



Debates

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Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Building—embedded utilities networks—update (Ministerial statement)	113
Transport—active travel—update (Ministerial statement)	116
Mental health—United Kingdom study tour (Ministerial statement).....	124
Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee.....	126
Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee	126
Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024	127
Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2024	129
Biosecurity Legislation Amendment Bill 2024	132
Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2023	135
Questions without notice:	
Taxation—general practice clinics	143
Government—infrastructure plan.....	144
Cotter Dam—maintenance	145
Lakes and waterways—safety	146
City Services—staffing	148
Government—human resources and information management system.....	149
Government—human resources and information management system.....	151
Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body	153
Planning—Macgregor	155
Transport Canberra—bus fleet	156
Transport Canberra—accessibility of buses	158
Planning—Majura Valley.....	159
Government—community engagement.....	160
ACT Policing—resourcing	160
ACT Ambulance Service—staffing	161
Government—investments	163
Canberra—cost of living.....	183
Adjournment:	
Women—National Association of Women in Construction ACT awards	203
Women—National Association of Women in Construction ACT awards	204
Dr Lowitja O’Donoghue AC CBE DSG—tribute	204

Wednesday, 7 February 2024

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms Burch) (10.01): 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 ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

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) (10.02): I am pleased to table the ACT government’s response to the recently completed Review of Embedded Networks in the ACT. The review was tabled on 27 June 2023. The Review of Embedded Networks was a requirement of a resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly in October 2022 that called on the ACT government to conduct a review with regard to assessing the appropriateness of potential reforms, including: a ban on new embedded networks; further regulation of embedded network providers; and further consumer protections for embedded network users.

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.

The review presented 21 recommendations to address the key risks associated with embedded networks while ensuring the benefits are fairly accrued to the end customer. Notably, the review did not support banning embedded networks due to the potential benefits that may be provided to customers through bulk-purchase electricity arrangements.

When I tabled the review in June last year, I noted that the recommended reforms were complex and unlikely to be achieved in the short term. Further analysis of the recommendations has confirmed this, which is why the government is supporting a program of work that will undertake a deeper investigation of the recommendations and present a detailed suite of options for their implementation.

The ACT government agrees that there is a case for better regulation and consumer protections in embedded networks. As an immediate step, the ACT government will commence development of plain English information that will assist ACT energy consumers to understand how embedded networks work and what the implications are for embedded network customers.

The ACT government will investigate the options available for improved regulation and consumer protections in embedded networks. This will include consideration of the current exemption framework for embedded electricity networks and whether it provides adequate consumer and price protections for ACT consumers. It will also consider the extent of the application of any exemptions, and which body should administer exemptions.

The ACT government will investigate contractual arrangements between network service providers and owner's corporations that tie unit owners into embedded networks for extended periods of time. Other regulatory options that will be investigated are improvements to complaints and dispute management, and the application of broader consumer protection codes and frameworks.

In looking at regulatory options, we will work with the Australian Energy Regulator who, following reviews in the ACT and other jurisdictions, has now commenced their own review of the national exemptions framework for embedded networks. The AER's review will consider whether action is needed to strengthen the regulatory oversight of embedded networks, enhance reporting arrangements and consumer protections, and restrict the growth of future residential embedded networks. We welcome this and the consistency that addressing these issues at the national level can offer.

The review recommends that the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission impose a reference price and allowable price adjustments for embedded networks that mandates any pricing plan provided by a licenced embedded network operator cannot exceed the reference price set by the ICRC. Whilst acknowledging the intention behind these recommendations, the ACT does not agree with establishing reference prices specifically for embedded networks, and subsequently imposing them as price caps.

For context, the existing ACT reference price is determined annually by the Treasurer and me, as the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, with input from the ICRC, and sets out the yearly cost that ACT residential and small business customers can expect to pay for their electricity use, based on average electricity use. This applies to all embedded network operators that are retailers under the National Energy Retail Rules.

Exempt retailers are not covered by this reference price requirement but are not allowed to exceed ActewAGL's standing offer price. The ACT will investigate options for ensuring the reference price applies to all embedded network operators. Further, the review did not identify any instance of price gouging, with the embedded network prices witnessed being comparable to ActewAGL's standing offer prices for electricity.

Instead, the ACT government will work with market bodies such as the Australian Energy Market Operator to explore options to improve retail competition for

embedded network customers, to help customers to shop around for the best energy deal and to move between energy providers.

I acknowledge the concerns raised by the review in relation to hot water pricing in embedded networks. The ACT government will further investigate whether intervention is required. Retail gas prices are not regulated in the ACT. This means for centralised hot water systems powered by fossil gas, any regulation on hot water could set a precedent for government intervention into the retail gas market.

The ACT government also agrees it is important to improve customer access to renewable energy and innovation and notes the government programs that are pursuing actions that aim to address these issues. For example, the Suburban Land Agency in the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate portfolio is delivering all-electric developments with sustainability requirements embedded within sales contracts in line with the zero emissions suburbs theme of the Suburban Land Agency Sustainability Strategy. These all-electric developments are supported by other sustainability requirements on a case-by-case basis that can include, but are not limited to: energy efficiency, energy battery storage, EV charging infrastructure and on-site renewable energy generation.

The ACT government is also partnering with the commonwealth government to develop a \$3.6 million program to make it easier for body corporates to install rooftop solar on multi-unit apartments. Over 2,100 dwellings will benefit, which will provide much needed cost of living support to Canberrans living in apartments.

The new Territory Plan, introduced in 2023 as part of the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project, includes a requirement that for every multi-unit dwelling that is required to have parking, one space is electric vehicle ready. Building ministers have tasked the Australian Building Codes Board to work with other relevant agencies to make sure that future buildings are ready to support the energy transition by making EV charging easy and safe and enabling further uptake of distributed energy resources like solar and battery storage within multi-unit buildings. This will be coupled with the introduction of the energy efficiency provisions in the 2022 edition of the National Construction Code, with all new building approvals required to comply from 15 January 2024 here in the ACT.

Given the extent of legislative amendments that would be required to implement the recommendations we are pursuing, the government is establishing a cross-directorate work program to undertake a deeper analysis of the merits and implications of the recommendations and to then draft amendments to acts and subordinate legislation as appropriate.

Developing a range of viable options and drafting the required legislative amendments will require extensive consultation with the ACT community and stakeholders, and this will form part of the work program going forward. Subject to budget consideration, this work program will commence in July 2024 and present options for regulatory changes to cabinet in mid-2025.

Madam Speaker, I commend the ACT government's response to the Review of Embedded Networks to the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

Review of Embedded Networks in the ACT—

Government response, dated February 2024.

Government response—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2024.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport—active travel—update Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (10.11): I rise today to update the Assembly on what the ACT government is doing to encourage the uptake of active travel by making it a safer, more accessible, convenient and enjoyable option.

Active travel includes walking, cycling, scooting, skateboarding and other types of micromobility. Canberra has a proud identity as a city of active people with some of the highest rates of walking, cycling and other forms of active travel in Australia due to our strong legacy network of paths. These modes of travel and recreation are an important part of enhancing our quality of life and are at the centre of the ACT government's plans to make Canberra an even more liveable and sustainable city by moving away from our city's past character as car dependent.

Active travel is key to enhancing the quality of life in our city and improving the health and wellbeing of Canberrans. Building a walkable and cycle-friendly city will help to reduce congestion and cut harmful emissions. It benefits all Canberrans no matter how they move around. I also want to highlight one of the most commonly overlooked benefits, which is safer roads. We know that networks that are walkable and rideable generally slow traffic and are overall safer for drivers, walkers, cyclists and pedestrians. At a time when the road toll nationally continues to rise we must acknowledge the benefits that active travel brings to road safety and take a holistic, safe systems approach.

I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the final Active Travel Plan 2024-30 was released last week. It sets out how we will deliver our vision of supporting more Canberrans to choose walking and cycling more often to improve quality of life. This is Canberra's first specific plan for how we will progress active travel and is accompanied by a design guide for best practice intersections and other active travel infrastructure.

The plan outlines ways to make it more safe, accessible, convenient and enjoyable for Canberrans to choose walking, cycling or micromobility, whether for commuting, exercising or socialising. In doing so, the plan recognises the importance of: safer infrastructure; a more connected network; better end of trip facilities; diverse enabling programs to encourage people to choose active travel and public transport more often; and how we can continue to deliver this as our city continues to grow and change.

In making the plan, we recognised it is essential to have the views of the community so that we can make real progress for people. We consulted on the Active Travel Plan and the cycling and walking maps it contains, and subsequently on the design guide. I want to thank people who took the time to provide feedback: including the 5,700 people who visited the YourSay website; 27 people and organisations who wrote submissions; 312 people who completed a survey; 49 people who made 336 comments on the walking network map and 161 people who made an impressive 1,701 comments on the cycling network map.

The consultation process provided us with concrete and practical feedback and has been summarised in a listening report which I released alongside the plan and design guide earlier this month. From the feedback we distilled key insights including that the broad vision for active travel has a high degree of support. Feedback also acknowledged that Canberra, unlike so many other cities, is starting from a high baseline of active travel. We recognise this high baseline, while also acknowledging there is more work to be done.

Another theme was for a complete and coherent network with appropriate amenities. This theme was reflected in submissions as well as the walking and cycling network maps. The final plan outlines our ambition here and I will shortly outline the projects that we have funded to make this goal a reality.

The plan responds to the feedback and sets out a path to achieve the vision through 13 key actions under five priority areas. They are: priority 1, safe infrastructure for walking and cycling; priority 2, a better connected and maintained path network; priority 3, supporting new and emerging types of active travel; priority 4, making active travel and bicycle parking easy; and priority 5, supporting behaviour change and partnering with the community.

These actions and priority areas set a clear strategy for achieving the vision that we have set out supporting more Canberrans to choose walking and cycling more often to improve quality of life. The plan also gets specific in setting out the walking and cycling networks we will prioritise through the walking network map and cycling network map. Madam Speaker, hundreds of people have had their say about the plan and these maps. We have used that feedback to provide the final maps, which will in turn guide future investment.

We do not expect practitioners out there designing our road networks, new suburbs or intersection upgrades, to guess how to achieve the vision of the Active Travel Plan and that is why we have provided a comprehensive guide that tells them how. The design guide provides a high level overview of the policy that governs active travel and fills the gap between our vision and the technical standards for streets. The design guide reflects a move away from just a prescriptive technical compliance approach to one that is about outcomes.

This new design guide ensures that intersections and streets are designed to safely support all forms of transport including walking, cycling and driving. It will improve pedestrian and cyclist safety by separating the different modes of transport at intersections where most conflicts and crashes occur.

The design principles balance safety and efficiency depending on the function of a street, which is determined using the movement and place framework. Some places are for movement and other places are for people. Our intersections and streets should be designed based on their unique environments and transport users. A key objective in the design guide is to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety by separating the different modes of transport on streets. Some of the methods for achieving this will be through pop-up cycleways, safe separated paths and protected intersection designs. The designs aim to passively encourage slower vehicle speeds in key areas where there are more vulnerable road users and potential conflict points. This makes the movements of pedestrians and riders more visible for drivers and improves the likelihood of a pedestrian or cyclist surviving a collision.

I have been pleased with the way practitioners have already responded to the design guide, with many already using the draft that was released for consultation. With the release of the final design guide we have set a clear expectation for how active travel should be considered in infrastructure, and I look forward to continuing to see it create meaningful improvements.

These new policies will become the blueprint for Canberra's future streets, intersections, paths and cycleways as we build transport infrastructure to move more people around our growing city. The ACT government has been making significant investments in walking and cycling infrastructure in recent years, with further investment in active travel initiatives in the 2023-24 budget review.

Through the budget review, a further \$4 million in funding will be provided under the commonwealth's Road Safety Program to deliver safe infrastructure for walking and cycling and fill in missing links in the path network. This is in addition to the funding that was provided in the 2023-24 budget last year to support active travel, and brings the total spending and forward estimates on active travel to over \$94 million.

This year a number of projects will start construction with others entering feasibility and design phases to support future investment in our active travel network. In the south, we have started construction on the upgrades to Sulwood Drive and a new shared path will provide the missing east-west connection between Drakeford Drive and Athllon Drive and link the C4 and C5 principal routes.

In Belconnen we have delivered the stages of the Belconnen Bikeway which improves cyclist and pedestrian accessibility from the city through to, and beyond, the Belconnen town centre, and connects the University of Canberra, CIT Bruce, and the Australian Institute of Sport. This year we will start work on upgrading path infrastructure around Lake Ginninderra, with the first stage of these improvements focussing on the shared path through John Knight Memorial Park. A feasibility study is also underway to look at the priority improvements raised by the community, including the uneven pavers along Emu Bank, with construction expected to commence later this year.

The government is also supporting the fastest growing parts of Canberra like Molonglo and West Belconnen by constructing a new seven kilometre off-road shared path from Drake Brockman Drive to Bindubi Street along William Hovell Drive, creating new path connections to the city. The William Hovell Drive upgrade project

is a multimodal transport project that will deliver benefits for road users, public transport passengers in the future and active travel users.

We are also creating better connections both in and out of the City. The Garden City Cycle Route will better connect inner north suburbs on the eastern side of Northbourne to the city and to the schools, community hubs and shops along the way, not to mention the upcoming development and construction of the new inner north destination playground. Construction will start this year on the first stage of works between the city and Braddon, from Cooyong Street through to Majura Avenue.

South of the city, we are delivering the Kingston Cycleway to improve safety for walkers and cyclists between the city and Queanbeyan. The first stage will start construction shortly, being a temporary popup bidirectional protected cycle lane on the inside lane of Bowen Drive, from Kings Avenue Bridge to the Bowen Drive car park. Stage two will include detailed design and construction for new and upgraded cycling infrastructure between Bowen Park and Cunningham Street in the Kingston Foreshore.

The School Safety Program continues to deliver infrastructure improvements around schools to improve safety and to encourage and support students and their families to walk or ride to school. In the last budget, we invested \$2.4 million in multiple packages of improvements, developed through consultation with school communities. This includes construction of new pedestrian crossings near Canberra High School in Macquarie, St Mary MacKillop College in Isabella Plains and Gold Creek High School in Nicholls, as well as a feasibility study for a controlled pedestrian crossing near St Edmund's and St Clare's colleges in Griffith. On top of this, we are also supporting the continuation of the enhanced school crossing supervisor program.

Following consultation on the ACT government's Active Travel Plan, \$2.1 million was invested in the last budget for a series of studies and designs for works identified as part of the plan. This includes: popup cycleways; the C8 City Loop Marcus Clark Street/Rudd Street missing link; upgrading the C5 from Cotter Road to Mulley Street in Weston Creek, the Lake Burley Griffin principal route; and the Melrose Drive main community route in Chifley; as well as new priority crossings for Miller Street in O'Connor. This funding will also support detailed design of priority recommendations from the Gungahlin town centre active travel feasibility study, including the design of new shared paths and addressing missing links.

Improving safety for pedestrians and cycling is also a consideration across our major road and intersection upgrades. Pedestrian and cyclist improvements will be delivered as part of the Gundaroo Drive duplication and the completion of John Gorton Drive and Molonglo River Bridge project. A combination of off-road shared paths, signalised intersections and underpasses will improve access along these arterial roads. I am looking forward to working closely with Minister Cheyne on the delivery of these active travel infrastructure projects which are underway, as well as new transport infrastructure projects in the future, in her capacity as the new Minister for City Services.

I am pleased to outline the significant progress our government has already made in encouraging active travel, as well as outlining our strategic vision and plan for the future. Investing in active travel and providing better active travel infrastructure

benefits all Canberrans, not just active travel users themselves. Every choice to walk, rides or scoot takes a car off the road, reduces congestion, frees up parking and benefits everyone that uses our road transport network. Every journey that Canberrans take on foot, by bike, skateboard or scooter helps make our city cleaner, healthier and less congested. I look forward to continuing to work with the community to implement the actions of the Active Travel Plan.

I present the following paper.

Active travel update—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2024.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.24): I welcome the minister's update on active travel, and I am really pleased to hear about the in-depth consultation that has gone into the new Active Travel Plan. That is a great way to develop it, and it clearly represents enormous goodwill from the ACT government and enormous support for active travel. But I am concerned that this Active Travel Plan contains no targets, no deadlines and not enough investment for us to deliver our goals. I am worried that this plan is not actually going to be effective in giving us more active travel.

In terms of targets, we used to set targets here in the ACT for active travel. In 2004 we set targets to grow the share of walking and riding to work. For the past two decades, the ACT government has failed to meet those targets. We have actually been going backwards. Now we have removed all of our quantifiable targets for increasing walking and riding in Canberra. I will pause for a moment and explain why that worries me. I have 2006 census data here which shows that in 2006, two decades ago, five per cent of journeys to work were made by walking and 2.5 per cent were made by cycling. Flash forward to 2021, only four per cent were made by walking and only 2.5 per cent were made by cycling. We are actually going backwards.

In 2004 in the Active Travel Plan—at the time it was the Sustainable Transport Plan—we set quite good goals. We wanted to increase our mode share to seven per cent walking and seven per cent cycling. We have abandoned any attempt to set a target and we have not acknowledged that we are actually going backwards. I think it is really important that we are specific and clear about what we want to achieve and how we are going to do it.

The plan also does not have deadlines. We only have one major active travel project currently under development and construction at the moment, the Garden City Cycle Route, and a version of that route has been planned since at least 2004 and promised by ACT Labor since 2020. We have only a small section of that project funded, and there is no deadline for when the whole path will be completed. So we have an ambitious cycling network map proposed in this plan, which is fantastic to see, but we do not have timelines on delivery; we do not know when we are going to get these things; and we do not know if we are tracking towards that delivery properly, because we have not actually named when we are going to do different things.

I am also worried that we are not putting enough funding and investment to achieve the active travel goals that I think we have, but I am a little unclear about what they are, because they are not set. So instead of proposing much needed large-scale investment into new paths, the Active Travel Plan highlights that balancing government spending priorities is a key consideration when making budget decisions for active travel. Obviously with any budget decision we are balancing priorities, but when your Active Travel Plan itself says “We do not have enough money to deliver this; we have to balance it with all the other things we need to spend our money on,” that is a bit of a worry. It is almost like we do not have confidence that we are going to spend on it at all.

Unfortunately, paths and active travel simply have not been a high priority for Labor. Our annual path maintenance funding in recent years has just been \$5 to 7 million each year, compared to \$800 million for new road projects and \$153 million for road maintenance in coming years. New funding of \$4 million for new and upgraded paths and crossings is really welcome; we are delighted to see that. But it is a tiny fraction of what we need to actually get more people walking and riding and wheeling around Canberra.

We need much more funding for new infrastructure; we need much more funding for regular maintenance; and we need much more funding to commit to delivering on this Active Travel Plan. We are really concerned in the ACT Greens that we are not seeing the commitment we need. We should have an Active Travel Plan that sets really ambitious targets; that measures progress of mode share against those targets; that sets deadlines on our big projects so that we know if we are delivering them on time; and that commits to providing enough funding to deliver on all of these.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, Minister for City Services, Minister for Government Services and Regulatory Reform and Minister for Human Rights) (10.28): I am pleased to follow Minister Steel in updating the Assembly on the ACT government’s significant pipeline of active travel infrastructure projects.

The ACT government has been making record investments in walking and cycling infrastructure in recent years, despite what you may have just heard. The most recent ACT budget saw an investment of more than \$29.5 million to support active travel. I was pleased to join the Chief Minister and Minister Steel last week to announce an additional \$4 million in funding for active travel infrastructure as part of the budget review. This brings the total spending across the budget and the forward estimates on active travel to over \$94 million. I am not sure that a commitment of almost \$100 million to deliver on our priorities is “not enough of an investment”. I am aware of some of the commentary that we have had in recent weeks, and that we bizarrely heard just now, that our record investments in active travel are not being delivered fast enough. Of course, I accept that we can always do more, but these criticisms are simply not grounded in reality.

Like any infrastructure project, delivering active travel infrastructure is an iterative process. When we deliver infrastructure, we need to make sure we do it properly and in the right places. That means undertaking the appropriate levels of planning, consultation and design. From project conception to finished project, active travel

projects go through a number of steps. These can include project and alignment selection, feasibility study, preliminary design, detailed design, planning and environmental approvals and then construction.

Many of our projects, including the Garden City Cycle Way, are ambitious—as they should be. But that means that they interact with roads, intersections and, in some cases, sensitive urban areas. So, naturally, delivery also involves community consultation. Ms Clay might like to reflect on the community consultation about William Hovell Drive and the shared path there and on just how important that was for the community. That has meant that this project has taken extra time. We all accept that, because we have a better outcome, thanks to that additional community consultation. To then come in here and say that projects are not being delivered fast enough is disingenuous. In addition to community consultation, there are environmental assessments, securing funding through the budget process and undertaking independent and competitive procurement processes. All these steps do not happen overnight and nor can they happen concurrently, as much as we would like them to.

Further, we have to accept the reality that Australia is currently experiencing one of the most heated infrastructure markets in recent memory. The construction sector is facing significant pressure with the huge pipeline of work, both within the ACT and, of course, within other major markets, including Sydney and Melbourne. Labour shortages and significant increases in material costs have only compounded this issue. We are not going to commit to deliver projects that are impossible to deliver right now because there are not enough workers or because construction firms do not have capacity. We need to ensure we have an infrastructure pipeline that is deliverable and grounded in practical reality. That is exactly what we are doing.

Every region of Canberra is benefiting from our investments, with several projects completed in recent years. As Minister Steel has mentioned, in Belconnen we have delivered all stages of the Belconnen Bikeway. We have also delivered new paths in Lawson and are finalising delivery of a path on Kuringa Drive. In Woden, we have delivered a high-quality cycleway through the Woden Town Centre, in addition to the new Heysen Street link, which connects Weston Creek to the Woden Valley. In Gungahlin, we have delivered a new shared path along Flemington Road.

I am excited that this year a number of projects will start construction. But we also have a pipeline of projects in feasibility and design stages. Again, it is a plan of stages; there are phases that need to be undertaken with these works to get them construction ready. Very pleasingly, plenty of projects are at a stage of being construction ready. As you have heard, construction will soon commence on the Sulwood Drive shared path in Tuggeranong, which I know that you would be looking forward to, Madam Speaker together with Minister Steel. Other projects include upgrades to the paths around Lake Ginninderra in Belconnen, which as you know I have been working on for many years now; the Garden City Cycle route in the inner north; and the Kingston Cycle Way in the inner south. We are also seeking to deliver benefits for active travel through our major road infrastructure projects. This includes delivering new paths and active travel safety improvements, such as through the William Hovell Drive duplication, the Gundaroo Drive duplication, the Molonglo River bridge, the Athlon Drive duplication and intersection upgrades right across the city, drawing from this best practice design guide.

We welcome the Australian government as a partner in delivering the infrastructure our growing city needs. As part of the Road Safety Project, which is funded fifty-fifty with the commonwealth, we are also delivering key missing links and improvements from the Active Travel Plan. Our announcement last week included the Kingston pop-up cycle way, which will be through this program. Other projects which have been funded fifty-fifty with the commonwealth include: a new pedestrian crossing on New South Wales Crescent at Telopea Park; raised crossings on the city to Woden C4 cycle route via Lake Burley Griffin; a new raised crossing on the city to Belconnen C3 cycle route at Bauhinia Street in O'Connor; upgrades to the crossing facilities on Hopetoun Circuit near the Adelaide Avenue intersection; a new raised pedestrian crossing on Bowman Street in Jamison, which I understand Ms Clay also called for, as did I; and pedestrian safety improvements on Beasley Street in Torrens.

Minister Vassarotti and I visited the picturesque village of Hall to meet with representatives of the Hall and District Progress Association just last week. As identified in the Active Travel Plan and following their advocacy, I was excited to share with the association that we are progressing our feasibility study on a new shared path. We understand the community's desire to see separated infrastructure for cyclists delivered as quickly as possible. That is exactly why we have funding for feasibility of future pop-up cycleways, following the first implementation in Kingston on Bowen Drive in the coming weeks. But it is not just about delivery of new infrastructure; we are making record investment in our path maintenance, with a \$5 million boost in the 2023-24 ACT budget, focusing on that maintenance and safety hotspots.

It is frustrating that there has been a fundamental misunderstanding of what a plan is, which regrettably has been further confused with Ms Clay's contribution this morning. A strategy makes clear to all what is a priority and, on that basis, how decisions should be made and resources should be allocated. It is not the mechanism for action or delivery; it is the why and the how. It has been critically important for us to create and share a transparent strategy, so that we are not just making decisions regarding funding and construction now or into the future that are random or nice-to-dos but are ones that are grounded in delivering on our priorities and supported by evidence of community need.

