jobs right across our framework but also in construction, wherever we can. Certainly, we will be looking at the opportunity to provide employment for Canberrans.

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)—government-owned corporations

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for industrial relations. Minister, I support the insourcing framework as a way of developing the ACT public service to have the skills and capabilities to meet the challenges that face us. As part of the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2), I am interested in why the legislation was drafted to exclude government-owned corporations from the framework.

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I will go to the insourcing framework first. It has been introduced as part of the government's commitment to promote the wellbeing of the ACT community by providing more secure employment. I am very pleased that Mr Braddock is supportive of that. The framework has seen the introduction of new ACT procurement practices through the Secure Local Jobs Code. As a further element of that framework, the government has committed to implementing a whole-of-government policy that government services will not be contracted out where they could be performed by public servants. The insourcing framework gives effect to that commitment.

I will go to the Territory-owned Corporations Act. That outlines the main objective for such corporations as being to operate at least as efficiently as any comparable business, and to maximise the sustainable return to the territory on its investment in the corporation in accordance with performance targets.

The government's focus, in establishing an insourcing framework, does not relate to the efficiency or the maximising of sustainable returns; rather, there is a focus, in secure employment, on the wellbeing commitments as well. Because the intent of the government's insourcing framework goes beyond the legislative object outlined for the TOCs, the government did not consider it to be appropriate to require these corporations to apply the insourcing framework.

However, there is nothing preventing those territory-owned corporations from applying the insourcing framework, should they wish to assess the viability of insourcing a service or works prior to making a decision to pursue a procurement.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, does the government want government-owned corporations to prioritise insourcing practices?

MR GENTLEMAN: As I said, the policy does not go to those TOCs. It has a different framework on efficiency and viability. We do not have a position there. Of course, should those territory-owned corporations wish to do that, they can access the framework.

Motor vehicles—registration

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, your government has stated that the way vehicle registration is calculated is due to change on 1 July 2024. The Access Canberra website indicates that you intend to shift to an emissions based calculation system to incentivise adoption of electric cars, and the Chief Minister claimed months ago that the cost of registration will not go up for most private passenger vehicles.

However, nearly a year after you announced this change, there still seems to be no publicly available information on how registration fees will be calculated under the new scheme. Unlike other jurisdictions, Canberrans have no online tool to calculate what their vehicle registration will cost. This is compounded by the complex and confusing way rego fees are currently calculated.

Minister, how, precisely, will the total cost of registration be calculated following the change, and which vehicles will see an increase in the cost of rego?

MR BARR: The policy area sits with me. I think it is probably easiest to take that on notice. Trying to explain the complexities of the registration system in one minute and 40 seconds with 27 interjections from Mr Hanson will—

Mr Hanson: I promise not to.

MR BARR: And yet you do! I thank Mr Cocks for the question. It is a legitimate question. I think there are two elements. Perhaps it might be easier to arrange a briefing for you, Mr Cocks. But I think it is important—and I am sure Ms Cheyne will take this on—that there is further information available on the website.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, how can Canberrans trust you to keep rego fees under control when they are already disproportionately high and you will not reveal what the cost will be under the new scheme?

MR BARR: Of course, our motor vehicle registration costs need to assist in the maintenance of the territory's road network. The intent of the reforms is to provide an incentive towards lower-emission vehicles and a small disincentive towards the highest-emission vehicles.

As I think Mr Cocks referred to in his opening question, I think about 96 per cent of vehicles are either cheaper or the same and about four per cent would see an increase.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, why does your government make it so difficult for people to find out the cost to register a vehicle when other jurisdictions have easy online tools?

MR BARR: I take on board the point that there is a lot of interest from those opposite in this policy direction. I am sure that they will try to find a reason to oppose it—because, like most things, when it comes to implementing a progressive reform that might reduce emissions and reduce costs for motorists, they would be opposed. This is from the party that said that electric vehicles would end the weekend.

Mr Parton: Was that here in this parliament?

MR BARR: It was your spiritual leader, the former Prime Minister, Mr Parton.

Mr Parton: Is Julie Collins your spiritual leader?

MADAM SPEAKER: Both sides, please stick to the question and the answer.

MR BARR: I accept the point that there would be value in having an online calculator. That is a fair point to make. As we get closer to the implementation, I think there should be one available.

Budget 2023-2024—active travel

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, how is the ACT government investing to make walking and cycling easier and better for all Canberrans?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. Our government wants to provide more opportunities for Canberrans to take up walking and riding to improve their quality of life and the quality of life more broadly in our city. As part of this year's budget, the ACT government has already announced that we are investing more than \$26 million to deliver a series of new upgrades and also maintenance investment to the ACT's famous cycling and walking network. This investment demonstrates that the ACT government is making active travel safer, accessible and more convenient by building the safe walking and cycling infrastructure that our growing city needs. A component of this investment is an additional \$5 million which will go towards maintaining Canberra's path and cycle network. This represents a 42 per cent increase in annual path maintenance funding, which will help to fix some of the safety hotspots that have recently been identified through a comprehensive audit of the over 3,000 kilometres of our path network.

The ACT government is also investing in a number of strategic network improvements, including new connections through the \$10.4 million stage 1 of the Garden City Cycle Route in the inner north, which will better connect people on the eastern side of Northbourne Avenue. The budget also includes \$3 million in the delivery of path upgrades around Lake Ginninderra following a comprehensive feasibility study. Also, there will be a \$2.6 million investment in a shared path link along the Kingston Foreshore between Cunningham Street and Bowen Park, as well as an investment of \$1 million in lighting infill and missing community path links.

MS ORR: Minister, how does this investment complement the ACT's first Active Travel Plan?

MR STEEL: This budget initiative is an important first step in delivering the actions outlined in the ACT government's first Active Travel Plan, which is currently being finalised following community consultation. The draft plan outlined ways to make it safer, more accessible and convenient for Canberrans to enjoy choosing walking, cycling or micromobility, whether for commuting, exercise or recreation.

The strategic network improvements included in this budget initiative will support the ACT government's implementation of the proposed cycling network and walking maps which were released with the Active Travel Plan last year.

In addition to the strategic network improvements, the budget also includes \$2.1 million to undertake studies and preliminary designs on other priority routes identified in the Active Travel Plan. This includes funding for feasibility and design initiatives for the rollout of pop-up cycleways, key cycling route connections and also priority crossings. This investment very specifically addresses key actions 3, 5 and 6 in the draft Active Travel Plan by renewing a community path network with increased maintenance funding and delivering priority missing cycle links using protected cycleways or offroad, shared or cycle path infrastructure.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what support is being given to support young Canberrans to walk and ride to school through the ACT budget?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her supplementary. We want cycling and walking opportunities to be available for people of all ages. It is an important part of enhancing the quality of life for people in our city, for young and old and everyone between. It is great for people's health. We know that it helps to reduce congestion and is also a zero-emissions form of travel. This budget initiative includes \$3 million of investment in active travel interventions which are specifically focused on helping students and also their parents in terms of walking and riding to school.

We are investing \$2.4 million to improve the road and path network around our schools to make them easier and safer to use. This funding will be used to construct six new pedestrian crossings near Canberra High School in Macquarie, two raised pedestrian crossings near St Mary MacKillop College in Isabella Plains, and another raised pedestrian crossing near Gold Creek High School in Nicholls. It will also include funding for a feasibility study for a controlled pedestrian crossing on Canberra Avenue, near St Edmund's and St Clare's Colleges in Griffith, which has been the subject of a petition in the Assembly on a different intervention. It also includes an enhanced school crossing supervisor program.

In addition to the physical infrastructure, we are also funding education. Seven hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars will be invested in communication activities which will help to encourage the uptake of active travel by both school students and the broader community. It includes funding for the "Rethink your routine" campaign, the Ride or Walk to School program, and the It's Your Move Safe Cycle program. This is a comprehensive active travel initiative that will help more students and parents to walk and cycle to school more often, as well as the broader community.

Mr Barr: At the risk of any further interjections, I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Answers to questions on notice

Question 1212

MS CASTLEY: Under standing order 118A, I request an explanation concerning some outstanding questions from three ministers. To start with, I ask about a question to the Treasurer, No 1212 on the *Notice Paper*.

MR BARR: I am aware that I have dozens of questions from the opposition. I believe I have answered all of them but this one. I believe the answer to this will be supplied today or tomorrow. The reason for the delay is that today is budget day. I have been somewhat busy on many other things over the past few weeks. I have sought to answer nearly every question that has come forward. I apologise, Ms Castley, that this one did not meet the deadline, but I understand that I will have an answer to you very shortly.

Question 1160

MS CASTLEY: I also ask about a question to the Minister for Mental Health, No 1160.

MS DAVIDSON: I am just checking which question that is. I will find out where that question is and get an answer back to you later today.

Questions 1139, 1140, 1176 and 1179

MS CASTLEY: For the Minister for Health, there are questions 1139, 1140 and 1179. I note that I got an answer to 1181 referring me, as a non-answer, to 1176, which I also do not have. I have one but not the other.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I was wondering about 1176 because I was under the impression that I had signed it; but these things do go through a quality assurance process, and I am told it is awaiting some further information. I apologise for the mis-ordering of those. I can advise Ms Castley that I have signed the response to 1139. I have a number of others here that were on the notice paper, and I cannot remember which ones Ms Castley referred to. The ones I have not signed are 1179, which I understand was redirected to Minister Davidson; 1176, which we have just talked about; and 1140, which has not yet been received from the directorate. This relates to the Calvary Public Hospital Bruce-North Canberra Hospital transition. Obviously, the transition team have been very busy managing that transition.

Supplementary answer to question without notice Acton—proposed fire station

MR GENTLEMAN: In relation to Mr Milligan's question on the cost of the Acton station, I can advise that \$45 million in funding for the design and construction of the Acton station was announced in August 2020.

Papers

Madam Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 17(5)—Auditor-General's Report No 2/2023—Management of Operation Reboot (Outpatients), dated 14 June 2023.

Budget 2023-2024—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 20AB—
Recommended appropriation—

ACT Audit Office—Copy of letter to the Treasurer from the Speaker, dated
19 June 2023.

ACT Electoral Commission—Copy of letter to the Treasurer from the Speaker,
dated 14 June 2023.

ACT Integrity Commission—Copy of letter to the Treasurer from the Speaker,
dated 19 June 2023.

