



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**8 FEBRUARY 2024**

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**Thursday, 8 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.

## **Petition**

*The following petition was lodged for presentation:*

### **Macgregor—play space—petition 3-24**

*By Mrs Kikkert, from 120 residents:*

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that:

- the Pulleine Crescent Neighbourhood Playground is small, with a swing set as the only piece of play equipment for over 20 years;
- there is space for potential upgrades; and
- Macgregor has more children than the territory average (according to the 2021 Census), making attractive, accessible, and well-equipped playgrounds particularly important for local families.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the ACT Government to:

- work closely with the Macgregor community to determine what improvements should be made to the Pulleine Crescent Neighbourhood Playground; and
- implement those improvements.

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.*

**Motion to take note of petition**

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

**Macgregor—play space—petition 3-24**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (10.03): I am pleased to be able to present a petition calling on the ACT government to make much needed improvements to the Pulleine Crescent neighbourhood playground in Macgregor. In total, 120 residents signed this petition. Two-thirds of them indicated they live in Macgregor, most of them in homes located close to this playground. These numbers indicate how strongly local residents feel about this matter.

As the petition notes, the only piece of play equipment in this so-called playground is a swing set with just two swings. Satellite images verify that it is at least 20 years old. In reality, it is probably much, much older. Pensioners in the neighbourhood have told me that the swing set was there when they were children; now adults, with small children of their own. At least one middle-aged man who signed the petition confirmed that he grew up using this outdated piece of play equipment.

The level of neglect indicated by a playground that has not been updated over the span of decades reminds me of a letter that I received from another West Belconnen resident just like week. She wrote that she has resided in her home for over 40 years and has slowly watched the deterioration of her suburb. “It sure amuses me,” she wrote sarcastically, “when we watch the government open up all these new suburbs with lovely new infrastructure”, she added, “whilst us older suburbs are left to rot!!!!” By the way, to make her point, that last line concluded with four exclamation marks!

Beyond asking for overdue improvements to this playground, the petition asks for the government to work closely with the Macgregor community to determine what improvements are most needed. To help drive that discussion, I will table a document with suggestions that I have received from residents so far, and I will also provide a copy of those suggestions to the minister.

Unsurprisingly, nearly everyone who has shared input with me has said the playground needs additional play equipment. The top request has been for slides. New or additional swings have been the second-most recommended, closely followed by scramble and scaling walls, bridges and ramps, and balance beams.

Outside of outdated play equipment, the most common recommendation has been for the ageing log bollards around the park to be replaced. These bollards were literally rotting and, in many cases, lying in the infrequently mown weeds. I am happy to report that my appeal for this repair has been heard and the replacement of the bollards began last week. This is nearly three months later than the government promised, but they do look great and beautiful. Other commonly requested improvements include additional seating to the one existing bench, shade sails, better landscaping and soft-fall surfaces.

As this petition notes, Macgregor has more children than the territory average, according to census data. Families who live in older suburbs have as much right to an attractive and well-equipped playground as those who live in newer suburbs.

One resident who lives near this playground in Macgregor said that it is a common sight for neighbourhood children to be queued up to get a turn on the single swing set after school. She also noted that new housing in the surrounding streets had markedly increased the number of households with young children, who deserve access to appropriate play spaces.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of all these residents, their neighbours, and all who signed this petition, I commend it to the Assembly and look forward to the minister's response.

I seek leave to table the document.

Leave granted.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I table the following document:

Macgregor—Pulleine Crescent Neighbourhood Playground—List of improvement requests from nearby residents, undated.

**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) (10.07): Just briefly, in response to Mrs Kikkert's petition. I look forward to receiving that petition and the terms of it, and working with her and the community about what improvements might be able to be made to that playground.

For an explanation regarding the bollards being delayed, in terms of the replacement, I just signed a letter to Mrs Kikkert last night actually, not even realising that this was being brought today. Mrs Kikkert, you will receive the letter this morning, I would hope, but the reason for the delay is that the contractor had issues sourcing the bollards. As Mrs Kikkert will read in the letter, and as she has observed herself, they are now being installed and we do expect the completion of the installation of those bollards to be by the end of this month, if not sooner. So I am pleased to hear that that was the most common request and that we are actioning it.

I look forward to discussing it further and receiving the terms of the petition, as well as the suggestions from local residents.

## **Paper Out-of-order petition**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.08), by leave: I table the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Stirling—Access from Wittenoam Crescent to Barlee Place Park and nearby Namatjira Drive bus stops—Proposed footpaths installation—Dr Paterson (15 signatures).

My petition today is about improving park access through Barlee Place Park from Wittenoom Crescent in Stirling. This path, or lack of path, has become quite a significant issue for residents in Stirling. Probably half the suburb of Stirling would walk through this park to get to the local bus stop and to access the shops, but there is one key street that is not linked to the path. Over the past three years, obviously with all the grass and the wet weather and the mowing issues, it has become a very fraught issue for residents who have to walk through this park to get to the connecting paths and bus stops.

This is something I feel strongly about supporting in the community. We are all about improving access to our local green spaces, active travel and access to our bus stops and public transport. So I think this is a no-brainer. It is on a lot of maps of the park, and a lot of service maps and things show that there is a path there, but there is not and there should be. I look forward to the government's response and a resolution to this because, unfortunately, it has become quite a significant issue for residents in the area.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Children and young people—justice Ministerial statement**

**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) (10.10): I am pleased to rise to table the final report for the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-2022, which outlines the ACT's significant achievements and progress in youth justice outcomes over the decade.

Ongoing reform and improvement to the youth justice system is critically important work. The small number of young people who become engaged in the youth justice system are often facing significant challenges in their lives, in their families, in their education and in their health and wellbeing. Youth justice engagement can be an opportunity to identify and put in place supports to ameliorate these challenges, at a critical juncture in a young person's life. But access to supports should not wait for behaviours to escalate. We must focus our efforts on identifying children and young people who are struggling as early as possible and providing the right diversionary supports to help them avoid entering the criminal justice system.

By implementing programs that help divert children and young people from contact with the criminal justice system, we can reduce and prevent their engagement in harmful behaviour. This makes our community safer for everyone, as well as improving the lives of the children and young people themselves. We know that once a young person enters the justice system, they are more likely to re-enter as an adult. They are also more likely to face life-long challenges in accessing employment and education; maintaining their health and wellbeing; and avoiding homelessness. Early diversion helps young people escape what can become a lifetime of engagement in harmful behaviour and the trauma and challenges inherent from having spent time in the criminal justice system. Often there are intergenerational complexities that

underpin the difficulties these young people and their families face. By identifying young people at risk and providing them and their families with support, we can break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are especially vulnerable to contact with the justice system. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were 19 times as likely to be under youth justice supervision in 2021-22 than non-Aboriginal young people. Targeted support based on consultation and collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is key to ending this over-representation. These challenges can be addressed through well designed, early supports that promote the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. The support that will prevent future justice system engagement can start during the early years of a child's life, and opportunities can continue to be available throughout childhood and into adolescence.

The Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-22 was an ambitious 10-year strategy, providing a framework for reform to the youth justice system. Initiatives under the blueprint focused on prevention and early, comprehensive support. These evolved over time to include programs such as Safe and Connected Youth, which works with children and their families to improve parent-child relationships and family functioning to reduce the risk of homelessness for young people. Youth engagement services funded through the Child, Youth and Family Services Program deliver a holistic early intervention response to vulnerable children, young people and families.

The ACT government has also invested in targeted diversionary services, such as the Functional Family Therapy–Youth Justice program, which uses assessment and early intervention to address risk and builds on existing strengths and protective factors—within and outside of the family—that impact the young person and their behaviours.

The blueprint also embedded evidence-based practices, including more opportunities for engagement with restorative justice; and secondary programs, including drug and alcohol programs, disability and mental health support, and engagement with education.

Significant improvements have also been made to the operations of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre over the past 10 years to provide a safe and therapeutic environment for young people and staff. Efforts include investing in training and workforce development for staff, so they can continue to provide high quality and rehabilitative support to young people in custody. Bimberi has worked with oversight agencies, and the government has responded to the recommendations they have made from time to time.

And, of course, the Assembly has now passed legislation to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12, with a further increase to 14 in 2025. We know that the younger the children are when they encounter the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to reoffend. Diverting these children and young people and providing comprehensive support to address the underlying factors behind their harmful behaviour means that we are redirecting them onto a healthier and safer path.



I am delighted to report that outcomes measured under the blueprint have shown significant improvements. Overall, the final report shows that from 2011-12 to 2021-22: the rate of youth offending in the ACT reduced by 75 per cent; the number of young people apprehended by ACT Policing decreased by 56 per cent; the number of young people under youth justice supervision decreased by 47 per cent; and the number of young people in detention decreased by 45 per cent. This shows that our community is safer because of the reforms made under the blueprint, and that fewer young people engaged in harmful behaviour and were involved in the criminal justice system.

Importantly, the blueprint has achieved significant improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Since 2011-12 the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under youth justice supervision decreased by 62 per cent, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention decreased by 56 per cent, and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT youth justice system reduced by 42 per cent.