I do agree, as I am certain has been published, that we can be clear about what we are doing where and at what stage progress is at. Those who are curious, including Ms Clay, can see on our tenders and contracts registers that there is plenty of funding, not just in words or in the budget papers but also in action. Our community will visibly see that in the coming weeks, with many of our works starting imminently. But, with the Active Travel Plan being released and it explaining why we are doing what we are doing and where we are doing it—that strategic overlay that a plan is—I do agree that we can paint a clearer, more transparent picture with our investment decisions in the pipeline. So I have tasked City Services with this work, with the view that anyone will be able to see what we are doing with our investment, where our projects are up to and what we have done and understand how those projects fall within our priorities and how they are supported by data and community need.

The ACT government is committed to making Canberra a city where people can enjoy the benefits of active travel, such as walking, cycling and micromobility. We are investing in a pipeline of infrastructure that supports these modes of transport with the

Active Travel Plan as our blueprint for future works. By doing so, we are enhancing the liveability of our city and making it more accessible, healthy, safe and sustainable for everyone. I commend Minister Steel on his excellent work and dedication to this project and in setting a framework that, as the minister who will be assisting with the construction of these projects, ensures that we have a very clear set of guidelines of what we are doing and why.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mental health—United Kingdom study tour Ministerial statement

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Population Health) (10.38): In December 2023, I led a visit to the United Kingdom to undertake a study tour to learn from leading services, academics and health policy leaders across the mental health portfolio.

The tour focused on key issues, including how high-performing mental health systems can help young people with their mental health; how we support people experiencing eating disorders; supporting people experiencing emotional stress or situational crisis; and crisis accommodation for people with mental health needs. The sheer range of services that we saw and the quality of the people that we spoke to was something we could not have seen in any Australian city. The work that we engaged with taught us a great deal about new and innovative approaches to mental health service design and delivery. The visits, the conversations that we had and the things that we learned are already influencing our ongoing work on eating disorder services.

Joining me in this delegation were representatives from the ACT Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services, a representative of the peak mental health non-government organisations and a representative from my office. The tour commenced with five days in London, where key visits included the following: site tours of various inpatient mental health units, including mental health crisis assessment services operating as alternatives to emergency departments; site visits to several eating disorder services including inpatient, outpatient and day programs; and visiting the highly respected eating disorder teams at the Maudsley Hospital, including the FREED team, which ACT's early intervention service model for eating disorders is based on; a site visit to a women's crisis house, as an alternative to the emergency department, and to a supported accommodation house for people with complex conditions transitioning towards home after an inpatient stay; and a site visit to a youth service where systemic family therapists, clinical staff and youth workers support young people to de-escalate mental health crisis and work on the underlying causes of their distress.

The tour also included meetings with the chief executive officer and key lead roles at Mind UK, the leading mental health charity in the UK. Mind has expertise around the perspective of people accessing mental health services as well as wider system intelligence, with a particular interest in emerging models for non-clinical interventions. We also had meetings with the Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Mental Health Research, a leading advocacy group for mental health reform in the

UK, and mental health system specialist representatives of the Kings Fund, which is one of the independent charities working to improve health care; and a meeting with senior representatives of the National Health Service England with responsibility for supporting across-England systems and providers to deliver high-quality services for all.

The tour concluded with two days in Scotland, where key visits included meeting with the teams implementing the Distress Brief Intervention program at the University of Glasgow. DBI is a time-limited intervention that provides support for people in psychological distress. The Australian government is supporting a trial of DBI in three states, and a commitment to consider DBI is part of the ACT Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention with the commonwealth. Three of the keys to why DBI is effective are what the team described as tenacious compassion, persistently offering support to people in distress; time, space and compassion to understand the person's support needs; and working with the person to create a distress management plan.

We visited the West Scotland Mother and Baby Unit at Leverndale Hospital, where the group undertook a site visit followed by an open discussion with staff. This visit aligns with, and provides valuable insight into, the work being undertaken by the ACT Health Directorate in relation to how we develop services relating to perinatal mental health. We met with Maree Todd, the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Jenni Minto, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, to discuss mental health initiatives and wider determinants on people's mental health outcomes.

I am extremely grateful for how generous everyone was with their time. Many of the health policy leaders, innovators, service providers and academics are global experts in their field. I believe what we have learnt from this visit will be immensely beneficial in guiding the way we think about mental health services in the ACT as well as how we plan for and deliver services for our community. It is clear from our visit that a lot of the challenges we are facing here in the ACT and Australia more broadly are similarly being faced in the UK. Some of the challenges include the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, particularly for young people; the need to more effectively support people in crisis and distress, which might be different to acute mental illness; rising pressures related to cost of living and the economic inequality crisis on the social determinants of mental health and distress; the need to consider alternative options to the emergency department for people with mental health needs; the rise in people affected by eating disorders; and breaking down stigma and the need for easily accessible information on mental health for everyone, including carers. The strong connections we made during our visit with our counterparts abroad will enable us to collaborate more closely and share ideas on how to tackle these big and persistent problems.

People are complex, and we need to continue to build a modern and mature mental health system to cope with that complexity. It is critically important that, as we continue to develop our mental health system, we also integrate mental health supports with physical health supports and with social services such as housing, disability services, family support, financial counselling and the justice system. There is a greater chance for success in recovery when people are treated with kindness and compassion, in a holistic way, across the full range of supports appropriate to their needs. What we saw on our visit demonstrated that this achievement is possible across

national and local jurisdictional boundaries, in the midst of a pandemic and economic pressures, when mental health and social resilience are prioritised by governments. Our trip to the UK has introduced us to new and innovative ways of designing and delivering mental health services, resourcing and governance which I believe could be implemented here in the ACT, ensuring we have a well-connected service system to meet the needs of all Canberrans. I present the following paper:

United Kingdom Study Tour—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2024.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (10.45): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

Due to an administrative oversight, the committee did not table schedules of statutory appointments during 2021 or late 2022. This statement covers those periods: 1 January to 30 June 2021; 1 July to 31 December 2021; and 1 July to 31 December 2022.

During the reporting period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2021, the committee considered 16 appointments to five statutory bodies. During the reporting period 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, the committee considered three appointments to one statutory body. During the reporting period 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022, the committee considered four appointments to three statutory bodies.

I now table the schedules of the statutory appointments considered by the Committee during these periods.

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee—Schedule of
Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Periods—

1 January to 30 June 2021.

1 July to 31 December 2021.

1 July to 31 December 2022.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.47): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

Due to an administrative oversight, the committee did not table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during the period 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022. This statement covers the periods 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022 and 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023.

During the reporting period 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022, the committee received nine proposed appointments to two statutory bodies. The committee considered one of these appointments within the 30-day time frame provided by section 228 of the Legislation Act 2001.

During the reporting period 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023, the committee received and considered 13 proposed appointments to the Restricted Medical Treatment Assessment Board.

I now table the schedules of statutory appointments for these reporting periods.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Schedule of
Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Periods—

1 July to 31 December 2022.

1 July to 31 December 2023.

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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) (10.48): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 to the Assembly today. This is a significant bill that introduces a number of amendments that will help improve our criminal justice system in the ACT. The bill includes amendments to the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005 that would increase the maximum number of appointed members that can be appointed to the Sentence Administration Board, or SAB, from 11 to 12.

The SAB has the power to grant or refuse parole, consider breaches of parole and intensive corrections orders, grant or refuse re-instatement of a cancelled intensive corrections order, manage hearings into parole progress and compliance in the community, as well as determine overseas travel requests by those on parole or subject to an intensive corrections order. The SAB plays an important role in our criminal justice system, and an increase in appointees will better support the operational needs of the SAB in undertaking its work. This new position provides for a dedicated position for the Chief Police Officer or their delegate. Although

membership of the SAB has previously included police ex-officio representatives, this amendment emphasises the important contribution police members make to the operation of the SAB, while expanding the SAB's membership to keep up with operational demands.

The bill also provides clarity to the definition of "serious offence" in section 300 of the Crimes Act 1900. Section 300 sits within part 13 of the Crimes Act, which sets out procedures for dealing with offenders where unfitness to plead and mental impairment are at play. The section provides a definition of "serious offence", which affects the types of order that can be made by the Supreme Court. The amendment to section 300 provides clarity that serious offences require not only actual or threatened violence but also substantial risk of harm to another person. This approach ensures orders restricting the liberty of mentally impaired persons are imposed in circumstances where their offending conduct, whether alleged or proved, indicates they pose a substantial risk of harm to other persons in the community.

Furthermore, the bill introduces two amendments to the Bail Act 1992. The first amends the act to extend the permitted time limits for a charged person to be brought to the court in limited circumstances. Currently, the Bail Act requires that a person who has been taken into custody and charged with an offence, and who is not released on bail by an authorised officer, must be brought before a court as soon as practicable and at least within 48 hours. The amendment will allow for the extension of this period from 48 hours to 96 hours in limited circumstances where a person is hospitalised and certified as being medically unfit by a doctor of that hospital facility. The amendment responds to occasions where an accused person is physically unfit or unconscious and either is hospitalised when charged or needed to be hospitalised after their admittance to the watch house.

The amendment incorporates safeguards that include that the doctor certifying the patient must be an employee or contractor of the hospital where the person is being treated and that the time extension cannot be extended beyond 96 hours overall. This amendment will ensure that a person in custody is treated fairly in their criminal proceedings and ensures their dignity by prioritising medical care, as well as minimising the resourcing strain on the courts, which occurs when a bedside bail application is required within an urgent time frame.

The second amendment to the Bail Act empowers the court to order bail conditions when a person appears before the court in response to a summons or court attendance notice. This amendment responds to a Supreme Court decision, which noted that, under the current law, bail cannot be required of a person who has appeared in court in response to service on the person of a summons. The court's current power to mitigate these risks is to remand the person in custody and then to grant the person bail. The need to remand a person before granting them bail is an unsatisfactory position.

A person will be deemed to be in the custody of the court for the purposes of making a bail order in two identified circumstances: firstly, where a person is served with a summons or court attendance notice while serving a sentence of imprisonment and the person is subsequently released from custody before appearing in court; and, secondly,

where the court is satisfied, on fresh evidence that was unavailable when the person was served, that a relevant risk applies in the proceeding, such as failing to appear, committing another offence, interfering with evidence or harassing a person who may be required to give evidence. In these circumstances, the court will be empowered to use its discretion and, after considering whether it is appropriate to do so, make an order granting the person bail, in accordance with the procedure under the Bail Act.

The bill also updates the list of Commonwealth and ACT offences which, upon conviction, trigger an obligation for an individual to register as a child sex offender for a set period of time. The bill amends the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 to reflect changes to substantive child sex offences in the Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) and the Crimes Act 1900 (ACT). The bill has been drafted in a way that ensures that a person who has been convicted of a historic offence that has been repealed or amended will still be captured by the registration requirements. Of note, the amendments only update the list of registrable offences in the schedules to reflect changes which have been made to other criminal law legislation and make no substantive changes to the scheme itself. The amendments will provide continued protection to the sexual safety of children in the ACT.

Finally, the bill includes technical amendments to replace references to the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006 and terms used in that act with references to the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022. The National Anti-Corruption Commission was established last year, and these amendments will ensure that ACT legislation recognises the new body. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2024

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) (10.56): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2024 to the Assembly. This bill will amend the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 to modernise and strengthen the ACT's defamation laws. There are two distinct purposes to the amendments in the bill. Firstly, the bill makes amendments to update defamation laws for the online environment. The bill clarifies when digital intermediaries are liable for defamatory material that is published by a third party on their service or platform. It intends to strike a better balance between protecting reputations and not unreasonably limiting freedom of expression when people publish defamatory content online.

Secondly, the bill will extend absolute privilege to communications to police and a prescribed list of statutory bodies. Absolute privilege prevents a person from suing another person in defamation. These amendments are intended to address the concern that defamation law acts as a barrier or has a chilling effect on the reporting of sexual harassment and other criminal or unlawful conduct to the police and other statutory bodies.

Defamation law is harmonised across Australia, so these amendments are being progressed in tandem with all states and territories. The amendments are informed by two significant national inquiries—the ACCC’s *Digital Platforms Inquiry* report and the Australian Human Rights Commission’s *Respect@Work* report—and substantial public consultation over a number of years.

The amendments relating to the online environment will clarify the liability of digital intermediaries in defamation for the publication of third-party content. Digital intermediaries include internet service providers, content hosts, search engines, review websites and social media platforms. Individuals who use online platforms to host forums where a third party may comment, such as an administrator of a social media page, are also digital intermediaries.

Recently there have been long and costly defamation disputes, whereby the host of a website has been found to be the publisher of comments posted on their forums by third-party users. These disputes have generated confusion, and there is widespread agreement on the need to clarify the law in this area.

The reforms introduce greater clarity and certainty for both plaintiffs—that is, the person who has been allegedly defamed—and for digital intermediaries, through a number of new measures. The bill will create two statutory exemptions from defamation liability for a narrow group of digital intermediaries, including search engines in relation to organic or non-sponsored search results, and conduit services such as email services.

In a significant step forward, the bill will create a new innocent dissemination defence for digital intermediaries. To rely on the new defence, the digital intermediary must provide a simple and accessible complaints mechanism on their website so that individuals can report defamatory content; and if a complaint is received, the digital intermediary must take reasonable steps to prevent continued access to the content within seven days.

The bill will also empower courts to order digital intermediaries to prevent access to defamatory content online even when they are not parties to defamation proceedings. To modernise the law, the bill will amend the requirements for offers to make amends so that in matters concerning online content an offer to remove or to block access to content is a suitable alternative to publishing a correction.

Finally, the bill will require courts to consider safety, privacy and the public interest when making orders requiring digital intermediaries to disclose the identity or contact details of a person who has posted online content. These reforms present a balanced, principled and pragmatic solution to the complexities posed by the online environment.

The reforms are also compatible with human rights. Defamation laws often involve balancing the inherent tensions between the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy and reputation. The amendments in the bill may limit the right to freedom of expression for the purpose of promoting the right to privacy and reputation. In particular, the new innocent dissemination defence may incentivise digital intermediaries to remove online content in response to an allegation of defamation, with the risk that lawful content will also be removed.

In response to strong stakeholder feedback, the new defence prioritises non-litigious, timely resolutions, thereby striking a more appropriate balance between the right to freedom of expression and the right to reputation. There are also several safeguards in place on the defence to ensure that the limit is reasonable and justifiable. As such, the amendments will create a safer online environment that promotes social connection and belonging and individuals' right to privacy for all Canberrans.

Turning to the second group of amendments, the bill will extend the defence of absolute privilege to ACT Policing and certain prescribed statutory bodies that may receive disclosures of criminal or unlawful conduct from members of the community. This reform responds to concerns raised by victim-survivors of sexual assault that the fear of being sued in defamation is a contributor to low reporting rates. Victim-survivors also report that alleged perpetrators may weaponise the threat of suit in defamation, creating an additional deterrent to reporting.

Absolute privilege provides a complete defence to defamation liability and it can be determined at an early stage in court proceedings. This is intended to reduce victim-survivors' exposure to the distress, cost and time of defending a matter. The reforms aim to ensure that victim-survivors and witnesses can be confident that what they communicate to the police and other prescribed entities is protected, so that they cannot be sued in defamation.

In addition to ACT Policing, the bill will extend absolute privilege to communications made to other relevant statutory bodies: the ACT Human Rights Commission, the ACT Integrity Commission, the Inspector of Correctional Services, the Office of the Workplace Health and Safety Commissioner, the Official Visitors Scheme, the Public Trustee and Guardian, the Sentence Administration Board, and the ACT Law Society and ACT Bar Association for the purposes of their complaints-handling functions.

Each of these prescribed entities relies on open and frank communication to be of service to the Canberra community. Reducing barriers to reporting will promote a safer community, whereby criminal and unlawful conduct is able to be appropriately investigated and sanctioned.

To promote consistency across jurisdictions, the Standing Council of Attorneys-General agreed to a set of guiding principles for states and territories to use in deciding when to extend the absolute privilege defence. In preparing this bill, the government has considered these principles, to ensure that each of the bodies to be prescribed in the ACT is aligned with their scope and intent.

The government is conscious that this reform will engage and limit the right to reputation, as it will remove a person's ability to sue in defamation with respect to

protected publications. To ensure that this limitation is reasonable, the prescribed bodies have been chosen because they share specific characteristics that will act as safeguards. For example, the prescribed bodies all have statutory restrictions on how they must handle personal information. As such, these bodies have the requisite expertise and processes in place to ensure that any false or misleading reports are managed in a manner that reduces the risk to reputation.

To conclude, the amendments in this bill are important to ensure that the ACT's defamation laws remain fit for purpose in the online environment. They progress important changes that will enhance Canberrans' right to privacy and reputation and, by creating a safer online environment, will promote social connection and belonging. The amendments will also remove barriers to reporting criminal or unlawful conduct, increasing the effectiveness of ACT Policing and other investigative entities and creating a safer community. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

Biosecurity Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.06): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 today. In my debate speech on the Biosecurity Act 2023, I acknowledged the traditional custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people, and how First Nations' intimate knowledge of country is relied upon on the front lines of Australia's biosecurity efforts.

Here in Canberra, the Murumbung Rangers are a collective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working for the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and the operational arm of Murumbung Yurung Murra. Thank you to the Murumbung Rangers for working on the ACT's front lines of biosecurity and sharing your knowledge of country with the broader ACT community.

The bill that I am introducing continues the work of the ACT government in implementing a modern and responsive biosecurity system that is fit for purpose and ready to meet the new and emerging biosecurity challenges. These important reforms are streamlining our complex suite of legislation into a single act.

Reforming our biosecurity legislation supports the implementation of the ACT Biosecurity Strategy 2016-2026, which acknowledges that biosecurity is a shared responsibility. It provides the foundations for governments, industry, non-government

organisations and the community to work together and to share resources, knowledge and expertise in developing a strong and integrated biosecurity system.

Our government's reforms have largely been delivered through the passage of the Biosecurity Act 2023. The passage of this bill that I am introducing today will support the Biosecurity Act. The bill makes amendments to several pieces of ACT legislation, following the passage of the Biosecurity Act and its associated regulations, to make sure that all ACT laws align with the reformed biosecurity system. The amendments contained in the bill are separated into three schedules: minor amendments to the Biosecurity Act and the Stock Act 2005, consequential amendments, and technical amendments. I will deal with each schedule in turn.

Schedule 1 contains the minor amendments and changes to the Biosecurity Act, which include extending the prosecution period for offences. The bill amends the Biosecurity Act to extend the prosecution period for offences under the Biosecurity Act by 12 months. Offences include failure to comply with the duty to notify of a biosecurity event; failure to comply with the duty to notify of the presence of a notifiable biosecurity matter; dealing with prohibited biosecurity matter; and engaging in prohibited dealing. Currently, those offences have a prosecution period of 12 months, which is not workable in a biosecurity context. This amendment would make that period two years.

As an example, to demonstrate the necessity of this amendment, varroa mite and red imported fire ants in New South Wales are thought to have been detected some 12 months after their original incursion. This would mean that only the most severe offences under the Biosecurity Act, those punishable by imprisonment exceeding six months, would be available. We believe our reasonable and proportionate change gets the balance right to protect the ACT's economy, environment and community from biosecurity risks by providing the broadest suite of compliance tools in responding to a biosecurity situation—of which two are never the same.

We are also making amendments to the Biosecurity Act to enable information sharing for the purposes of managing biosecurity risks for information collected under a suite of laws. This aims to ensure that government works in an integrated manner in protecting the ACT's economy, its environment and the community from biosecurity risks. These provisions would limit the need for duplicate registrations and other actions under the Biosecurity Act. Safeguards ensure that the information-sharing entity must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the information is necessary for the exercise of the person's functions.

Schedule 1 includes minor amendments, including changes to the Stock Act. Schedule 1 of the bill also modernises several aspects of the Stock Act, particularly in relation to stock marking, with the development and implementation of the National Livestock Identification System—Australia's system for identifying and tracking the movements of certain animals for disease control, food safety and market access purposes.

Section 234(2)(d) of the Biosecurity Act allows for regulations to be developed for the marking, branding, tagging, or attaching of a device or other identifier to any biosecurity matter or carrier. Regulations being drafted under this provision will implement the NLIS provisions in the ACT.

The bill updates the Stock Act by replacing “alpacas” with “species of the family Camelidae”. This family includes camels, llamas and alpacas. This will make the Stock Act more consistent with other regulations regarding livestock. The bill removes the compulsory requirement in the Stock Act for earmarking of small stock, such as sheep and goats. This recognises the mandatory implementation of electronic identification for sheep and goats nationwide by 1 January 2025, as agreed by Australia’s agriculture ministers in September 2022, and improves animal welfare outcomes.

The bill also updates the travelling stock permit requirements in part 4 of the Stock Act to reduce red tape for farm businesses, increase consistency across similar species and allow for more flexibility into the future.

The amendments in schedule 2 are technical in nature and update references. This includes replacing references to repealed acts with the Biosecurity Act and aligning the definition of the term “pest” with the definition in the Biosecurity Act. These straightforward consequential amendments in schedule 2 apply to a number of laws, including but not limited to the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act, the Animal Welfare Act, the Environment Protection Act, the Fisheries Act and the Urban Forest Act.

Schedule 2 deals with consequential amendments and changes to the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1989. The bill inserts a 10 business day limitation period on the application period for the review of biosecurity emergency declarations and biosecurity control declarations. Judicial review processes may unduly delay the control or eradication of a biosecurity threat, thereby increasing costs to the ACT community and decreasing the effectiveness of those efforts. However, I believe that these reasonable and proportionate changes get the balance right to protect the ACT’s economy, environment and community from biosecurity risks.

Schedule 2 has consequential amendments and transitional provisions for the Biosecurity Act. Schedule 2 of the bill creates transitional provisions in the Biosecurity Act to ensure effective and efficient transition from repealed regulatory regimes to the modernised biosecurity framework.

Schedule 2 of the bill also amends the Firearms Act 1996 and the Firearms Regulation 2008 to ensure that authorised persons under the Biosecurity Act can obtain a firearms licence if required in their duties and to enable cross-border recognition of licences for those assisting in responding to biosecurity incidents in the ACT. Section 230 of the Biosecurity Act explicitly provides that it does not authorise a contravention of the Animal Welfare Act.

Finally, schedule 3 of the bill makes several technical amendments, on the advice of Parliamentary Counsel.

The biosecurity system is complex. By its nature, the biosecurity system interacts with many other laws, policies and processes relating to plants and animals. For this reason, I am really proud of the work that has been done to improve the biosecurity system. I would like to thank the community, industry and members of the Assembly for their input during the development of the biosecurity legislation system.

I extend this sincere thanks to the hardworking people in the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. These ACT public servants are the ones we rely upon to work with rural land managers to manage pests and diseases day to day. They are the people who respond when there is a biosecurity incident. The ACT environment is healthier because of the work they do, and we appreciate the dedication that they bring to the job.

The term “once in a generation” is often used, but it really does apply to the biosecurity reforms being implemented by the ACT government. The biosecurity reforms will lead to better outcomes for people and their community, with improved wellbeing and environment for all. I look forward to continuing to consult and work with industry, community and my Assembly colleagues as we implement the reforms over the coming months. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2023

Debate resumed from 2 November 2023, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.18): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this bill. The problems of procurement in the ACT are well documented. The Auditor-General has released eight reports in this Assembly alone, detailing the systematic failures of the minister’s management of procurement. These reports have delved into a range of deficiencies; and crucially they have emphasised several key themes: a lack of expertise, an absent minister, a lack of transparency and accountability, and insufficient probity.

These issues are informed by policy and legislation that is set by the Special Minister of State, Minister Steel. But this is not the only issue with this bill. This bill was tabled in the Assembly in early November 2023 and brought back for debate today, offering members of the Assembly only a three-month time line to provide a response. Crucially, this bill also was presented prior to the lodgement of the Auditor-General’s report on 15 December into the disastrous HRIMS program, which the minister addressed yesterday. I will have more to say about that.

Following comprehensive research from both me and my office into understanding the state of procurement in the ACT and the contents of the bill, the Canberra Liberals have reached the conclusion that we cannot support it. The Special Minister of State does not highlight transparency as a key value, and I think this is, distressingly, a clear indicator of the values of this Labor-Greens government. Despite encompassing \$1.5 billion in expenditure every year, procurement remains wracked with deficiencies that this bill does not adequately address.

The minister will be amending the regulations that prescribe the monetary threshold for open tenders on construction projects to \$1 million, from the previous \$200,000. Meanwhile, goods and services will move from \$200,000 to \$500,000. These are significant movements. The government agencies and directorates will not need to

tender construction-related procurement of a monetary value of less than a million and will have to obtain only three quotes as part of the limited tender process. We will have more goods and services contracts of \$500,000 without going to tender.