Standing order 191—Amendments to:

Corrections and Sentencing Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, dated 14 and
16 June 2023.

Period Products and Facilities (Access) Bill 2022, dated 14 and 16 June 2023.

Planning Bill 2022, dated 19 June 2023.

Road Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, dated 14 and 16 June 2023.

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

Children and Young People Act, pursuant to subsection 727S(5)—ACT Children
and Young People Death Review Committee—Annual Report 2022, dated
28 April 2023.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 12—*Inquiry into the Work
Health and Safety Amendment Bill 2022*—Government response, undated.

Rights of Older Persons—Assembly resolution of 18 October 2022—Letter to
the ACT Minister for Veterans and Seniors from the Federal Attorney-General,
dated 29 May 2023.

**Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise
stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Animal Welfare Act—Animal Welfare (Fees) Determination 2023 (No 1)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-101 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Clinical Waste Act—Clinical Waste (Fees) Determination 2023 (No 1)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-102 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Dangerous Goods (Road Transport) Act—Dangerous Goods (Road Transport)
Fees and Charges Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-113
(LR, 19 June 2023).

Dangerous Substances Act—Dangerous Substances (Fees) Determination
2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-114 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Domestic Animals Act—Domestic Animals (Fees) Determination 2023
(No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-103 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Electoral Act—Electoral (Fees) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument
DI2023-109 (LR, 15 June 2023).

Gambling and Racing Control Act Financial Management Act—Gambling and
Racing Control (Governing Board) Appointment 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable
Instrument DI2023-96 (LR, 1 June 2023).

Government Procurement Act—Government Procurement (Non-Public Employee Member) Appointment 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-107 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Health Infrastructure Enabling Act—Health Infrastructure Enabling Regulation 2023, including a regulatory impact statement—Subordinate Law SL2023-11 (LR, 2 June 2023).

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission Act—Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (Price Direction for the Supply of Electricity to Certain Small Customers on Standard Retail Contracts) Terms of Reference Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-97 (LR, 5 June 2023).

Labour Hire Licensing Act—Labour Hire Licensing (Fee) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-115 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Machinery Act—Machinery (Fees) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-116 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Plastic Reduction Act—

Plastic Reduction (Single-use Plastic Products) Exemption 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-99 (LR, 5 June 2023).

Plastic Reduction (Single-use Plastic Products—Special Circumstances) Exemption 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-98 (LR, 5 June 2023).

Plastic Reduction Amendment Regulation 2023 (No 1), including a regulatory impact statement—Subordinate Law SL2023-10 (LR, 8 June 2023).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Macnamara) Determination 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-100 (LR, 8 June 2023).

Public Unleased Land Act—Public Unleased Land (Fees) Determination 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-104 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Venues) Determination 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-110 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Scaffolding and Lifts Act—Scaffolding and Lifts (Fees) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-117 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Tree Protection Act—Tree Protection (Fees) Determination 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-105 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Utilities (Technical Regulation) Act—Utilities (Technical Regulation) (Operating Certificate Fees) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-111 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act—Waste Management and Resource Recovery (Fees) Determination 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-106 (LR, 13 June 2023).

Work Health and Safety Act—Work Health and Safety (Fees) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-118 (LR, 19 June 2023).

Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act—Working with Vulnerable People Background Checking (Fees) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-108 (LR, 15 June 2023).

Light rail—stage 2B

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.00): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Greens/Labor government has provided no comprehensive business case for Stage 2B of the tram project;
 - (b) getting the tram to Woden will be one of the largest capital projects in the history of the ACT;
 - (c) the people of Canberra have never been given a comprehensive and compelling business case for connecting Commonwealth Park to Woden with a tram system;
 - (d) the people of Canberra have not been told what Stage 2B will cost;
 - (e) previous stages of the tram project have relied on property value uplift to yield a positive benefit and the proposals did not stand up based on transport benefits alone;
 - (f) there are other lower cost alternatives to the tram capable of delivering the same or superior public transport services between Civic and Woden;
 - (g) travel times from Woden to Civic via a tram will be greater than current bus services;
 - (h) the potentially enormous capital and operating cost of Stage 2B will deprive funding to critical services such as police and justice, city services and health that are badly needed to sustain community safety and wellbeing; and
 - (i) Canberra's public deserves better accountability and transparency;
- (2) calls on the ACT government to:
 - (a) curtail proceeding with any works contracts or infrastructure procurements for Stage 2B;
 - (b) prepare and provide a cost benefit assessment that:
 - (i) compares the proposed Stage 2B capital and recurring cost with an electric bus service option and other options to deliver passenger services between Woden and Civic;
 - (ii) omits estimates of land value uplift from the public transport route between Woden and Civic;
 - (iii) provides forward budget estimates of capital and recurring costs for each option;
 - (iv) depicts capital and operating cost differences between the options; and
 - (v) clearly articulates the public transport benefit from each option;
 - (c) prepare a business case for a public transport solution that offers the public faster travel times between Woden and Civic that equal or exceed current bus service times;

- (d) provide the ACT public with a detailed report on the cost benefit study findings and forward budget projections; and
- (e) report back to this Assembly by 30 November of this year on progress made with the cost benefit assessment and associated recommendations.

Let us talk about the tram because we love talking about the tram, Madam Speaker. I think it is really important that we are talking about it today, budget day 2023, because when the budget is laid on the table later today, there will not be much that we can see of the tram project, and that is for a number of reasons. One of them is that this government, despite talking a big talk on this subject, are absolutely dragging the chain on it. They say that they are getting on with it, but they are moving at glacial speed.

I must say that I look forward at some stage during the debate to seeing the amendment from Mr Steel, but I am yet to do so at this stage. There will not be much to see in regard to the bottom line at the end of the forward estimates because they will keep kicking it down the line. How anyone can possibly believe that we can, as a small city, spend well over \$3 billion on stage 2 of the tram project and that that level of spend will not heavily impact the bottom line is ludicrous.

Furthermore, we are talking about stage 2 of a project which, in theory, will have four, five or six stages. At the end of it all, the final figure will be monumental. As we hurtle towards another election in the city next year, the biggest single difference between the two sides is this issue. It is the biggest single difference. “2B or not 2B” is the question, and I think that, as every week goes by, more and more Canberrans are arriving at the conclusion that the answer is no.

My motion calls upon the government to do what the people of my electorate—and other electorates, but I spend a lot of time talking to people in Tuggeranong—want them to do; that is, press pause on the pursuit of at least stage 2B of this white elephant right now, to just come clean with exactly where we are at, and to just come clean with the numbers.

As we get further and further into this term, it is certainly becoming more and more apparent that the early suggestions of just when this project was going to get to Woden were never, ever going to be fulfilled. It was not all that long ago that the Chief Minister stated publicly that the tram would be in Woden by 2025, and we know that there is as much chance of that occurring as there is of—I do not know—the West Coast Eagles winning the AFL premiership this year.

In terms of official advice from the government on these matters—and that is what it gets down to—there is really not much on offer. We just heard the minister saying, “Trust us because we’re getting on with it.” And that is about it. I know that this is the signature project and I know that this is the thing that Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury will dine out on forever, after their retirement. But right now the details are not really forthcoming.

This government are not keen to lay out the numbers because they know the numbers do not stack up. One of the clearest indications of that fact—and I mentioned it

earlier—is that even Labor and the Greens keep on kicking this project down the road. I think Mr Steel is actually a little embarrassed by it, to be honest, because I think he would like to see it actually kicking along and lining up with his rhetoric, but it is not. It just is not.

Here we go; here is the amendment. I will have a good read of it at some stage. Thanks for that; that is good service.

We were once sold a scenario that stage 2A would be completed before the election in 2024. There is certainly no chance of that; none at all. Based on all of the information that we have, there is absolutely no chance of it getting to Woden before 2030. The time estimate that my office has suggested, that being 2034, is itself looking a little optimistic. Again, I find it absurd that the only genuine cost and arrival date estimates have come from my office. That is just ridiculous.

We were originally told that this project was so important for our climate change goals, for our emissions goals. But by the time it is completed, all of the “must save the planet by this date” deadlines will have long passed. This is not about emissions and it is certainly not about public transport. As much as anything else, the tram project is about arrogance. The arrogance with which this government treats the people of Canberra knows no bounds. If it is not the seizure of a successfully privately owned hospital, then it is telling people they cannot have gas cooking or heating, or making you queue up by the thousands in the vain hope of getting a block of land to build a house on. That is the sort of arrogance I am talking about.

Our community infrastructure and services are starved of funds in a whole range of areas, and no doubt there will be sincere and profound promises. There will be amazing promises again to fix it all in the budget this afternoon, but we have heard it all before. Even with this afternoon’s promises, including promises of greater choice, greater wellbeing and a better Canberra, we all know that this government has chosen to hang a very large millstone around the community’s neck with a multibillion-dollar tram project.

When I say “multibillion-dollar project”, as I said earlier, we are just guessing. It is not just me that has been kept guessing; it is the entire ACT community. We have an inkling from what has been mooted that getting the tram to Woden—or indeed most probably Mawson, based on questions that were asked in this chamber—from where it terminates at the moment will be a far greater cost compared with getting it from Gungahlin to Civic. The engineering works, the bridge works and the roadworks will certainly promise to make stage 2B the biggest infrastructure project in Canberra’s history, and one that we will all pay for, for several decades to come.

We are promised great benefits from the tram project, but the economic assessment was positive only when real estate value uplift along the light rail corridor was taken into account. In other words, the transport benefit did not justify the cost incurred. If you look at the ACT Auditor-General’s evaluation of stage 2A, you will find again that the land value uplift is a key factor.

Mr Assistant Speaker, are we being deceived by this government or not? I think that is the big question. Are we about to spend a very large but yet unknown sum of money

to improve our public transport system, or are we just spending way too much to increase the price of land along the light rail corridor? That is the question.

Honesty in government often emerges as a bit of a catchcry when one side or the other wants to criticise, but in the case of the tram project, transparency and accountability are real issues. They are real issues because this government are not being honest with any of us. I know it, they know it and the Greens know it. As much as Ms Clay is on the same tram as Mr Steel, she is constantly asking him for exactly the same stuff that I am asking for. She is asking for the same stuff.

We are yet to be informed of the cost of stage 2B, even a ballpark figure. Is it \$2 billion, is it \$3 billion, is it \$4 billion or is it higher? Here is yet another opportunity for this minister and this government to inform the public. It owes this to us because we all know that the tram from Woden to Civic will be much slower than the bus services.