While there are still improvements to make, it is important to acknowledge that the ACT is the only Australian jurisdiction to have seen a significant decrease in these rates over the past 10 years. In 2011-12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT were 12 times as likely to be under youth justice supervision compared to non-Indigenous young people. This rate fell to seven times as likely in 2021-22—still over-representation, but far below the national average of 19 times more likely.

There is more to be done to further improve the youth justice system in the ACT, and the government is now looking ahead to the next stage of reform. As a community, we must remain committed to addressing ongoing and emerging challenges in the youth justice system and in the lives of children, young people and their families. This requires a renewed focus on diversion from the justice system.

Our ongoing efforts to improve the youth justice system are linked with, and complementary to, our efforts to support raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. This is a major reform that will yield positive outcomes for children and young people who would otherwise come into contact with the system at an early age. These children and young people will instead be provided with age-appropriate support to prevent harm to themselves and the community.

The important work to develop a Throughcare program for the youth justice system is ongoing, and I look forward to updating the Assembly in due course. The government has invested \$200,000 in the 2023-24 ACT budget to co-design and develop this program. The Throughcare program will aim to reduce re-offending and recidivism at all stages of contact with the justice system, building on the successes achieved under the blueprint.

In closing, I wish to thank once again the many people who work tirelessly each day to support some of our most vulnerable children and young people. This important work is critical to helping children and young people for life, and to helping keep our community safe.

I would also like to thank Minister Davidson, as the outgoing minister with responsibility for youth justice, for her work to help get us to this point and for her evident commitment to improving the lives of the children, young people, their families and the broader community affected by the youth justice system. We will continue to work together with this objective in mind in her role as the Minister for Justice Health and the Minister for Mental Health.

I am pleased to table the final report of the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-22 for the information of the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

- Final report on the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-2022—  
Report, undated.
- Ministerial statement, Wednesday, 7 February 2024.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the 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) (10.19): I rise to speak in support of the work that Minister Stephen-Smith is continuing with youth justice, in my role as the Minister for Justice Health, where I continue to have responsibility for the health and wellbeing of young people with health needs in our Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

Through the work of the alternative service response to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the disability screening tool to identify reasonable adjustments that might be needed for young people who are in Bimberi, we have reinforced our understanding of the importance of allied health and disability supports for young people in the youth justice system. We know, for example, that 100 per cent of young people in Bimberi would benefit from allied health supports, and we know that the disability screening tool that was trialled at Bimberi in its first six months found that more than half of those people needed some reasonable adjustments for disability. In response to that, Bimberi staff have worked with allied health professionals to put those adjustments and supports in place and make sure that we are addressing the needs of the whole person. Justice Health will continue to work with Youth Justice and the Community Services Directorate to ensure that health and disability needs are addressed in the Throughcare plan, and that work will continue.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Dhulwa Adult Mental Health Unit—update 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) (10.21): I rise today to provide my third update on work underway to develop the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit, based on the report of the independent board following their third meeting. I also table the latest report from the independent board. Dhulwa is a forensic mental health facility for people with complex mental illness, or people with mental illness who have had, or are likely to come into, contact with the criminal justice system and who are unable to be cared for in a less restrictive environment.

As Minister for Mental Health I maintain my commitment to making sure we implement the recommendations made in the Dhulwa review final report. This work was completed by experts led by Barbara Deegan, and I thank her and her team for the work they applied to the review, and the frank and fearless advice they continue to provide to me. That advice is being put into action through the implementation of the recommendations. The board has now met three times to review progress towards implementing the recommendations. I received the third report into my office on 29 November and I am updating the Assembly at the first available opportunity.

To date, 17 recommendations and 32 subactions have been completed and endorsed by the board. For example, the board confirmed that progress has been made in areas relating to the staffing profile of Dhulwa and the training provided to staff. A full complement of allied health positions at Dhulwa has been recruited, with a retention plan in place to ensure a positive work environment that benefits both staff and people receiving care.

Staff have also received training on the Safewards model, as part of a broader body of work to implement the Safewards model of care in Dhulwa. Safewards aims to identify the stressors that can lead to conflict so that staff can prevent escalation and helps staff to ensure the safety of those present during times of conflict. Safewards also helps avoid the need for patients to be contained, thereby improving therapeutic outcomes for patients. Now that Safewards training is complete, further work is underway to fully implement the program. The board endorsed the recommendation to complete a Safewards implementation plan, followed by an action plan. Use of the Safewards model will work well with the other areas being improved. This includes work towards an aggression prevention protocol.

The feedback I have received from Dhulwa's dedicated and hardworking staff is that these changes have made a real difference—to themselves and to the people receiving care at Dhulwa. It is important that I continue to listen to their experiences and ensure that we are continuing to head in the right direction, and I thank staff for their engagement with me and my office.

I also acknowledge that some of the recommendations may require more research, investigation and planning to complete than was apparent when the board's report was released. There are two recommendations that may not be fully implemented within the initial 12-month time frame. Firstly, infrastructure changes are required to meet the intent of recommendation 2.5. Changes to infrastructure cannot always be planned, designed, budgeted, put to tender, physically completed and approved as quickly as would be ideal. Secondly, recommendation 7 requires representation of the lived experience workforce in the multidisciplinary team, which is subject to the broader divisional approach. CHS's Lived Experience Director has recently commenced and

will initiate work on a divisional lived experience workforce model. I am satisfied that, although the work will not be completed within a 12-month period as planned, the delay is for valid reasons and does not undermine the intent and improvements of this project.

I thank the Dhulwa Inquiry Oversight Board, Canberra Health Services management and the Dhulwa team for their clear and unwavering focus on improving care at Dhulwa through their support for skilled and compassionate care.

The implementation process has also uncovered some questions about how the recommendations may work in practice. The board has determined that Safewards needs to be fully implemented and evaluated before the adoption of a Safewards secure model can be considered. This is a prudent and reasonable adjustment, and I accept that this means related recommended actions may not be completed as planned.

Madam Speaker, this work is not straightforward. Dhulwa's purpose is to provide care to people with the most complex mental health illness. I am also aware that it has been upsetting and difficult for staff to hear negative stories about their workplace, especially after they and others have worked so hard to achieve the improvements that are already making Dhulwa a safer, more positive environment for everyone. It is their commitment to change that has resulted in the improvements made to Dhulwa, and I want to thank everyone who works in the facility for their willingness to work towards implementing the recommendations.

With the continued dedication of the board and the staff at Dhulwa, I am confident we will achieve the improvements needed to make Dhulwa a safer and more appropriate environment for everyone present.

I present the following papers:

Dhulwa Independent Oversight Board—Report 3—

Report, dated 23 October 2023.

Ministerial statement, 7 February 2024.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MR PETERSSON** (Yerrabi) (10.26): 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.

I wish to inform the Assembly that during the applicable reporting period, 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023, the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion considered a total of six appointments to the following bodies:

- ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies;
- ACT Teacher Quality Institute Board; and
- ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority Board.

Madam Speaker, I now table a schedule of the statutory appointments considered by the committee during this period:

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2023.

## **Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.27): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity.

At its private meeting on 12 December 2023, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into climate change and a just transition. At that meeting, the committee agreed to the following terms of reference for the inquiry:

The committee will inquire and report into how the ACT can make a just transition to ensure that all Canberrans get the benefits and protections of climate action.

This will include:

- A. The effectiveness, efficiency and equity of programs and rebates to reduce emissions, increase energy efficiency and help the transition to electrification;
- B. Skills, training and programs to support the workforce skills and job-readiness required to transition to electrification and decarbonisation; and
- C. Any other related matters.

The committee will report to the Assembly on a date to be determined. The committee called for submissions on 12 December with a submission closing date of 19 February 2024.

### **Statement by chair**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.28): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity.

At its private meeting on 5 December 2023, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the ACT environment's bushfire preparedness. At that meeting, the committee agreed to the following terms of reference for the inquiry:

The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity will inquire into and report on matters relating to the ACT's bushfire preparedness, with particular reference to:

- A. The environmental factors contributing to bushfires in the ACT and surrounding areas;
- B. The impact of bushfires on climate emissions, climate adaption, and biodiversity;
- C. Bushfire risk, resilience, and potential impacts;
- D. Management of bushfire risks and bushfire preparedness;
- E. The condition of ACT parks, reserves and other open spaces, including consideration of fuel loads and emergency access;
- F. Coordination between environmental agencies and other government agencies;
- G. Cross-border risks and issues; and
- H. Any other matters.

The committee will report to the Assembly on a date to be determined. Submissions closed on 2 February 2024.

### **Statement by chair**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.29): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity.

At its private meeting on 12 December 2023, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into e-petition 17-23, the Indian (common) myna control petition. At that meeting, the committee agreed to the following terms of reference for the inquiry:

The committee will inquire and report on Indian (common) myna control, with particular reference to:

- A. The prevalence and distribution of common myna birds in the ACT;
- B. The impact of the common myna on:
  - I. native plant and animal species in the ACT;
  - II. agricultural production in the ACT;
- C. Exploration of current common myna control activities in the ACT;
- D. The role of the ACT Government in common myna management and control activities;
- E. Animal welfare issues related to the common myna; and
- F. Any other related matters.