The bill will also change board referrals to \$7 million monetary value. This will result in less scrutiny given to procurement in the ACT, given that the current value is \$5 million. The ACT has already demonstrated that it is much more prone to mismanagement and failure than other jurisdictions, so increasing these values is not a wise move. The Canberra Liberals do not support these changes.

Where this minister also fails is to incorporate further checks and balances into the limited tender process, ensuring that procurement is rigorous, captures each of the values of procurement and is accountable to the public. A system the Canberra Liberals would like to have seen at least explored is something similar to what is used in New South Wales and Victoria, called evaluation criteria. This provision mandates that agencies provide an assessment outlining how they attend to evaluate supplier submissions, and the weighted purpose and function of the procurement. As such, suppliers and the public understand exactly what the agency is able to achieve and whether this is featured in the performance of the procurement. The policy could also be incorporated into the limited tender process in the ACT, giving us a system that prioritised, in a more meaningful way, probity and transparency every step of the way.

As was observed with the Campbell Primary School procurement, on which we are waiting a report from the Integrity Commissioner, transparency is essential. In this case, despite a company offering a cheaper and higher quality proposal, the union-preferred tenderer was chosen, as it had received the blessing from the minister's office. Disgraceful! As such, "spare capital works funds" were added into the agency budget to meet the union-endorsed tender, despite the preferred bid being \$900,000 cheaper. That is a disgraceful waste of taxpayers' money.

That is just one example of procurement mismanagement in the ACT; there are many others. We heard yesterday about the delayed replacement of the diesel buses in Canberra, which the Greens, in this Assembly, rightly criticised this minister for. We also have the Acton waterfront project blowing out from \$11 million to \$44 million.

For the Canberra Liberals to support this bill would be an insult to the hardworking and honest citizens of the ACT whose taxes were egregiously wasted on a \$78 million abandoned HR and payroll project. In any other responsible government jurisdiction the responsible minister would have lost their position for this failure. In a business, an executive who was responsible for losing \$78 million of the business's money—in fact, quite a bit less than that—in most cases would no longer be in that executive position. How can we trust this minister with this amount of taxpayer money to get procurement right when we have seen such a systematic and continuous failure on his part?

We saw the minister yesterday providing his solution to the HRIMS debacle. He is going to create a new Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy, with a new director-general and how many additional staff, to solve a problem where, really, the source of the problem is his failure to manage a procurement adequately on behalf of the taxpayers of the ACT.

A payroll and human resource management system is not an exotic creature. It is something that every large organisation has. Despite that, the minister failed to act when the expenditure was out of control, leading to an eventual wastage of \$78 million and growing. Only in the ACT is endemic incompetence rewarded, as we saw with the recent reshuffle by the Chief Minister which actually gave a promotion to Minister Steel. Yesterday we did hear the minister apologising about the waste. But how about he takes true responsibility and hand his portfolio over to someone who may—if the government can find someone within its ranks—do a better job.

In conclusion, we are not supporting this bill because, at the broadest level, the government needs to go back to the drawing board. We have had an incredibly critical report from the Auditor-General since the presentation of this bill. That should have caused the government itself to say, “Hang on. We need to pull this bill back and adopt the lessons from the Auditor-General into a more comprehensive bill that actually promotes transparency and accountability.” Frankly, we should have been under the governance of a different minister.

The government needs to go back to the drawing board on this procurement bill because it needs to properly address the failure and \$78 million wastage in managing a payroll and human resource system. It needs to go back to the drawing board and reflect properly, without necessarily creating a new government agency with a new director-general. It needs to go back to the drawing board. The Chief Minister needs to think seriously about who should be managing procurement in the ACT, this \$1.5 billion—and it is not this minister. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this bill.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.27): I would like to thank Minister Steel for the briefing provided to my office on this bill. In the absence of an inquiry, I had to do a bit more due diligence on the bill than usual. Given the magnitude of the structural changes to the act—reorganising entire parts of the legislation whilst modernising them at the same time—it was not always clear from the explanatory notes what the bill was actually trying to achieve or why particular changes were being made. Those who are not already intimately familiar with the act are unlikely to fully appreciate what this bill is doing, and what the problems are that it is trying elegantly to solve.

The minister will, as per tradition, go into more detail on what the bill does. From my perspective, the bill sets up a system that is sound, ensures that the procurement framework and rules sit suitably within legislation or disallowable subordinate legislation and instruments, and creates a space for cultural change that the Auditor-General has made clear needs to happen. For this reason, the Greens will support this bill.

Firstly, I want to linger on a key element not specifically referred to in the bill—that is, cultural change. This bill is the stepping point for cultural change, not the end point. It is not the silver bullet. It is still within the power of individuals to obfuscate regarding what they do, and no amount of legislation can completely correct for that. But the expectations are now set, and the capacity for the territory system to mature is there.

We need to talk about the culture of the senior ACT public service, and whether it emphasises that responsibility and accountability as part of its culture. We know

accountability exists within the ACTPS. Frontline and junior staff are regularly held to account, and that is the way it should be. But whether there exists a culture of accountability at all levels of the ACTPS is a serious question on which I have my doubts. Are they truly accountable to the people of the ACT? How often have we seen a senior ACTPS officer take personal responsibility and accountability for something that has gone wrong? Why are we seeing a strata of senior public servants who have remained in place for extended periods of time, despite repeated concerns about governance on particular issues?

Secondly, it is important that the government has the technical capacity to effectively manage and run procurement projects—not simply outsourcing technical projects such as IT upgrades to outside companies, but ensuring that the ACT government possesses the technical skills to manage these projects and procurement. The insourcing framework is not just for cleaners and frontline service delivery roles. It is also about ensuring that the ACTPS has the skills in technical areas that are critical to the ACT government's operations and the delivery of its services.

This is fundamental, given the importance of IT, which is the underpinning tool or system for so many of the government's operations, services and functions. For too long, IT services have been outsourced without suitable consideration being given to who has the technical skill to effectively manage an IT contract and effectively communicate between an IT consultant and the business areas.

I can almost guarantee that this will not be the last word on procurement in this Assembly. The ACT Greens believe that a healthy democracy requires openness, probity, transparency and accountability in all aspects of government, including government departments, government-owned entities and statutory authorities.

Minister Steel and his successors in that role can still expect to be brought to account for issues if and when they arise. With the Procurement Board established in a way that means it is responsible to the executive rather than directly to the Assembly, the Special Minister of State will remain ultimately responsible for procurement activities in the ACT, whoever that minister happens to be and from whatever party, and I doubt that anyone in this chamber will let them forget it.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (11.32): I am pleased to close the debate on the in-principle stage of the Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2023, which enacts important amendments to the ACT government's procurement legislation.

Each year, the ACT government spends close to \$1.5 billion on procurements that support the delivery of public services, infrastructure, economic growth and community wellbeing. In recognition of that, in February 2022 the Procurement Reform Program was established to enhance the ACT government's procurement framework, ensuring the delivery of efficient, effective and accountable business outcomes that meet the policy objectives of the government and strengthen procurement practice across the ACT public service.

The Procurement Reform Program is underpinned by three focus areas. The first is transparent, evidence-based procurement decisions which are conducted with probity

and can withstand the highest levels of scrutiny. The second area of focus in the Procurement Reform Program is to support our local workforce, local industries and business. By delivering consistent, timely, practical and customer-focused advice and service through all phases of the procurement life cycle, our government will make it easier for territory entities to engage with local business, and for local business to engage with us through the procurement process. Finally, we are streamlining our legislative framework, policies, processes and templates to ensure they are efficient and can facilitate timely procurement outcomes.

Under this aspect of the reform program, the need for legislative amendments to enhance the current procurement legislation was identified. This bill is an important deliverable under this program of reform. The Government Procurement Act and Government Procurement Regulation have not been subject to a complete review since 2007. This has meant that the procurement legislation needed an update. An opportunity also existed to enhance accountability and decision-making in procurement. This bill helps to mitigate any potential confusion or inconsistent interpretation of procurement matters, as well as helping to reduce delays in their application, and the ongoing need for advice to interpret concepts during the development of a procurement.

The bill will strengthen the procurement ecosystem in the ACT by implementing significant reforms to the Government Procurement Act 2001, the Government Procurement Regulation 2007 and associated legislative instruments. These reforms ensure that the legislative framework remains contemporary, is modern, makes sure that it supports the efficient and effective financial management of resources in accordance with the Financial Management Act 1996, and enshrines important procurement values for our community.

As I have foreshadowed in the Assembly, the bill also gives effect to the ACT government's adoption of the recommendations from a range of reports of the Auditor-General, including the Auditor-General's 2023 performance audit report on the activities of the Government Procurement Board. That report recommended that the government should review the value thresholds in the regulation and, if appropriate, propose revisions. This bill acts on the Auditor-General's recommendation by increasing these thresholds from \$1 million to \$7 million; further, matters referred to the board for advice will also be reflective not just of the monetary value of a procurement but of its risk.

Those are the provisions within this bill that the Canberra Liberals have not supported today. They have made it very clear that they do not support the Auditor-General's recommendation, which is being enacted through this bill today.

The amendments expressly provide for procurements to be referred to the board during the planning and sourcing phases of the procurement life cycle. The bill strengthens the board's functions and governance with an appropriate process for escalation when the board considers that unmitigated risks are not being adequately addressed. This will be enacted through an enhanced terms of reference in subordinate legislation and supported by forthcoming instruments which will set the board's strategic directions, support the compliance of any whole-of-government procurement practices, and provide the appropriate authorising environment for the board in meeting its objectives.

As recommended by the Auditor-General's report and agreed by this government, the bill will clarify and strengthen the role of the Government Procurement Board, its purpose, function, obligations and composition, which will include the chair of the board as a non-public employee, and the deputy chair will be a public employee. Currently, the board comprises nine members, of which five are public employees and four are non-public members. Amending the board's composition to be chaired by a non-public member will increase the proportionate representation on the board in favour of non-public employees.

The bill will also establish an annual reporting requirement on the performance of the board. The bill creates a framework to ensure proponents receive advice at a time that can be practically implemented and to mitigate the risk of proponents disregarding the board's advice. The board's new terms of reference will give effect to a process that will allow the board to opt to review proposals again where risks or issues remain, and is further supported by the escalation provisions outlined in this bill.

It is clear from the provisions in the bill that there are various levers enabling me, as the responsible minister, to give effect to the various operational matters that the board may require guidance on to ensure that it discharges its duties in clear alignment with government policy.

The pursuit of value for money remains enshrined in our legislative framework. The bill strengthens this position by ensuring that value for money is not just the best outcome for the procurement but is the best outcome that maximises the overall benefit to the territory.

For example, the bill ensures that all procurement contracts include labour relations, training and workplace equity plans, and local industry participation plans. Together, these support local industry by ensuring consideration of local suppliers in the procurement process and, similarly, by requiring that consideration is given to ensuring that persons employed by a contractor supplying the ACT government are subject to appropriate workplace standards and conditions.

Similarly, the amendments incorporate key aspects of the procurement values and current procurement policies to ensure that ACT government buyers are supporting the ACT government's objectives whilst seeking quotations. The new requirements will allow ACT government buyers to seek an exemption from the quotation requirements, specifically to approach suppliers from three key segments: certified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entities; entities based in the ACT or surrounding region; and small to medium-size businesses.

Our quotation and tender requirements in the Government Procurement Regulation have remained unchanged since 2007. The concept of oral quotations and the dollar thresholds are not in step with current practices across other Australian jurisdictions or with our international trade agreements. Furthermore, the Government Procurement (Charter of Procurement Values) Direction is not expressly reflected under the provisions set by the regulation.

The bill now provides amendments requiring written quotations for the lower value procurement, to help with making more transparent procurement decisions. As stated,

the amendments also lift monetary thresholds for open tenders to \$500,000 for goods and services and \$1 million for construction-related procurements.

The Canberra Liberals have come in here today and opposed those measures that will support small business. This is in direct response to feedback from businesses, including small and medium-size enterprises—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MR STEEL: which noted the costs and resources associated with tendering for relatively low-value work. It reduces the burden on suppliers and it allows them to respond with more opportunities to work with the ACT government. The step that the Canberra Liberals will take today, in opposing this bill, will mean that, in relation to small business in the territory, they will never have any credibility whatsoever to criticise the work that we are doing to support small business. Labor and the Greens, who are supporting this bill today, support small business in the territory.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, not again.

MR STEEL: The Liberals are clearly not supporting them, despite claiming that they are the party of small business.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, I have come to you three or four times. You are either ignoring me or you are being persistently unparliamentary, so stop.

MR STEEL: On another matter, which the Liberals also oppose, in relation to probity in procurement, this government has made significant changes through this bill in enshrining probity principles into government procurement legislation. We know that probity in procurement and public trust are critically important, to make sure that our procurement processes are robust and transparent.

A new section in the act has been included to ensure that all procurements are conducted in accordance with the ACT government's probity principles. This is a critically important thing that we are doing, to enshrine probity in the primary legislation. This is not being done in other jurisdictions around Australia. It is an important integrity measure, and Mr Cain and the Canberra Liberals today are again opposing this measure in the bill which will improve the transparency, honesty and uprightness of our procurement processes in the territory.

Madam Speaker, I draw your attention to minor revisions to the explanatory statement. These provide further clarification on the operation of the bill. These include the explanatory statement confirming that the intent and provisions of the bill capture circumstances where an entity is acting on behalf of a territory entity; this is subject to the provisions of the bill. The explanatory statement clarifies that a standing offer

arrangement will be notified even where arrangements represent no cost to the territory. This ensures transparency across these arrangements regardless of their value. The explanatory statement makes clear that, with respect to provisions relating to exemptions from limited and open tender thresholds where the procurement is from a winner of a design competition, the competition judges have sufficient independence. These changes clarify the existing provisions in the bill and remove any possible areas of ambiguity.

The combination of amendments to primary legislation and subordinate legislative instruments creates a more robust and accountable procurement framework for the territory. They are an important step forward.

Before I close, I want to address one issue that Mr Cain raised in relation to the HRIMS program. The focus of Auditor-General's report No 10 of 2023, which was tabled in the Assembly yesterday but delivered to members last year, was on a range of different matters. Procurement was one small part of that, but the focus was on planning, the focus was on governance—

Mr Cain interjecting—

Mr Gentleman: A point of order, Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, please.

MR STEEL: The focus was on planning; the focus was on governance; and the focus was on project management issues. There were some issues related to contract management and some work that can be done through the planning for procurements in relation to ICT projects. But to come in here and suggest that somehow we should be scrapping this bill and starting again—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, you are now warned.

MR STEEL: shows a clear misunderstanding of the HRIMS program. I point Mr Cain to the government's response to the Auditor-General's report yesterday, which goes into a significant amount of detail in response to that program, the issues raised and what actions we are taking to address those issues. Clearly, he does not understand the issues that are present in that program. As a result, the Canberra Liberals have made a very significant misstep today in opposing this bill.

I commend this bill to the Assembly. It represents one of the biggest reforms we have undertaken to the Government Procurement Act, and it is a significant step forward as part of the government's ongoing Procurement Reform Program. I table the revised explanatory statement to the bill, and I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question put:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 16

Noes 9

Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr	Peter Cain
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson	Leanne Castley
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Ed Cocks
Joy Burch	Shane Rattenbury	Jeremy Hanson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Elizabeth Kikkert
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Nicole Lawder
Emma Davidson	Rebecca Vassarotti	Elizabeth Lee
Mick Gentleman		James Milligan
Laura Nuttall		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 11.49 am to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Taxation—general practice clinics

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, during annual report hearings on 23 November last year, you were asked whether Treasury had completed any modelling or estimates on how much revenue your government will collect from GP payroll tax. In response you said, “No. We will get data in due course on extra payroll tax collections.” However, FOI documents reveal that you were actually briefed on 25 August 2023, that your application of payroll tax to contractor GPs could raise \$5 million a year. Chief Minister, why were you not upfront about the revenue your GP payroll tax will collect and will you correct the record now?

MR BARR: That was not modelling, that was just an estimate. Modelling would be far more precise.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, why have you decided to force some GPs to increase their fees during a cost of living crisis and freeze recruitment of new GPs to stay under the payroll threshold for a \$5 million boost to your broken budget?

MR BARR: There has been no change in payroll tax legislation, or indeed application. A period of grace was provided for GP practices who were above the \$2 million threshold, which would see them not pay any payroll tax, and a mechanism was put in place where no payroll tax would be applied if the rate of bulk-billing lifted to its pre-COVID levels. I do note that the rate of bulk-billing has lifted. I think it would lift further if the incentive were further increased in the coming commonwealth budget.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, are you so concerned about your budget bottom line that you decided to insult GPs by saying that they are and I quote, “seeking to minimise tax” and “lack an ambition in relation to bulk-billing”?

MR BARR: What I am not going to do is automatically grant payroll tax exemptions to everyone who asks. I do note that we have had GPs, dentists, psychologists and a range of other allied health professionals all ask to not have to pay payroll tax. If the Treasurer of the day just agreed to every single request there would be a significant erosion of the territory’s revenue base. Other jurisdictions are applying the same principles, where they provided a temporary amnesty or periods of waiver, but clearly the integrity of the nation’s payroll tax system is at stake here. I repeat that the issue is ten years of under funding of Medicare that is now being turned around. What happened when the bulk-billing incentive was tripled? Bulk-billing went up everywhere, and if the incentive is further increased, bulk-billing will continue to increase across our community. So being lectured by the Liberal Party on funding for Medicare and bulk-billing, after ten years of running down the system, is hypocrisy of the most extreme level. The Liberal Party have no credibility on Medicare and no credibility on primary healthcare at all.

Ms Lee: Point of order Madam Speaker. Again, could you please remind the Chief Minister to directly answer the question instead of getting into arguments on—

MADAM SPEAKER: I believe it is in order, but following on from yesterday and today, I am quite happy to go back and have a view and if I change my mind I will let you know. Thank you.

Government—infrastructure plan

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to your announcement today that the mid-year budget will contain funding for a new rectangular stadium at Bruce and the Canberra Pavilion, which will eventually include a convention centre. The latest update of the ACT Infrastructure Plan already announced \$2.2 million in funding for an “operational needs analysis”. Chief Minister, will you be releasing a plan before the election on how you will build and pay for these projects when you already will have to spend around billions of dollars in the next few decades getting the tram to Woden?

MR BARR: What we have announced is further funding for precinct planning in three precincts—Exhibition Park, the Convention Centre Precinct in the CBD and the Bruce Health, Education and Sports Precinct. In each, we have outlined a pathway forward as part of the Infrastructure Plan that you identified, Ms Lee. We intend to work with the commonwealth in relation to the Bruce precinct; I am hopeful of a positive announcement around the future of the Australian Institute of Sport; we would seek to work with the commonwealth in relation to the convention precinct; and we have our own master planning and capital works investments announced in relation to the next stages of Exhibition Park’s renewal.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, how many feasibility studies has the Labor government already commissioned for a new stadium and convention centre in Canberra since 2009?

MR BARR: The government, as part of the then Football Federation Australia and Australian government bid, participated in a process to look at Canberra as a potential venue for that ultimately doomed bid for the 2022 Football World Cup. We did commission work in relation to both Manuka Oval and Canberra Stadium. Building on that work, we have looked at, examined and undertaken technical due diligence in relation to a stadium in the city. That technical due diligence showed that that was not a feasible pathway forward. You cannot build a facility of the size required on that site—it is not possible. So we have now focussed our efforts on the Bruce precinct and are funding the technical due diligence in the budget review to progress work on the stadium at Bruce.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, how can Canberrans trust that you will build any of these projects, given your track record of abandoning major infrastructure projects?

MR BARR: The government has a very strong track record of delivering projects, in spite of the opposition from those opposite—for example, light rail stage 1 and stage 2A underway. We are now onto the completion of our third hospital—

Member interjecting: The Cotter Dam expansion.

MR BARR: The Cotter Dam expansion was built. I think that has been in place for some time now. We are now onto the completion of our third hospital—the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the University of Canberra Public Hospital expansion and a new northside hospital to come. That is three built and one in the pipeline—four for Labor. What is the Liberals’ record on hospitals? You have blown one up—so minus one.

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: It is a fact. You imploded a hospital. That is your contribution. The Liberal Party’s contribution to health infrastructure in the ACT was to blow up the Royal Canberra Hospital. We have built two, with a third about to be completed and a fourth in the pipeline, compared to what you did in government, which was to blow up a hospital. You have never built a hospital. We have—multiple.

Mr Hanson: Only because I forced you into it in 2016, Andrew. You weren’t going to build it and then I—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: Welcome back. I missed you yesterday, Jeremy—exiled on the backbench.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr and Mr Hanson, can we end the reunion, please.

Cotter Dam—maintenance

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, recent media reporting reveals that the Labor government’s Paradise Dam in

Queensland will have to be rebuilt after tests showed that the roller compacted concrete in the wall is degraded and will therefore be a future safety risk. Legislative Assembly committee reports show that the same concrete was used in the construction of the enlarged Cotter Dam and similar construction issues have occurred, and that in 2012 cracks in the dam appeared. Chief Minister, have you conducted any tests on the concrete in the enlarged Cotter Dam since its construction and can you guarantee that the concrete is not degraded?

MR BARR: I missed the first part of your question, the very first sentence, because your colleagues were still interjecting.

MS LEE: Shh, everybody! Recent media reports reveals that the Labor government's Paradise Dam in Queensland will have to be rebuilt.

MR BARR: Right. The Queensland dam. Thank you. I will seek some advice from Icon Water. I have not had any cracks in Cotter Dam brought to my attention. As the asset managers, I am sure that Icon Water are undertaking regular maintenance of the facility. I do note that the facility was built in spite of the interjections from Ms Lawder—

Ms Lawder: Over time and over budget.

MR BARR: that apparently infrastructure isn't built. I certainly can confirm that the enlarged Cotter Dam was built and is storing a lot of extra water for the territory.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, have there been any further reports of cracks or structural issues at the enlarged Cotter Dam since it was completed? You mentioned in your first answer that you would get some advice. Can I just confirm that you will take it on notice?

MR BARR: Thank you. I have had nothing brought to my attention regarding any concern in relation to the integrity of the dam wall at Cotter Dam. Nothing has been brought to my attention in that regard, but I will ask Icon Water for any information that they can provide to assist me in responding to Ms Lee's question, which I will do when I have that information available.

MS LAWDER: Chief Minister, will you release all or any documents related to the testing of the roller compacted concrete at the enlarged Cotter Dam?

MR BARR: Subject to advice from Icon Water, I would see no reason why not.

Lakes and waterways—safety

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Parks and Conservation. Minister, on closer reading of the government's response on the coroner's report on drownings in the ACT rivers, one of the coroner's recommendations was for the ACT government to consider the Royal Lifesaving Society of Australia's advice to install flotation devices and throw ropes at popular river locations for swimming. What has the government done so far and plan to do in the future on the installation of flotation devices and throw ropes?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thank you to Mr Braddock for the question. As noted, that was a recommendation of the coroner's report, and we have been working particularly with the Royal Lifesaving Society in terms of developing a local drowning prevention plan, which is currently under development. We are hoping that the plan will be completed before next summer, and we are working with range of other government agencies in finalising the plan.

Around the issue of lifesaving equipment, we have been reflecting on the experience of this being a strategy that was in place many years ago, particularly being installed in many popular swimming locations. They stopped being replaced due to extensive vandalism and theft; however, this was some time ago, and reinstalling them is currently under active consideration. We are, as part of that consideration, and some of the discussions we are having with Royal Lifesaving Society is about considering whether or not bystanders can use such equipment safely or effectively, and so we will continue to interrogate that issue and hope to have the plan finalised, as I noted, before next summer.

MR BRADDOCK: Will the local drowning prevention plan also address the ability for members of the public to be able to call for emergency services' help at these locations?

MS VASSAROTTI: The issue of mobile phone coverage is an issue that has been identified, and we do acknowledge that there are really significant limitations on phone coverage at popular swimming spots. That is why in some of these particularly popular spots there is the provision of emergency communications to partly address some of these issues.

The plan is investigating whether or not phone coverage is possible in the area and will provide an appropriate way of ensuring greater swimming safety. We do note that getting telecommunications infrastructure into swimming spots, particularly those that are relatively isolated, would have significant investment, but again, it is under active consideration.

MS CLAY: Minister, how important is swim safety education and awareness for our multicultural communities?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thank you for the supplementary question. It has been identified through the coroner's report and the work that the Royal Lifesaving Association has done that there are particular groups that are at risk in our community, and certainly some of the early work that I reported about yesterday has really taken this into account.

The summer campaign, which was around reducing the risk around waterways, was targeting those most at-risk communities, so they include younger men, migrants, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as well as residents that are living in proximity to waterways. As part of that, we have ensured that translations of the website's swim safety information are accessible for our multicultural communities, and also that the social media campaign also targets people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We are actually really pleased that the campaign

has reached its benchmark goals for the target audience, and the engagement numbers have been really pleasing.