We are being compelled to pay billions for poorer services. The government owes us a thorough and compelling analysis because the taxpayers have to stump up the revenue. I am sure that when push comes to shove, and if indeed contracts are signed, most of that money will be borrowed. But it will remain a millstone around our neck for a long time. The sources of the revenue will come from us paying higher rates, higher fees and government charges, a higher cost of living, and artificially inflated land costs along the light rail corridor.

Just as frightening, what critical services and infrastructure will be starved of funds due to the acquisition of this massive white elephant? There is no question that, if you are spending \$3½ billion on this thing over there, you cannot spend it on all of these things over here. There is always an opportunity cost.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I reckon some of those opposite, quietly, might agree. I do not think they will be voting with me, but who knows? We should not be kept in the dark about what is going on here. Members ought to agree that it is not unreasonable to ask the government to give us some transparency by late this year, as called for in this motion. I will sit down so that I can read the amendment and listen to my friend Mr Steel.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (3.10): Well, it is another sitting week and another light rail motion. Speeches keep on getting shorter, the rhetoric keeps on getting thinner and the ideas keep on getting whackier from the opposition in relation to transport. Yet, there is still no transport plan from the opposition.

Governments are often criticised for not thinking beyond the next election—for not planning ahead and putting in place long-term policies to address long-term challenges. But, in this city, that criticism can only be levelled at the opposition, because our government has a comprehensive plan for transport to build an integrated public transport system, with mass transit light rail at the heart and electric buses running to the suburbs.

Our plan is future focused, with investment to expand our city's first mass transit system: light rail. We started that by building the highly successful first stage of light rail, which the opposition railed against at the time and did everything that they could to undermine the benefits of that project when the business case was released. But, since operations have begun, we have seen the extraordinary success of that project. It came in under budget, and the benefits have exceeded expectations. We are seeing now the same approach used by the opposition to try to undermine future stages of the project.

The introduction of light rail from the city to Gungahlin has increased patronage on public transport, compared to the previous rapid bus route. The Red Rapid was a successful rapid bus route, but it did not deliver the same transport benefits that light rail, as a mass transit system, has.

In his motion, Mr Parton recognised—which I think is a flaw in his politics in this motion—that light rail does not just bring transport benefits; it brings benefits in terms of urban regeneration and land use and, indeed wider economic benefits, including those that we are seeing on the stage 1 route, on the corridor. This includes the development of more housing to accommodate more people, which is a key challenge that we have in our city at the moment. Of course, we want those benefits to flow. We saw more people working and living in that corridor during light rail stage 1 construction, and we are also seeing that since it commenced operations.

The frequent, reliable and comfortable services provided by stage 1 of light rail have been embraced by Canberrans on the north side, and we want to extend those same benefits to the residents of the south side. Why should they miss out on having better public transport?

The government's vision is to extend the light rail line to the south side to create a central mass transit spine from Gungahlin through to Woden. This means that all Canberrans will be able to travel to key destinations and key employment hubs, including in the parliamentary triangle but also in places like Deakin and Woden, that they can travel right along the line in a single trip, and that line will be integrated with rapid and local bus services. In the future, additional light rail lines are planned to other town centres and destinations.

An integrated public transport network is key to delivering our vision for a connected, sustainable and vibrant city, and this will build on the existing bus fleet. We already have rapid bus routes, including articulated buses, that run from the city to Woden, and we are already transitioning this fleet to electric buses. We have the largest number of electric buses delivered per capita in the country. Buses are, and will remain, an important part of an integrated public transport system in Canberra. We have 12 electric buses in operation. We have procured an additional 94 battery electric buses. These procurements will transition more than 20 per cent of our bus fleet to be zero emissions transport, with 106 battery electric buses in total in the fleet. Of course, we will continue to transition the rest.

The State of the Environment Report 2021 is the report that the federal coalition refused to release, but it was released last year by the new Labor government federally.

It rated Canberra as the best city for access to public transport, with 65 per cent of dwellings situated within 400 metres of public transport with a reasonable service. This is a system that we want to build on by expanding the mass transit component of our integrated transport network so that more Canberrans can access this service.

Buses will continue to play an important role by providing services to the suburbs, and they will closely integrate with other forms of transit. However, buses alone will not deliver the mass transit system that Canberra needs. Buses are impacted by traffic congestion and disruption unless they operate on a dedicated busway, which has subsequent impacts to the road network, as it requires a lane of traffic, potentially, to be removed.

Light rail is delivering a genuine mass transit system for Canberra. Each vehicle can comfortably transport 207 passengers and is designed for a maximum capacity of 276 passengers. By comparison, a standard bus can only hold around a quarter of those passengers. An articulated bus can hold one third of an LRV's passengers.

In addition, the capacity of light rail vehicles can be further increased with larger vehicles and potential future modifications to the stops. These longer-lasting light rail vehicles will help to move our growing city with higher capacity, frequent and reliable services that operate in a dedicated corridor. That is why we do not call them trams; we call them light rail.

This will be essential to support the densification of our city as we move towards a population of 500,000, which could now be as early as 2026. The ACT government has already committed to developing and publishing a business case for light rail stage 2B, which will include an economic analysis that is developed in accordance with established national guidelines—guidelines that Mr Parton's motion asks us to depart from.

This motion is just another Liberal attack on a better public transport system that is fit for our growing city, because they have no ideas and no plan for public transport. They would never deliver light rail, yet they continue to attack us for delivering light rail.

To refresh the Assembly's memory, it was just over six months ago when I amended one of these motions to confirm that the ACT government would continue to release business cases and contracts for future stages of light rail and publish estimated costs for stage 2B once contracts are signed—indeed, that is for stage 2A as well, with an updated cost estimate, noting that we already have published the net present value figures for that project for the business case—and the procurement is finalised to ensure that the territory is in the best position to achieve value for money.

The ACT government has previously stated that, due to the complexity of the route through the national capital area, the stage 2B business case will be developed following NCA and commonwealth parliamentary approval processes. This includes the development of an environmental impact statement and early design, which are necessary to confirm the scope of the project to inform analysis of the project's costs and benefits.

This is why Mr Parton's and the Liberal Party's bogus claim around what this project will cost needs to be called out. They simply do not understand what the final scope of the project is in order to cost it. That is what we will do as part of our business case, but that needs to happen after those planning processes, those planning risks, are addressed.

The ACT Capital Framework notes that the projects require significant resources to undertake the front-end planning and due diligence work—the kind of work that Mr Parton has not done—that is necessary to build a comprehensive business case. Under this framework, various detailed technical guidelines are currently applied in the economic appraisal of projects including, specifically, the transport project appraisals.

These guidelines include: the Transport for New South Wales Principles and Guidelines for Economic Appraisal of Transport Investment and Initiatives, which provide guidance on the estimation and monetisation of benefits and economic costs relating to transport projects, with a catalogue of parameter values and evaluation methodologies, including the value of time for business and private purposes, vehicle operating costs parameters and parameters for congestion safety and environmental impacts; the Australian Transport Assessment and Planning Guidelines, which provide tools, techniques and parameter values for economic appraisals relating to transport projects; and the Australian Transport Council National Guidelines for Transport Systems Management in Australia, which provide a framework for appraisal of transport investment and initiatives, including detail on techniques for estimating benefits relating to transport investments.

The ACT government will continue to use the national guidance and guidelines applicable at that time when developing light rail stage 2 business case. This includes using applicable land use benefits when conducting economic analysis. The ACT government has used the well-established Australian Transport Assessment and Planning Guidelines 08 *Land-use benefits for transport initiatives*, when calculating the economic land use benefits associated with transport projects like light rail. These guidelines are recommended by Infrastructure Australia in their guide to economic appraisal and are widely supported at a national level. They are, indeed, expected by the commonwealth, especially in the projects that they fund.

Make no mistake: what Mr Parton's motion today is calling for us to do is depart from those accepted guidelines, which is an incredibly radical proposal because transport infrastructure has long been recognised to have potential effects on land use. Because of market imperfections and feedback effects between land use and transport demands, such as second round transport benefits, changes in land use can result in a range of additional benefits to those that are captured in a fixed land use transport appraisal. So, contrary to the Liberals' preferences, these are the types of nationally supported guidelines the ACT government will be using when conducting economic analysis to develop the light rail stage 2B business case.

Unlike the Liberals, we will not be manipulative. We will not be cherry-picking the types of benefits that we analyse to manipulate the outcome. In fact, it is very concerning to see this radical proposal and this radical disregard for using nationally accepted guidelines in the development of the light rail stage 2 business case.

In this motion, the Liberals have called on the ACT government to omit estimates of land value uplift from the public transport route between Woden and Civic. To make it crystal clear for the Assembly, what they are calling on the ACT government to do is to manipulate the business case to suit their agenda and to go against recommendations made by the ACT Auditor-General in their recent performance audit of the stage 2A business case and, indeed, by Infrastructure Australia. It is a concerning insight into how the Liberals will twist the facts to suit the agenda that they are pushing, but it is not surprising.

The ACT government has and will continue to be transparent with the Canberra community about the costs and benefits of light rail. We have already published the business cases for light rail stage 1 and light rail stage 2A, and we've also published the *City to Gungahlin Light Rail: project delivery report*, which looks at, of course, the realisation of benefits on that project. Today, I am committing to provide a five-year benefit realisation update next year when we reach April 2024, five years after operations commenced in April 2019.

It is disappointing that our long-term vision for transport continues to be opposed by the small-thinking conservatives in the Canberra Liberals. They have no plan for public transport other than to oppose it or criticise how long it will take us to build this important, complex infrastructure for our growing city, but they would never build it, ever.

Their position ignores the fact that work has already begun to expand the mass transit south, with light rail vehicles ordered and work underway to raise London Circuit to enable the stage 2A line to be extended to Commonwealth Park. Mr Parton must take the Monaro Highway on his way to and from work, because he clearly has not driven down Commonwealth Avenue and seen the massive amount of construction that is underway to enable this project to happen.

We have always said that there will be complex planning, environmental and heritage work necessary for the stage 2B extension. Early work has already begun in realising heritage and landscape design for Commonwealth Avenue with the National Capital Authority. This will be followed by the development of the environmental impact statement, and we will be engaging with the community, particularly next year, as we go through that process.