The committee will report to the Assembly on a date to be determined. The committee called for submissions on 12 December 2023, with a submission closing date of 18 March 2024.

*(Quorum formed.)*

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

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.32): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. On 30 November 2023, the Property Developers Bill 2023 was presented to the Assembly. Also on 30 November 2023, the Assembly referred the Property Developers Bill 2023 to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, resolving that:

Notwithstanding the provisions of standing order 174, this Assembly refers the Property Developers Bill 2023 to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services for consideration of inquiry and, should the Committee decide to inquire, report by the last sitting day in March 2024.

At its private meeting on 14 December 2023, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the Property Developers Bill 2023. In accordance with the Assembly's resolution, as amended on 6 February 2024, the committee will report back to the Assembly by 30 March 2024. The committee called for submissions on 15 December 2023, with a submission closing date of 16 February 2024 and a public hearing scheduled for 7 March 2024.

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.33): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. E-petition 4-23, titled "Stop Private Car Parks on Protected Public Green Open Spaces", was received by the Assembly on 29 August 2023 and referred to the committee under standing order 99A. This petition relates to a car park in Lyneham that was built next to Brindabella Christian College, and an application by Canberra Grammar School in Griffith to formalise a car park on a public park across the road from the school.

The government response to the e-petition stated that ACAT had made orders with regard to the car park in Lyneham to cease operating at the end of the school term of 2023. The government response also pointed out that the application by Canberra Grammar School was refused by the ACT Planning and Land Authority in March 2023. The government response also provided the petitioners with information on relevant provisions and processes of both the previous and new planning systems.

The committee acknowledges that these cases are part of a growing list involving private schools and developers using public spaces. Given the growing prevalence of the issue of private use of public spaces, the committee may examine this matter later in the year in an inquiry. The committee notes that its powers are mainly those of information gathering. Given the ongoing processes involving both ACAT and government, the committee is of the view that an inquiry would be constrained by the possible application of the sub judice convention and is unlikely to shed further light on the issues raised in the petition. For these reasons, the committee will not be

inquiring into the matters raised in the e-petition. The committee hopes the petitioners have been provided good information from the other processes and encourage them to reach out to the committee if that is not the case.

## **Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2024**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Business, Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Police and Crime Prevention) (10.36): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I present the Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment Bill, a bill designed to reinforce the ACT's work health and safety regulations, which reflects this Labor government's commitment to protecting the health and wellbeing of all working people.

The bill is responsive to agreed improvements to the national model work health and safety laws and upholds the obligations as a signatory to the Inter-Governmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety for the ACT. Specifically, the bill would increase maximum penalties for work health and safety offences, thereby ensuring that penalties more appropriately reflect the seriousness of work health and safety duties. The increase is significant, with maximum penalties going up by almost 40 per cent and increases to the most serious classes of offence, including occupational manslaughter. The bill also introduces an indexation mechanism to support WHS penalties maintaining relevance over time.

This Labor government was one of the first in Australia to introduce the work health and safety industrial manslaughter offence, in 2021, and we were the first to amend work health and safety regulations to prohibit the uncontrolled processing of crystalline silica material in 2022.

The bill seeks to clarify that workplace safety category 1 offences may apply to officers or a person conducting a business or undertaking who, through recklessness or negligence, expose an individual to a risk of death or serious injury. New provisions would allow courts to consider and aggregate the conduct of bodies corporate charged with breaches of their work health and safety duties—that is, these provisions allow the court to consider the total conduct of any employee, officer or agent of a body corporate, rather than only considering the conduct of those at the executive level. Importantly, this will allow consideration of the impact that corporate culture plays in contributing to offences.

Additionally, the bill makes minor technical changes to other legislation within my portfolio, including the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act, and the changes



will align commencement of the expanded Services Industry Scheme with the quarterly levy reporting cycle commencing on 1 April 2025. Amendments are also made to the Public Sector Management Act to clearly express the independence of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner.

In summary, this bill strengthens the work health and safety offences and penalties framework and aligns with model work health and safety laws. As a minister of this Labor government, I am proud to acknowledge that our achievements in work health and safety reform are nation leading. Beyond that, our efforts regularly establish international firsts in workplace safety reform. Labor will always stand up for and fight for the rights of workers. We know that safe and healthy workplaces are the right of all people.

This bill is yet another step taken by our government to deliver safe and healthy workplaces for the whole Canberra community. I commend the bill to the Assembly as an important continuation of the territory's progressive stance on WHS standards and continued improvements in industrial reform.

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

## **Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Membership) 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) (10.41): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Membership) Amendment Bill 2024. The ACT Climate Change Council is established under the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010 and advises the minister on matters relating to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing, and adapting to, climate change. This amendment bill amends section 20(b) to accommodate at least two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives on the council.

The bill addresses feedback we heard on the importance of appointing representatives with local connections to country and a strong preference for having both a male and a female representative on the council. This will enable both men's and women's business to be considered, in line with cultural lore, and provide specific, connected and localised advice and solutions relevant to the council's remit.

The amendments will demonstrate the ACT government's commitment to recognising the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's continuing connection to the

lands and waters of the ACT. The amendments will also facilitate reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the ACT government, the council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2024**

Debate resumed from 6 February 2024 on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (10.43): I rise to speak today on the Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2024. The purpose of this bill, which the Canberra Liberals will be supporting, is simply to update the commencement date of the Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2023 from 31 March 2024 to 1 July 2024. The need for this amended commencement date for the bill arises from another administrative error. Unfortunately, administrative errors have become a common theme. The minister's failure to table outpatient data by the last sitting of 2023 comes to mind.

I understand the 1 July commencement date is necessary in order to allow affected services time to implement the changes that are being made to the Children and Young People Act 2008. These changes passed last year include rebalancing emphasis on statutory child protection and redirecting greater attention towards early support for families.

This bill is aimed at forcing improvement in areas such as referring to early support services and identifying if a child is Indigenous, as soon as possible. In responding to last year's bill, the opposition consulted various stakeholders, including those in the Indigenous community. They overwhelmingly expressed a lack of confidence and trust in the government's competency in reforming child protection practices. However, this bill is a step in the right direction and hopefully represents a more positive change of pace. Just as the Canberra Liberals supported last year's Children and Young People Amendment Bill, we will also be supporting this minor change today.

I would like to thank my predecessor in the families, youth and community services portfolio, Mrs Kikkert, for her office's research into the bill as presented last year. I would also like to thank Ms Stephen-Smith, her advisers and the directorate for organising a recent briefing on today's bill.

I commend the bill to the Assembly and hope that the change in commencement date will allow the relevant services sufficient time to prepare for these legislated changes.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (10.45): I stand to briefly speak to the Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2024. The ACT Greens express their ongoing support for the swift passage of these crucial legislative changes. The Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2024 is the second iteration of a suite of amendments that bolster the ACT government's commitment to safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people, preserving cultural identity, maintaining family connections, and

the early detection and prevention of issues. This bill continues to do the work to incorporate and emphasise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles—which actively recognise the importance of connections to family, community, culture and country—in child and family services, and asserting that self-determining communities are central to supporting and maintaining those connections.

The ACT Greens are proud to advocate for the protection of children and will continue to advocate for a multifaceted approach to child safety. Let us promote shared responsibility, amplify the voices of our children, enhance support services, refine decision-making processes and redouble our efforts to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in Canberra’s child protection system.

**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) (10.46), in reply: I thank members for their participation in this very brief debate and for their support of this bill.

As others have seen, and as I said when I introduced the bill, it is a simple one that corrects an administrative error in the Children and Young People Amendment Act 2023 that would have seen the act commence on 31 March rather than 1 July, which was what the government had intended. As I outlined in my introductory speech earlier this week, the bill amends the commencement date to 1 July, giving affected agencies time to prepare for the important changes to the Children and Young People Act that the 2023 bill affects.

I thank Ms Castley, in particular, for her collaborative approach to this process and for supporting the timely passage of the bill through the Assembly. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

**Sitting suspended from 10.47 am to 2 pm.**

### **Questions without notice**

#### **ACT Policing—City Police Station**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, reports yesterday were that police officers were being pulled out of the City Police Station as the building is no longer a safe workplace. Last year during discussions with the Chief Police Officer you said, “It is important to note that the government does not have to build or own the buildings that stations are located in” and that a potential outcome is, and I quote, “an approach to market.” Did the Chief Police Officer, or any other official, previously raise concerns with you about the need for urgent repairs to this building?