We do identify that we are really focused particularly on delivering interventions within the parks areas of responsibilities, but we acknowledge that swimming vulnerability for migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities may not be limited just to rivers and lakes, so we do need to work across government to ensure that we are really promoting swim safety, skills and awareness for all environments, not just those that are covered through the Parks and Conservation Service.

City Services—staffing

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, I was pleased to hear last week that the ACT government has committed to directly employing 71 new staff in City Services. Can you provide more information regarding this announcement?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in our plan to invest in City Services and to create more jobs for Canberrans. As we know, City Services are essential for maintaining the quality of life and the environment in our beautiful capital. Our plan is to directly employ 71 new staff across a variety of entry-level jobs within City Services, including temporary traffic management for routine road work, advanced weigh-bridge operations at waste facilities, and school crossing supervisors. Delivering more secure jobs to more Canberrans is a key priority for the ACT government, underpinned by the whole-of-government Insourcing Framework and Secure Employment Framework. Insourcing a variety of entry-level jobs within City Services will provide greater job security for many low-paid and vulnerable workers who provide essential services to the Canberra community.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: I hear you are looking for a job! Secure work provides many economic, social and health benefits. It ensures workers have consistent and predictable income they can rely on, as well as access to sick leave and recreation leave when they need it, leading to improved financial, physical and mental wellbeing. This is part of our broader vision to make Canberra a more sustainable, inclusive and vibrant city for everyone.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how does directly employing these workers allow the government to provide better and more responsive city services to the community?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. This is one of the key reasons that we are making this \$2.2 million investment to directly employ City Services' workers and ensure high-quality service delivery to the public. By directly employing these workers, we are able to reduce our reliance on external contractors and agencies and adjust services as required, without the restriction of contract terms which can be costly, unreliable and inconsistent and add another level of management. For example, directly employing a dedicated traffic management team will allow the government to be more responsive and flexible in delivering a variety of road based

city services, such as road repair and maintenance, tree pruning, mowing and litter-picking. Maintenance teams will be able to more rapidly deploy across the city without needing to arrange contractor traffic management well in advance.

Insourcing these services will also improve the government's ability to maintain road network operations and react to unplanned or last-minute events, including responding to emergencies. Directly employing these workers will allow us to better manage our resources, plan our projects and respond to the changing needs and expectations of our community.

MS ORR: Minister, what other work is being done to improve city services and maintenance following the multiple storm events over the summer period?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. Recurrent summers with significant weather events have disrupted the crews' usual proactive work program. While we did have a dryer October, the rainfall in November, December and January was 172 per cent, 138 per cent and 182 per cent of their long-term averages, respectively. For context, we received almost the same amount of rain from October to January as we did in the previous season over those four months, and that season was a La Niña season. This season's pattern of rain and sunshine has resulted in not only high soil saturation, which can bog heavy machinery, but also intense growing conditions, resulting in thicker and faster growth. Our crews are needing to go slower to avoid damaging machinery and to cover an area multiple times in one go. Sunny days like today can be deceptive in masking just how damp the ground still is.

During this season, we delivered additional residential green bin pick-ups and quickly deployed green waste skip bins across Canberra's worst-affected suburbs to assist the community with clean-up following December's storm, and our crews have been working overtime—day, night and on weekends—to keep our city safe, clean and presentable. As the Chief Minister outlined yesterday, the unpredictable weather is another reminder that the changing climate necessitates different approaches to our city's repair and maintenance services.

My first priority in this portfolio has been to personally visit and engage with our hardworking GSOs at each of the City Presentation depots across the ACT. Having spent more than 20 hours talking to frontline staff already, I value the expertise and experience of our crews, including some with over 20-, 30- and more than 40-year careers in servicing our city, and we so sincerely thank them. Their feedback and ideas are directly informing our work to support them to do what they do best. We are exploring opportunities for surge capacity and equipment, as well as further efficiencies and efforts which may assist without compromising safety.

Government—human resources and information management system

MR CAIN: My question is to the Special Minister of State. I refer to the Auditor-General's report into the failed HRIMS project where he said:

The HRIMS Program was a significant failure for the Territory ... Every aspect of the HRIMS Program, including its planning, governance and administration and management arrangements, was characterised by multiple failures at all levels.

Minister, noting your apology in the Assembly yesterday, are you now finally admitting that you were responsible for this significant wastage of ACT taxpayer money?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Yesterday, I did deliver the ACT government's response to the Auditor-General's report No 10 of 2023, which did acknowledge the failures of the HRIMS program. I, as the minister, and the government, have taken responsibility to identify the problems with the project and put in place a lower cost and lower risk solution to the territory's human resource needs, particularly in relation to ICT, and have taken responsibility in applying the lessons learnt from the project to future ICT projects.

When I became the Special Minister of State around December 2020, the program had just been assigned to the Chief Digital Officer, and it failed to meet its first deliverable. At that point, the government then undertook multiple technical and non-technical reviews into the program. We paused the program to identify the problems, initially with a view to resetting the program to get it back on track. But in examining the issues, we discovered that there was a lower cost and lower risk solution—that is the solution we are now pursuing at lower cost to the territory. We found opportunities to streamline the complex HR processes, which were contributing to the issues in the HRIMS program, and we made a very difficult decision as a government to discontinue the HRIMS program, which was a responsible decision not to spend an additional \$140 million on that project.

In the response that I outlined yesterday, I have outlined the lessons learnt very clearly and the actions the ACT government is taking to address them, both for the new PC HRM program and for ICT projects. That is what responsibility looks like. I refer the opposition to the comprehensive statement yesterday.

MR CAIN: Minister, how can the ACT taxpayers trust you with any project, given you failed so spectacularly in your role overseeing the HRIMS project?

MR STEEL: In the response that I outlined yesterday, I have taken responsibility as minister. During my time, when the problems were identified with the program, we undertook reviews; we identified the issues; we put in place a lower cost solution for the territory, and we made the difficult decision to discontinue that program.

Now we have very comprehensively outlined the lessons learnt which will inform the new HR management solution, and, also, all future ICT projects. We have done that in a range of different ways which are structural in the ACT public service, and which put in place more robust policies and governance processes for all ICT projects. One particular example I would give is the best practice planning and delivery guide for ICT projects. That is already in place and informing other ICT projects in the territory, right across government. It has come as a lesson learnt from the HRIMS process that we needed to make sure there was better planning from the very beginning to inform the delivery of that program, and better optioneering to understand the full range of options and solutions available to government. We put that in place under my leadership. We are taking responsibility for the program and making sure that we improve and do better for future ICT projects.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you finally do the right thing and resign?

MR STEEL: It is not unusual for the Liberal Party to claim a scalp, but that would do nothing to improve the situation in relation to ICT projects in the territory. As minister, I take responsibility for improving the way we manage our ICT projects in the territory.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR STEEL: I have done that from the very beginning of taking this portfolio. When something does go wrong—and things do go wrong in government from time to time. It is how you manage those issues. We have identified the issues; we have found a lower risk and lower cost solution for the territory, and we are applying the lessons learnt. That was comprehensively outlined yesterday. I will continue to take responsibility for the better management of ICT projects going forward.

Government—human resources and information management system

MR CAIN: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Special Minister of State. Minister, I again refer to the Auditor-General's report into the failed HRIMS project. The Auditor-General found:

Planning for the HRIMS Program was poor. The Territory failed to account for the complexities of the ACT Public Service industrial relations environment when developing and implementing the HRIMS Program...The Territory failed to finalise and endorse basic program management documents for the HRIMS Program.

Governance and administrative arrangements for the HRIMS Program were poor ... Program monitoring and assurance arrangements were poor, including quality assurance, program reporting and risk management activities.

I could go on and on. As the Minister overseeing this project, why did you get it so wrong?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We have proactively identified those issues through the technical and non-technical reviews that were commissioned during the time that I was minister overseeing this project. As a result of identifying those issues, we put in place in actions to address them, which were fully and comprehensively outlined in the ACT government's response to the Auditor-General's report yesterday. It is the proactive work that we had undertaken in relation to the program when it was not meeting its deliverables, which enabled us to provide that comprehensive response early. I suspect one of the reasons the Auditor-General only made one recommendation in relation to the program was because we had undertaken such a significant amount of work to review the program, to identify the issues, and also because of the substantial work we had already undertaken to address many of the issues identified—although there are some where ongoing work is required—in relation to project management; in relation to planning; and in relation to governance. We have been proactive. When things did not go right with the program

we identified those issues and we put in place actions to address them, including a better solution for the territory of a future HR system, and, as well, put in place the lessons learned for all future ICT projects.

MR CAIN: So, Minister, why did you let this project go on for so long when it is clear from the Auditor-General's scathing report that it was in trouble for a long time?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We certainly acknowledge the planning issues associated with the project that occurred early on. There is work we can do, particularly around better decision-making in the early stages of a project life cycle, to make sure we properly look at the issues; the complexity of the program; to make sure we have better processes in place, particularly around business process; to then assist in an easier delivery of an ICT program of this size, particularly in this case where it involved 18 different enterprise agreements. The complexity and scale of that, in implementing the business processes across government, was underestimated. We acknowledge that.

Mr Cain: And whose fault was that?

MADAM SPEAKER: You were warned, Mr Cain.

MR STEEL: As a result of identifying those issues early on, through the various reviews that we have undertaken, we have now put in place a range of different actions which were identified through those reviews and have been tabled very clearly for the Opposition to have a look at in the response we made yesterday. They include work that we have already done to put in place a new best practice design and implementation delivery guide for ICT projects, which is informing better decision-making early on in the project's life cycle, so that we can prevent these issues from happening in the future.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will give you the call, but Mr Cain you are warned. If I hear another peep out of you, you will be named.

MR COCKS: Minister, why did you continue throwing good money after bad on this project, when cabinet could have intervened when the first doubling of expense for this project was brought to you?

MR STEEL: Well we have not. We have closed the program. That was a decision we made last year in the budget, following work that had been done to review the program where we identified a previously discounted option to look at upgrading the HR Chris21 system at a lower cost and lower risk for the territory, but also noting still the need to build a new time and attendance system. Many of the costs associated with the program accrue at the point that we made the decision to discontinue it. So yes, there was a cost involved in that, but it was the responsible decision because it did not throw good money after bad. It avoided a future additional cost of \$140 million which was expected for the program. So from the get-go, when the issues were first identified with the program, when it did not meet its deliverables: we reviewed the program; we put it on pause; we identified the issues; we found a lower cost solution; we closed the program; and now we are putting in place the lessons learned for all future ICT projects, including the new PC HRM program.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, members, please!

MR STEEL: We have taken responsibility right the way through.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You have concluded Mr Steel? Yes?

MR STEEL: Thank you Madam Speaker.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, the 2023-24 mid-year review includes \$1.23 million to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, bolstering Canberra's legislated First Nations Voice following the majority support in the referendum last year. Minister, what will this funding deliver and how will it strengthen the Elected Body?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the question. As Ms Orr rightly points out and as we are all aware, last October more than 60 per cent of Canberrans said yes to elevating the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on issues that affect them. This is an idea that, unlike the Canberra Liberals, ACT Labor wholeheartedly supported. The Barr Labor government is now investing \$1.23 million to strengthen the ACT's own voice mechanism, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. This includes funding to increase the amount of time Elected Body members are paid for each year. This will support members to dedicate more time to engaging with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and representing the ACT on the national stage, including as part of the coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations, the Coalition of Peaks, which sits alongside ministers at the Joint Council on Closing the Gap and alongside officials in the partnership working group that is driving that change.

We will also strengthen the Elected Body's capacity to work with the ACT government to drive better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right here in the territory and to hold the government to account for our commitments. This initiative also provides funding for an independent secretariat for the Elected Body, which will provide critical administrative and record-keeping supports to help it run efficiently. That independent secretariat is already in place.

The government is also investing \$200,000 from the Healing and Reconciliation Fund to engage an independent review to undertake consultations with the local community on how we can continue to strengthen the Elected Body model into the future. This will support the government, the Elected Body and the community to ensure that the model meets the community's expectations and is well placed to work in partnership with government and community to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

MS ORR: Minister, how will a stronger Elected Body enhance the voice and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. ACT Labor is firmly committed to supporting the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and uplifting their voices in decision-making forums. The ACT government recognises that it is vital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be able to live well and in line with their own values and to be empowered to work in partnership with government and to hold government to account.

The Elected Body is a critical voice in promoting and protecting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT to freely determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development in line with the right to self-determination. Since its inception in 2008, the Elected Body has played an essential role in developing and implementing programs and initiatives through its advocacy and active partnership with the ACT government and the local First Nations community, including in the development of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement. The current agreement, 2019 to 2028, was the first 10-year agreement and is being delivered in partnership.

With more time and resources, this additional funding will bolster the Elected Body's ability to engage with the community and the government on policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. This includes holding hearings to monitor the government's delivery against our commitments. Hearings were held last year and further hearings will be held this year, before the next Elected Body election in July this. As I said, the Elected Body represents the ACT on the coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations. In this capacity, the Elected Body represents the rights, interests and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT at the highest level.

We also work with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations with representatives across a range of committees and portfolios to ensure that self-determination is real in the ACT.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how will this additional funding support the implementation of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary question. The priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap outline how governments can achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through shared decision-making, developing partnerships with Aboriginal representatives and through long-term and sustained investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Achieving these ambitions will require governments to invest in mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their say on policies and programs that affect them.

The national agreement also commits all governments to identify, develop and strengthen an independent mechanism that will support, monitor and report on

transformation of government entities and institutions. In the ACT, the Elected Body serves as the primary mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their voices heard. But we know that we can do more to strengthen that mechanism. In the Productivity Commission's report released today, the ACT has been recognised as having an elected body as an independent mechanism. But we also know and have been told that we need to do more.

The increased resourcing will strengthen the self-determination of the Elected Body and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the review will enable us to understand how we strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body into the future in the context of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the need for the independent mechanism but also in the context of a growing community-controlled sector in the ACT. Other representatives on the coalition of peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations represent the community-controlled sector. We did not have a peak in the ACT to play that role at the time the Coalition of Peaks was formed. Perhaps in the future we will. The review will look at all of that context as well as in the context of the consultations that were taken on the National Voice, so that we can deliver on the objectives that Canberrans have clearly voted for.

Planning—Macgregor

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. It relates to Macgregor block 9, section 140, and is about lease enforcement and maintenance. Minister, this development was completed at the start of 2022 but has never been used for its purpose, and the block is overgrown and is not maintained. Has the government taken any enforcement action to ensure that the block is maintained?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her question. I am happy to seek advice about whether any compliance action has been undertaken by Access Canberra. Access Canberra's role can be to inspect blocks in the ACT to make sure that they are in accordance with the Planning Act. That includes consideration of issues like rubbish that could be visible in the public domain, whether a lease has a building constructed within the required time frame and whether a lease is being used in accordance with the purpose clause in the Crown lease. I think that is the issue that Ms Clay has identified. I am happy to come back and provide some more information about that specific block in Macgregor.

MS CLAY: As well as block maintenance, has the government taken any enforcement action to ensure that the block is used for its intended lease purpose?

MR STEEL: That is the issue that I will come back to the Assembly on, and Ms Clay specifically.

MISS NUTTALL: If not, could you give us an indicative time frame of when you may take action to see the block used for its intended purposes?

MR STEEL: I assume that by "you" you mean Access Canberra, operating in their capacity and their independent role. I will certainly find out some information from them about what they are doing in relation to this matter. I was not aware of any

specific issues in relation to this prior to today's questions, so I will seek some advice about what the exact issues are and whether any complaints have been received by Access Canberra as well.

Transport Canberra—bus fleet

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, your government was given specific advice by the commonwealth more than a decade ago that the Renault diesel buses currently being used on our network would be non-compliant to disability standards in late 2022. We are over a year past that deadline, and yesterday, as well as talking about short-term fixes, you admitted that there would be a further delay. Given the many warnings on this, how could you possibly have failed to comply with this ten-year deadline, and can you guarantee that the Renault diesels will be off Canberra's streets by the end of 2024?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question, and he is quite right. We have been advised by Scania Australia that they have unfortunately experienced further delays in being able to provide Transport Canberra with leased diesel buses as part of a lease contract arrangement that has been in place since early 2022, which would have enabled us to meet the deadlines required under the Disability Discrimination Act, which is a commonwealth act and requirement.

As a result of that, we are of course looking at a range of options. I have asked advice from Transport Canberra to seek advice on what we can do to address this issue, either through the contract or other means, to be able to make sure we can replace these buses as soon as possible and provide accessible transport for Canberrans.

It is of course a great disappointment for me that Scania Australia has not been able to deliver these buses as per the terms of their contract. The arrangement was in place with them to meet our requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act, but because they have not met the terms of the contract, we have not been able to comply with that in the timeframe specified.

We are minimising the use of the Renault PR100 series buses as much as possible, but we also need to make sure that we retain reliability of services for Canberrans at the same time, so as one new bus is supplied to us, whether it is from the contract with Scania Australia or through another contract that we have in place—for example, we have purchased 90 Yutong buses. If one of those arrives, we will replace one of the Renaults and take it out of service. Only a small number of them remain in the fleet, Madam Speaker, and we are trying to minimise the use of those as much as possible so that we can provide accessible transport for Canberrans.

MR PARTON: Minister, why should Canberrans believe you this time, given the retirement of the Renault diesels has already been delayed on so many occasions?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I have been upfront and transparent with the public and with the Assembly, providing at the earliest opportunity an update on the supply of these buses, because it does invoke this particular act of parliament, the Disability Discrimination Act. I have been providing those regular updates for the community and for the Assembly on when they will be supplied, Madam Speaker.

The government over a number of years has been engaged in procurement of new buses. We have done that under a new Zero-Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra. We did it prior as well. Minister Fitzharris purchased around 80 Scania Bustech buses. We have gone forward with a further leased agreement that has not yet been completed, but we have also purchased 90 electric buses and also executed another contract with Custom Denning for four additional leased electric buses.

We are currently updating the Zero-Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra at the moment, which we expect to deliver later on this year, which will look at the pathway ahead and what we need to do to not just support the zero-emissions transition, but make sure that we have got a fleet renewal strategy in place to support the growing needs of our community.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why does your government fail to achieve every transport related deadline it sets for itself?

MR STEEL: We have not, Madam Speaker, and you just look at the examples: stage 1 of light rail delivered under budget, successfully operating now. Just under five years since April 2019. We are getting on with projects like the new ticketing system, which continues to be up front. We are looking at providing updates to the community on that soon, Madam Speaker. We have already got 12 electric buses in the fleet, the highest per capita of any city transport operator in the country. We are getting on with the work in the transport space to provide better transport. We have just signed a contract, Madam Speaker, with Canberra Metro for the stage 2A extension to Commonwealth Park. All that the—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR STEEL: The problem with the Canberra Liberals is they do not promise anything. In fact, they promise to cut things: to cut transport infrastructure, cut services. Madam Speaker, we build things.

Ms Lee: Madam Speaker, point of order. Again, according to standing order 117, I ask you to ask the minister to be directly relevant in answering the question rather than get into furious arguments.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not believe he is debating, and I think he is just responding to the question, but as I indicated—

Ms Lee: Really? Because he is just talking about apparently what the Canberra Liberals do.

MADAM SPEAKER: —earlier, I am happy to review the last couple of question times, and should I need to come back to something, I—

Ms Lee: I think so.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, I have said I would review. I do not need commentary.

Transport Canberra—accessibility of buses

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, your government continues to show disdain for members of the disability community by running non-compliant buses on the network for more than a year after they officially became non-compliant. How is Transport Canberra making sure that passengers who require an accessible service can get that service? What information and mechanisms are out there to ensure that everyone can access our transport system?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the statement that I gave yesterday which demonstrates that we are being up-front and transparent with the community about where we are up to in the transition to accessible buses for the community. There are also the steps that the ACT government, through Transport Canberra, has been taking to support people with a disability to access transport services. Of course, as transport minister, I established the Accessibility Reference Group. We have been engaging with them in Transport Canberra and City Services.

I refer the member to the statement where I said that we have been working closely with the community. If a person with a disability wants to, they can contact Transport Canberra if they need an accessible bus on the service that they use regularly, and we can take that into consideration in terms of changing which particular bus is used to deliver that particular service. We also, of course, have other options available which they can talk to Transport Canberra about—

Mr Parton: You can give them a lift.

MR STEEL: Yes; it may include potentially giving someone a lift or it may be about providing them with information about the options that are available in terms of the Flexible Bus Service, which is there to support people with mobility issues, to be literally picked up from their home and taken to a local shopping centre, a GP or where someone needs to go.

MR PARTON: Minister, if the government had been given a 20-year warning on this deadline rather than just the 10 years, are you confident that you could have managed this important transition?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. It is ironical, but I will address the question anyway. All bus operators and all transport operators, like Transport Canberra, around the country have been grappling with the issue of the transition to Disability Discrimination Act requirements. They do not just apply in relation to the accessibility of buses; there is a range of other requirements as well. Many of them are not meeting the requirements under the commonwealth act at the present time. We have been discussing those challenges.

We have a very small number of disability non-compliant buses. We are working very hard and diligently to phase them out as soon as possible, but there have been some effects from COVID-19, as a result of the supply chain issues and workforce issues experienced by the bus industry, that have meant that the buses that we had contracted have not been delivered in the time required. We have those contracts in place to deliver them in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. I have provided

transparent updates to the community in the Assembly when those have not been delivered on time, and I will continue to provide further updates as we receive more buses and when we are able to fully transition these buses out of the fleet.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, has the government been updating the Australian Human Rights Commission about its non-compliance with the disability standards?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

Planning—Majura Valley

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer the minister to the promise made 14 months ago by his predecessor, Mr Gentleman, to grant Majura farmers 25-year leases with no withdrawals. Minister, do you stand by this offer?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. As she knows, the issue that is currently holding up the consideration of renewal of leases in the Majura Valley involves split blocks—that is where the Australian government, particularly through the Department of Defence, has an interest in that land—and waiting for a decision from the federal government to de-gazette those blocks. We cannot make a decision to renew those blocks until a decision has been made by the Commonwealth and until we can fully understand the conditions that may be attached to that decision.

I have taken the opportunity, as the new planning minister, to meet with many of the farmers and their representatives on these split blocks. I have listened to their concerns. I understand much more about their concerns and the uncertainty that they currently face in relation to the tenure on those blocks. The Chief Minister has written to commonwealth ministers, now on a number of occasions, to advocate for a decision that is made in a timely way.

Ms Castley: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I asked if the minister stands by Minister Gentleman's offer. It is a yes or a no.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am not directing the minister to answer yes or no.

MS CASTLEY: How does the government justify leaving this issue unresolved for the Majura Valley farmers in limbo for 19 years, given the lives it has disrupted in the process?

MR STEEL: The government has been working as collaboratively as we can with the commonwealth government to resolve this issue. We have been advocating to them consistently, including when the Liberals were in power federally, because it has been going on for such a long time. They did not make a decision in relation to their property disposal policy.

We are advocating for the current government, federally, to make that decision in a timely way that gives the split-block owners an opportunity for certainty going forward, but, ultimately, the ball is in the commonwealth's court, and once they have made a decision, then the ACT government can consider making a decision in relation to renewal.

MR CAIN: Minister, why are you incapable, despite your rhetoric, of drawing a line under this issue which has been mishandled for nearly two decades? It is something even Mr Gentleman could see needed to be done.

MR STEEL: Mr Cain has ignored my answers to the previous questions. This is a matter that is currently before federal government. We are advocating for them to make a decision. We cannot make a decision for them. That is a decision they have to make for themselves. We have made that very clear to the people residing in the Majura Valley. We cannot make that decision for the federal government. Once they make that decision, then we can consider what opportunity there might be for renewal.

Government—community engagement

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 19 December, the winning ideas for the My Little Big Idea were announced. However, at the time, the YourSay page for the Richardson idea indicated that the community panel workshop was yet to occur. Chief Minister, why was this, and can you offer us assurances that the neighbourhood democracy processes were fully undertaken?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Nuttall for the question. I understand there was only one proposal that came forward that would fit within the criteria of the program for Richardson, and that was put forward by the Richardson school community. There were other submissions but they were beyond the possible scope of the program with a \$40,000 budget. So with only one viable idea that came forward, it was the only one that could be pursued. I think it does have very strong support from the Richardson school community. It will be a valuable asset for that school and the broader suburb of Richardson, and indeed surrounding suburbs.

MISS NUTTALL: When can the Assembly expect to see the results of the planned review into the My Little Big Idea pilot program for both Richardson and Page?