To do that, we need to progress the necessary early design to get through those planning approvals ahead of the final business case procurement design and construction. We have also long-contracted AECOM to facilitate this planning and design work. On the "call" in the motion today to stop further contracts, we have already started this work on 2B with AECOM to get through this necessary planning work.

We are committed to delivering the future-focused transport infrastructure that our growing city needs to maintain our status as one of the world's most livable cities. In order to do that, we need to change. We need to build a mass transit system, because we do not want to be choked up with congestion. We need to make balanced and considered investments in transport—public transport, roads and active travel. We are building the infrastructure our city needs today to support all modes of transport,

including mass transit, and the solution is not one or the other. It is mass transit light rail, it is buses, it is active travel, it is other roads transport. We consider them all holistically as part of an integrated public transport network, and we are investing in renewed infrastructure across all modes.

To move more people around our city more efficiently in the future, we need to prepare our transport system now with future-focused investments, not decades down the track when congestion traffic impacts would, in fact, be worse. That is exactly what the ACT government is doing, as a future-focused government.

We are committed to delivering transport infrastructure for our growing needs now and in the future, and I look forward to delivering a comprehensive, integrated plan with projects that are based on accepted economic appraisal principles.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government published the business case for Light Rail Stage 1;
- (b) the ACT Government published the contract for Light Rail Stage 1 and a contract summary for Light Rail Stage 1;
- (c) the ACT Government published a benefits realisation snapshot of Light Rail Stage 1 following its completion and operation which included land use benefits quantified at \$240m;
- (d) the ACT Government published the business case for Light Rail Stage 2A and has committed to publish the business case for Light Rail Stage 2B, however the release of costing details prior to signing contracts will not be provided where it may negatively impact the ACT Government’s ability to achieve value for money through the procurement;
- (e) the ACT Government has committed to publish the contracts for Light Rail Stage 2A and Light Rail Stage 2B once the procurements have been finalised and contracts have been signed; and
- (f) the ACT Government has committed to publish assessments of the realisation of benefits of Light Rail Stage 2A and Light Rail Stage 2B following the completion and after operations commence on each Stage;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the *ACT Capital Framework* notes that projects require significant resources to undertake the front-end planning and due diligence work necessary to build a comprehensive Business Case;
- (b) the ACT Government has stated that due to the complexity of the route through the National Capital area, the Stage 2B business case will be developed following National Capital Authority and Commonwealth Parliamentary approval processes, which includes the development of an environmental impact statement and early design which are necessary to confirm the scope of the project to inform analysis of the costs and benefits of the project; and

- (c) the ACT Government has already signed a contract with AECOM to facilitate the design and planning approvals for the entirety of Stage 2; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) continue conducting economic analysis and public reporting for all future stages of light rail based on the *ACT Capital Framework* and informed by accepted national guidelines from Infrastructure Australia, which includes transport benefits and land use benefits;
 - (b) update the Assembly on the benefits realisation on Light Rail Stage 1 five years since operations commenced in April 2019, including benefits from land value changes;
 - (c) continue to build an integrated city-wide integrated public transport network, combining mass-transit light rail with rapid and suburban bus routes as outlined in the *ACT Transport Strategy*;
 - (d) continue to build Light Rail Stage 2 to Woden as part of the initial north-south spine of Canberra's integrated public transport system; and
 - (e) continue to undertake the necessary planning and due diligence work to inform the development of the Light Rail Stage 2B business case."

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.25): I would like to speak to Mr Parton's motion and the amendment circulated by Minister Steel. The motion and the amendment cover several issues. I will summarise them, but I will be brief. We have already spoken about this topic quite a lot.

The motion notes the history of the project. It does not actually mention all of the information published so far and all of the commitments made about when we will publish more information on future stages. I will not run through that in detail; it is in the amendment, and the minister has outlined it. It is important, for completeness, to explain what has been published and when the next bits will be published.

The motion fails to recognise when information is released, and we have already discussed this many times. It actually makes a lot of sense to me. Before taking on this role, I was a company director and I have run businesses. I have negotiated contracts in government. I have negotiated contracts in the private sector. I have negotiated contracts as a private business operator, and I understand this. You do not publish your upper limit whilst you are negotiating a deal. It is not a good idea. You will get charged that top rate if you tell people what it is. That is not how we typically run negotiations in any of those capacities, and I am quite pleased that I am part of a government that also sticks to that basic premise of how to run a negotiation.

We are obviously at an earlier stage, even, in scoping out some of the project. We will publish those figures, and we have said when we will publish those figures. I am content to see that schedule and to see that we are getting the updates published when they are meant to be published.

The motion calls on the government to undertake feasibility studies for alternatives to light rail. I was really interested in this aspect of it; I would be keen to debate alternatives. But we did not really see any alternatives in the motion.

We have alternatives stated as “an electric bus service option and other options”. That is not really enough for us to look at a feasibility study for other options.

If we are going to debate an alternative, we actually need a little bit more substance than “and other options” or “an electric bus service”. We already have those. It would be really valuable for the opposition to put together something tangible and something that is a genuine alternative. That is a really important role for an opposition, particularly in the transport sector, but we do not have it.

That we need a firm proposal with solid business cases is actually the premise of this motion. It would have been good if, in those alternatives, we had that premise honoured; if we saw those firm alternatives and then had a call to produce a cost-benefit analysis on those. I would have been really interested in using that. It is not a good use of public resources to call for a cost-benefit analysis of “other options”. It will not get us anywhere.

The motion asks us to omit land use changes from the business case for stage 2B. We have already had a discussion about that. It shows a bit of a misunderstanding about how business cases and benefits realisation reports are calculated across Australia. I have learned a lot about this in the last 2½ years in this role. I will briefly outline some of those learnings.

In June 2022, we debated a motion of Mr Parton’s calling on the ACT government to look at the Auditor-General’s report on light rail stage 2A and to update cost-benefit assessments to reflect the Auditor-General’s comments. We had read that report in our office. Amongst the recommendations, the Auditor-General asked the ACT government to “identify the nature of the development costs and benefits associated with the project, including the land use and city-shaping benefits to be derived from light rail stage 2A”. He also asked the ACT government to “develop a benefits realisation plan for light rail stage 2A”.

Those requests from the Auditor-General explicitly recognise land use changes as an important measurement in assessing the light rail project in a transparent and accountable way. Removing land use changes from our economic analysis would actually go against the Auditor-General’s recommendations. It would remove that layer of scrutiny for this project which the Auditor-General has specifically told us he wants to see included.

It would also mean that our light rail business case and benefit realisation assessments do not meet national guidelines. We have heard quite a good explanation for that. There are national guidelines on undertaking economic analysis on this kind of major project. They are guidelines that the whole country follows. They are set by Infrastructure Australia, and it is really important that we follow that same consistent methodology that everybody else is following, and that our Auditor-General has told us that we should follow, too. If we did not do that, we would be an outlier in the country in how we assess projects. We would be out of step with the agreed standards on how to assess this project.

Changing the methodology part-way through is also a bad idea because it will make it impossible for Canberrans to compare one stage of light rail to another stage of

light rail. It will make this project impossible to compare to other projects around the country. It is just not a good idea in putting together a rational assessment of whether we are getting a good deal for our investment.

We do not want to remove that and end up with less transparency and less scrutiny. We do not want to remove that land use change and end up being out of step with the set national methodology, and we do not want to do something that goes against the way that the Auditor-General has told us we should make these assessments.

Light rail has many benefits, and the benefits are greater for the integrated network than they are for each individual stage. I will run through these really quickly. I think that it is important to remember the whole story, but I will not labour the point. It will improve public transport options for many people in Canberra. Light rail to Woden opens the possibility for future stages to extend to Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Molonglo. It will give Canberrans a public transport option that they genuinely want to use—and our passenger numbers on stage 1 show this. People love using light rail. This is the sort of public transport that people really want.

It gives us a real chance to reduce climate emissions, which are over 60 per cent of our tracked emissions. I was pleased to hear Mr Parton talk about this. I share his concerns. I think we need to do this more quickly than we are. I certainly do not think part of that progress will involve coming up with new methodologies. I think it means delivering the service better and quicker than we have.

This project provides city-shaping benefits for Canberra. It is the way the IPCC and city planners all around the world are telling growing cities to build. It will help Canberra to reduce our urban sprawl. It will deliver on our ACT government goals for transit-oriented development, and that has been a core focus of this government since 2004. It is long-established that this is the way we need to grow and build.

It will let people live closer to public and active transport and have shorter, cheaper and more comfortable commutes to work. We have already seen this with the first stage. We are not talking about an academic proposal anymore. We are talking about a service that is actually delivering all of these things.

Canberra is growing faster than any other capital city, state or territory, in Australia at the moment. The best time to build this city-wide, high-capacity, high-frequency, stable and popular public transport network would have been 20 years ago, but the next best time is now. We know that it works. We know that we need it. We know that we need to get on and build it, and we need to build it quickly and well.

The Greens do not want to get side-tracked with vague ideas about alternatives that have not really been formed. Show us something. Show us a genuine plan. If you want that to be looked at, give us something really tangible that we can look at. Please do not just put up general “other options”. And please do not ask us to abandon the reporting structures that Infrastructure Australia and the Auditor-General have told us are the right way for us to report and appraise how we are delivering this project.

I had the benefit of having a chat to Minister Steel about the amendment. The Greens are quite happy with the amendment. We think it achieves more scrutiny and more

transparency than the original motion does. The motion aims for transparency and scrutiny. I absolutely applaud that. I think that the amendment actually achieves that scrutiny and transparency in a better way.

This will also be the first time that we will see an update from the May 2020 snapshot, and we will see the assessment of the benefits published. I am really looking forward to seeing that analysis. We are certainly waiting for that in our office. That is exactly the kind of scrutiny that we need. We can learn from that scrutiny, and we can apply it to future stages. The ACT Greens will be supporting Minister Steel's amendment.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.34): We will not be supporting the shallow amendment from the minister. Have you read this, Mr Assistant Speaker? It is rubbish. It does not address the substantial questions that have been presented in the original motion. Mr Steel has again shown absolute disdain for the people of Canberra by refusing to commit to providing the information that people are calling for. He knows all of the answers to these questions, but he does not want to impart that information.

Mr Steel is embarrassed by those numbers, and he is embarrassed by his government's failure to fulfil any meaningful time-line predictions on this project. He is embarrassed. I can understand that embarrassment. Labor are just hanging on in there, in the hope that the Greens do not crack the whip hard enough to actually force them to do it faster. Of course, if they do that, they do not really have the money.