**MR BARR:** That conversation was in the context of new police facilities, particularly as it related to the possibility of a co-location of the Winchester Police Centre, the headquarters, which is in an old TAFE campus building in Belconnen, and the possibility of co-locating a new city station. The model they were referring to—this is both the ACT Chief Police Officer and indeed, Commissioner Kershaw, the head of the AFP—was that they were wanting to investigate a model similar to Victoria. We had a very productive discussion and we have indeed funded that work. I understand that the team within ACT Policing have been progressing that previously funded work with a view to bringing back some specifications for what would be needed for both a headquarters and a city police station, and the government will consider those. As I said, in those comments, we would not necessarily need to own the building. We could simply lease space in a building. I inquired of Commissioner Kershaw and CPO Gaughan whether that was a model that could work, and whether there was precedent in other police services. The answers were “Yes, it could work” and “Yes, there was precedent” and that is what they are exploring.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, what action have you taken on approaching the market to find a new building for the City Police Station, if any?

**MR BARR:** We are certainly looking at possible sites within the City Renewal Precinct, but we need the scope of what would be required. So we cannot approach the market until we know exactly the GFA and other specific security and other requirements that ACT Policing would have. That is the work that we have funded. It is underway. Once that is completed we will be in a position to make an investment decision. Obviously Treasury will need to conduct a net present value assessment of whether we are better to seek to lease a facility, so effectively go to market with a pre-commitment to lease a certain amount of space within a building. I did also inquire as to whether there could be other tenants within the building. There are examples in other Australian cities where there are other commercial tenants within a building that is either a police headquarters or a police station. Once we have that information we can go to market, but we are certainly looking at possible sites.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Chief Minister, will you take immediate action to restore the City Police Station so that officers can return to the building as soon as possible?

**MR BARR:** Minister Gentleman has already addressed that in the media, and so I would refer you to his comments, Mr Milligan.

### **ACT Policing—City Police Station**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Police. I refer to reports in the *Canberra Times* yesterday of police officers being pulled out of the City Police Station because the building is not fit for purpose. The Deputy Commissioner has previously raised the issue of the station, saying “We need a new city station; I’ve been banging on about this for three years.” When were you first made aware that the City Police Station was not fit for purpose and why have you not prioritised getting the matter resolved before now?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I acknowledge his comments in the media this morning but also correct those comments in that the City

Police Station is not closed. There certainly has been over recent rain events water damage on the ground floor of the City Police Station that may pose a health and environmental risk without proper remediation.

Work has already started on the water egress in the City Police Station. I had a look at it about four months ago. I was shown where the water was coming in through the ground floor of the station. Work began on the planning for repairs almost straightaway and we have had engineers in there looking at the water egress. But to ensure the safety of our officers, the Chief Police Officer has indicated that they will move some of the staff to the Barton offices as of next week. This will ensure that they are not at risk of any contamination from—

**Ms Lee:** I raise a point of order, Madam Speaker. The minister is more than halfway through his answer, and the question that Mr Milligan asked was very clearly: when was the minister first made aware that the City Police Station was not fit for purpose? I ask that he be directly relevant to the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think he still has time. He has spoken about a visit and being aware of it.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** That is right, Madam Speaker. About four months ago, when we had severe rains in the ACT, I visited the City Police Station after being advised of the water egress. But it has happened over years. It has happened prior to this event as well. But we are at the point now where the CPO has indicated that he feels that the safety of our officers needs to be paramount, and therefore he is moving them out whilst we do some of those repairs. It is of course a temporary move, and they will come back to the City Police Station. Of course, it is up to the CPO and the team at ACT Policing to understand— *(Time expired.)*

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, when did you first raise this issue with cabinet? Did you request funding to address ACT Policing's concern about the City Police Station?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No; this is being funded through the director-general's contingency fund.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, can you guarantee that the City Police Station will be fixed before the end of 2024?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The City Police Station is 66 years old. When we talk about "fixing it", we can certainly rectify the water leaks. That is an engineering solution. There have been some challenges as we have had the engineers in there doing some of the work on the water leaks. In fact, we found that some of the COLORBOND material they have used to do some of the repairs has actually caused more water egress into the ground floor. We are having Monarch Building Solutions coming in straightaway to start that work to retrofit some of the piping. It is quite an intricate engineering situation, where the stormwater drain actually comes down inside the outer columns of the building. So they need to be re-sleeved and it needs to be ensured that the traps underneath that contain the water from the downpipe drains are larger—

**Mr Cain:** A point of order, Madam Speaker: it is interesting to hear about the minister's understanding of the work, but can he guarantee that this will be fixed by the end of 2024?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** He has actually responded to your language, Mr Cain. There is no point of order. Have you concluded, Mr Gentleman?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Yes.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—funding**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Skills and Training. Minister, how is the ACT government investing in public TAFE through the CIT?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her question. Our government is investing in TAFE through the Canberra Institute of Technology, as the centre of our vocational education and training system. We do that because it delivers high-quality vocational education and training that addresses the needs of students, industries and communities.

That is why we have made it part of our VET sector, as we invest more than 70 per cent of all public funding in VET, towards public TAFE in the ACT. It includes investments in TAFE infrastructure, including through the CIT Woden campus project, which is making excellent progress. It will deliver a new, state-of-the-art facility in the Woden town centre and deliver training to around 6,500 students each year.

Our investment also includes working with the federal government, through the new National Skills Agreement, to deliver matched funding to develop nationally networked TAFE centres of excellence, funding to support improved course completions and funding to support initiatives in critical or emerging industries, particularly in the new economy. It also includes investments and partnering with the federal government in delivering fee-free TAFE places—3,600 over the next three years—to address skills shortages and open the doors of education to more Canberrans who might otherwise be unable to afford it.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what steps is the government making to support world-class training at CIT?

**MR STEEL:** We know that in order to have world-class training we must have the best technology, particularly as we invest in new TAFE infrastructure and new TAFE campuses. That is why it was great to announce, with the Chief Minister, that the ACT government will invest an additional \$8 million in the latest smart technology at CIT Woden, through the budget review, and provide students with the simulated learning environments and hands-on training spaces that are needed to deliver that high-quality training.

The CIT Woden project will see the main building top out later this year. It will be equipped with new audiovisual technology, augmented hearing systems, camera tracking capability, videoconferencing equipment, LED wall displays, smart screens, microphones, amplifiers and speakers. This will create a better experience for

students, particularly as they learn online, and it will create a better experience for teachers as well. We will also deliver modern commercial workstations and appliances, a demountable stage and creative art equipment through our investment. The state-of-the-art facility at CIT Woden is an important commitment to TAFE in the territory. It is part of our commitment to make sure that TAFE is at the centre of what we do in vocational education and training.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, how will these investments ensure that Canberrans are skilled for the future?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question. Our investments are all about creating the skills of the future, through major investments in public TAFE. Last week I joined the Chief Minister at CIT Fyshwick, another TAFE campus, to announce that we will be submitting a proposal to the commonwealth that we establish a new centre of excellence, as part of the National Skills Agreement. Our proposal will include the expansion of CIT's nation-leading electric vehicle training centre to support more training places for the emerging electric vehicle automotive industry and to support the electrification of our economy, particularly an expansion that will include heavy electric and fuel-cell vehicles.

We know that we need at least 1,280 additional electricians and 270 more electrical engineers for our local economy as we embark on the transition to net zero by 2045. That is why we have also announced funding to support the feasibility and scoping of a broader future energy skills hub at CIT to incorporate our proposed centre of excellence and expand training in electrotechnologies.

Sparkies are going to be at the centre of this transition, and we need more of them trained, through our TAFEs and other RTOs, to meet the needs of our economy. This transition is going to create a lot of jobs. It is going to require a lot of new skills. It needs to be supported, as well, through the reskilling and upskilling of existing workers in other trades. Through our investment in CIT we are supporting both our commitment to electrification and the creation of local jobs, skilled jobs that will power the Canberra economy.

### **ACT Policing—resourcing**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Police. Yesterday during question time, you were boasting:

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.

The Deputy Commissioner told the *Canberra Times*:

We need a new [City] station; I've been banging on about this for three years.

While the AFP Association President told the *Canberra Times*:

We have been informing the ACT government for some time that the condition of ACT Policing accommodation needs to be addressed.

How can you maintain that ACT Policing has received record investments when the ACT has the lowest police per capita in the country and workplaces are no longer safe for use?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Milligan for the question, and I will reiterate: we have made record investments into ACT Policing through our budget—a budget that Mr Milligan has voted against every single year! Of course, these investments are not just staff on the ground; they are also in accommodation. For City Police Station, for example, in the last budget there was \$2.7 million for work there on the watchhouse, bringing it to a modern environment, a safe environment for people to work with; and of course we have a contingency of some \$300,000 for the work that is happening at the moment for the repairs to the water damage at city station as well.