MR BARR: I am anticipating the evaluation will be complete in the first half of the year. I will look at it and then I am sure it will go up on a website.

MS CLAY: Why does it say, in the third report on the parliamentary agreement released in December, that the agreement was for conducting the pilot in two suburbs rather than the originally agreed five? And why does it not state why the decision was made by the Treasurer to only budget for two, not five?

MR BARR: There was a mutually agreed variation of the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement.

ACT Policing—resourcing

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Crime Prevention. Minister, the recent *RoGS* data shows that the ACT continues to have the lowest number of police per capita in the country. Minister, how are these low numbers affecting the operation of policing in the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. This government has, of course, made record investments in policing in the most recent budget and investments in each budget prior to that while I have been the police minister. This has shown in the work that ACT police have been doing across the territory in crime prevention and also in reducing crime. You can see in the *RoGS* data that the trend for crime in most circumstances is trending down. There has been very good work done by ACT Policing, and I think that comes on the back of our strong investment in the police force.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why are our police numbers consistently the lowest, year after year?

MR GENTLEMAN: As I said, we make the investment in ACT Policing and then they, in an operational sense, use that funding to ensure that they can get the outcomes that are needed for a safe community. Of course, Canberra is one of the safest cities in Australia. The work that they are doing should be congratulated, and I take this opportunity to congratulate our Chief Police Officer, who has served the longest of any of our CPOs in the ACT. He is heading off next month for some long service leave, and we will be updating the Assembly on a new CPO after that. There has been very strong work done by ACT Policing, as you can see in the result today in finding the two lost children—again, very good work by ACT police.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many of the police reported in the *RoGS* data are actually on active duty and not on sick leave or other leave?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Parton for the question. It is a level of detail that I do not have immediately in front of me. But I am happy to take that on notice and come back to the chamber.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, will you please update the Assembly on the new ACT Ambulance Service roster?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Dr Paterson for her interest in our first responders. The government values our frontline responders. That is why we are investing \$19.71 million over four years to implement a new and modernised roster for our paramedics. The roster is designed specifically to support our hardworking ambulance crews. It is fit for purpose for our modern, highly capable and committed Ambulance Service.

We know that in recent times demand for the ACT Ambulance Service has been at its highest levels. Despite this, and as noted in the *Report on Government Services*, ACTAS continues to deliver some of the country's fastest ambulance response times. Our investment in a modernised roster will enable ACTAS to continue to be one of the nation's leading ambulance services, but it will also boost the health, safety and wellbeing of our frontline responders.

We care about the health and wellbeing of our paramedics, who are central to the success of ACTAS in providing the highest level of care and life-saving services to members of our community when they are at their most vulnerable. The government remains committed to ensuring that the Canberra community can continue to have the highest confidence in the performance of their Ambulance Service.

DR PATERSON: Minister, will you please advise how the improved roster arrangements will benefit ACT Ambulance Service workers and the service overall?

MR GENTLEMAN: The current funding of \$19.71 million over four years will support 30 full-time equivalent new frontline paramedics, increasing the available crews through peak periods. Our investment will alleviate the physical and mental pressure on our paramedics; provide additional support and supervision to on-road crews; improve fatigue management and practices resulting in less physical and psychological injury; and enable a better work-life balance for paramedics.

In addition, training requirements and professional development opportunities will be better supported under the new roster by increasing operational flexibility, ensuring that our ambulance workforce support staff continue to enjoy rewarding careers in the ACT Ambulance Service, with improved rostering leading to better health, wellbeing and work-life balance for the workforce. The government will continue to provide support for our ACTAS workforce as they continue to meet community expectations.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, will you please advise how the improved roster arrangement for the ACT Ambulance Service will benefit the ACT community?

MR GENTLEMAN: Our Ambulance Service performs a vital role in our community, responding to those in need when they are at their most vulnerable and when they need it the most. As noted, ACTAS delivers some of the fastest response times in the country, as well as achieving very high levels of patient satisfaction. More paramedics and available crews will ensure that Canberrans feel safe, supported and cared for.

The pattern of the new roster will expand the workforce, which allows a degree of specialist and general ambulance capabilities to be available during peak demand and reduced during periods of low demand. A modernised roster will support the mental and physical health of our paramedics, which is paramount to enabling them to perform at their best and provide exceptional care for the people in our community.

The investment positions ACTAS to be even better placed to continue to meet community demands and expectations of our Ambulance Service, while maintaining exceptional response times. Frontline workers play an integral role in the safety of our community and we thank them for their continued commitment to providing essential services.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Government—investments

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.06): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Hamas attacks commencing 7 October 2023 involving the targeting and death of Israeli civilians, including women and children, the taking of hostages, and widespread rocket fire into civilian areas;
- (b) the immense loss of life and human suffering occurring in the Gaza Strip, including that of women and children due to Israeli military action;
- (c) these events occur in the context of ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories, construction of illegal settlements, and the historic displacement and apartheid treatment of the Palestinian people by the State of Israel;
- (d) that the International Court of Justice has ruled that all steps to prevent genocide in Gaza must be taken;
- (e) the impacts of the conflict and the decades of struggle are felt deeply in the ACT community; and
- (f) as a result, many communities and individuals here in Canberra:
 - (i) are facing an extremely challenging time, concerned about the safety of family, friends, and loved ones; and
 - (ii) have been subject to racist slurs and taunts based on their ethnicity or religious beliefs;

(2) calls on all Members of this Assembly to:

- (a) voice their support for:
 - (i) an immediate and permanent ceasefire;
 - (ii) a release of all hostages and political prisoners;
 - (iii) all perpetrators to be held accountable for their actions in accordance with international law;
 - (iv) reinstating and enhancing funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency; and
 - (v) ending the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and apartheid against the Palestinian population;
- (b) condemn all forms of racism, including antisemitism and islamophobia, and state these have no place here in the ACT; and
- (c) voice their support for Canberra's Palestinian and Israeli communities during this challenging time, including people seeking refuge in the ACT;

(3) further notes:

- (a) the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) maintains a database of companies complicit in the establishment and maintenance of illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territories;

- (b) as of 31 December 2023, the ACT Government held investments in the following companies listed in the UNOHCHR database:
 - (i) Airbnb Inc;
 - (ii) Alstom SA;
 - (iii) Bank Hapoalim BM;
 - (iv) Bank Leumi Le-Israel BM;
 - (v) Booking Holdings Inc;
 - (vi) Expedia Group Inc;
 - (vii) Israel Discount Bank Ltd;
 - (viii) Mizrahi Tefahot Bank Ltd; and
 - (ix) Motorola Solutions Inc; and
- (c) that the ACT Government's Responsible Investment Policy of March 2023, and its Environment, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) controversy assessment exclusions should preclude companies listed in paragraph (3)(b) as they are complicit in the human rights violations by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people;
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to report back to the Assembly by August 2024, on divestments that have or may be undertaken, to ensure that company ESG controversy assessment exclusions fully consider companies involved in illegal settlements in Palestinian territories; and
- (5) requests that the Speaker convey to the Israeli Embassy and Palestinian General Delegation a copy of this motion on behalf of the Assembly.

Gaza is in the midst of a humanitarian catastrophe. At least 27,000 people are dead or presumed dead, the overwhelming majority killed by the Israeli military. More than double that have been injured. Amongst the dead are at least 10,000 children.

According to Oxfam, the daily death toll is 250 Palestinians per day. This is the worst rate we have seen this century. In the space of just four months, the civilian death toll already exceeds that of two years of war in the Ukraine. But even these bleak statistics do not paint the full picture.

As foreign minister Penny Wong confirmed last Thursday, 400,000 Palestinians are starving, and one million people in Gaza are at risk of starvation. That is at least half of Gaza's population. Under the State of Israel's ongoing blockade, there are significant shortages of food, water, sanitation and medical supplies throughout the strip. Bombs have been dropped, seemingly indiscriminately, with significant structural damage to Gaza's infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and civilian evacuation destinations that were designated by the State of Israel itself.

The majority of the city is now uninhabitable. Evacuation orders are issued, but there is nowhere for the evacuees to actually go. People are trapped. It has developed into a humanitarian crisis with no end in sight, a form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people that, as the International Court of Justice found, could be reasonably characterised as genocidal.

Heartbreakingly, this is not out of character for the State of Israel. We can look at over a century's worth of history; but, ultimately, the Palestinian people have been oppressed and displaced for over 75 years. Most of the population of Gaza are either refugees or descended from refugees who were displaced from their homes by the State of Israel.

Wielding the power of the region's largest military force, the Israeli government, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, continues to do everything in its power to prevent the displaced and dispossessed Palestinian people from organising themselves or self-determining their own destinies. Israeli settlements continue to be illegally constructed in occupied Palestinian territories. The establishment of a Palestinian state continues to be opposed. Palestinians suffer under the apartheid rules that dictate where they can live and what civil services they can access. The Gaza Strip has been blockaded since 2005.

It is with this history and under this context of disempowerment that the militant group Hamas rose to political leadership in the Gaza Strip. On 7 October last year, Hamas staged a raid on Israeli populations in areas neighbouring the Gaza Strip. At least 1,300 people were killed and 236 people were taken hostage. Let us be clear: this was an atrocity; it was a tragedy, and it must be condemned. But it would be egregious to consider the events of 7 October outside that history and the context I mentioned.

The situation is mired in generations of animosity and hatred. The world's great powers have not been able to solve it, and it is not for the want of trying. In fact, armchair generals in far-off capitals helped to create this disaster in the first place.

Resolving what has become the most intractable conflict in modern history will only happen when the arms are laid down; when, in Jerusalem, the people of the Levant can come together and self-determine their futures in a manner that is at peace with one another. This could be a long way off, and it will take a lot of work, but the world owes it to humanity to try.

Where does this leave us? And by "us", I mean us as Canberrans. What is the role that we need to play here? In a small, subnational jurisdiction on the other side of the world, our role is small, but it has the potential to be meaningful. Our role, as with all good global citizens, is to always advocate for a peaceful future and resolution, to call for steps towards peace and to cease activities that move us further away from that goal.

Right now, that broadly means three things, which are covered in my motion today. The first is obvious: we stand in solidarity with our Palestinian and Israeli communities here in Canberra who are advocating for peace and liberty. We must display compassionate leadership, as these communities in Canberra suffer with grief, sorrow, fear and powerlessness in the face of a humanitarian disaster. In doing so, we must refuse to conflate legitimate criticism of the warmongering tactics of the modern State of Israel with antisemitism, much as we must refuse to conflate support for the Palestinian people with Islamic extremism.

We must also condemn all forms of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, wherever we see it. To those peaceful communities here in Canberra who face discriminatory slurs and racial taunts, whether it be in the schoolyard, the workplace or places of worship, we offer our support. I want us to clearly state that racism has no place in the Canberra community.

The second is to join in international calls for immediate actions to de-escalate this humanitarian disaster: an immediate and permanent ceasefire; the release of all hostages and political prisoners; for all perpetrators to be held accountable for their actions, in accordance with international law; and for ending the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and apartheid against the Palestinian population. Every step towards peace and de-escalation matters, and every additional voice in the chorus makes it stronger.

Lastly, it is imperative that we remove ourselves from any support or endorsement of activities that underwrite and perpetrate this crisis. I ask the question: in what way is it acceptable for the ACT government to be investing in and profiting from companies that are complicit with human rights violations? Why do we, as a human rights jurisdiction, derive financial benefit from these companies that are complicit in activities that are in contravention of international law?

The construction, utilisation and maintenance of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories are tangible steps that move us further away from peace. These settlements have been recognised as illegal under international law. The Human Rights Council of the United Nations has commissioned independent investigations into the impacts of these settlements on the Palestinian people. Subsequent to these investigations, in 2020, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights developed a database of companies that are complicit in the construction, utilisation and maintenance of these illegal settlements.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to table the June 2023 update to this database, which shows the 97 companies identified by the UN.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I present the following paper:

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner—OHCHR update of database of all business enterprises involved in the activities detailed in paragraph 96 of the report of the independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, dated 30 June 2023.

I struggle to understand the companies on this list—how they think running their operations in the full sight of human rights violations could possibly be okay. But here we are.

When we compare this list to the ACT government's investments, for which the last update was published online on 31 December, it emerges that there are nine matches

to the UN database, which are listed in my motion, and I have highlighted them on that list. Four of them are Israeli financial institutions that provide an essential flow of finance to help develop, expand or maintain settlements and their activities, including loans for housing and the development of business.

Three of the companies are accommodation powerhouses. Expedia Group, Booking Holdings and Airbnb are listed as companies that provide services supporting the maintenance and existence of these illegal settlements. In this case they profit from short-stay accommodation services in those occupied territories. Alstom is similarly listed, in this case for their partnership in providing transport lines into illegal settlements on Palestinian land, not to mention their activities in East Jerusalem. Lastly, Motorola has been listed for their provision of communication services in the occupied territories and, more specifically, for their provision of security equipment and related services.

I should stress that this is a rather conservative database developed by the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Companies are only listed when, after independent investigation, it is demonstrated that they are involved in the construction, utilisation and maintenance of these illegal settlements. Companies can engage with the UN to be removed from the list where they can show they have withdrawn or are withdrawing from the illegal settlements. We are dealing with the most egregious companies, most obviously complicit in the illegal occupation. We could, and probably should, be looking much broader than that, but this is a good place to start.

Divestment from these nine companies will send a very clear signal that the ACT should not be connected to or financially benefit from companies identified by the United Nations as complicit in human rights violations through these illegal settlements.

The ACT government already has a framework for the implementation of such divestments. The ACT government's Responsible Investment Policy has provisions for the exclusion of listed company shares based on an environmental, sustainability and governance controversy assessment. I quote from the policy:

The controversy assessment identifies and excludes investment where a company is assessed as having a very severe ESG controversy related to their operations, governance practices and/or products, and services that allegedly violate national or international law, as well as regulations and/or commonly accepted global norms.

The question I ask is: why shouldn't being identified by the United Nations as being complicit in the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories count as a severe controversy? I am hoping to be enlightened today. Even if one were to argue that the controversy might not have been sufficiently severe to warrant exclusion in the past, I ask: how can you argue that this is not the case in the face of this humanitarian crisis?

This is not student politics. Peace in the Middle East will not be achieved from this Assembly. I know that, just as well as our local communities do. They understand this is a highly emotive, difficult international issue that would normally sit far beyond the jurisdiction of this Assembly.

However, there are communities living right here, right now in Canberra who are struggling. These are our constituents who are calling for our compassionate leadership on this moral issue. They are trying to engage with us as their representatives. My inbox has overflowed with correspondence on this issue. They have conducted weekly protests in the 17 weeks since October last year. They are not going away. They care, and they want us to care. Some of them are here today, and I welcome their presence within the chamber. I would like to question how many members have actively engaged with their community members and their constituents on this very question.

In closing, I would like to paraphrase Mr Barr, in a motion that he spoke to on Ukraine last year. He said that our jurisdiction has a strong history of supporting and strengthening human rights, multiculturalism and diplomacy, and that the motion was a small but important opportunity to voice our support, not only for our local communities but internationally.

The decisions we make here today send important signals and help to set expectations both across the country and for our own people. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (3.19): by leave, I move the following amendments together:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(c), substitute:
 - “(c) this escalating conflict has occurred in the context of ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories, construction of illegal settlements, and displacement of the Palestinian people”.
2. After paragraph (1)(f), insert:
 - “(g) as individuals and in our collective society we all have responsibility to act with humanity in our actions and reactions;
 - (h) the conflict in Gaza and Israel has and continues to challenge the commitment to humanity of the actors of this conflict as well as the global community; and
 - (i) the impacts of the conflict and the decades of struggle that have led to this point are felt deeply in the ACT community”.
3. Omit paragraphs (2) to (4), substitute:
 - “(2) that all Members of this Assembly accordingly voice their support for:
 - (a) key elements of the Prime Minister's motion of 16 October 2023, as passed with bipartisan support in the House of Representatives, and in particular:
 - (i) justice and freedom for Israelis and Palestinians alike;
 - (ii) international efforts to establish and maintain humanitarian access into Gaza, including safe passage for civilians;
 - (iii) the Australian Government's ongoing efforts to provide consular assistance to affected Australians and to facilitate the departure of those who want to leave the region;

- (iv) the motion's condemnation of all forms of hate speech and violent extremist activity, including antisemitism and Islamophobia; and
- (v) affirmation in the strongest possible terms that hateful prejudice has no place in Australia;
- (b) a permanent humanitarian ceasefire;
- (c) release of all hostages and political prisoners;
- (d) all perpetrators of human rights violations and unlawful killings to be held accountable for their actions in accordance with international law;
- (e) restoration of humanitarian aid to the civilian population; and
- (f) withdrawal from internationally agreed Palestinian territories;
- (3) further calls on all Members of this Assembly to:
 - (a) act with responsibility and thoughtfulness as representatives of the ACT community, to ensure to the best of our ability that all members in our community have their rights upheld, and that our actions serve to alleviate the negative impacts this conflict is having on ACT residents;
 - (b) continue to condemn antisemitism, islamophobia, and racism, and state these have no place here in the ACT; and
 - (c) voice their support for Canberra's Jewish, Palestinian, and other affected communities and individuals during this challenging time, including people seeking refuge in the ACT;
- (4) that this Assembly further notes:
 - (a) the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) maintains a database of companies involved in one of ten defined activities (paragraph 96 A/HRC/22/63) that raise particular human rights violations concerns regarding Israeli settlements throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with 97 companies currently listed that have, directly and indirectly, enabled, facilitated and profited from the construction and growth of the settlements;
 - (b) as of 31 December 2023, the ACT Government held investments in the following companies listed in the UNOHCHR database:
 - (i) Airbnb Inc;
 - (ii) Alstom SA;
 - (iii) Bank Hapoalim BM;
 - (iv) Bank Leumi Le-Israel BM;
 - (v) Booking Holdings Inc;
 - (vi) Expedia Group Inc;
 - (vii) Israel Discount Bank Ltd;
 - (viii) Mizrahi Tefahot Bank Ltd; and
 - (ix) Motorola Solutions Inc; and
 - (c) the ACT Government's Responsible Investment Policy of March 2023 includes an Environment, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) controversy assessment that identifies and excludes investment where a company is assessed as having a very severe ESG controversy related

to their operations, governance practices, and/or products and services that allegedly violates national or international laws, regulations and/or commonly accepted global norms; and

- (5) calls on the ACT Government, following advice from the Investment Advisory Board regarding the current policy settings, to report back to the Assembly by the end of August 2024 on divestments that have or may be undertaken, to ensure that company ESG controversy exclusions fully consider companies involved in, or profiting from, any human rights violations, including the illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territories.”.

I thank Mr Braddock for his motion this afternoon. I state at the outset, and I hope I speak on behalf of all members of the Assembly, that our hearts go out to the people who are suffering through this conflict. It is hard to avoid seeing the pain and suffering in all forms of media every single day, and we particularly note the harm that children and young people are experiencing at this time.

It is a natural human instinct, whenever we see pain and destruction in the world, to think about what we can do as individuals and what forces we could possibly marshal to help. We must also consider what we, as representatives of our community, can do within our own jurisdiction to best help people who are living in Canberra and are being negatively affected by this conflict. As Mr Braddock has touched upon, we are, in large part, powerless from our jurisdiction to affect the course of the conflict; but we are certainly in a position to support and care for our fellow Canberrans in what we say and what we do. There is no doubt that there are many people living in Canberra who have loved ones living in the conflict zone or are subject to the indiscriminate missile attacks and violence of the Hamas incursion.

I have brought forward a series of amendments to Mr Braddock’s motion this afternoon, with a view to try to find agreement in this place to support our local communities and promote harmony and mutual respect. My aim, in bringing forward the amendments—and my office and colleagues have been working with both the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens—has been to try to find as much common ground as possible. I acknowledge and thank both other parties in this place for seriously engaging on that. I think the amendments do find a lot of common ground; but I acknowledge that there are still some words, phrases and sentences within both the original motion and my amendments that may still cause some concern. I acknowledge that. This is an issue about which there are obviously many different perspectives. We have done our best to try to bring this place together and I think we have got quite close. I acknowledge the efforts of members from all parties to achieve that.

The promotion of harmony and mutual respect at this time is very important for Canberra. I also think it is important that we take the opportunity in this debate to reiterate where there is, I believe, agreement across the three parties. There are the key elements of a motion that was moved by the Prime Minister in the commonwealth parliament that achieved near universal support shortly after the horrific attacks of 7 October. I acknowledge that much has happened since then. We have seen the impact of Israel’s response against the Hamas attacks on the Palestinian civil population. I think it is worth quoting what the Prime Minister said in that debate. He said:

The Palestinian people are suffering greatly, and this suffering has impacted on generations of Palestinians. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which is home to two million people, is deteriorating rapidly.

That is why I believe our focus should be on recognition and support for the human rights of civilians who are caught up in this conflict and are fleeing human rights abuses.

An element of my amendments seeks to effectively describe, by quoting the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the database of companies involved in defined activities. The companies that Mr Braddock has listed, nine of them, are held as investments by the territory's Superannuation Provision Account. The database involves what is described as defined activities. The use of the word "complicit", in an attempt to perhaps be a catch-all, is not the language that the UN uses. I think that is an important distinction and why it is in the amendments, and why my amendments set out the steps that the government will take in reviewing holdings of the Superannuation Provision Account in a structured and considered way.

We have an investment review advisory board and we have, as Mr Braddock indicated, a set of screening guidelines that are used by our fund managers. It is certainly appropriate to review that in light of this information. That is the reason for the amendments. That section of the amendments focuses specifically on a direct quote from the UN office.

I commend the three separate parts in the amendments that, as I say, seek to find as much common ground as possible. I again thank each political party for the sincerity and good faith in the discussions that have occurred in the lead-up to debating this motion this afternoon. We might not have reached a position where we will have complete unanimity on every single word in the motion and the amendments, but I do acknowledge the genuine goodwill that has been brought to try to get to that point. I think there are only a small number of differences. That is important, and it is important that this effort was made so that we could demonstrate to our community—despite the fact that we have often quite significant political differences on many issues and we spend a lot of time debating those things—that we may be able to come together and be as united as we possibly can be in support of ACT residents who are affected by this horrible conflict.

I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (3.27): The attacks on Israel by Hamas on 7 October last year shocked everyone around the world. Over 1,200 Jewish people were killed—the biggest loss of Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust. Sadly, conflict has been a part of life for many in the Middle East for a long time, but the heinous attacks on 7 October by Hamas, the targeting of innocent civilians and the taking of hostages—many of them women and children—were horrific and we must condemn these actions in the strongest possible way.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, our thoughts and sympathies go to all members of the Jewish community here in Canberra who have lost loved ones and are suffering as a result of these horrific attacks. Today I reinforce the Canberra Liberals' position that

we stand with Israel and recognise its inherent right to defend itself. We also acknowledge the devastating loss of Palestinian life and that innocent civilians on all sides are suffering. We recognise that Hamas does not represent Palestinian people, nor their legitimate needs and aspirations. As with all conflict, it is often the innocent who suffer the most; and the loss of any civilian life, especially children, whether they are Israeli or Palestinian, is a tragedy. But we must not lose sight of the provocative action that initiated this war. Hamas still holds more than 100 hostages captive, many of whom are innocent women and children who have suffered unimaginably.

As leaders, we must condemn antisemitism, Islamophobia and any form of racism. Sadly, we have seen events taking place around the country which promoted antisemitism. I, like many Canberrans, were deeply disturbed to see such behaviour occurring in Australia. As leaders in the ACT, it is our responsibility to condemn in the strongest possible terms any event or behaviour that seeks to celebrate the atrocities we are witnessing in the Middle East, and I will continue to do that.

In relation to the divestment issue, I note that the ACT government has in place its responsible investment policy, and Mr Barr's amendments indicate that the government will be seeking advice from the Investment Advisory Board on these matters in light of current events, and that process should run its course.

In relation to Australian funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, there have been a number of concerns raised over the years about this organisation, including that it is using its resources to encourage antisemitism and support extremist ideologies. It is extremely disturbing to see recent allegations that UNRWA staff may themselves have been involved in the 7 October atrocities. I note that the federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Penny Wong, has paused funding to UNRWA while an investigation is underway. Humanitarian support is vital in Gaza for genuine civilians, but it must be delivered in ways that do not support or benefit Hamas in any way.

Like Mr Barr, I also acknowledge the genuine and sincere effort that was made by Mr Barr's office and my office, and of course with Mr Braddock as well, to seek some type of agreement on the amendment. But we are disappointed because we had, of course, worked in good faith in the understanding that it would be in line with the motion that was passed at the federal parliament level and received bipartisan support from both coalition and Labor members. Whilst there are parts of Mr Barr's motion that we do not dispute, as a whole we are not in a position to support them as they do not accurately reflect the bipartisan agreement that was reached by our counterparts in the federal parliament. For those reasons, the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendments.