Mr Steel knows full well that I will be releasing a comprehensive transport policy. He is looking forward to it; he is actually looking forward to it. He knows that I will be releasing a comprehensive transport policy in the lead-up to the election in 2024, and he is a bit worried that it will be pretty solid. He is a bit worried. He knows that I have more room to move than he has, because we will not be spending \$4 billion on a tram.

I will not be dictated to by Mr Steel as to the timing of those announcements, so he can carp on all he likes from the sidelines—and I look forward to him doing it, because he is quite entertaining when he does it. I find that he is quite entertaining. But I will make those announcements at a time that I choose.

Mr Steel is disappointed that we are holding a torch to his government. That is what he said in his speech, basically. He is disappointed that we are holding a torch to his government. He has been trusted by the people of the ACT to deliver this project, and he is letting those people down. He somehow does not seem to believe that, as the shadow minister, I should be watching closely and that I should be holding him to account.

Mr Steel should know that I will be watching his every step. I will be taking note of every failed promise. I will be recording every milestone that we fail to meet, every delay and every cost blowout. Every single time that something does not go to plan, I will be there, and I will shine a light on it. That is one of the reasons why they pay my salary.

From Mr Steel today, it was pretty much like the stance on Calvary, really, wasn't it? Mr Steel's position is, "We've got the numbers, so it's my way or the highway." No; the amendment is full of weasel words, and I would say to Mr Steel: you can't hide

behind weasel words forever. The people of Canberra want to know what this project will cost and when it will be delivered. We will not be supporting the amendment.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 7

Ms Berry
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 Cocks
Mr Hanson
Mrs Kikkert
Mr Milligan
Mr Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Municipal services—streetlighting

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.41): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) lighting in public places exists principally to meet the needs of people in the community, and it is essential to have the right light in the right place;
- (b) thoughtful best practice lighting design of our public spaces and neighbourhoods can vastly improve their night-time amenity, allowing Canberrans to walk, ride, roll, skate or scoot comfortably and safely around our city at night;
- (c) best practice lighting design is defined by the following standards:
 - (i) AS/NZS 1158.1.1:2022 Lighting for roads and public spaces, Part 1.1: Vehicular traffic (Category V) lighting—Performance and design requirements;
 - (ii) AS/NZS 1158.3.1:2020 Lighting for roads and public spaces, Part 3.1: Pedestrian area (Category P) lighting—Performance and design requirements; and
 - (iii) AS/NZS 4282:2019 Control of the obtrusive effects of outdoor lighting;
- (d) the Australasian Dark Sky Alliance (ADSA) describes best practice lighting design as:

- (i) start with natural darkness. Only add light for specific and defined purposes;
 - (ii) use adaptive light controls. Manage light timing and intensity. Ensure light levels are aligned to the human occupancy of the space;
 - (iii) use the lowest intensity lighting appropriate for the task. Consider the reflectance of all infrastructure surfaces and reduce illumination accordingly for higher reflective surfaces. Consider the likely night-time activity of the space, and how this may change across an evening;
 - (iv) light only the object or area intended. Lights, and the surfaces they illuminate, should be arranged to minimise stray light heading to the sky, and shielded to avoid light spill. Reduce or eliminate any direct views of light sources;
 - (v) use reduced short-wavelength light sources with reduced or filtered blue, violet and ultra-violet wavelengths; and
 - (vi) use a suitably qualified lighting professional. Practitioners of exterior lighting should have attained recognition through a standardised assessment process from a professional organisation;
- (e) safety and perceptions of safety, especially for women and vulnerable Canberrans, are improved in the presence of best practice lighting design which reduces glare and enhances the visibility of unlit areas;
 - (f) best practice lighting design enables social and community activity in the night-time economy, enhanced visitor appeal, as well as attracting astro-tourism to Canberra;
 - (g) best practice lighting design can also reduce:
 - (i) light pollution or obtrusive light spilling into our homes;
 - (ii) the impacts of artificial light on wildlife in our city, for example on certain species of birds, insects and bats, which evolved with the absence of light at night; and
 - (iii) energy use and associated costs;
 - (h) public space lighting infrastructure in the ACT predominately supports lighting our roads for vehicles, road related areas and urban centres, while parks and other recreational spaces generally have fewer public lights;
 - (i) the ACT Government has announced significant investments in public realm lighting, including new lighting at Telopea Park, Garema Place, Lake Ginninderra and Yerrabi Pond, and \$1 million for further infill lighting and gaps in the community paths network;
 - (j) Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) rules for the charge for the use of electricity by streetlights removes the incentive to utilise smart controls in our streetlight network; and
 - (k) our night skies, including those of Namadgi National Park and Mt Stromlo, are precious natural assets that should be protected from increasing light pollution from the lights of Canberra; and

- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) commence updates in this parliamentary term to the municipal infrastructure standard for public lighting and collaborate with leading lighting experts and academics including ADSA and the Conservation Council, as well as other stakeholders, to ensure that lighting meets the needs of women and vulnerable people engaging in active travel;
 - (b) develop the municipal infrastructure standards to:
 - (i) adopt best practice lighting design choices, including the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia Street Lighting Smart Controls' *Model Public Lighting Strategy 2020*; and
 - (ii) apply the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's *National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife 2023*, to consider and reduce impacts on biodiversity from the use of artificial lighting including the use of dark spots or corridors, dimmable or motion sensor-based lighting, and time-based cut offs;
 - (c) make best practice lighting choices when adding new lights or replacing/upgrading existing lighting, to ensure our city is continually improving the quality of lighting, the health of the night environment and conservation of the night sky;
 - (d) consider and undertake practical measures to improve lighting in Canberra's public spaces including:
 - (i) a dark spot study of priority public spaces that support active travel and recreation;
 - (ii) continuing to increase investment in the Streetlight Infill Program;
 - (iii) delivering warmer lighting (suggested at or under 3000 Kelvin) in residential roads, parks, and pathways;
 - (iv) investigating a variety of public lighting fittings for all public realm upgrades that are mindful of heritage value, public safety and decoration;
 - (v) minimising the impact of night lighting on plants and animals when adding new lights or replacing/upgrading existing lighting;
 - (vi) assessing the appropriateness of lighting in trees so as to minimise any detrimental impact on trees, and where unavoidable, ensuring that any lighting in trees is necessary and purposeful;
 - (vii) dimming or turning off unnecessary public lighting (for example sport ground lighting) in off peak periods to reduce the impact of light pollution;
 - (viii) becoming an Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia Street Lighting and Smart Controls Program partner;
 - (ix) writing to the AEMC in support of industry as they work to ensure that smart street lighting controls are recognised as valid metering points and can be utilised;
 - (x) promoting best practice façade and awning lighting to help boost our night-time economy; and

- (xi) identifying spaces suitable for dark sky place designation by the International Dark Sky Association, to encourage astro-tourism and star gazing; and
- (e) report to the Assembly on progress by the last sitting day of March 2024.

I rise today to throw some illumination on my motion on public space lighting. When public lighting is done well, there is really no downside. Improving the way we light our public spaces at night will make them safer and more attractive, whether it be in our town centres, in our heritage and tourism precincts, or in our suburbs. Improved lighting will lower our energy costs, help our wildlife, and improve human health and wellbeing, all while creating business and tourism opportunities.

First, let us backtrack a little. Human evolution has not kept pace with the proliferation of light. The pupils in our eyes, our natural circadian rhythms, our hormones and other bodily systems all evolved over billions of daily cycles of daylight and starlight. Ancient humans learned to use fire and enjoyed the faint, warm red glow of an evening campfire to push back the night. For millennia, First Nations peoples used the stars to navigate, forecast the weather and find food. You may have heard of the Dark Emu, an emu shaped constellation made by the dust lanes in the Milky Way. The emu's position in the sky during the year could be used to predict the bird's behaviour, including when it lays eggs. But, with the arrival of Europeans and artificial light, the Dark Emu began to be erased.

In 1880, Thomas Edison invented the first mass-produced light bulb and, with the proliferation of electricity, city lighting got out of hand worldwide. We have all grown up taking city lighting for granted. In some parts of the city, light is everywhere: streaming out of the windows of deserted office buildings, dazzling us with glare, and flooding acres of pavement and roadway. Light shines into the night sky, glares into people's eyes and spills into their homes. In other locations, a landmark building has to compete against a whole host of other light sources, so you can end up with a lighting bidding war, where more lighting is needed to stand out from the background. Unattended businesses and car parks can be lit like prisons, with harsh white lighting that blinds and discourages pedestrians, diminishing their perception of safety.

In other parts of our city, it is far too dark. It is well documented that women and vulnerable people are less likely to catch a bus after dark that requires them to wait at an unlit bus stop, or women will not walk at night because patches of glaring, stark white light remove their ability to see into the pool of darker shadows, with their eyes unable to quickly adjust to the sharp edges of contrast in the light. We are in a situation where we have too much "bad" light in some places, and at the same time we do not have enough "good" light in other places where it is needed.

Light pollution also has consequences for wildlife. Light pollution can disrupt the migratory routes of birds and bogong moths. It can discourage the night-time mating calls of frogs and toads. It can change predator behaviour and confuse or distract pollinators and other valuable insect species. It is estimated that light pollution is increasing by six per cent every year. That is not good news and we need to do something about it. Our circadian rhythms respond to light and influence hormone release, body temperature, eating habits, digestion, brainwave activity,

cell regeneration and much more. When these are disrupted by light pollution, there are cascading effects on our health and our wellbeing. How do we balance these conflicting needs: safety versus starlight; beauty versus energy costs; usefulness versus nuisance; human needs versus those of wildlife? We need the right light in the right place.

It is actually really hard to describe lighting without sounding like a boring engineer. I am sorry, but I am going to have to give it a go. If we use best practice lighting design, we are able to choose the right light in the right place. This means that we will be able to have beautiful, well-lit public spaces where people feel safe and want to be, and light can be used in a way that prevents it from being wasted or polluting our night skies. What are these best practice lighting design choices? Firstly, we start with natural darkness and only add light for specific purposes—only lighting a space that needs to be lit for the use that people want. Secondly, we use adaptive controls. We actually do not need the lights to be on at 100 per cent brightness when most people are asleep. Some places in the United Kingdom dim public space lighting to 10 per cent after midnight every evening, and the data has shown no increase in accidents and, in fact, a drop in crime. It is not just about how much light; it is about the quality and directionality of the light. Which brings us to the third point, which is to use the lowest intensity lighting appropriate for the task. The fourth point is to light only the object or the area intended.