But Mr Milligan goes to the overall question about a new city station for the ACT. The Chief Minister has touched on it earlier on and we have agreed with ACT Police and of course the federal commissioner on a new station for the ACT. We have a panel that is working through that at the moment. I have visited the VicPol new station in Melbourne, with the Chief Police Officer, looking at the opportunities that we could deliver here in the ACT. These learnings are quite important as we go forward, and we have some very passionate people in JACS and in ACT Policing that are keen to have input into the design of a new city station.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Why have you only announced \$2 million in funding today, when the issue has been known since 2017? How did you come to that figure?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Madam Speaker, it was a budget figure in the last budget—2.7 for repairs to the watchhouse. It was well discussed through budget estimates, so it is not news. It was in the last budget. The figure that I have just announced is for the repairs for the water egress at city station that has occurred recently.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, why have you failed to make any significant investments towards providing adequate accommodation for police officers, especially given they have now had to leave the building because it is not safe?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I will reiterate the work that we are doing on the Master Accommodation Plan, particularly for Gungahlin, where at the end, police will have control of the whole building. We have worked with RFS, with SES and the volunteers to design a new opportunity at Mitchell for them to operate in, and then of course a new station for Fire and Rescue and our paramedics at Casey will allow police to fulfil the whole accommodation opportunity at Gungahlin. This is a commitment we have made, and it is being funded.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—chief executive officer**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, recently the Remuneration Tribunal called for submissions for their Autumn review, which includes looking at the remuneration of the stood-down CIT CEO. ACT taxpayers are currently paying for an acting CEO and the stood-down CEO whilst the Integrity Commission is investigating a possible case of corruption. Chief Minister, have you made a submission to the Remuneration Tribunal arguing that the stood-down CEO of



the CIT should not receive another pay rise while she is being investigated by the Integrity Commission, and, if not, why not?

**MR BARR:** The Leader of the Opposition may have missed a disallowable instrument that I have introduced: the Public Sector Management Amendment Standards 2024 (No 1). I signed that off on advice to address some of the issues that are pertinent to questions around what happens in relation to executives and statutory officeholders in a situation where contract termination may or may not occur. Public sector management standards have been in place. There is a publicly available amendment that I have signed. In relation to the Remuneration Tribunal, it would not be within their remit to make a decision to single out an individual. I think the line of questioning from Ms Lee heads down the path of a denial of natural justice.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, have you made any previous contact or inquiries to the Remuneration Tribunal regarding this matter so that ACT taxpayers are not paying two full-time salaries for CEOs, such as over the last two years?

**MR BARR:** It would not be a matter for the Remuneration Tribunal. Ms Lee should understand that. Obviously, there are a number of legal requirements and, indeed, the presumption of innocence that does need to apply here. As Ms Lee has indicated, there is a process underway that is public, and we will await findings from the Integrity Commission.

**MR CAIN:** Chief Minister, what action will your government take, including submissions to the tribunal, to ensure that the CIT's CEO does not get another significant pay rise, given she has been on paid leave for nearly two years?

**MR BARR:** That is another example of where the supplementary question cannot be adjusted to reflect previous answers. If you had been listening—

**Mr Cain:** Are you making a submission to the tribunal—

**Ms Lee:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order: standing order 117 is very clear about what the answer should be, and I ask the Chief Minister to just answer the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The standing orders also say interjections should not be allowed. Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To be clear, this is not a matter that the Remuneration Tribunal would make an individual determination on, in relation to a person who holds a position. That is an unreasonable proposition for the Canberra Liberals to put forward. I do point out the Public Sector Management Amendment Standards 2024 (No 1) disallowable instrument.

### **ACT Public Service—Public Sector Management Standards**

**MR BRADDOCK:** With respect to that instrument—and I promise you there was no collusion between myself and the Liberal Party on this question! That instrument amends the circumstances in which, at the end of an SES member's engagement, they will be eligible for a payout, and it will now also include circumstances where the

engager loses confidence in the SES member's ability to exercise the functions which the SES member has been engaged to exercise.

The explanatory statement states what the change is but has not provided the reasons as to why that change is being incorporated into the instrument.

**MR BARR:** I presume the question is, "Why the instrument?" It is a simple amendment that has been made to reflect contemporary approaches that make it clear that senior executives and statutory office holders who are the subject of findings of serious misconduct, serious corrupt conduct or systemic corrupt conduct do not receive this payment.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Chief Minister, what would you say to the suggestion that a so-called "loss of confidence" in a senior executive has the same effective meaning as having concerns of underperformance?

**MR BARR:** I think they are legally different.

### **Light rail—stage 2B**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, five years ago you were lamenting the coalition's victory at the 2009 federal election in Canberra, and I was celebrating your lamenting—

**Mr Barr:** 2019.

**MR PARTON:** 2019—by saying that Canberrans probably will not ride light rail to Woden until 2025. It is what you said. Chief Minister, it is now early 2024. The Coalition, of course, is no longer in government. It seems though that the tram will probably will not arrive at Woden until sometime after 2030. Why does your government never meet any of its own delivery targets when it comes to stage 2 of the tram?

**MR BARR:** I do, of course, note that the change of federal government has indeed brought a partner to the table in the delivery of light rail infrastructure. I do always find it ironic that the party that does not want any progress—you do not want this built at all—and yet you spend an extraordinary amount of time, you spend an extraordinary amount of time throwing obstacles up, attempting to block progress—

**Mr Cain:** Cheaper and better outcomes!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Barr—just, just—put it to the side Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** You spend a lot of time, Mr Parton, seeking to stop progress on this project, and then come into this place and complain that things are not happening first enough for you. You do not support the project. What is clear, is that we do have a delivery partner and a financing partner in the commonwealth, but it is very clear, as has been expressed multiple times, that the next stage through the national triangle does indeed involve the federal parliament, the National Capital Authority and a range of environmental and heritage issues.

**Mr Hanson:** That is not new! That was not new, when you have said it would be delivered by 2025. There is nothing new there.

**MR BARR:** Welcome back Mr Hanson.

**Mr Hanson:** Thanks.

**MR BARR:** It is always good that you interject from the back bench! I have missed you terribly. I have missed you terribly.

*Members interjecting—*

**Mr Hanson:** You interrupted my nap time!

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, members!

**Mr Hanson:** Do not respond, Mr Barr. Do not respond.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You have 16 seconds left, Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** Madam Speaker, with friends like these Ms Lee is well served, is she not?

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, do you have any confidence in the tram arriving in Woden before 2034, given the deadline blow-outs that stage 2 has experienced to date?

**MR BARR:** Yes.

**DR PATERSON:** Why, Chief Minister, is it so important that we do get light rail to Woden?

**MR BARR:** Our city is the fastest growing in Australia. We need to provide more public transport infrastructure. We also need to provide more infrastructure in health, education and in a number of areas. However, in order to ensure that we remain Australia's most liveable city, and one of the most liveable cities in the world, it is important to invest in transport infrastructure: active transport infrastructure; public transport infrastructure; and indeed, certain targeted upgrades to our road network. It would appear there is only one party in this place committed to doing all three. You lot—the Canberra Liberals—are not interested in public transport and the Greens political party find it very difficult to invest in road infrastructure.

**Ms Lee:** Madam Speaker, another point of order. Again, I draw your attention to standing order 117, about answers.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I have gone back and considered, and I think my ruling, that there is no breach of standing orders, is in place. Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** So we will continue our focus on investing in all forms of transport infrastructure right across the city.

**Mr Parton:** Hovercrafts?

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Barr. Members—interjections—hang on!

**MR BARR:** I suspect Mr Parton might have let his brand new policy out of the bag there! Hovercrafts for all, is it? They would have to be BMW, of course, would they not!

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members! We have question time and I am calling questions without notice.

### **ACT Health—Digital Health Record system**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to your answer during question time on Tuesday where you said, “I have no information that the outcomes for individuals who have passed away or were in palliative care were related to the referrals that were not received.” Minister, will you tell the Assembly how many patients had to wait longer than clinically recommended because of your disastrous DHR system losing over 200 referrals?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Again, I completely reject Ms Castley’s representation of the Digital Health Record. In fact, as she well knows, the issue occurred in relation to the integration system, which has since been replaced.

In question time the other day an issue was raised regarding the patient who passed away during the period between the original issue and the issue being identified. I can advise Ms Castley that two of the referrals were for that patient rather than being for two separate patients and that the patient was receiving treatment from CHS during this period and that their death was not related to this issue. So, to put to bed one of the potential scare campaigns from those opposite, CHS has provided definitive advice on that matter. CHS instituted its clinical procedures, as was advised at the time, and we are seeking some further advice in relation to whether any immediate harm—

**Ms Castley:** Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. I asked how many patients had to wait longer than clinically recommended. I do not believe she has answered that question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** She has gone to the substance of the question, as I understand it.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am happy to take that question on notice. I do not have that information here with me. I am not entirely sure that we will be able to answer in

detail. As Ms Castley is aware, a number of those referrals had already come through different channels. It may be an unreasonable diversion of resources to go back through those 231 referrals. *(Time expired.)*

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, have any patients that were unfortunately affected by this latest DHR stuff-up taken legal action?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Not to my knowledge, but I will take the question on notice and double check.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, will you apologise to any patients impacted by this serious failure of the DHR system?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Again, I would emphasise that this was not a failure of the DHR system; this was an issue with the integration engine, which has since been replaced. It was an issue of the integration process. And, again, I would emphasise that—as is clear in the information that is available to Ms Castley through questions on notice and through the caveat brief that she has access to—this system processed thousands and thousands of referrals and this was a small number. If any individual has been adversely affected by an issue in our system, of course, I am sorry about that and, of course, I apologise to them for that.