In finishing, it is important to note and hear the words of Eddie Jaku, the author of *The Happiest Man on Earth*, who said:

There are always miracles in the world, even when it seems dark.

Indeed, let's hope so.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (3.32): Right now, in Gaza, the world is witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe. The ongoing immense loss of life and human suffering is staggering. As of this week, the UN estimates that approximately 100,000 people in Gaza have been killed, injured or are missing since the start of the recent outbreak in conflict. Staggeringly, 17,000 children are estimated to be unaccompanied or separated from their parents in Gaza. Medical personnel and journalists have been killed in an unprecedented number. More than 80 per cent of the population of Gaza has been displaced, and around 60 per cent of all buildings have been destroyed or damaged. Some of the oldest mosques and churches in the world have been destroyed, along with almost all hospital infrastructure, universities and schools. This disaster must end.

The attack by Hamas on 7 October was a horrific act. The killing of 1,200 people and the taking of hostages were atrocities and should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. These were acts of terror. The perpetrators of this abhorrent violence should be held accountable. Human rights are universal and the killing of civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, is always wrong. We will never find peace with even more escalating violence responding to violence.

I join my colleagues today in calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire. It is the only way to prevent further civilian casualties and bring peace to the region. But I, too, acknowledge, as a subnational jurisdiction on the other side of the planet, that our calls alone will not solve this conflict. Further, I support the release of all hostages and political prisoners. Our collective humanity is weakened when civilians are used as targets, shields and tools for bargaining.

Also, I urge for the urgent restoration of humanitarian aid funding by the commonwealth government. The commonwealth government has pledged over \$46 million in aid since October. Its urgent recommencement is needed to save lives. The World Health Organization estimates that 93 per cent of the population in Gaza is facing crisis levels of hunger, with insufficient food and high levels of malnutrition. This ongoing suffering is incompatible with our humanity.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by both the scale of suffering in Gaza and the distance from our home here in Australia; but there are, of course, tangible actions that we can and should take as a government to address this humanitarian crisis. A core principle of this government is that public money should only be spent with businesses that uphold high ethical standards. The government's investments should be held to that same high ethical standard. That is why I support the ACT government seeking advice on the current policy settings for our investments and the consideration of companies involved in or profiting from any human rights violations, including the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, and then taking all relevant actions to support human rights.

This has been an incredibly difficult time for our community, and I offer my support in solidarity to those who are suffering. Canberra is a diverse and inclusive city, but I know that Canberrans have been the subject of racist slurs and attacks through their ethnicity or religion—even children. Islamophobia and antisemitism have no place in

the ACT and must be strongly condemned. Every Canberran should feel safe and included in Canberra, full stop. Unfortunately, the death and destruction in Gaza, West Bank and Israel means that many Canberrans do not feel safe right now. I know Canberrans are waking up every day with the anxiety of checking if their family members have survived another day in this conflict. As long as this continues, these Canberrans will continue to suffer.

I urge all members in this place to support the Chief Minister's amendments. They are considered and I think they are wise. We in this place should add our voices to those across the world and locally here in Canberra, in calling for a permanent ceasefire and peace for both Palestinian and Israeli people.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (3.37): I rise to speak in support of Mr Braddock's motion. The Greens are calling for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and a free Palestine. The ripples of events unfolding in Gaza right now are being felt deeply by the Palestinian community in Canberra. These are events that have impacted on the family and friends of many people who are our friends and families. I acknowledge those who are here today in the gallery, particularly my friends Lena and Tamara, who have really helped me with this speech today.

Already, at least 27,000 Palestinians have been killed. This government cannot, in good conscience, continue to support a regime committing genocide. This government cannot, in good conscience, continue to support a regime bombing hospitals, bombing schools and bombing refugee camps, all resulting in the loss of life of thousands of innocent Palestinians. As members of the global community and as elected representatives, we should all stand in solidarity with the struggle for Palestinian liberation. We have an obligation to stand up, speak out and fight for justice. What is happening in Gaza is horrifying. It is hard to comprehend the scale of the devastation.

As Mr Pettersson has outlined, already over 27,000 Palestinians have been murdered in this conflict. More than 85 per cent of the population has been displaced. Two-and-a-half million people have been forced to relocate within an area that was already one of the most densely populated places on the planet, smaller than half the size of Canberra. This overcrowded, unsanitary environment is ripe for disease. It is estimated that more than a quarter of a million people are about to die from starvation. This must stop. I am sick to the stomach when I hear people justifying the mass execution of innocent Palestinian civilians, the denial of human rights and the denial of safety, because there is absolutely no way that you can justify what is happening right now, each day, to the people of Gaza.

After over 75 years of occupation, apartheid and blockade, we cannot be surprised by the conflict in that region. History has shown us time and again that you cannot displace an entire people and take away their land without massive upheaval, sorrow, pain and injustice. Nothing justifies ongoing war crimes, collective punishment and the serious risk of genocide occurring in Gaza. There has been serious and compelling evidence put before the International Court of Justice that the state of Israel is committing the crime of genocide. This is something we cannot ignore. To do so would be an abhorrent abdication of our responsibilities as parliamentarians.

Some will argue that, as a local government, this is not our business. To that, I say: defending human rights and calling for peace is all of our business. As representatives of our local community, we can and must join our voices to the calls for peace and justice. Each week, the ACT Greens have joined hundreds of our local community members calling for more action from the federal government. We have spoken at rallies in solidarity, joining our voices to the international chorus calling for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and a free Palestine. As elected members of the local community, we can shine a light and give voice to those who are ignored and silenced.

If you watch the Murdoch media, you could be excused for not getting a true picture of the impact of the conflict from a Palestinian perspective. I am going to paint a picture, because every day Palestinians are living in horror, fearing for the lives of the people they love. Palestinians are waking up each morning and calling their families to find out if they are still alive. Palestinians are waking up to hear of a new war crime each and every day—the bombing of a childcare centre, a hospital or a refugee camp, where people have been told they will be safe.

I want to share the story of Lana and Mohammed Ghassan Radwan. It is a distressing and upsetting story. At the ages of six and 11, they had dreams, like all children. Mohammed, like my kids, dreamt of becoming a football player and, like my kids, was excited to attend a local football match, but he did not make it. Two days before her death, Lana sent a video to her sister saying she did not want to die, she did not want to be torn to pieces, and that she missed her school and her friends. Lana and Mohammed died in an Israeli air strike on their home, along with their mother and siblings, on 17 October 2023. This is just one family whose lives have ended, leaving their families devastated. Their lives are left un-lived. All this suffering of the innocent civilian population is completely preventable. Less than 100 kilometres away, other human beings are living comfortably in Tel Aviv.

Palestinians deserve the same right to a good life as everyone else. Right now, governments across Australia are complicit in supporting a regime committing war crimes, whether it be through supplying weapons to commit war crimes or cutting aid funding, as the Australian government has done, or investing in companies that support the illegal occupation of Palestine, as the ACT government is currently doing. We need to ensure that the ACT government is not complicit. We need to divest. Divestment is a tangible action and a signal that we will not stand by and allow war crimes to go unchecked.

I would like to thank my colleague Mr Braddock for his work on this motion. We need an immediate ceasefire. We need an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. We need a free Palestine. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.45): I have lost count of how many speeches I have given at rallies, protests and vigils for the more than 27,000 Palestinian people who have been killed, including more than 13,000 children and over 600 healthcare workers—children, refugees, aid workers, journalists.

The peace movement is what got me to start attending rallies and protests decades ago, and peace was the cause for the first protest I ever helped organise. It is something I still believe in. I have been at these protests, week after week with my Greens colleagues, just 500 metres away from this building. I have seen the Greens member for Yerrabi there, the Greens member for Ginninderra, both the Greens members for Kurrajong, and our newly elected Greens member for Brindabella. I know that they are committed to this.

Those of us in government have the privilege of representing the people in our community—and it is a privilege. Politicians are dispensable. It is our job to listen and to act. The Labor Party said that Israel has a right to defend itself, but to defend itself from what? From children, from hospitals, from refugee camps? These are not acts of defence and they never were, and there must be no excusing the inexcusable. Bombing hospitals and refugee camps is not an act of defence. What is happening is genocide.

The Australian government cannot pretend that they have no role in this. Until the Australian Labor and Liberal parties call for an end to the genocide, an end to Australia's military support for Israel and support for a free Palestine, the Labor and Liberal parties are complicit. But the Greens will not be, and I will not be. So, as a Greens minister in the ACT government, I call for a ceasefire. As a Greens minister in the ACT government, I call for an end to the occupation of Gaza. As a Greens minister in the ACT government, I call for a free Palestine.

I am here to work alongside our kind, compassionate community, who recognise the pain, the suffering, the mourning and the grief that is currently being experienced. This pain is being felt across Canberra, across Australia and around the world. The Greens are working in solidarity with the global community that is using people power to demand an end to the violence. Violence degrades and weakens the bonds that tie us all together, right when we most need to remember our common humanity and that what we all want is the power of love and not a love of power, because that shared part of our humanity is the basis for lasting peace. Australia must be a strong voice in an international push for peace and de-escalation.

Blocking access to food supplies in Gaza means more than 350,000 children under five years old are at risk of starvation. UNICEF predicted just two weeks ago that child wasting, when a child under five is more than two standard deviations under the World Health Organisation median weight for height, is expected to increase in Gaza by more than 30 per cent in coming weeks, affecting up to 10,000 children. The World Health Organisation reports that people in southern Gaza are also unable to access clean water and medical supplies without humanitarian aid assistance. Those most susceptible to the health impacts of unclean water, starvation and lack of medical support are the elderly, small children and babies, and people with other health conditions.

The ICJ's decision must be supported by the Australian government, and that includes reinstating funding for humanitarian aid through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—UNRWA. Foreign minister Penny Wong should be ashamed of every day that children continue to go without aid as a result of federal Labor's previous decision to stop that critical funding.

It is not enough to agree in principle that humanitarian aid funding should be restarted; actually turn the tap back on. Humanitarian aid is not a reward-based system for those who comply with the ruling power of the day. It is radical love in action. You do not give that love to get something in return. You give that love, you give the support needed for survival, because all human beings are worthy of love. Radical love means you do not look away when you see someone is in pain. You bear witness so that they do not carry that suffering alone, because it is when your heart breaks that mercy can flow through.

As a community of kind, connected, and compassionate people, Canberrans will, of course, want to provide support to refugees who come to our city. As the minister responsible for food relief and material aid, and for mental health services in the ACT, I am committed to doing all that I can for people in the ACT who need this support.

Mr Braddock's motion calls on the ACT government to take steps towards divestment from companies involved in illegal settlements in Palestinian territories. He is not asking for something unachievable by a small city-state far from the frontline of the war. He is asking us to take a simple action that is open to us, as the ACT government, to reduce economic support for companies complicit in human rights violations. If members cannot bring themselves to support this motion with the amendment, may the people of the ACT remember this at the next election and vote for people with some humanity to take their place.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.50): I rise in support of Mr Braddock's motion and to support and reiterate the comments that Mr Braddock has already made. Those facts about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza that Mr Braddock has put on the record are shocking for all of us to hear, and they bear reflecting upon: more than 27,000 people dead, or presumed dead, and as many as 13,000 children; more than double that injured; and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians starving.

Gaza is a city being destroyed, and the Palestinian people are being destroyed. All of us in parliaments all around the world need to acknowledge and take action on that.

One of the things we can do, as a local government, is to disconnect our investments from the entities that are recognised as being complicit in these activities. That is an important statement. We have a responsible investment policy, and it is important to extend it to these recognised problematic companies.

More broadly, as Mr Braddock said, we need to lend our voices to the international calls for ceasefire, and I welcome the comments from colleagues in the chamber today that have expressed that. I think, sometimes, as was touched on in the discussion, we can feel powerless at this great distance, but it is through the building of a global movement calling for these sorts of actions that we can generate the pressure and the momentum to change what is happening at the moment.

We need to stand in solidarity with our local Palestinian and Israeli communities, who would advocate for peace and liberty in the Middle East. We also must condemn all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, wherever we see it. That is certainly a duty that we have right here in the ACT. It is a practical difference that we can make.

Issues of racism and anti-Semitism can become confused and challenging in this debate. But I want to emphasise this fact: it is not anti-Semitic and it is not racist to stand up against atrocities that are being committed in Palestine. These protests and calls of condemnation are only to do with the actions of the state of Israel and have nothing to do with Jewish people. Of course, many Jewish people have also been vocal in condemning the actions of the state of Israel and the atrocities committed. They are all people who care about humanity and care about stopping atrocities, regardless of race or religion.

I have seen that, unfortunately, there have been reports of racism or vilification in our community in conjunction with this conflict—people targeting their fellow civilians with Islamophobic or anti-Semitic attacks. I and the Greens absolutely condemn that behaviour. In this time we must stand together and support each other. We must all work hard to make the Canberra community welcoming for those in the Palestinian, Jewish and other communities who choose to live here. On behalf of the Greens, I again extend our support and friendship to all the diverse communities living here in our city.

I also want to re-emphasise, as I have said before, that we condemn all human rights and war crimes across Palestine and Israel—crimes by Hamas and by Israel. The crimes by Hamas—the killing of civilians and the kidnappings—are truly horrifying. War crimes and crimes against humanity should and must stop. We grieve with those who have lost loved ones. We reject and condemn all forms of violence, especially against civilians.

Let me return to the situation currently unfolding in Gaza. Evacuation orders are issued, but there is nowhere for evacuees to actually go. People are trapped. It has developed into a humanitarian crisis with no end in sight, and the state of Israel is showing little to no interest in the damage it is causing. In fact, it looks like a deliberate intent to cause as much damage as possible to collectively punish the Palestinian people and to ethnically cleanse them from the strip. It does look like a genocidal attack on the Palestinians.

When we start talking about genocide, be it hypothetical or real, we need to remember that there is an international genocide convention expressly established to prevent it. The International Court of Justice in the Hague, at the behest of South Africa—a state that knows what it is like to live under a regime of apartheid and dispossession and come out the other side—is investigating whether what is happening in Palestine constitutes genocide. Settling that case in judicial terms will no doubt take many years. Nonetheless, part of the point of the court's work is to make orders for the prevention of genocide, not just to point the finger at those who have done it in the past. The ICJ has issued some preliminary orders. It is the court's view that:

... at least some of the acts and omissions alleged by South Africa to have been committed by Israel in Gaza appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the Convention.

So the case has been made; it has been found plausible, and if Israel does not want to be found guilty of genocide it needs to change its behaviour. Again, as the International Court of Justice has ordered, Israel must do everything in its power to prevent the commission of genocide, including:

... all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to members of the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip.

The ICJ also said:

The State of Israel shall take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip ...

This is incredibly damning of the conduct of the state of Israel. It highlights how overwhelmingly disproportionate to the circumstances the behaviour of the Israeli government and military has been in these circumstances. They are playing the role of the aggressor in this situation, not the defender.

The Secretary General of Amnesty International, Agnès Callamard, has observed that the most effective means for Israel's compliance with the ICJ's preliminary orders would be for the implementation of an immediate ceasefire. A ceasefire would create the space for de-escalation of the conflict, the exchange of hostages and the provision of humanitarian aid. It would provide the space to find a peaceful solution, and the rest of the world has a role to play in that, in backing a peaceful solution.

In conclusion, I again express my support for a permanent ceasefire. I condemn the violence and extend my support and solidarity to Canberra's Palestinian and Israeli communities—those who seek peace. I support Mr Braddock's motion, including its call to expand the scope of the ACT's responsible investment strategy.

Ordered that the question be divided.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.58): I move the following amendment to Mr Barr's proposed amendment No 1:

Omit paragraph (1)(c), substitute:

“(c) this escalating conflict has occurred in the context of ongoing occupation of the Palestinian Territories, construction of illegal settlements, apartheid, and displacement of the Palestinian people”.

The Greens do not support the removal of the references to apartheid in Palestine. This is a very real situation—a separation wall, not unlike the infamous Berlin wall—and it is constructed by Israel, run through the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinians require special papers to travel and they are constrained in where they can live, where they can work, what medical services they can access and even where they can go to school. Israeli security tends to shoot first and ask questions later when dealing with Palestinians.

If we in this Assembly do not recognise this as apartheid, it should be considered that this is what has been concluded by South Africa, a nation with the closest experience of apartheid in this world, as well as other organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Commission of Jurists. This is the lived reality of the Palestinians.

Question put:

That **Mr Braddock's** amendment to **Mr Barr's** proposed amendment No 1 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Andrew Braddock
Jo Clay
Emma Davidson
Laura Nuttall
Shane Rattenbury
Rebecca Vassarotti

Noes 17

Andrew Barr	Nicole Lawder
Yvette Berry	Elizabeth Lee
Peter Cain	Suzanne Orr
Leanne Castley	Mark Parton
Tara Cheyne	Marisa Paterson
Ed Cocks	Michael Pettersson
Mick Gentleman	Chris Steel
Jeremy Hanson	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Elizabeth Kikkert	

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Question put:

That **Mr Barr's** amendment No 1 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Shane Rattenbury
Jo Clay	Chris Steel
Emma Davidson	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Mick Gentleman	Rebecca Vassarotti
Laura Nuttall	

Noes 8

Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
Elizabeth Kikkert
Nicole Lawder
Elizabeth Lee
Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.06): I wish to speak quickly to the remainder of Mr Barr's amendments. It must be a negotiated agreement where everyone is not entirely happy with the results. There is some additional information and context provided in the rest of Labor's amendments, most of which I am comfortable with. In fact, I would have included much of it myself if I had not been constrained to 500 words. This includes discussion of our responsibility to act with humanity and with more specific reference to the UN resolution which created the company database.

There are, however, some elements I wish to discuss in a bit more detail. In the new (1)(h) Labor makes reference to the conflict in Gaza and Israel. This overlooks the fact that the conflict extends beyond Gaza and into the West Bank. To be accurate, the reference should be to Palestine and Israel. The amendment also inserts reference to a motion by the Prime Minister in the commonwealth parliament on 16 October. I want to be clear: that was a very bad motion, with some terms that I will not repeat here. What makes this amendment tolerable to us is the fact that it is constrained to key elements of that particular motion. Of those listed, we are in agreement that they are important principles.

I also draw attention to “a permanent humanitarian ceasefire,” which is included in the amendment, rather than “an immediate and permanent ceasefire,” which was included in my original motion. Putting that kind of qualifier on and taking the immediacy off tells me that people are not seeing the sense of urgency that is required. The daily death toll is 250 people. The fighting has to stop and it has to stop now.

In terms of removing the reference to UNRWA, I am going to take this as an admission that there is a requirement to reinstate humanitarian aid as soon as possible back into the Gaza Strip. You can see this in Minister Penny Wong’s comments, where she talked about why Australia has funded UNRWA for so long—that they are the only organisation capable of actually providing the humanitarian aid that Palestine needs and that, without it, a million people are at risk of starvation. We know the state of Israel wants UNRWA disbanded. It is obvious that Labor bowed to lobbying pressure when they decided to withdraw that funding, and now they are looking to desperately try to backpedal.

Finally, there is some clarification around the language used about companies that are complicit in the illegal occupation of settlements in Palestine. I think the proposed words are weaker, but if that is what it takes to get this motion passed by the Assembly I am prepared to work with that.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (4.09): Mr Deputy Speaker, as you have obviously heard in the contributions from other members, I endeavoured to get as much unanimity as I possibly could. I do not think I would be the first person in the history of this terrible conflict who has tried to find consensus prior to bringing often very, very strongly held opposing views to some form of consensus.

I thank members for the nature of this debate. It could have been handled in a very different way. This place cops a lot of criticism at times for not being a mature place of debate. Our collective efforts in trying to find compromise today set a pretty good example, frankly, for what I have observed has happened in other parliaments, even in our country. I thank and acknowledge members for the way in which this debate has taken place. Words do mean a lot. My responsibility as Chief Minister, very clearly in this context, is to not seek to divide my own community or to inflame tensions or to score political points out of an enormous tragedy.

I again thank members for their efforts to try to reach compromise. I thank Mr Braddock. I know that some things here are not 100 per cent what he wanted.

I acknowledge Ms Lee and the Canberra Liberals. We made great efforts to try to find consensus, and I think there are many elements of this motion that they are more comfortable with than what sits on the notice paper. Sometimes we just cannot reach agreement on every single word, but I thank members for that intent, for bringing an open mind and an open heart to try to get to this point. There will probably be another division on the balance of the amendments, but I think this collective effort will leave the final agreed motion by this Assembly as a better motion that has more elements of support across the chamber, and I thank members for that.

Mr Barr's amendment No 2 agreed to.

Question put:

That **Mr Barr's** amendment No 3 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15		Noes 8
Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr	Peter Cain
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson	Leanne Castley
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Ed Cocks
Tara Cheyne	Shane Rattenbury	Jeremy Hanson
Jo Clay	Chris Steel	Elizabeth Kikkert
Emma Davidson	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Nicole Lawder
Mick Gentleman	Rebecca Vassarotti	Elizabeth Lee
Laura Nuttall		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.14): I wish to thank the Chief Minister and Labor for their support of key elements of the motion today. I want to reflect briefly on what that means. Interstate and federally, my Greens counterparts have attempted to move motions in their own parliaments calling for ceasefires, other similar actions and support for peace in Palestine, but I think this is the first time that we will have Labor and the Greens agreeing on a resolution on the Gaza conflict. That speaks to our maturity as a progressive jurisdiction that is able to debate challenging issues.

At the annual reports hearings last year, when I first brought the question of divestment from companies complicit in illegal Israeli settlements to the Chief Minister, it was dismissed out of hand. Today we have demonstrated that we have the sensibility to recognise that financially benefiting from companies that are involved in or profit from illegal settlements and occupied territories is not okay. I thank the Chief Minister for listening. It is my personal hope that this will be the moment that will inspire a turning point in how our federal and interstate counterparts view this crisis.

What is going on in Gaza is not okay. The continuation of decades of dispossession and disempowerment in Palestine is not okay. Our ongoing support for companies that

are involved in or profit from settling in occupied Palestinian territories, in contravention of international law, should not be okay. We will add our voice to the chorus that is calling for peaceful resolution of what is happening right now in the Gaza Strip. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 8

Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr	Peter Cain
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson	Leanne Castley
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Ed Cocks
Tara Cheyne	Shane Rattenbury	Jeremy Hanson
Jo Clay	Chris Steel	Elizabeth Kikkert
Emma Davidson	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Nicole Lawder
Mick Gentleman	Rebecca Vassarotti	Elizabeth Lee
Laura Nuttall		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra—cost of living

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.19): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) recent analysis by Numbeo, the world's largest cost of living database, has confirmed that Canberra has the highest cost of living in Australia;
- (b) the cost for Canberrans to visit their general practitioner is the second highest in the country;
- (c) Canberra remains the second most expensive city in which to rent;
- (d) Canberra has the highest vehicle registration costs in the country;
- (e) Canberra is the most expensive state or territory in the country for children's sport, including swimming lessons; and
- (f) Canberra remains the second most expensive city in Australia to buy a house;

(2) further notes:

- (a) that Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that while living costs for all household types are increasing, it is employee households (households earning wages) that have recorded the largest annual increase in living costs of all household types, with a 9.0 percent increase;

- (b) community groups such as the ACT Council of Social Services are seeing, largely for the first time, a significant increase in people on incomes – i.e. wage earners, accessing their services; and
 - (c) the latest ABS figures show retail spending in the ACT fell 3.8 percent in December, well above the national rate of 2.7 percent, demonstrating that Canberrans are really feeling the pinch; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Labor-Greens Government to:
- (a) explain to the people of Canberra why cost of living in the ACT is so high under their Government; and
 - (b) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in March on measures to alleviate cost of living pressures for all Canberrans.

In every single budget this term, Mr Barr has claimed that he is assisting Canberrans with the cost-of-living pressures. This first started after being dragged by the Canberra Liberals to include a cost-of-living statement. Mr Barr declared:

A range of cost of living pressures are outside the influence of governments. Examples include interest rate increases, general market forces and the decisions of independent pricing authorities.

He went on to say:

The Government is committed to supporting households meet the cost of living where possible. This means supporting a strong economy and protecting jobs, limiting the impact of changes in taxes and fees, providing consistently high quality services through sustainable revenue, and delivering targeted assistance to lower income households.

Mr Barr, as Treasurer, has contradicted almost every single declaration that he made in that first cost-of-living budget statement. Let us have a look. Supporting a strong economy? After his last budget, S&P downgraded the territory's AAA credit rating because of the ACT government's "rise in the expenses of large infrastructure programs which are delaying fiscal recovery". To make it worse, this government has racked up billions of dollars worth of debt and an interest bill of over \$614 million. That is over \$1.6 million a day and growing. Mr Barr, who talks about assisting Canberrans with the cost-of-living crisis, continues to borrow billions of dollars, which Canberrans will be paying for decades and generations to come.