For those who are worried about safety, it might sound counterintuitive, but brighter does not necessarily mean safer. We should not have bright streetlights hidden up in the tree branches when what we actually need is light down at the human level on the footpath. Lighting shields should direct light down so that it is not shining into your eyes or creating light pollution. Smart lighting technology means we can use sensors that light a space only when people are in it. The added benefit is that, when the light is not glaring into your eyes, you can actually see more into the shadows, improving the perception of safety. One person described it to me in this way: when you increase the lighting on a wall, you are in fact illuminating the graffiti vandals' canvas to make their work easier.

The fifth point is to use light sources with reduced or filtered blue, violet or ultraviolet wavelengths. This is a technical way of saying, "Use warm lights, not cool lights." Lighting temperature means whether a light is warm, white, cool or stark white. Lighting temperature is measured in kelvin. It is counterintuitive, because cooler lights actually have a higher temperature. Most of our public lights are set to 4,000 kelvin, which is a stark and cool white. Think of highway or prison yard lights. It is a light optimised for safety in fast road environments. But best practice says lighting for people in public spaces should be at a warmer temperature: less than 2,700 kelvin. Think of festoon lights or an old-school filament bulb. A little warmer goes a long way to making spaces more inviting for people. If you light a space like a prison yard, people will not want to stay there. They will think that it must be an unsafe setting to be lit so brightly. Compare that to the warm light of fairy lights. Where would you rather hang out?

Modern technology has much better solutions than we are currently making use of. Smart lighting with smart controls can make our city a much more welcoming place at night so that the right amount of light is used to suit people moving throughout

the city. A well-lit space has a positive reinforcement loop, contributing to the night-time economy of the ACT. As people feel safer and hang out in the space, it will no longer be deserted, and others will then feel more confident and safer to be there too. Creating a space where people feel comfortable is obviously incredibly important for businesses in the night-time economy. There are also real possibilities in creative and beautiful lighting that events like the Enlighten Festival have only begun to tap. We have started to move Floriade into the suburbs. Imagine if we did the same with Enlighten. What could our suburbs look like then? Imagine if we could turn night-time cycling or walking into a fun activity or a festive event, in the same way night-time skiing is an event at some snow resorts.

Best practice lighting also removes barriers to increasing active transport. For some, cycling or walking home in winter darkness is a deal breaker. Some people do not feel safe exercising outdoors after 5 o'clock during winter. This stops them from walking the dog or running around their local water body. This is a time that lighting in public spaces, streets and paths becomes even more important, to assist Canberrans to consider alternatives to a car-based commute.

The ACT—both its government and its population—continues to be ambitious when it comes to lowering our energy consumption. Modern lighting that is targeted when and where it is needed yields important savings. By systematically replacing older light fittings reaching the end of their life span with better designed new technology, we can gradually make Canberra a far better place to be and see at night. An added benefit of having the right light in the right place is that we reduce light pollution, which by definition is light where it should not be. The ACT is privileged to have exceptional night skies, with the Milky Way visible. If we make best practice lighting choices, going forward, we can ensure that we protect this natural resource and we can benefit by fostering an astrotourism industry.

We can take inspiration from places like Flagstaff, Arizona, which became the first International Dark Sky City in 2001. It is estimated to have 90 per cent less light pollution than other cities of the same size. As well, it has a booming astrotourism industry. More locally, we can take inspiration from the River Murray Dark Sky Reserve in South Australia, or Australia's first Dark Sky Park, the Warrumbungle National Park. Imagine if Namadgi National Park could receive a similar accreditation, inspiring people to come and see the night sky in all its glory.

By passing my motion today, this Assembly will help Canberra's planners, builders, designers, conservationists, tourists and, perhaps most importantly, its residents create a city with a coherent, evidence-based and clearly articulated framework for our public space lighting. The great thing is that we do not need all of this to happen overnight. Public space lighting is not one single massive infrastructure project that requires enormous up-front investment; it is a long-term vision that we will achieve bit by bit. But it starts, crucially, with a clear, articulated vision to see the light, so to speak. That is what today's motion is for. I commend it to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.53): That was worthwhile, was it not? I think it was a great speech from Mr Braddock, as they always are, and I thank Mr Braddock for bringing forth this motion today. Mr Braddock's motion concerns the implementation of best practice lighting standards in the ACT. I think you could say that, in summary,

it attempts to improve public lighting in the interests of public safety, as was well articulated by Mr Braddock.

I think I speak on behalf of all members when I say that it is probably one of those moments where I wish that there was a half-hour limit to those opening speeches to motions, because I think the second quarter hour could have been even better. Certainly, we are all on board when it comes to improving public lighting in the interests of all the things that Mr Braddock has mentioned: public safety, night-time activity and diminishing light pollution.

As more Canberrans wish to adopt active travel, the government should better prioritise that footpaths and cycleways are sufficiently lit. I know we will not get any argument from Mr Steel. Public lighting ensures the safety and amenity of active transport routes for Canberra's pedestrians, cyclists and skaters and for Canberrans who walk or ride around our city at night, whether that be to and from work or other activities. Poorly lit areas pose a risk to their personal safety. I never thought about that whole scenario of providing the canvas for graffiti, so you have pushed me in a different direction.

For women, young people and vulnerable Canberrans in particular, improved lighting infrastructure can increase the perception of safety. In addition to lighting infrastructure, an increase in police visibility is necessary to keep Canberrans safe, and this is another area that this Labor-Greens government seriously needs to work on. More police does not equal more crime, as Mr Braddock has previously suggested in this place. I note that there will be some announcements, finally, from Mr Gentleman in this area. We look forward to those.

From an environmental perspective, improving public lighting practice can decrease light pollution. While this will benefit our local nocturnal wildlife, it can also address public lighting polluting peoples' homes. Currently, public space lighting is predominantly in place to illuminate roads and urban centres. A proportional focus on lighting for parks and recreational areas, as well as active transport routes, may increase safety and amenity.

Mr Braddock's motion calls on this government to do a lot of worthwhile things. I thank Mr Braddock for bringing forth this motion today, for shedding light on this important issue. The Canberra Liberals will not be opposing this motion.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (3.56): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion today, which we will be supporting. I thank him for his very thoughtful speech, as well. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion today about public lighting and its importance and to outline the priorities the government has in ensuring that public lighting across Canberra is fit for purpose and responds to community needs and, as we have heard, a range of other priorities as well.

The ACT government manages an extensive public lighting network of over 80,000 lights right across our streets, active travel network, public parks and open spaces. This expansive network is supported by new lighting investment as part of a range of projects that the government delivers, including new play spaces, shop upgrades,

active travel infrastructure and road upgrades. I was pleased to announce just over a week ago that the ACT government will continue this investment in the budget. Certainly, I welcome the recognition of that significant investment in Mr Braddock's motion.

New public lighting will be included in upgrades at Yerrabi Pond, Telopea Park, Garema Place and Lake Ginninderra as part of the active travel improvements there. We are also making a \$1 million investment in missing community path links, with half of that amount going specifically to streetlight infill, which is not necessarily associated with that path program. It could be anywhere where there is currently not streetlighting available and where community requests or other needs have been brought to the government's attention. The ACT government have heard from the community, through our Active Travel Plan and our consultations on suburban infrastructure projects, that there is a need for more streetlighting in some places and careful consideration of how streetlights are managed in others.

Mr Braddock's motion goes to an extensive array of issues around how we manage our public lighting network and ensure that it remains fit for purpose. It notes the importance of lighting for public safety, the need for efficient lighting and the need to address light pollution. These are all important issues to address and often require a very careful balance. Often, simply dimming lighting or using warmer lights does not actually achieve the best outcome for our community in a particular case. Instead, better design and better light placement can often achieve a practical outcome while maintaining good energy efficiency and prioritising public safety.

Indeed, careful consideration of all of these factors is how the government prioritises and identifies future public lights. Using a weighted criteria selection, the government assesses proposed lighting against strategic compliance with government policies, environmental outcomes and community outcomes, with considerations on security, public safety and road safety. It is important that we consider all of those elements carefully to achieve the best lighting outcome in a particular case.

The ACT government also uses a municipal infrastructure standard to guide our approach to lighting and, indeed, is the approach taken by contractors when they are building new projects. This is an important document that identifies not only specific design criteria for lighting but important principles and responsibilities when it comes to maintaining and supporting public lighting infrastructure around the ACT. The standard, as it currently operates, requires all luminaires to be fitted with a seven-pin National Electrical Manufacturers Association socket and smart nodes. That is compatible with the territory's smart city specification, which allows dimming.

As I informed the Assembly during question time in the last sitting week, we have been undertaking dimming trials in Molonglo Valley and the Gungahlin suburb of Throsby. Both trials go to many aspects of Mr Braddock's motion. The trial in Molonglo has been conducted with the support of Mount Stromlo Observatory. They are interested in the potential light pollution that is coming from surrounding suburbs, particularly in Molonglo, and its effect on their astronomy activities up on top of the mountain. These findings of the Molonglo Valley trial have shown that while dimming the lights did have an impact on minimising light pollution, it is unlikely to be a substitute for the proper selection and installation of lighting. We will consider

these findings and other guidelines when considering whether the dimming of lights should be a practice we undertake in the future.

The standard also allows, where suitable, for use of warmer lights at lower kelvin for use in designated pedestrian areas. This is something that must be considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on public safety. We do implement warm lights in particular public realm projects, and a 3,000-kelvin lighting schedule has been approved for the upcoming Lake Tuggeranong foreshore improvement project. It is important, however, to assess whether warmer lights are necessary in all areas that support active travel or public parks.

For some, the use of brighter lights is more useful or provide a greater safety outcome. As we are making decisions about types of lights, colour and warmth, we must also consider that. I point to the example of Haig Park, where the government has installed brighter lights to support public safety and amenity, which was a real concern of the community. It is important that we do not rush to take a one-size-fits-all approach to lighting in our public spaces and overly increase the energy consumption associated with warmer lights to a point where it does have a detrimental impact on the overall energy efficiency of the network as well.

Mr Braddock has called on the government to review and update the standard, in line with the range of protocols and guidelines. I can inform the Assembly that we support that. The government has already commenced its regular review of the standard. We will look to finalise changes to the standard in 2025. As always, we will develop these new standards with the Australian standard as well, and the best practice policies from a range of different organisations.