But I would re-emphasise something I said the other day: the systems that were in place before this were far from perfect. You have been a nurse, Madam Speaker, and you have worked in the health system. Anybody who has worked in the health system understands that the 40 systems that were in place prior to the Digital Health Record being implemented were far from perfect and were not always well integrated. This issue was picked up and addressed. The scaremongering that is going on from those opposite, with the conflation of issues, to suggest that this is about Epic, is absolutely incorrect.

### **Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act—implementation**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Women. Minister, last year the Assembly passed the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Bill. Can you please update the Assembly on what progress has been made to implement this bill?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question, but I particularly want to acknowledge Ms Orr for her advocacy on ending period poverty in the ACT. The ACT is only the second jurisdiction in the world, after Scotland, to enshrine free period products in law as we aim to eliminate period poverty.

As I announced at the end of last year, through the 2023-24 midyear budget, the government has committed \$2.8 million to support the rollout of free period products across our city. This funding will provide for the installation of period product dispensers in a number of public locations, such as ACT public schools, child and family centres, and public health facilities. This commitment shows that Labor takes seriously the issue of period poverty and addressing inequity more broadly across our city. No-one in our community should have to struggle to afford pads and tampons.

As an update to the Assembly: free period products have been available since the end of last year in our child and family centres in Gungahlin, west Belconnen and Tuggeranong, and at the Child Development Service in Holt.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what does the rollout look like in our ACT public schools?

**MS BERRY:** We know that school students are some of the most significantly impacted by period poverty. Forty-eight per cent of the people who menstruate have recorded missing education as a result of having to manage their period. The impact that period poverty has on education and work, for those who experience, it is significant. We do not want any student to feel as though they have to use unsuitable products to manage their periods if they run out of tampons at school or cannot afford to buy them.

Whilst providing period products is ongoing policy within our schools, along with other hygiene products, this commitment sends a very clear message. Providing access to period products at every ACT public school will reduce the burden of managing periods, especially for young people.

Part of Ms Orr's bill called on the ACT government to develop information about menstrual health and hygiene. This is an important step to reduce the stigma and shame that people who menstruate might experience. This is why we have provided funding, through the 2023-24 midyear budget, to develop educational resources on menstrual health, to help reduce the stigma associated with menstruation.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, what is the next stage of implementation?

**MS BERRY:** It is important to note that free period products are already available in public schools, as I have noted. However, over the course of this year the ACT government will be conducting a procurement process to find a provider for period product dispensers to be rolled out across our ACT public schools. Maintaining people's privacy when accessing period products is a key part of the principle of dignity. This is why the government has seen fit to invest in the provision of dispensers. Having period products available via dispensers is a key part of the principle of dignity that my colleague Ms Orr highlighted in her bill. In addition, the rollout of period products in other public places, such as public health facilities, will continue throughout the year.

If there are any members who would like more information on this, I encourage them to look at the CSD website. This is another example of how ACT Labor is committed to addressing inequality across our community.

### **Government—human resources and information management system**

**MR CAIN:** My question is to the Special Minister of State. Minister, in question time on 29 June last year, you said that you were briefed on the HRIMS project in November 2020 and were made aware then that the project was not going to meet its deliverables timeframe of December 2020. You also said at that time:

... we then paused the program and undertook multiple technical and non-technical reviews into the program.

Minister, why did you not cancel the program then?

**MR STEEL:** Because we did not know what the issues were. We undertook those reviews and inquiries to understand the issues with the program, initially with a view that we wanted to set the program back on track to deliver its intended outcome. But through that process, as a result of all the reviews that were commissioned, we then found that there was an option that had not been fully considered, which was to upgrade the existing CHRIS21 HR21 systems at a lower cost and lower risk for the territory.

As a result of finding that option, we are now pursuing that, and we made that announcement through the budget around eight months ago, as well as making the decision to close the HRIMS program so that we could then focus on this new PCHRM program.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, when did you first brief cabinet on the issues facing the HRIMS project?

**MR STEEL:** Madam Speaker, I am not going to comment on confidential cabinet process, but the answer broadly is we discovered the option around the time that the Leeper review was also being conducted, and that informed the decision in the budget in June.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, did you brief the Chief Minister on these issues, and if so, when did you first bring it to his attention?

**MR STEEL:** I believe this was brought to his attention through the budget process, Madam Speaker.

*Ms Lawder interjecting—*

### **Municipal services—Evatt shops**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, can you provide an update on the Evatt shops upgrade?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. Work is continuing on the Evatt shops upgrade. Ms Clay would be aware that there was a community consultation period that ran from 28 June to 21 August last year, and that the *What We Heard* report was released on 5 October. Following that consultation, final sketch plans are in progress as we speak. They will inform the detailed design, with an expectation that the detailed design will be completed in April and shared with the community. From this, a construction tender will be released and, once the contract has been awarded, construction will commence. Works are expected to take approximately six to nine months, dependent on weather.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, when will the final upgrades be completed?

**MS CHEYNE:** I refer Ms Clay to my previous answer.

**MISS NUTTALL:** What upgrades did people ask for during the consultation?

**MS CHEYNE:** There were 230 surveys received during the consultation period. Some of the most popular elements that were voted as being sought after at these shops were: safety improvements, including lighting, path and pavement improvements; places to sit and to gather; and play elements. Then, against the preliminary design that was released, people commented on the proposed nature play and accessible play elements, on new seating and tables providing spaces to sit and gather, as well as on improved access for pedestrians including paths, safe crossings and stairways. And this is all available online on the YourSay website.

### **Minister for Sport and Recreation—correspondence**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, on 20 November last year, more than two months ago, you received an email into which I was cc'd asking questions about the change of operations management of the Gungahlin Leisure Centre. The email raised significant concerns regarding the operation and access to the centre, including the handover of private bank details from one provider to the next. However, as of 22 January, according to the concerned person, you have not yet replied to that email.

Minister, how long does it take your office to respond to letters of concern, particularly where the matter is of some urgency, as was the case here? When will you reply to the concerned constituent?

**MS BERRY:** I think I recall that email, or an email similar to that, and I will have to take it on notice and see where the response is up to.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, were you aware that private banking details were to be passed over to the new operators?

**MS BERRY:** There were a number of arrangements in place as part of the transfer to the new operators of our leisure centres and swimming pools across the ACT. With regard to bank details and other information that was provided, I will take that on notice.

### **Kambah—50th anniversary**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy. Minister, it was raised to me by a constituent that Kambah is about to celebrate 50 years since its establishment. They expressed that it is vital to celebrate milestones like this, as a way to embrace the sense of community among Canberra's outer suburbs. The 2023 recipients of the ACT Event Fund were granted amounts ranging from \$10,000 up to \$30,000. With this in mind, how does the ACT



government plan to support smaller scale community led events in 2024 such as the 50th anniversary celebration for Kambah?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Nuttall for the question. The ACT Event Fund is our primary avenue for event and festival funding assistance via the ACT government and it does support a range of economic and community outcomes across artistic, cultural, sporting, community and special interest events. It supports both larger events that attract tourism and increase economic activity in the region, as well as community events within Canberra's town centres and suburbs, encouraging the involvement of local community and the utilisation of community assets, precincts and spaces.

My understanding is that I have signed off on the 2024 event fund and the successful recipients at the end of last year, and I believe that is in the final stages of deeds being issued and accepted. There are a range of organisations that have been supported, whether for a smaller-scale community event, or for a larger one that is going to create some economic activity, including one this weekend, which is of course the Belco Bowl Jam.

In terms of other areas of funding that Ms Nuttall might be interested in, there are arts activities grants which are available all year round for applications of up to \$5,000. Outside my portfolio responsibilities, there are several programs that support community led events, including multicultural participation grants, youth week grants and more.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, given the eligibility criteria for the ACT Event Fund states that applicants must provide supporting documentation that demonstrates their experience delivering similar services, are any considerations made for first time event organisers in light of the potential community benefits?

**MS CHEYNE:** Certainly with this fund, we do have two separate streams of funding, as I mentioned, so both community event funding and the event development funding. For community event funding, up to \$10,000 is available to support the delivery and enhancement of events that can encourage local engagement and participation. Applicants seeking \$5,000 or less will have no requirements for providing own source budget revenue but those seeking more than \$5,000 will not be able to apply for more than 50 per cent of the event's total cash expense budget. I would note, that within the ACT Event Fund there is a small amount of funding that goes towards sector development. There was a two day session, I believe held last year, which had a very high attendance rate of people from right across the community with varying levels of experience, about how to host a successful event. As a result of that, there are now a range of resources that are available at [events-dot-canberra-dot-com](http://events-dot-canberra-dot-com) and I believe that Events ACT will be holding a similar session for the sector again this year.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, what measures are taken to promote equity for other milestone events in the ACT?