Let us take another point: limiting the impact of changes in taxes and fees on households. There is no chance of that. Since the 2012-13 budget Mr Barr has been double-dipping on Canberrans' rates and conveyance duty. Since he started the taxation reform agenda—which, by the way, he promised would be revenue-neutral—he has collected nearly triple the amount of tax from Canberrans.

Despite collecting hundreds of millions of dollars in extra taxes, the Treasurer has continued increasing other charges, making the ACT one of the most expensive jurisdictions to register a vehicle, to run a business, to buy and rent a home, to visit a GP, to register your child to participate in sport, and to register your child for swimming lessons. After more than a decade in charge of the ACT's budget, the

Treasurer has achieved one thing: he has made the ACT one of the most expensive jurisdictions in the country for almost everything.

After more than a decade in charge of the ACT's budget, the Treasurer has failed to use the levers that are within the control of the local government to provide cost-of-living relief for thousands of Canberrans doing it tough. The result is that low- and middle-income families have been slugged with some of the highest taxes and charges in the country and have received no meaningful relief from this government. ACTCOSS revealed during estimates that for the first time they were seeing a significant increase in people on middle incomes accessing their services. These are the people that this government has abandoned while they foist higher taxes, rates, government charges and registration costs on them.

Since Mr Barr became Treasurer, the revenue this government collects from general rates has almost tripled. Registration costs for passenger vehicles have increased by almost \$200. Mr Barr continues to collect more revenue from stamp duty than he did in 2012-13, when, supposedly, that tax was being phased out.

As a result of Mr Barr's fiscal mismanagement, it is not surprising that the world's largest cost of living database, Numbeo, confirmed that the ACT has the highest cost of living in Australia. At the same time, ABS data show that, whilst these costs are increasing for all households, it is those earning wages that are feeling the biggest increase in cost-of-living pressures.

I received an email from a constituent last week that sums up just how low to middle income families in Canberra feel they are being treated by this government. The email said:

When we moved to Canberra we didn't account for the very high cost of living compared to Brisbane. We are the definition of the working poor, and it is predominantly because no government agency is willing to give us real meaningful support. My income puts us in a social bracket that doesn't qualify us for government support with child care, but at the same time when we go to the bank for a personal loan they say our cashflow is not enough to guarantee the amounts of the personal loan we need to manage our life. As a result, we are considering relocating back to Brisbane for a job that pays less but at least the cost of living will be bearable.

Let me repeat that: my constituent is considering relocating out of Canberra for a lower paying job because "at least the cost of living will be bearable". This is the type of story that I am hearing every day from Canberrans. There are people out there who know that the Greens-Labor government have abandoned them—the government that have been in power for over two decades and that have failed to support Canberra families. If they wanted to help, surely they would have done something now.

In contrast, the Canberra Liberals have been listening to the people who email us, who come and talk to us when we are out at street stalls, who talk to us when we are doorknocking, who talk to us at events. We have announced measures—very real, very meaningful measures—that will support many, many Canberra families.

We understand that parents face large expenses from school uniforms, stationery, school equipment and registration for sport. That is why we announced that, if elected, we will provide parents with a \$150 back-to-school voucher for each school-enrolled child. We also know that families are burdened with very large up-front costs for extracurricular and sporting activities, with the ACT being the jurisdiction with the highest costs associated with registration for kids' sport, and that is why we will offer a \$100 voucher to parents, for each child, to contribute to registration, tuition or other creative activities that their children may enjoy.

We have also committed to extending free public transport to all students, including vocational and university students, in addition to seniors and concession card holders. Not only does this simplify the current fare system but it will also provide relief for parents whose children catch public transport to and from school. This measure will also ensure that university and vocational students will be able to travel to and from class for free, providing targeted relief for Canberrans who are starting their careers.

The Canberra Liberals will also provide a \$100 rebate off all light passenger vehicles, campervans and caravans registered in the ACT. I have already spoken about the Labor-Greens tax grab on registration costs, which have increased by almost \$200 in the space of 10 years, making the ACT the most expensive jurisdiction in which to register a vehicle, campervan or caravan. Our plan is to ensure that Canberrans are provided with relief for these exorbitant registration costs, these costs that Canberrans have been paying that have increased by over \$200 over the last 10 years.

We have also included in our cost-of-living package a \$50 rebate off energy bills for all rateable dwellings, so whether you are renting or have just bought your first home or are downsizing, every Canberran will be able to receive that off their energy bills. This package provides real, meaningful and effective cost-of-living relief for Canberrans that have been forgotten by this Labor-Greens government. These are the Canberrans that have been paying some of the highest expenses in the country and receiving so very little from this government.

On our package, a family with two children in primary school and two cars will be \$750 better off. That is a significant saving for Canberrans who are struggling with some of the highest mortgage repayments, taxes, bills and living expenses in Australia. With retail spending slowing down in the ACT, the government needs to act quickly and effectively to provide relief for these Canberrans.

Unfortunately, the Labor-Greens government has indicated that it will not be looking to help Canberrans who are the new Canberrans that are doing it tough—the Canberrans who have not previously needed this type of assistance. Instead, as we have heard only today in answers in question time, the hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars that have been squandered and wasted by this Labor-Greens government will, of course, equal even higher rates, taxes and fees, because of the government's pure incompetence.

The Treasurer has managed to increase revenue, through increasing taxes and conveyances, by around a billion dollars since 2012-13. Whilst he hit households with higher rates to receive this revenue, he still managed to lose the ACT government's

AAA credit rating. Whilst increases in cost of living have caused families to seek financial assistance or to move outside of the ACT, Mr Barr has more than doubled rates and still reported a deficit every year that he has been Treasurer.

Canberrans want to know why their costs are constantly increasing and they are not receiving the help that they need from this government. They want to know why this government can spend and waste and squander hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, including \$78 million on a failed HR system, when households around Canberra need cost of living assistance. What further action will this government sit on while Canberrans are doing it tough?

The Canberra Liberals are committed to ensuring that we provide the support that is so needed amongst so many Canberrans. We have already prioritised the cost-of-living pressures that are facing our community. We know that Labor and the Greens have always dismissed our calls. The Canberra Liberals will make Canberra families with two children and two registered cars at least \$750 better off and provide a much-needed return to Canberrans, who are paying some of the highest charges to this government. We will include these cost-of-living relief measures in our very first budget and get to work immediately to help families who have spoken to us about their cost-of-living struggles. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (4.31): I move:

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

(1) notes:

- (a) the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is Australia’s national statistical agency and an official source of independent, reliable information;
- (b) the prices of essential products have increased significantly across Australia in the last two years, combined with interest rate increases this has placed many household budgets under pressure;
- (c) the December Quarter 2023 Consumer Price Index (CPI) released by the ABS showed that Canberra’s CPI increased by 0.4 percent in the December Quarter, the equal lowest of any capital city in Australia and through the year rose by 3.7 percent, lower than the national increase of 4.2 percent over the same period;
- (d) inflation still remains a risk on the economic outlook and the Government continues to monitor the varied impacts across the community; and
- (e) the Federal Government has made changes to the Stage 3 tax cuts to deliver a fairer tax reform outcome that supports more workers without increasing the risk to the inflation outlook;

(2) further notes that in the 2023-24 financial year, the ACT Government has introduced new initiatives and expanded existing initiatives to address cost-of-living pressures faced by vulnerable members of our community including through:

- (a) extending the Utilities Concession to Commonwealth Health Care Card holders, benefitting around 12,000 additional low-income and low-wealth households, taking the total number of eligible households to around 43,800 eligible for an \$800 rebate this financial year;
 - (b) partnering with the Commonwealth Government to provide energy bill relief to Canberrans. Eligible low-income households with an average electricity consumption will receive around \$327 in additional energy assistance in 2023-2024;
 - (c) establishing a Rental Relief Fund for people facing immediate difficulty in meeting rental payments, paying their rent for four weeks up to \$2,500; and
 - (d) a one off \$250 booster payment to households on the priority housing wait;
 - (e) delivering more affordable homes in the pipeline through the Affordable Housing Project Fund; and
 - (f) other concessions, such as:
 - (i) the Pensioner General Rates and Police, Fire and Emergency Services Levy (PFESL) Rebate, providing around 15,300 households a rebate of up to \$750 per year for general rates and \$98 PFESL rebate per year;
 - (ii) the Conveyance duty concessions - providing 4,800 eligible home buyers up to 100 percent discount on conveyance duty;
 - (iii) spectacle subsidy scheme providing around 10,600 Canberrans with a subsidy of up to \$200 for spectacles;
 - (iv) motor vehicle registration concessions providing 63,900 ACT drivers with up to a 100 percent discount on motor vehicle registration fees;
 - (v) free Chromebooks for every student in high school and college, and one between every three students in primary school;
 - (vi) driver licence concessions providing around 6,000 ACT drivers with up to a 100 percent discount on driver licence fees; and
 - (vii) public transport concessions providing reduced or free fares on Transport Canberra bus and light rail services for over 5.9 million trips;
- (3) finally notes, as updated to the Assembly in August 2023, that the Commonwealth Government has introduced a number of cost-of-living measures, in partnership with the Territory, or on their own, including:
- (a) cheaper child-care, with Child Care Subsidy rates up to 90 percent for eligible families;
 - (b) new Paid Parental Leave Scheme, meaning around 180,000 families will be able to receive the payment for up to 20 weeks, and increasing to up to 26 weeks by 2026;
 - (c) cheaper medicines through 60-day dispensing;
 - (d) bulk billing incentives for the most common GP consultations for children under 16 years, pensioners, and other Commonwealth concession card holders;

- (e) energy rebates with up to \$3 billion of direct bill relief for vulnerable households and small businesses;
 - (f) expanding eligibility for the Single Parenting Payment meaning that around 57,000 eligible single parents will receive an extra \$176.90 per fortnight;
 - (g) increasing the rate for JobSeeker, Austudy and Youth Allowance payments; and
 - (h) providing the largest increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance in over 30 years; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue to monitor the impacts of cost of living on Canberra households using independent and reliable sources of information and data through the Cost-of-Living Sub-Committee of Cabinet;
 - (b) continue to deliver targeted cost-of-living support; and
 - (c) provide a cost-of-living statement in the 2024-25 Budget.”.

The amendment highlights a number of important points that I think need to be made in response to the opposition leader’s motion and speech. I think the first and important point to raise is 1(a):

... the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is Australia’s national statistical agency and an official source of independent, reliable information ...

I think they should be referred to, rather than Numbeo—which, for those wondering, is a Serbian online database of perceived prices that is a crowdsourced website where the cost-of-living index that Ms Lee referred to in her motion is based on input from 100 contributors only, over the past 12 months. There is no verification of that data; it is entirely crowdsourced and not statistically valid or indeed reliable. In choosing a data source to mount my argument, I would use the ABS, rather than a crowdsourcing website from Serbia as the basis for determining public policy.

I think it is an excellent guide for the community as to how Ms Lee would look to govern. When the ABS releases data, a week out from your pre-planned motion on cost of living, that shows that Canberra in fact had the lowest quarterly inflation of any capital city in the last three months of 2023, you instead get your staff to jump on Google to see what you can find—any old Serbian crowdsourcing website will do, it seems!

Governing requires you to monitor the right data, to work closely with community organisations and to actually have a plan that could target support to those households where it is needed most. I think one point of agreement between Ms Lee and me in relation to this is the need for more targeted support for working families and working households and individuals who pay tax. That is why we are very supportive of the changes that the Albanese government has made to the stage 3 tax cuts. I know that those changes were initially opposed by the Liberal Party federally. I have not heard a single word from the Canberra Liberals as to what their views are on the changes to the tax legislation that Treasurer Chalmers introduced into the House of Representatives this week. I do note that the federal opposition leader, Mr Dutton, together with his shadow cabinet, has now agreed that they will not stand in the way of those tax cuts.

I note in 1(e) in my amendment that these changes deliver a fairer tax outcome that will support more households, that certainly will support people in Canberra, and that deliver much fairer and better outcomes and targeted support—annual tax cuts greater than the examples that Ms Lee outlined in her presentation to the Assembly. I note that some Liberals have rubbished that extra \$850 to many low income households, as if that is somehow insignificant.

I do note Ms Lee's example of a dual income, two-car household—which is not necessarily the circumstance of most low income households in the ACT—which stands to benefit by only \$750 under a range of incentives that she has put forward. You have to own a number of those assets that are considerable expenses for many low-income households. I think the point that ACTCOSS made was that that package from the Canberra Liberals was quite regressive and not particularly well targeted.

Our view—and I stated this—is that we should focus our efforts on cost of living, on one of the largest annual, quarterly, monthly or weekly expenses of households that does not require you to own a car and that does not require you to be a property owner—that is, your electricity account. I think pretty well everyone has an electricity account. The ACT government provides concessions and rebates for our most vulnerable households, of more than \$1,000, together with the commonwealth-provided rebates of around \$300 to every household in this current fiscal year.

I signal in this place, as I have publicly, that we will look to focus on existing payment mechanisms—our existing concession programs and energy rebates—as the best way to deliver assistance to households. That way they can choose how they spend money, because not everyone has a kid who plays sport. What about the ones who are engaged in non-sporting extracurricular activities? That is where the Deputy Chief Minister's education equity fund covers much more activity and provides much more meaningful support for families that need it—much more meaningful and targeted support. It provides up to \$750—not \$100 but \$750!—for secondary students, to support a wider range of needs. That is just one example.

Not everyone owns a caravan. Not everyone can afford a caravan, but people do have electricity accounts, and that is, I think, a very fair and equitable way to deliver different levels of support, depending on family circumstances. Of course, the government that has the most information about people's income levels is the federal government, and that is why we strongly support the tax cuts that we now see will be waved through the senate by the federal Liberals. I think the term that has been used is: "They have bitched and now they will fold". That is the case, and it is good to see. Canberra households will definitely welcome those tax cuts on 1 July.

Ms Lee's commentary suggested that the ACT economy was performing poorly. Again, the statistics do not back up that accusation. The ACT economy has grown by nearly 41 per cent over the last decade. The national growth in that same period was 27 per cent. The jurisdiction that came closest to the ACT's 41 per cent growth was Victoria, in the low 30s. In the last completed fiscal year, 2022-23, our GSP growth was 4.3 per cent—again, the highest in the nation. Our jobless rate, at 3.8, is currently below the national average. We have the second lowest underemployment rate in the nation.

We were really pleased to see inflationary pressures falling. It was great that yesterday the Reserve Bank did not further increase interest rates. It may well be that we are now past the peak of that rate-tightening cycle, and that the next moves will be down. We certainly look forward to that and hope that that will occur sooner rather than later. As we acknowledge, the ACT has a greater proportion of households with a mortgage than the national average. So reductions in interest rates this calendar year would be most welcome, together with the targeted tax cuts, and together with further targeted assistance from the territory government.

We will also look at issues such as further support for parents within the education system. The Deputy Chief Minister has outlined that, including through the education equity fund. We, of course, support our nurse-led walk-in centres that provide free health care in locations spread across the city—a service that the Canberra Liberals have opposed from its inception. And they are yet to state their usual position, which I am sure they will before the election, that they would shut them down.

We are pleased to see the Albanese government putting in place an industrial relations framework that supports wage increases. Real wages have grown for the last two quarters. The Albanese government have restored conditions in enterprise agreements that support the large number of federal public servants—essentially a quarter of our workforce and our households in Canberra—who are employed by the federal government.

From the ACT government's perspective I think it is worth putting on the public record that our cost-of-living and concession supports in this current fiscal year are estimated to reach around \$145.2 million. Many of the initiatives that that \$145.2 million supports are outlined in my amendments to Ms Lee's motion.

In this coming budget, we will be looking to alleviate financial pressure on Canberra households from their electricity prices and to provide support in education, free public health care and transportation costs. I look forward to working with my cabinet colleagues in consideration of those policies and how we can work with the commonwealth government and complement the new and better targeted tax cuts to ensure that households in Canberra can be supported.

Working in close partnership with the commonwealth will be essential in delivering on key national priorities and key local priorities. I look forward to continued engagement through the Council for the Australian Federation and National Cabinet, the Board of Treasurers and the Council on Federal and Financial Relations, particularly as we look to address cost of living pressures, access to primary health care and improved housing access, choice and affordability.

My amendment is comprehensive. It relies on trusted sources for data. It reflects the diversity of programs and activities that we have in place. I commend it to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.44): I will start by saying, on behalf of the ACT Greens, that we acknowledge that the rising cost of living is a real and serious problem and it needs real and serious efforts to help the people who are most affected

by it. We will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment to this motion as it gives a more accurate and realistic picture of the cost-of-living situation and it is not premised on the Numbeo data, which, as Mr Barr has explained, is likely not the most accurate or complete source of cost-of-living information about Canberra.

As I have said, cost of living is a serious and significant issue that demands government efforts and attention, and it is a clear focus for the Greens in the Assembly. The inescapable reality is that goods and services cost money. Even services we might consider essential, like medical care or education, are not free. I said this the last time we discussed cost of living in the Assembly, but it is a cruel problem inherent in this capitalist world that we live in—the inequality, and the ever-widening gulf between rich and poor. We need compassionate policies and interventions to try to tame these inequalities and support vulnerable people. The rising cost of living limits people's access to goods and services and forces them into difficult choices. The least well-off people in Canberra are increasingly forced into the difficult position of choosing between essentials, such as whether to pay the rent or whether to pay for health care for themselves or their family.

There is no doubt that there is a cost-of-living crisis. It is a national issue affecting every state and territory, with significant increases in food, fuel, electricity, housing, renting, education, medical and hospital services—essentially, all of the key goods and services that people need to live. One of the important factors in the cost-of-living crisis is, of course, that while costs are going up, incomes—essentially wages—are not keeping up with the increases. As ACTCOSS points out, in its *2023 Cost of living report*, price increases in these essential areas—food, electricity, renting, et cetera—have a “disproportionate impact on low-income households in the ACT”.

What are the causes of this cost-of-living crisis? They are many and complex, and, it is well acknowledged, they largely lie out of our control here in the territory. That is why we see, for example, so many people hanging on the decisions of the Reserve Bank, because interest rates and the rate of inflation are so central to economic outcomes across the country. But the causes are broader than that. ACTCOSS's *2023 Cost of living report* lists the pandemic, the 2022 floods, interest rate rises, the war in Ukraine and the Black Summer bushfires as having historic impacts on the costs of essential goods and services.

The cost-of-living challenges we face today are also the result of long-term decisions made by governments, particularly at the national level, in essential areas such as housing. We continue to have a national housing system that fails to adequately prioritise social and affordable housing and that structurally favours people who already have capital—encouraging, for example, the purchase of investment properties through negative gearing, which favours wealthier investors at the expense of people like young first home buyers. Affordable housing is a declared priority for the ACT government, and it is a priority that has been strongly pushed by the Greens in this assembly. Just this week, members will have seen the announcement of 70 new affordable rentals as part of a new 140-unit build-to-rent development in Phillip—a partnership of CHC Australia and the Canberra Southern Cross Club and supported by the ACT government's \$60 million Affordable Housing Project Fund.

I discussed recently in another Assembly discussion about cost of living that rental affordability is also particularly challenging at the moment due to broad and multifaceted reasons. For example, the post-COVID border opening has led to an influx of migrants and students into the country, which has put extra pressure on rental supply. Rising interest rates have also meant that landlords, in some cases, are passing on the difference to their tenants. I have already mentioned the investor-friendly regulatory environment attracting investors, driving up rents and keeping would-be homeowners out of the market.

The Greens have been very active in our efforts to tackle this rental crisis, to bring some good pricing relief to renters and to better empower renters in the disempowered relationship they often have with landlords. I will not go through all the reforms again, but members will have heard us advocate for a rent freeze and for improved rent caps, and, through the Attorney-General and energy portfolios that I hold, I have already implemented a ban on no-cause evictions as well as new minimum insulation standards for rental properties.

I need to point out that, while all these measures are important in helping Canberra's less well-off cohorts with cost-of-living challenges, they are also reforms that the Liberal Party criticise and oppose. I pointed this out during the last motion on cost of living, and I will point it out again today: despite Liberal Party motions like the one today that give lip-service to affordability issues, the Liberal Party actually constantly oppose, block and criticise real actions that will help people who are the most vulnerable.

One of the factors that contributes to cost-of-living pressures in the ACT is the fact that, comparatively, we have a well-paid population. We have the highest median wage in the nation and the largest proportion of high-salary earners. This is important to take into account when we consider the cost of living in the ACT. Yes, housing, for example, is expensive in the ACT but it is "affordable" in the context of the ACT's relative to average income levels. The really problematic issue that emerges here is that, of course, not everyone sits at those high levels of salary. So our high prices really bite hard for people who are doing it tough already; people on lower incomes who cannot keep pace with some of those better paid jobs in our city. That is why we need interventions that specifically assist those who are less well off. Government has a clear and unambiguous role to level the playing field.

National policies remain significant to the ACT. One of the best ways we can assist people in poverty is through raising the rate of Jobseeker and other benefits like it. That is what the expert organisations tell us, the non-government service providers, who are out there helping people. That is why the campaign continues. The Greens have raised this issue repeatedly. This is a critical and fundamental measure that would help people who are most in need.

Let me talk about an important national policy issue, the federal stage 3 tax cuts, which have already been mentioned in the debate today. The original tax cuts as proposed by the Liberal Party were massively unfair and expensive. They would have entrenched inequality permanently in this country. It was a terrible, structural

punishment to the less wealthy people of Australia, and it does not accord at all with a party that claims to care about the cost of living. Labor has improved this package, delivering an extra \$84 billion to low- and middle-income earners over the next 10 years and doubling tax cuts for Australians on an average income.

That is an improvement in the right direction—the Greens agree—but it still not the real and significant change we need to help address inequality. There are no additional supports for pensioners or the unemployed, some of the people in most need of assistance. The changes also still mean that the lowest 40 per cent of income earners only receive nine per cent of the benefit by way of tax cuts over the decade. The reshaped tax cut plan is still unfair. There is still \$84 billion in tax cuts going to people earning over \$180,000. There are still a lot of people who need relief getting nothing or not much compared to those in the higher income brackets.

Another national issue that is significant to us all is the cost of food and groceries. The Greens at the federal level have raised concerns about the pricing practices of major supermarkets and the impact this has on Australians and their cost of living. The Greens last year secured an inquiry into the impact of market concentration on food prices and the pattern of pricing strategies employed by the supermarket duopoly. The result of this focus will be, hopefully, reforms to the supermarket oligopoly in Australia and pricing changes that bring relief to Australians paying for necessities.

Electricity prices are another essential item that have increased steeply in price right across the country, due again to a complex array of national and international issues. The key point to emphasise here is that, amongst the turmoil, the ACT has maintained the lowest or close to the lowest electricity prices in the nation. Consumers literally have to pay, on average, hundreds of dollars extra for electricity if they live just cross the border in New South Wales. That is because of the ACT's renewable electricity policies and the long-term contracts we have set up that protect us from wholesale price spikes.

I have mentioned various federal issues, but I emphasise as well that there is so much to be done at the local level, and there is a lot that this government is doing. I have already mentioned the affordable housing and build-to-rent schemes, which have been central parts of our government's budgets in recent years. We have also established an effective Rent Relief Fund, which assists renters who are at risk of eviction and are in rental hardship. The program can pay up to four weeks of rent. I also want to reemphasise the significant range of concessions that are available. Concession holders, for example, are eligible for up to \$800 off their energy bills, and they can also receive free or discounted public transport and discounted car registration. All these concessions are set out in some detail in Mr Barr's amendment that the Greens will be supporting, and so I will not go into them in any more of the detail.

I will say, though, that members will note that the majority of this cost-of-living help is targeted, and it goes to concession holders, or pensioners, or renters at risk of eviction—the cohorts of people who most need our help. It targets our resources, which are always limited, of course, and it ensures people most in need of help are the ones who get it.

This stands in stark contrast to the approach of the Canberra Liberals, who say they want to help with the cost of living. I said earlier that cost of living is a real and serious problem and it needs real and serious solutions. I would not put the Canberra Liberals' election announcement of last week in that category. I have talked about how cost-of-living stresses hurt Canberra's least well off and most vulnerable, and that the many people who have higher than average incomes are often protected from the harshest impacts of price rises. We need to target our resources to those who need it.