I caution that the management of streetlights and achieving a holistic outcome requires careful consideration and balancing of priorities—not just those that align with the interests of one segment of the community. There are a range of different things that we will need to consider. The government will need to continue to make decisions about public lighting on a case-by-case by basis, ensuring that every decision is one that is made with due diligence and consideration of all of the impacts that it can have for both the community and the environment. I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this thoughtful motion to the Assembly. The government will be supporting it.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (4.03): I want to thank Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion to improve lighting in our neighbourhoods and public spaces and speak briefly to some of the environment elements of the motion.

Elle Lawless, Executive Director of the Conservation Council ACT pointed out that artificial lights in our city affect our wildlife. We have native insects and animals such as bogong moths and microbats that have evolved without exposure to light at night. Bright lights confuse them, as we have seen with the pictures of Parliament House covered in bogong moths—unfortunately, not that recently. To benefit both people and wildlife, we need to make better lighting choices.

Researchers from the University of Sydney have found that different temperatures of lighting impact certain species of insectivorous microbats. For example, changing the streetlights from warmer mercury vapour lamps to cooler LED lights can lead to a decline in some of these bats in cities. However, if we use best practice lighting design, we can ensure that our lights are appropriately warm and shielded. This is especially important on the outskirts of our cities, where we need to avoid light penetrating into unlit bushland and nature corridors.

While there is more work to be done, I would like to discuss some of the initiatives that the ACT government is trying in order to minimise light pollution's impact on wildlife. Firstly, I would like to touch on the National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife. The ACT government now requires new developments to adhere to the National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife.

These guidelines mandate light spill assessments for proposed lighting that is adjacent to the habitats of threatened and migratory species, ecological communities and species protected under our legislation that are known to be affected by artificial light. For example, guidelines are applied to migratory shore bird habitat, such as that of the Latham's snipe. They are also considered for other species and the potential impacts of lighting in the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary.

There are examples of ecologically sensitive public space lighting. Several new developments in the ACT have implemented ecologically sensitive public space lighting. The Dairy Road development, for instance, commits to limiting artificial light spill levels into the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, ensuring that they are no greater than before the development. This protects the Latham's snipe from additional disturbance.

Light pollution impacts are also being taken into account in the planning of new suburbs. In Whitlam, the potential impacts of car headlights on the adjacent Kama Nature Reserve were considered, and measures such as a retaining wall and special streetlight designs are being explored.

There are also the urban interface guidelines. The Suburban Land Agency, in collaboration with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and other ACT government stakeholders, have developed urban interface guidelines. These guidelines include requirements for controlling light pollution in the interface between greenfield estates and nature reserves. These will be tested in the future greenfield suburb of Kenny.

These examples demonstrate the innovative ways in which the ACT government is addressing the issue of light pollution and its impact on native wildlife. I really appreciate Mr Braddock's motion and look forward to how it can contribute to positive change for our city and the creatures that call it home

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.07), in reply: I would like to thank all members for their enlightened contributions—some brighter than others. With its leafy suburbs and generous open spaces, Canberra has long been known as the bush capital. Its reputation in this area is being further enhanced by the ACT government's tree planting programs, habitat restoration, water quality projects and so much more.

But I suspect that most of us think of Canberra mainly as a bush capital by day and not at night. If we can add the right public space lighting in the right places, Canberra truly will be a bush capital around the clock. We should aspire to be a model for other jurisdictions to follow in this area, as we are in so many other areas.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

At 4.08 pm, the sitting was suspended until the ringing of the bells.

The bells having been rung, Madam Speaker resumed the chair at 5 pm.

Appropriation Bill 2023-2024

Mr Barr, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and the following supplementary papers:

Explanatory statement to the Bill, incorporating a compatibility statement, pursuant to section 37 of the *Human Rights Act 2004*.

Budget 2023-2024—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 10—

Budget Outlook.

Budget Statements—

A—ACT Electoral Commission | ACT Executive | ACT Integrity Commission | Auditor-General | Office of the Legislative Assembly.

B—Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, together with associated agencies.

C—ACT Health Directorate | Canberra Health Services | ACT Local Hospital Network.

D—Justice and Community Safety Directorate | Legal Aid Commission (ACT) | Public Trustee and Guardian for the ACT.

E—Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate | City Renewal Authority | Suburban Land Agency.

F—Education Directorate.

G—Community Services Directorate | Housing ACT.

H—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate | Transport Canberra Operations | Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority.

I—Major Projects Canberra.

Indicative Land Release Program—2023-24 to 2027-28.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 62(1)—Statements of Intent—2023-2024—

Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority, dated 14, 16 and 23 June 2022.

ACT Long Service Leave Authority, undated.

Title read by Clerk.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (5.00): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Introduction

The 2023-24 budget delivers better healthcare, more housing, and cost of living relief to the Canberra community.

Over the past decade, the ACT has been the fastest growing jurisdiction in the nation. This population growth is contributing to our economic growth.

The Territory is at full employment, with unemployment regularly under three per cent—the lowest in the nation.

We have achieved our 250,000 jobs target two years early; and we are on our way to 300,000 jobs in our economy by 2030.

But in the year ahead we face some challenges.

Many Canberrans are doing it tough due to inflation, and the interest rate increases designed to fight that inflation.

Inflation is a national and international problem, but through this budget we are delivering local solutions.

It starts with one of the biggest investments in housing in the territory's history.

Our \$345 million housing package will deliver new social and affordable homes for Canberrans; and accelerate major repairs and maintenance across thousands of our existing public housing properties.

It is a comprehensive response that delivers the housing that Canberrans need now and will need in the future.

This budget delivers targeted cost of living support for the households who need our support the most.

One of the most direct forms of financial support will see more than 43,000 Canberra households receive an \$800 territory utilities concession every year.

In contrast to the one that came before us, this is an ACT government that builds hospitals.

Through this budget we will complete and open the major expansion to the Canberra Hospital and take significant steps to commence construction on the new northside hospital.

Economic overview and strategy

When it comes to employment, this budget comes at a time of higher inflation and global economic uncertainty.

Just as last year's budget focused on the task of economic reconstruction from COVID-19, this 2023 budget continues our targeted, strategic public investment to keep our economy stable and strong.

Public investment will grow in 2023-24, supported by the ACT government's Infrastructure Investment Program.

It is infrastructure that will serve the Canberra community for multiple generations, across health, housing, education and transport. These investments have immediate and long-term payoffs, boosting our productivity, creating jobs and building a better and healthier society.

Delivery of more social and affordable housing, the final stages of the Canberra Hospital Expansion, Light Rail Stage 2A, the new Canberra Theatre Centre and the new Woden CIT campus are key projects that will contribute to our ongoing wellbeing and economic growth.

The labour market continues to perform strongly, with the latest data showing an unemployment rate of 2.9 per cent and a participation rate of 72.1 per cent—the second highest in the country, and well above the national average.

Employment is forecast to grow by two per cent in 2023-24 and across the forward years, bringing us closer to 300,000 jobs in our economy by 2030.

This employment growth is forecast to be partnered by real wage growth.

Let me be clear—real wage increases are part of the deliberate economic architecture of the ACT.

The latest job vacancies data showed there were 11,500 vacancies in Canberra during the first quarter of 2023, and around 9,300 unemployed people.

In simple terms, we have more job vacancies than people looking for work. That is full employment. It is a good economic outcome, but we understand the impact this has on business.

It is the government's intent, through our education and training policies, to assist those unemployed Canberrans to obtain the skills they need to fill these available jobs.

We will also work with the commonwealth government and business to attract more skilled migrants to our city.

The territory's population is estimated to grow by 2¼ per cent in 2022-23, which is ½ a percentage point higher than estimated earlier in the year. Growth is forecast to stay at or above two per cent across the forward estimates.

In simple terms, people are voting with their feet. They want to live in Canberra. Overseas and interstate migration, along with natural increases, are all forecast to continue increasing as our city continues to grow.

So the government's task is to manage the growth of our modern city, by providing the housing, health and other essential services and facilities that make Canberra such an attractive place to live.

In this budget, the government has made a choice. We have decided to invest now in health, housing and cost of living support, to retain our world leading living standards, boosting the capacity of our economy for future growth and to support those most in need.

It is a choice to invest in a sustainable future while strengthening the territory's fiscal position over time.

This time last year, when I released the 2022 budget, the fiscal position had improved by over \$800 million over the four-year forward estimates period.

In the budget I deliver today, our fiscal position continues to strengthen by a further \$403 million. The government now projects headline net operating balance surpluses of \$142 million in 2025-26 and \$212 million in 2026-27. Our operating cash surpluses are forecast to reach \$712 million in fiscal year 2026-27.

In 2023-24, the operating balance deficit is reflective of three key factors:

- Continuing to invest in services and infrastructure needs now;
- Delaying the commencement of new revenue initiatives whilst inflation is high; and
- External impacts on the ACT economy as part of the current tightening of monetary policy.

Key balance sheet metrics for 2023-24—measured through net debt, net financial liabilities and net worth—are all broadly comparable with the recent budget review.

The government has a clear fiscal strategy for the short-, medium- and long-term.

In the short to medium term, our operating cash surpluses will help to pay for our transport, health and school infrastructure projects.

In the early 2030s—once the government has fully funded the territory's superannuation liability—it will no longer be required to make large annual budget appropriations equivalent to the benefit payments. This means the territory will be able to direct those payments to other purposes, including paying down debt.

To put this in perspective, in this budget, over the four-year forward estimates period, that budget appropriation is forecast to be \$1.7 billion.

Investing in the wellbeing of Canberrans

This budget is the fourth since the wellbeing framework was released. We continue to strengthen the linkages between the framework, the government's policy development and the budget process—highlighted by the investments included in this budget.

This budget invests in our health workforce, in better healthcare in our community, and planning and delivering public healthcare infrastructure for the future.

The budget provides over \$540 million in new funding for healthcare. This includes commencement of work on the new northside hospital, with construction to commence mid-decade and recruiting 80 more healthcare professionals across our facilities.

Alongside our major hospital builds for the south and the north of Canberra, we are expanding and improving access to health services.

We are boosting paediatric care with the establishment of the Paediatric Hospital in the Home program. This will mean children and young people who are acutely unwell can spend more time at home, surrounded by the love and care of their family, while still receiving the highest quality care from Canberra Hospital's specialist paediatric team.