**MS CHEYNE:** I would note with regard to the ACT Event Fund is that it is a very rigorous process in terms of making sure the recipients are both able to hold the event they are successful for and also that there is a balance right across the community. I would note in particular, and going to perhaps some of Ms Nuttall's questioning, that

again there is the Belco Bowl Jam this weekend, but year after year, SouthFest, including SouthFest in the Suburbs, has been supported by the ACT Event Fund.

This year, I would note that there are 19 event development funding successful applicants and 11 community event funding applicants. They are spread across arts, sport and recreation, community gatherings and festivals, and food and beverage. I believe through this rigorous application process that we have, while we do have different standards for the levels of funding that people are applying for, and different requirements of course as that scales up, I do think we have a very wide range of events, both geographically, and also in event type.

### **Arts—the Hon Ms Susan Ryan AO—public sculpture**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy. Minister, could you please provide an update on the government's public art commission to honour the late Senator Susan Ryan AO?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. At the end of January, I joined Minister Kristy McBain and Justine Butler, who is the daughter of the late Senator Susan Ryan, to jointly announce the location of this special ACT government public art commission. Susan Ryan was a formidable trailblazer who continues to inspire Australian women, the public service and wider community through her significant contributions as a senator in the ACT and minister in the Hawke government, as well as in senior roles across the private and public sectors.

The commission honouring Susan Ryan not only enhances the representation of women in the territory's public art collection but also pays tribute to Susan as a champion for the rights of women and the pivotal role she played in the creation of the Sex Discrimination Act, which has its 40th anniversary this year. As we know, this act literally revolutionised rights for women in Australia. Many women would not be in the roles and positions they are now if it were not for this act, which prevents discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status, or pregnancy. As education minister, Susan Ryan also increased participation and finishing rates of schoolchildren and tertiary enrolments, in particular, increased dramatically. While there are some who associate her with the introduction of HECS fees, they do not realise that, behind closed doors, she in fact vociferously opposed this but she was overruled.

Following a two-stage open public tender process, acclaimed Australian artist Lis Johnson has been selected to memorialise the late senator through a life-sized bronze statue, which will be installed and unveiled in the Senate Rose Gardens later this year.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how has the family of the late Senator Susan Ryan AO been involved during this process?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. The artist, Lis Johnson, was also responsible for the recently launched bronze sculptures of Dame Enid Lyons and Dame Dorothy Tangney outside Old Parliament House, which have become exceptionally popular, I would say. Liz has been collaborating closely with Susan Ryan's family, including Justine Butler, and she was present at the announcement of the location.

It has of course been crucial to engage and consult with the family at every stage of the process right from the initial conversations—I called Justine to seek her family’s permission very soon after the 2022 election result, actually—and throughout the commissioning process and in consulting with the family about the artist, the depiction and the location of the artwork. When I spoke with Justine at the recent event, I learnt that she had just visited the artist’s studio in Victoria, where she was able to connect with Lis, sharing stories about her mum and her mannerisms, and to ultimately ensure that the final work captures the essence and presence of Susan Ryan for generations to come.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what is the significance of the location that has been announced?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary and I would like to acknowledge her efforts in ensuring that our public art collection better represents women. The life-size bronze sculpture of Susan Ryan will be located adjacent to the Senate Rose Gardens eastern central entry, in very close proximity to where Susan once had an office in Old Parliament House. The work will be in a purpose-designed setting featuring a curved bench seat, new paving and interpretive signage.

During the location announcement, Justine recalled the many happy memories that she and her brother Ben had spending time with their mum at what was then Parliament House and in the gardens and surrounds. I learnt that during the summer Susan and her parliamentary colleagues played social tennis games in the gardens, which also provided an important place to think and work during sitting weeks. It is also an area that today plenty of school students from across the country gather in when they are visiting Canberra, and I love that they will get to know this former education minister and minister for women.

Moreover, I hope that, for generations to come, people—and especially young women—will gain the same strong appreciation for and inspiration from Susan Ryan that I and many of my generation, and generations before me, have gained. She was unwavering in her beliefs and in advancing women’s rights, and something having not been done before was never a deterrent. Instead, her unrelenting determination for change improved education, the economy and equality. Australia changed for the better because of her.

I want to thank both houses of federal parliament for their approval to locate the sculpture of Susan Ryan within the Parliamentary Zone given that this location was so important to the family. Indeed, Susan was elected as the ACT’s first Labor senator in December 1975, having campaigned with the slogan “a woman’s place is in the Senate”. I look forward to unveiling later this year.

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

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Cocks for this sitting due to personal reasons.

**Legislative Assembly—interparliamentary relations—Republic of Kiribati**  
**Statement by member**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (2.55), by leave: I table:

ACT Legislative Assembly exchange with the Maneaba ni Maungatabu Kiribati—19 to 24 November 2023—Report, undated.

**MR PARTON:** I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

**MR PARTON:** I acknowledge members of the delegation from Kiribati who are in the parliament. I have had a number of discussions with them, along with Madam Speaker and others. I understand, based on the feedback that you have given to me, that the visit has been of exceptional benefit.

When Dr Paterson, Mr Evett and Mr Duncan joined me in Kiribati in November, it certainly hammered home to us—and I think I speak on behalf of Dr Paterson—the wonderful efforts that not just this Assembly but also the entire commonwealth government and entire Australian government have put towards enhancing the relationship between the two nations. Kiribati is extremely important to Australia and will remain important to Australia for a long time, and it is within all of our best interests to continue that engagement.

It was also a remarkable experience to sit in the parliament in Kiribati. I am sure you have done that yourself, Madam Speaker. It is fascinating that, when it all boils down, so often—as occurs when you go to various countries around the world—the issues that come to parliament are exactly the same in Kiribati as they are here. I know that Ms Cheyne will be pleased to hear that many of them refer to her portfolio, to city services. So many times when you examine politics on a global scale, you find that the issues that are actually of concern and are actually being focused on are those minor or minuscule issues—or they seem minor unless you are in the centre of them—that actually affect people’s lives from day to day.

So thank you for making us feel welcome, and thanks to Jayden Evett for coming up with what is a magnificent report that really does highlight what a great visit it was. Thanks not so much for filling the program in the way that it was, because it was chock-a-block! It was absolutely non-stop, but it certainly enabled us to experience much of your wonderful country. Thank you very much.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (2.58): I would like to reiterate Mr Parton’s words and welcome the delegation here to the ACT. It really was a fantastic trip that we had to Kiribati, and to visit your parliament was an experience that I will not forget. We learnt a lot and had a wonderful engagement with your Speaker and President. We learnt a lot from our trip over there. I hope you have enjoyed your stay, and we look forward to engaging with your parliament over the coming years. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) (2.59): Just a final word of thank you and appreciation on behalf of all members here for the various trips that the partnership, the twinning arrangement, has provided. We hope you have enjoyed your stay here, and we welcome you back at any time. Thank you.

## Papers

**Mr Gentleman** presented the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Reports—2022-23—Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Corrigendum, dated February 2024.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 30E—Half-yearly performance reports—December 2023, for the following:

ACT Health Directorate, dated February 2024.

ACT Local Hospital Network, dated February 2024.

Canberra Health Services, dated February 2024.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, dated February 2024.

Community Services Directorate, dated February 2024.

Education Directorate, dated February 2024.

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, dated February 2024.

Housing ACT, dated February 2024.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate, dated February 2024.

Major Projects Canberra, dated February 2024.

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, dated February 2024.

Transport Canberra Operations, dated February 2024.

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principal) Act 2023 (Victoria)—As adopted by the Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Act 2012, including explanatory statement.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Community Services Directorate—FOI-CSD-23/2, dated 2 November 2023.

Gene Technology Act, pursuant to subsection 136(2)—Operations of the Gene Technology Regulator—Annual reports—2022-2023, dated 13 September 2023.

Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023, dated 24 October 2023.

Inquiries Act—Australian Capital Territory Board of Inquiry—Criminal Justice System—Final report—Final Government response.

Planning Act, pursuant to subsection 268(2)—Statement of Leases Granted—1 October to 31 December 2023, dated February 2024.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 19—Inquiry into responses to Auditor-General recommendations for reports 5/2017, 7/2019 and 6/2020—Government response, dated February 2024.

United States Trade Mission, Sept/Oct 2023—Statement, dated February 2024.

Waiting Times—Outpatients and Emergency Department November 2023—Government Report, dated November 2023.

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

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Public Sector Management Act—Public Sector Management Amendment Standards 2024 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2024-19 (LR, 6 February 2024).

## **Disability Inclusion Bill 2024**

**Ms Orr**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, together with its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (3.00): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise to speak on my Disability Inclusion Bill 2024, which I proudly introduce today. The introduction of this bill marks years of work that my team and I have done and will continue to do. We have big plans for improving disability inclusion in Canberra and are very much looking forward to seeing how this bill will, in practice, help improve the lives of people with a disability.

The Disability Inclusion Bill 2024 is an act to promote the inclusion of people with disability in the ACT community in every respect. The bill recognises and applies the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and establishes principles to protect and promote the rights of people with disability to fully realise their inclusion in the ACT community. Most significantly, the bill establishes a social model of disability within ACT law. A social model is a profound and important shift in the way we address inequity in our community.