The Liberal Party's promise was for a single year of non-means tested payments to Canberrans. As the CEO of ACTCOSS pointed out, not means-testing these payments would mean that well-off people would receive government payments when they simply do not need it. This would come at the expense of help that could be provided to the least well off. It is a payment to everyone, even the millionaire who does not even feel the cost-of-living pinch! I heard one community NGO refer to the Liberal Party promise as a "bribe". It is a poorly aimed band-aid at best. Also, the payments do not go to any of the structural, entrenched issues that cause and exacerbate cost-of-living issues in our city. I hope that I see the Liberals make significant commitments to affordable housing, or commitments that will help renters or concession holders—initiatives that are targeted at the smaller cohorts of people who actually are the most in need—rather than a splash of cash to everyone in the community.

To conclude, I will just say that the Greens will continue our focus on cost of living; on issues like affordable housing, rental reform, energy reforms that benefit the environment; and also reduce costs for households. We will continue to support the government to undertake these same kinds of initiatives and to push for reforms that help those most in need. Let us be clear: prices are going up. This does create cost-of-living pressure, but the bottom line is the real crisis is an inequality crisis. Giving more money to the top income brackets, splashing cash all over the place to those higher income earners who do not need it, comes at the cost of supporting those in our community who are doing it toughest. Government needs to be focused. Government needs to provide the most support to those on lower incomes who are being most heavily impacted by cost-of-living pressures. That is what you do to really address cost-of-living pressures in this country.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (4.58): Mr Assistant Speaker Pettersson, do your friends rent? Have they been talking to you about how rent is through the roof? Are wages keeping up with costs? Don't get me started. And don't look at your supermarket bill. It is like Woolies and Coles are in competition to price gouge. Canberrans are not just knee-deep; they are drowning in this crisis. I cannot fathom how a generation of politicians has allowed us to get to the point where people are using more than half of their pay cheques just to cover the rent.

Even the name we give this crisis, the cost of living, does not front up to the reality of the issue. It fails to recognise that basic needs like food, water and electricity are not commodities of choice. People cannot choose whether or not to buy these things. They are a really important part of a good life that everyone should have, no matter

how much money they have or do not have. Above all else, I feel like the term “cost of living” downplays the crisis and can disconnect decision-makers from the reality of skyrocketing prices for people that are doing it tough.

Just last week, the Canberra Liberals announced their cost-of-living plan, which will see Canberrans on six-figure salaries with BMWs effectively getting coupons on their car registration. I cannot even begin to comprehend how they think that this will scratch the surface for those doing it tough! If you really want to tackle cost of living, we need to start talking about inequality instead. This is an inequality crisis. Labelling this issue what it really is, inequality, helps us recognise that this a systemic problem—and systemic problems need systemic solutions, not tinkering at the edges.

Over the past couple of decades, negative gearing, privatisation and a housing market designed to price people out have put people’s livelihoods on the brink. The inequality crisis is fundamentally about how the economy has been set up. Put simply, it is not working-class households that are doing well out of Australia’s unaffordable housing market; it is the rich. We live in a country where the primary investment mechanism is not stocks not banks, but housing.

Every federal government in Australia since the 1980s has been complicit in the rise of housing as an investment and the decline of housing as a social good. In the 1980s, Hawke increased tax concessions to encourage even higher housing costs. In the 1990s, Howard made the housing market even more lucrative for investors through capital gains tax. Fast forward to now, and federal Labor refuses to abolish negative gearing, continuing to treat housing as a lucrative investment. The problem is that housing should not be an investment mechanism; it should be a human right. Your life circumstances should not determine whether or not you can live comfortably.

Canberra has dealt with housing crises before. We can look at how the government of the day responded to figure out how to fight this inequality crisis properly. In the late 1920s, over 100 years ago, the Federal Capital Commission, which was in charge of Canberra at the time, decided: “Owing to a lack of support by private enterprise, the commission was compelled to assume the entire responsibility for providing residential accommodation,” and there we have it! The commission did not say, “Owing to cost of living we began to give Canberrans coupons.” The commission said that the government needed to directly provide housing.

The private housing market is failing. As it fails, we are starting to see the structure of our economy showing its true colours. It is built on the subjugation of working people to a market designed to price people out and to put people’s livelihoods on the brink. If we want to chat about the cost of living, let’s call it what it really is: inequality. If we want to chat about the cost of living, let’s start talking about systemic solutions to a systemic problem. If we want to chat about the costing of living, let’s start talking about housing.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Population Health) (5.04): There has been a rapid increase in the need for food relief in our community in recent years. What the Community Services Directorate talk about is unprecedented demand. The story I hear from the people who

run our community food pantries is what really hits home—how it feels to need this support to put food on the table each night. They tell me they are seeing families coming for help who have never needed this kind of support before—people who have a job but do not earn enough to pay all the bills for their household; the feeling of shame that people have when they have to ask for help they never thought they would need. Nobody should have to feel like that. Women have told me that they save the last fresh apple for their children’s lunch boxes or they skip dinner themselves to make sure there is enough for everyone else; that they will get their partner’s, parents’ or kids’ prescriptions filled, but they do not have the cash to get their own as well, so they take less than the prescribed dose of their own medicines to stretch them further.

That is why we committed an additional \$389,000 in the 2023-24 financial year to increase capacity for food relief services. This funding directly subsidises freight costs for our local community food pantries to get the supplies that they need from Foodbank in New South Wales, as well as supporting food rescue activities here in the ACT. We also funded support for long-term Food Relief Network sustainability in the ACT through funding of \$475,000 in the 2021-2022 ACT budget. This included a food relief database to enable better informed decision-making about emergency food relief trends. While it is a pity that the Treasurer missed this in his list of targeted cost-of-living measures, the people who run these food relief services really do appreciate the support and thank you.

Community food pantries who are participating in the network—which is led by Volunteering ACT, who were also a key partner in the Canberra Relief Network during COVID health regulations—include St Vincent de Paul, Anglicare, Community Services #1, St John’s Care, Holy Cross Tuckerbox, and UCX at the University of Canberra. Most of these are organisations that I already knew about from my previous community sector work. I know how hard they are working to meet people’s basic needs but also to be that friendly face when someone is going through a stressful time and be a place that wraps people in support and love, not shame. The feedback that I hear from some of our small local food pantries is that the additional resourcing we have put into the Food Relief Network is working. They are getting more supplies through the door from Foodbank. But, at the same time, demand through need has grown so fast that many of our local services are still struggling to keep up.

What we are talking about here is not just about the cost of living. As Minister Vassarotti said, this is an inequality crisis. The price of food, clothing, health care and housing going up hurts everyone, but it hits differently when you are already spending half your income on housing and when you are already working multiple jobs and still have to say no to a dental check-up. It is the people on the lowest incomes who do not have savings and do not have optional extras they can cut from the household budget who are feeling it in ways that those of us in this place, with these jobs, do not.

I have talked multiple times in this place about what is driving this, so I am not going to give you another economic inequality 101 lecture. You are all still welcome to come to my office and I will roll out the last four decades of housing cost and labour force data to explain how we know that we are getting into end-stage capitalism and we are building a city that is unliveable for minimum wage workers. But none of you ever come to see me to talk about the problem; you just come in here and run the

same complaints every couple of months. You do not actually move the conversation forward to real solutions.

So let me lay it out for you. I really hope you are listening over there. This is not rocket science. This is how capitalism works, so listen up. If you mess with the levers in the market, like negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts, as has been done, and you are not building enough public housing at a pace that keeps up with population growth, you will have people paying far too much rent in the private market and you will have more people choosing between putting food on the table or paying the electricity bill—

Mr Hanson: It is tough being an anticapitalist from your mansion?

Mr Cocks: How big is your house?

MS DAVIDSON: because, after rent or mortgage repayments, there is not enough left for all the other bills—

Mr Cocks: It has to be 400 square metres.

MS DAVIDSON: You really want me to get back into the statistical data, don't you?

Mr Hanson: Yes; we do. Please.

MS DAVIDSON: I am sorry—you are going to have to come to my office and see me personally. You have people who should be in public housing having to compete for private rental market housing, but we just do not have enough of it, and we do not have enough private housing that meets the needs of people in the lowest 40 per cent of household incomes in this city. This is what we are trying to work on. If we want to shift this, we have to turn around trends that have been driven by managed investment fund decisions that are incentivised by negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts, and that means we are rapidly becoming a city of people who rent apartments from corporations and not people who own homes.

I am very relieved that we are investing in food relief programs, but that is putting a bandaid over the gaping wound that is an inequality crisis and a housing affordability crisis. I want to build more public housing. Minister Vassarotti wants to build more public housing. You heard what my colleague Laura Nuttall so eloquently said about the private rental market yesterday, that there are too many people competing for too few affordable private rental properties.

The commonwealth could help us out here. They could stop messing around with the market through negative gearing and capital gains tax. They could forgive the ACT's public housing debt, as they have done for some other states. But we are in here pushing, from both inside the cabinet and from the crossbench, for the Labor Party to work with us on solutions. I think it is about time that the Liberals either join us in trying to get systemic solutions or stop wasting everyone's time with their promises for coupon schemes for Canberrans on six-figure salaries with BMWs to get a discount on their car rego! What about the Canberrans who are actually living in their

car because they cannot afford a home? Let's actually get more resourcing for targeted support for those who need it most.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.10): I do not think I am going to go to the utter and complete economic illiteracy and incompetence from the last speaker. However, I want to touch on something that every speaker on the government side has brought up today. Every speaker has talked about targeted support. They want targeted support. What they are saying, and what it seems like they mean, is that they think support should only be provided to those on the absolute lowest possible incomes—that only the people on the absolute lowest incomes are suffering from this government's cost-of-living crisis, and that is just not true.

The people who are truly suffering span the entire demographic across the ACT. Everyone is suffering under this government's incompetence. Everyone is suffering from rising food prices. Everyone is suffering from the astoundingly high prices that this government charges for registration, for rates and for every charge it wants to bring in. It charges as much as it possibly can and it hurts families and individuals across the community.

Madam Speaker, you do not have to be on \$100,000 to feel this sort of pain, but you will feel it. This government seems to think that if you are earning \$100,000 a year you are rich. They think that if you are on 100 grand a year you might be able to afford a BMW. Well, let me tell you: you would have to be earning \$186,000 a year for a household to afford the average house in Canberra. That is not wealthy.

This government knows that the single biggest cost-of-living increase inflicted by Labor over the past couple of years has been astounding interest rate rises. They know that people are struggling to make their mortgage repayments. Under this government, the cost-of-living crisis is not limited to people who are unemployed and it is not limited to people who cannot afford to drive a car. It is not limited in any way. It is hurting everyone, but if you listen to those opposite, it is all about targeted supports. The way they have targeted them excludes just about everyone in the community, and it is about time we started supporting everyone through this cost-of-living crisis.

Labor argues that you do not need cost of living relief if you are earning \$100,000 a year. Labor seems to think that it is more important to have discussions about the precise source of where people are saying they are feeling the crunch, where they are feeling the pain of cost of living. I can tell you that everyone is feeling the crunch right now. Everyone is feeling the pain that comes with this cost of living crisis. Everyone deserves some support.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (5.14): I will speak briefly on this motion. I want to start by saying that I think the Canberra Liberals do want to support people who are experiencing a really tough time at the moment with increases in cost of living. There is no doubt about that. But they are in opposition, we are in government and we have different points of view on how that—

Mr Hanson: Shame!

MS BERRY: Jeremy, wherefore art thou?!

It is the way that we approach this issue that differs. ACT Labor and this government are providing cost-of-living assistance that is targeted, means tested and directed at people who need that funding and that support most. The reason we do that is that we are absolutely focused on ensuring that we can resolve the inequity in our system by making decisions that are practical and proven to change lives. It helps people who genuinely need that support most.

The comments that Mr Rattenbury referred to, made by the CEO of the ACT Council of Social Service, suggested that these kinds of voucher supports that the Canberra Liberals have suggested are regressive. That does not support people; it actually increases the divide and does not improve equity at all. I think that is the difference between where the Canberra Liberals come from and what ACT Labor is on about: making sure that we are supporting the people who need it most.

We are providing different kinds of funding and supports—and that is outlined through the Chief Minister’s amendment to Ms Lee’s motion—which are targeted not specifically at low income families but at families who need support for costs of living that are increasing beyond any family’s ability to be able to afford them. I think what we need to agree on here is that there is a challenge in the ACT and across the country at the moment that we are all trying to address; we are just trying to address it in different ways.

One of the things that I want to respond to, after listening to Ms Davidson’s speech just then, is particularly how women and young people are being impacted by the cost-of-living challenges. A surprise to me—and I had to read it a few times and hear it a few times—was some of the comments that were made by a Greens’ member here yesterday about driving a car, and that it should be restricted to only people who can afford it.

I was not going to mention Mrs Kikkert’s meme that described the comments that were made, but I think it is my favourite meme of the year so far. What I hear from young people and from women is that having a car is absolutely vital to their work, to getting around this city, to looking after their family. For the spokesperson for women and transport to make those kinds of comments—and maybe it was a mistake—means that there is a belief that there are people in this community who are on low incomes who should not be able to have a car to get around in, unless it is an electric vehicle, of course, or who should be using public transport instead.

I have been hearing our Greens colleagues talking about the inequality crisis and that we need to do more for everyone, regardless of how they are living their lives. We are addressing those issues from government and putting in cost of living measures that are targeted. They are targeted because it makes a difference to people who need it most, but that does not mean that people are going to be left behind, because when you address inequity, everybody’s lives improve. The divide between those who do and those who do not is reduced, and there is a real strength in our community and we can really achieve things for each other by making a difference in those targeted ways.

I will leave it there. I will just say that I do not agree with the way that the Canberra Liberals have targeted the Chief Minister or the government on cost of living, when clearly there are pages and pages of just a few of the cost of living measures that the ACT government is embarking on. That, combined with the supports that the federal government is providing, particularly the changes to tax cuts, will make a difference for people.

This crisis is not going away any time soon, so we need to make decisions about how we support people that are careful and considered, that meet the needs of families who need it most, that are progressive, that are practical and that are proven to make a difference and change people's lives. I support the Chief Minister's amendment to Ms Lee's motion. I look forward to us all continuing this conversation about how we support people in the best and most practical way that supports them where they are.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (5.19): I thank all my colleagues for their contribution to this debate. I did not realise there were going to be so many. The contributions that were made have been insightful and perhaps sometimes entertaining.

Firstly, we saw today the classic response that I assume we can expect from Mr Barr for the rest of the campaign trail. It is classic deflection. It is so focused solely on scoring cheap political points that he does not even go to the substance of the matter. We saw how well that worked out for him in his haste to criticise the Canberra Liberals' cost-of-living relief policy when he made that pathetically embarrassing blunder in demonstrating that he could not even read his own Treasury's costing documents, and we saw it again today! The first thing he went to was scoring a cheap political point. It is clear that he has not left his student politics days behind.

Secondly, whenever the Canberra Liberals bring the important issue of the cost of living into this chamber, we get, as Ms Berry said, pages and pages of pure cut and paste that the Labor Party responds with every single time. Let's keep in mind that we are talking about the cost-of-living pressures that thousands of Canberrans are facing right now. We have been raising these concerns for years, and there is always the same response. It just goes to show that this Labor-Greens government has run out of ideas and has run out of steam to do anything new about it. There is complete lack of respect, empathy and understanding for the thousands of Canberrans doing it tough—cut and paste; cut and paste!

Thirdly, what we are starting to see from Mr Barr is that he takes credit for federal government initiatives. How many times has he spoken about the stage 3 tax cuts that have bipartisan support now at the federal level? We see a pattern of behaviour in terms of what we will start to see from Mr Barr: classic deflection and student politics, repeating and repeating their failed policies, and then taking credit for something that the federal government or some other government has done. I think we are going to expect that now.

If I go to paragraph (4) of the amendment, it contains the words "continue to", which of course is Labor-Greens government speak for: "Well done. Aren't we good? A big pat on the back for us." There was a famous scientist who said that the definition of

madness is continuing to do the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result, and here we go: cut and paste. I have lost count of how many times we have seen this same cut and paste set out when we bring forward issues of the seriousness of the cost-of-living crisis plaguing Canberrans.

Mr Rattenbury starts saying all the right things like: “It’s important and it requires government attention.” Of course it does, but let’s not forget that, as a member of cabinet and as a member of the government’s Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet, he has been at the coalface of making decisions when it comes to being able to provide that very much needed support! He cannot wash his hands of the utter failures of this government when it comes to the thousands of Canberrans who have been abandoned. If Mr Rattenbury is not whinging about something that he has no control over, then he is taking credit for it, and we saw that again today. If he is not whinging about the RBA or the federal government in terms of the Jobseeker rate, then you have his coalition partner taking credit for the federal government’s tax cuts.

Let’s talk about the so-called targeted assistance. Many members on the other side talked about the Future of Education Equity Fund. Let’s put the real facts on the table. Last year, this fund paid money to 5,000 students. Out of over 82,000 students in the ACT, the fund paid money to 5,000 students! That does not even meet the number of kids that are living in poverty, according to the ACTCOSS data. Over 9,000 children live in poverty in the ACT. So that fund that has been spruiked over and over again by members of Labor and the Greens did not even provide assistance to the minimum number of children that are living in poverty, let alone the children of the low- and middle-income families that are doing it tough. It did not even cover the number of children defined as living in poverty.

Ms Vassarotti and Ms Davidson made judgemental and shaming comments about anyone who drives a BMW and about how about how they are going to get a cash splash! Let me ask a question. Ms Vassarotti might not drive a BMW, but she still drives a pretty nice car. She is on a very wealthy income, and I know she has three beautiful children. Is she really going to apply for the vouchers? Is she? What I am getting at is this: we might talk about targeted assistance, but my point is that it is about making it as accessible as possible for people like my constituent that I spoke about in my earlier speech—those who do not qualify for any government assistance or support but are in a position where they are having to apply for a personal loan just to cover their living costs. These are Canberrans who are working. They are on an income—some of them are even on a decent income—and they are struggling. It is about making it accessible for them.

It is also about making it accessible to so many constituents who have come to me and talked about how complex the application process to get any funding from the ACT government is. So many with a disability, so many seniors and so many people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background have said to me, “First of all, I didn’t even know this existed. Then, when someone told me, I went online, tried to apply and I could not do it. They kept asking for this and this and this,” and a lot of the time they gave up and ended up going to a charity instead for that much needed assistance. So it is about making it accessible for those Canberrans.

It is also about making it accessible for the Canberrans who need that relief up-front, not months later after having gone through many hoops to try to access the funds. We are talking about thousands of Canberrans, and many of them have never faced cost-of-living pressures before. We have heard time and time again from charities and community organisations that so many Canberrans who were previously regular donors, whether it was money or food, and are now coming to them and saying, “I never thought I would be in this situation, but can I please get some assistance?” Once again, we saw lack of empathy and understanding—the way that this Labor-Greens government has always been dismissive.

Let’s do something different. Let’s try something different, because, despite the fact that there have been many pages of “Look at us. Look at this government scheme,” things are not working. That is something they absolutely cannot accept. Canberrans are doing it tough, and it is clear once again that only the Canberra Liberals take seriously the cost-of-living crisis plaguing our community.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 7

Andrew Barr	Laura Nuttall	Peter Cain
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson	Ed Cocks
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Jeremy Hanson
Joy Burch	Shane Rattenbury	Elizabeth Kikkert
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Nicole Lawder
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Elizabeth Lee
Emma Davidson	Rebecca Vassarotti	Mark Parton
Mick Gentleman		

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Women—National Association of Women in Construction ACT awards

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.33): Today I am really pleased to stand to commend the remarkable accomplishments of the National Association of Women in

Construction ACT and extend a very warm welcome to a number of their committee members and winners of last year's awards who have joined us here in the chamber. I would like to specifically and sincerely thank the President of the ACT Chapter, Meagan Higgins, and her entire committee. They hold a number of events throughout the year to assist women in the construction industry through personal and business mentoring and networking; industry awareness; enhancement of skills and knowledge bases; and, importantly, encouragement to pursue and establish careers in construction.

Today I would like to especially acknowledge a remarkable group of women in construction who were the winners at late last year's NAWIC ACT awards, the 2023 NAWIC Awards. This was a wonderful celebration of excellence, innovation and empowerment within the construction industry. More than just accolades, these awards represent a powerful recognition of leadership, resilience and ground-breaking contributions. I would like to run through the winners of the NAWIC ACT 2023 Crystal Vision Award winners: Diversity and Inclusion Award winner for 2023, Erin Flannery; Mentor of the Year for 2023, John Reed; Achievement in Design Award winner for 2023, Katy Horswell; Achievement in Engineering Award, Karen McLellan; Innovation and Sustainability in the Construction Industry Award, Charne Esterhuizen; Emerging Leader Award winner for 2023, Taylar Hoadley; Leadership in Construction Award winner, Elise Klarenbeek; Leadership in Safety Award winner, Chey Lawler; Capital Region Student of the Year, Kayla Hogg; Tradeswoman of the Year, Chey Lawler; Construction Business Woman of the Year, Sophie Lumsden; Crystal Vision Award winner for 2023, Stephanie Jaros; and President's Award winner for 2023, Tracy Wilcox.

I would like to congratulate all the winners and, just as importantly, all of the nominees. In politics we often talk about standing on the shoulders of the women who come before us. I think that is just as true, if not more so, for the construction industry, one of those traditionally male-dominated industries. It is great to see women thriving in the construction industry in a large part here in the ACT through the support and encouragement of NAWIC ACT.

Women—National Association of Women in Construction ACT awards

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms Burch) (5.36): With a level of indulgence, can I just recognise the group and thank Nicole Lawder for her recognition of your efforts over the 12 months. May it well continue in the years to come.

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG—tribute

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Disability and Minister for Health) (5.37): I rise with great sadness to pay tribute to a great Australian. Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG, aged 91, passed away peacefully on 4 February on Kurna country in Adelaide, South Australia with her family by her side.

A proud Yankunytjatjara woman, Dr O'Donoghue was born in 1932 in a remote north-west corner of South Australia. She was removed from her mother and community at two years old and did not see her mother again for more than 30 years,

and then only found her by chance. Dr O'Donoghue and her siblings grew up at Colebrook Children's Home in South Australia. The missionaries anglicised her name to Lois and forbade her from speaking her own language or asking questions about her origins or her parents. So much of her identity was taken from her. Her parents were taken from her; her language was taken from her; her community and her name were taken from her.

Remarkably, Dr O'Donoghue spent her adult life giving to others. The powerlessness she experienced as a child drove her to spend the rest of her life empowering others and fighting for social justice. Dr O'Donoghue was a passionate advocate and campaigner for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. She achieved many firsts and was part of many key moments in our nation's history and our reconciliation journey. She was the first Aboriginal trainee nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, graduating as a nurse and remaining at RAH for about a decade. She later joined the South Australian branch of the federal Office of Aboriginal Affairs, going on to become the first woman to serve as regional director of an Australian federal department.

In 1976, Dr O'Donoghue became the first Aboriginal woman awarded the Order of Australia and, in 1999, the first Aboriginal person to be named a Companion of the Order of Australia. She would receive many other honours over the course of her life for her service to the Aboriginal community, including being made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1983, a Dame of the Order of St Gregory the Great in 2005, and being named the 1984 Australian of the Year by Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Dr O'Donoghue was appointed the founding chairperson of the National Aboriginal Conference in 1977, and she later became the founding chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in 1990. These two roles saw Dr O'Donoghue increase her national impact, spending significant time here in Canberra. In 1992, she became the first Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person to address the United Nations General Assembly.

A passionate advocate for constitutional recognition, Dr O'Donoghue campaigned fiercely for the recognition of Aboriginal people in the 1967 referendum. This was a cause she felt so strongly about that she hitchhiked all the way from Adelaide to Canberra to be here when the results came in. As chair of ATSIC, Dr O'Donoghue played a key role in drafting the Native Title legislation following the High Court's historic Mabo decision as a lead negotiator with Prime Minister Paul Keating. She would later work with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who sought her counsel in preparing for the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, and she was invited to sit prominently in the House of Representatives to witness that historic moment. The photograph of Prime Minister Rudd grasping Dr O'Donoghue's hands after the apology has surely become one of the iconic images of Australian politics.

The story of Dr O'Donoghue's life is one of remarkable resilience and dedication to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When her biographer, Stuart Rintoul, asked her why she lived the life she had, she responded simply, "Because I love my people." This biography, which I read last year and would highly recommend, described many poignant moments, but none more so than her decision to marry her

own love, Gordon Smart, in 1979 when Dr O'Donoghue was in her mid-40s, having previously decided to forgo marriage and children in favour of full-time work—a difficult decision for women at that time.

I offer my heartfelt condolences to Dr O'Donoghue's family and friends and to all members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who have been lifted up by her work and legacy. Australia has lost one of its truest and greatest leaders. May the memory and legacy of Lowitja O'Donoghue live on forever.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.42 pm.