Budget funding will also help train paediatric and emergency department staff in preparation for the opening of the Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital.

The government is working to improve mental health services and support for Canberrans.

The last three years have been perhaps the hardest time in many people's lives. The government recognises more investment is needed in services, outreach programs, preventive mental healthcare and facilities to strengthen the options available.

That is why we are investing \$28 million in additional funding over the next four years to support programs targeted at eating disorders, early intervention, and child and youth mental health.

As I have touched upon, this budget delivers more affordable homes and housing options for Canberrans.

The \$345 million investment in this budget, when combined with the ongoing planning reforms, is the pathway through which the government seeks to increase housing stock across the board. There are a range of new initiatives designed to increase choice, increase access and improve affordability.

We will fund more build-to-rent projects. We will grow, renew and repair public housing, and drive a significant expansion of the territory's community housing sector.

We are establishing a \$60 million affordable housing project fund, the first of its kind in the territory, to significantly grow the number of long-term affordable rental homes in Canberra. Four projects have already been identified to be delivered out of the fund.

We are investing \$233 million in public housing growth, repairs and renewal. We are also delivering a second large-scale build-to-rent project in Gungahlin, following the release of land in Turner for a pilot build-to-rent project. Both of these projects will include at least 15 per cent affordable long-term rental requirements.

These specific programs will contribute to the government's delivery of 600 additional affordable rentals and 400 additional public housing dwellings, as outlined in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement.

We are also dedicating an additional \$20 million to meet increased demand for homelessness services, to continue specialist COVID-related support programs and to provide essential food services to those in need.

Rounding out our housing package, we will continue to cut stamp duty as part of our ongoing tax reform program—reducing a significant barrier to home ownership in the territory.

The delivery of more, affordable and well-located housing will continue to be our key goal as we finalise the planning reforms that are before this Assembly through the new Territory Plan and District Planning Strategies.

This budget commits a further \$11 million to accelerate land release, alongside continuing planning reform, to enable the private market to play its role in delivering more new housing for Canberra.

All Australians are facing a financial hit from rising prices, rising rents and rising mortgage costs. Currently, wages are struggling to keep pace with the rising cost of goods and services. The Reserve Bank's decisions on interest rates are hitting businesses and some households particularly hard. Some Canberrans, particularly those on low incomes, are struggling. The government understands this. That is why the budget's cost of living support package goes where it is needed most.

The budget provides nearly \$38 million in additional cost of living support for low-income households. This maintains last year's increase of \$50 in the utilities concession for a further year, to address rising gas and water prices.

The utilities concession eligibility will be extended to include commonwealth health care card holders, expanding the scheme to cover an additional 12,000 households.

The government's very wise decision to source 100 per cent of its electricity needs from renewable energy providers through fixed price long-term supply contracts will assist Canberrans to receive lower electricity bills in 2023-24.

Without the ACT's large scale renewable energy contracts, the average household on the regulated standing offer would have faced electricity bills around \$225 higher.

The government is also addressing the impacts of inflation as an employer—an employer of over 27,000 Canberrans—and through our enterprise bargaining pay offer, a pay offer that prioritises increases for lower paid classifications, and through the provision of a one-off upfront cost of living payment for all ACT government employees, we are working to address cost-of-living pressures for our own staff.

We will also provide a one off \$250 booster payment to households on the Housing ACT priority housing waitlist, whilst the Vulnerable Household Energy Support Scheme will also be extended to deliver improved thermal comfort and reduced energy hardship for vulnerable renters. These are important initiatives that this government is proud to deliver.

This budget strengthens our education system to give Canberra children the best possible opportunities in life.

A centrepiece of the budget is more than \$50 million to ensure all three-year-olds in the ACT are able to access one day per week of free quality early childhood education from January of next year.

This nation-leading initiative, and I want to acknowledge its champion, developer and soon-to-be implementor Deputy Chief Minister Berry. This is an initiative that will give every Canberra child an essential head-start in their schooling. It is another initiative we are very proud to deliver in this budget.

Funding will also be continued for the safe ACT public schools program, ensuring our schools have processes and policies in place to address bullying, harassment, violence and other behaviours of concern.

This budget commits funding for a second college in Gungahlin. The new school will be best-practice design with cutting-edge facilities, to cater to one of the fastest-growing population centres in the nation. This project adds to the major school-building program undertaken by the government over this term of the Assembly, with four new schools completed or under construction across the city.

Madam Speaker, I think we would all agree that Canberra is one of the safest, most-welcoming and inclusive cities in the world. As we grow, we want to keep it that way.

As foreshadowed, the budget contains a large investment in ACT Policing. It funds the recruitment of an additional 126 ACT Policing personnel by 2027-28, expanding upon the additional 60 personnel funded through the 2019-20 budget.

The additional police will be deployed in suburban growth and urban renewal areas. They will be targeting dangerous driving and other anti-social and destructive behaviour so everyone can feel safe on our roads, in our businesses and public areas, and in their own homes.

A new emergency services station in the Molonglo Valley will be funded to be completed in fiscal year 2025-26. This will bring ambulance and fire and rescue services closer to residents in this fast-growing region. \$66 million is allocated to construct a modern facility to support our first responders in their service to the community, to ensure speedy emergency response times and serve the future growth of the Molonglo Valley.

The government recognises that a safe and welcoming city is much more than emergency personnel numbers and stations; it requires a supportive and inclusive

community culture. Perhaps the best recent example of this, which we have all enjoyed, is our incredibly successful National Multicultural Festival, an event which attracts people from around the nation and from around the world. I know for many Canberrans it is the highlight of our fantastic Summer and Autumn events season.

I want to acknowledge Minister Cheyne, who advocated for an expanded National Multicultural Festival for the belated 25th anniversary, which was delayed several years due to COVID. In this budget, I am delighted to announce that the government continues to support the festival at 25th anniversary levels so that it can continue to showcase our multicultural community.

This budget will help Canberra be cleaner, neater and even more beautiful—if that is possible, Madam Speaker!

The government will invest an additional \$177 million to make sure that as our city ages it continues to have well-maintained community infrastructure and services. This will support more tree maintenance and planting new trees. Our rapid response mowing and weeding teams will be boosted.

There will be new investments in stormwater infrastructure that will improve the capacity of our stormwater network.

The budget will deliver improvements to the amenities and recreational opportunities across Canberra at popular parks and open spaces to ensure Canberrans can enjoy more time in quality venues outdoors.

So in Belconnen, Hawker Playing Fields will be upgraded, including additional parking, upgraded LED sportsground lighting at all three ovals to support night-time training, and new toilet facilities and female-friendly change-rooms.

In Gungahlin, the Yerrabi Pond District Park will receive significant upgrades, with new toilet facilities to be built on both sides of the pond, as well as new picnic facilities and lighting.

In my own electorate, one of Canberra's oldest inner south parks, Telopea Park, will see improvements in new formalised paths, lighting and landscaping.

The government is also building the next stage of the Acton Waterfront Park on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin—a park for all Canberrans.

We will also upgrade some of our oldest suburban infrastructure through the City Precinct Renewal Program, with an investment to ensure that the City Centre, Acton, Braddon and Dickson remain attractive destinations for locals, visitors and businesses.

Our territory remains a leader in taking climate action.

We are the first jurisdiction to be powered 100 per cent by renewable electricity, which has already delivered significant dividends for the community, as I have mentioned, sheltering the territory from much of the electricity price shocks across the National Electricity Market being experienced on the eastern seaboard.

We are encouraging electric vehicle take-up and have legislated to ensure new suburbs are all-electric and will be zero emission. Our major government infrastructure, such as the Canberra Hospital expansion, will be fully electric-powered and heated—an Australian first.

This budget also establishes a further step in our path to electrification, with a rolling program of funding established to commence electrifying government owned properties.

And we are taking action in a way that brings the community with us with a further \$80 million investment in our award-winning Sustainable Household Scheme to continue to support households to improve their energy efficiency, reduce their emissions and lower their cost of living.

Working with the Commonwealth Labor Government

After almost a decade of neglect and underfunding of our city by the commonwealth, we now have a federal Labor government that recognises Canberra as a growing city in its own right—a federal government that respects our self-determination and agency as a self-governing jurisdiction.

I want to assure our community that we are working closely with the federal government to ensure Canberra gets its fair share of the national funding pie, across housing, health, skills, environment, climate change, the NDIS and transport infrastructure.

This budget demonstrates many initiatives that start this work, and we look forward to building on this in the years ahead.

Conclusion

The budget I hand down today on behalf of the government delivers healthcare, housing and cost-of-living support that Canberrans need now.

It builds the hospitals and schools that maintain our world-class standard of living.

It supports businesses and our economy to create thousands more secure local jobs.

But beyond the dollars and cents contained in the budget papers, this document and this budget reflects the priorities and aspirations of our growing community.

It is a budget that builds for the future and puts forward our vision for Canberra—a city that is modern, a city that is livable and, importantly, a city that is inclusive.

In closing, I want to thank all of my colleagues for the contributions they made to make this budget possible. I thank all of the ACT public servants, particularly in Treasury, who have worked many long hours to get the budget where it is today. I commend it to the Assembly.

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

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024

Mr Barr, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and the following supplementary papers:

Explanatory statement to the Bill, incorporating a compatibility statement, pursuant to section 37 of the *Human Rights Act 2004*.

Budget 2023-2024—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 20AC—Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024—Departures from Recommended Appropriations—Statement of Reasons, dated 27 June 2023.

Title read by Clerk.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (5.26): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to be able to table the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024. As members are aware, this bill is the mechanism for the appropriation of moneys for officers of the Legislative Assembly.

The bill provides for total appropriations of \$4.336 million for the Auditor-General, \$6.686 million for the Electoral Commissioner, \$8.610 million for the Integrity Commissioner and \$21.545 million for the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

With that very brief speech, I commend these appropriations to the Assembly.

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

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Answer to question on notice—question 1160

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) (5.28): I rise to answer a question on notice from earlier today. Ms Castley asked for an answer to question 1160 on the notice paper.

Ms Castley, I had understood that the answer I had passed on would be passed on to you. It looks like something might have gone wrong there, so I thought I would read it out again.

The answer to the question is that all ACT executive staff are pooled and employed by the Chief Minister, so no further breakdown can be provided.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.29 pm.