The bill establishes a framework for creating disability inclusion strategies across government priority areas of participation, such as health, education, employment, justice and social inclusion. These are to be developed in consultation with people with disability and key stakeholders. It also requires ACT government agencies to develop disability inclusion plans which are specific to their organisation and to detail how they are going to adapt their work practices and programs to be more inclusive of people with disability. In line with the social model of disability, the bill puts the onus on those priority areas of participation to proactively remove existing barriers to full participation, equity and inclusion, rather than have people with disability individually and consistently seek the accommodations to which they are entitled.

There are many members in the community who ask why this bill is necessary, despite improvements in disability rights. The simple answer is that people with disability continue to face heavy discrimination in many facets of their lives. It occurs any time a person with disability is treated unequally, less favourably or not given the same opportunities as others because of their disability. It could be experienced directly by an individual or indirectly because of a blanket practice, rule or policy that causes unreasonable disadvantage to a person with a disability. While I acknowledge that there is no overnight fix, this bill helps to ensure that government and organisations are being as inclusive as possible. Speaking to the community is vital to ensure that they are conscious of their responsibilities, as well as ensuring that the people who are going to be directly impacted by this bill feel heard and supported in Canberra.

From the very beginning, we knew that to make Canberra more inclusive for people with disability we needed to ensure that all Canberrans knew their responsibilities and walked this path together. For too long, it has been the responsibility of people with a disability to overcome the obstacles and challenges that our society unknowingly creates in their lives. For too long, people with disability have been made to feel unsupported, unworthy or even a burden to the world around them. I want to change that narrative and help to ensure that no-one in our community ever feels this way again.

As I have already mentioned, a major element of the bill is the introduction of a social model of disability within the ACT. A social model of disability seeks to change society to empower people living with impairment. It understands disability as a social construct, by way of the interaction between people living with impairments and their environment, which is characterised by physical, attitudinal, communicative or social barriers. Our social environment must adapt to enable people living with impairments to participate in society on an equal basis with others.

In contrast with the medical model, which understands disability as a health condition to be individually addressed, the social model of disability is now the international standard for understanding and addressing disability, consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is in contrast to the medical model of disability, which says people are disabled by their impairments or differences. Under the medical model, these impairments or differences should be fixed or changed by medical and other treatments, even when the impairment or difference does not cause pain or illness. The medical model looks at what is wrong with the person and not what the person needs. It creates low expectations and leads to people losing independence, choice and control in their own lives.

To give an example of how a social model is different to a medical model, imagine a young adult with a learning difficulty who wants to live independently in their own home but does not know how to pay the rent. The social model recognises that with the right support on how to pay their rent they can live the life they choose. The medical model might assume on behalf of the person that the barriers to independent living are overwhelming, and they may be expected to live in a care home. I am sure I am not alone in thinking that the latter does not seem right in today's society. Presently, the medical model singularly informs any legislative approach to disability in the territory. This bill changes that.

My team and I have been out in the community, talking with everyday Canberrans about disability inclusion and how this bill will help to better support some of its most vulnerable members. The support has been overwhelming, and we are spreading the word that for disability inclusion to really work it requires the whole community to drive change and accept responsibility for making our common places and spaces more inclusive to all. We can do better and we can be better.

It is clear that it should not be the responsibility of an individual with a disability to overcome challenges and obstacles that people without a disability do not have to overcome. Having a disability inclusion act will bring us in line with work that other Australian states have done, most notably New South Wales and South Australia, who already have disability inclusion acts. Naturally, they differ slightly from this bill, which has been developed with the intention of complementing existing policy and legislative frameworks. For instance, the ACT currently writes and implements disability inclusions strategies and so this bill directly addresses them, whereas other states do not. Additionally, South Australia's legislation includes screening for workers participating in the NDIS, whereas we have dealt with this in separate legislation in the ACT.

I think it is also worth noting how this bill will work with other schemes to improve the lives of people with a disability. Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 is the national disability framework intended to drive action at all levels of government to improve the lives of people with disability. It supports Australia's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The ACT has signed up to Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 and is committed to realising the change that it seeks to achieve.

The Disability Inclusion Bill is intended to support the initiatives of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 by applying the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in ACT law to create a framework which drives the change that states and territories seek to achieve in the national strategy. This bill codifies the framework for the existing Disability Justice Strategy and Disability Health Strategy and will build on these by requiring further strategies across other key priority areas.

I would like to draw attention to some of the more significant clauses within the bill. Clause 5 sets out the object of the act. The object of the act is to ensure that people with disability are recognised as an important and valuable part of our diverse community and that it is the responsibility of all of us to foster a community where people with disability are included. The object outlines that, to do this, ableism must be addressed and barriers to accessibility must be not only identified but also removed.

This approach is core to moving to a social model of disability in the ACT, where people with impairments are not required to change to fit within the community but rather the community adjusts its structures and practices in a way that enables people with impairments to participate in society on an equal basis with others. The object is achieved by requiring the development of disability inclusion strategies to drive change across the whole community, and disability inclusion plans for the public sector so that government programs and services are inclusive.



Clause 5(3) notes that, to achieve the objective of the bill to an extent that is reasonably practicable, the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant human rights instruments affecting people with disability, as enforced from time to time, are to be supported. The UNCRPD is pivotal in progressing disability rights globally and supporting the implementation of the social model of disability. Australia ratified the UNCRPD on 17 July 2007 and it came into force in 2008.

In 2009, Australia ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability. The Optional Protocol came into force in Australia in 2009. Both documents therefore influence the legislative and policy approach of the Australian government and the states and territories. In implementing the requirements of this bill it is crucial to consider these documents, as well as other instruments that may be in place, to make sure the responses arising from the actions of this bill are consistent with our wider commitments and obligations.

Clause 6 defines the terms “disability inclusion” and “ableism” for the purposes of this act. The concepts involved in these definitions are central to this act and its implementation. As we move to a social model of disability, commonly held practices and perceptions will be challenged. The concepts outlined in this section are intended to provide a clear basis from which disability inclusion under a social model should be approached as the objects of the act are implemented.

Clause 8 sets out the meanings of priority inclusion areas and the responsible minister for the purposes of disability inclusion strategies. The priority inclusion areas are intended to cover the priorities outlined in Australia’s Disability Strategy, as well as providing for the minister to declare additional priority inclusion areas.

Clause 9 sets out certain parameters to guide the development of disability inclusion strategies for priority inclusion areas. Disability inclusion strategies are intended to be high-level documents across a range of stakeholders in a priority area and are not limited to one organisation.

Clause 9(1) establishes a requirement that the minister responsible for a priority inclusion area must make a strategy for that priority inclusion area. The minister responsible must make the strategy in consultation with the minister responsible for this bill, which will be the Minister for Disability. This is an important aspect to the development of strategies. To drive the change sought by this bill, all ministers with responsibility will need to direct change within their portfolio areas. Consultation with the minister responsible for this bill will allow the minister responsible for this bill to meet any obligations they have for the implementation of this bill, as well as meet their portfolio responsibilities.

Clause 10 sets out the minimum requirements for consultation when developing a strategy for a priority inclusion area. Importantly, this clause requires that consultation must be undertaken in a way that is inclusive of people with disability and in ways that are accessible to all abilities.

Clause 13 sets out certain parameters to guide the development of disability inclusion plans for a public sector entity. Disability inclusion plans focus on the actions that a

specific entity will undertake to improve the inclusion of people with disability and to address ableism across their organisation.

Clause 14 sets out the minimum requirements for consultation when developing a disability inclusion plan. Importantly, this clause requires that consultation must be undertaken, again, in a way that is inclusive of people with disability, and in ways that are accessible to people of all abilities.

Clause 15 allows a public sector entity required under another territory law to prepare an inclusion plan or plans to avoid duplication by preparing a single plan that will be taken to meet the requirements of this act and the other acts. This is particularly relevant in the context of positive community obligations.

Clause 17 establishes the Disability Advisory Council. Clause 19 sets out the number of members, roles and make-up of the council. Importantly, this clause requires that the minister must take all practicable steps to ensure that membership of the council reflects the diversity in the community. Clause 21 establishes that the council has the autonomy to operate in a way that it considers appropriate.

Clauses 1.1 and 1.2 in schedule 1 outline the general principles that should be applied when devising strategies and actions to achieve disability inclusion plans.

In finalising my remarks today, I would like to thank the people and organisations that have provided feedback and shaped this bill into the best that it can be. It has been a privilege to walk this path with so many advocates for change who, in their own work, do so much to make this world a more inclusive place. I am grateful for the time they have taken to share their expertise and truly consider every aspect of the bill so that it meets its full potential. I look forward to continuing to work with all these people as we take the next step in making the ACT a more inclusive place for people with disability. Thank you.

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

## **Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill 2024**

**Ms Clay**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, together with its explanatory statement and a climate impact analysis.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.14): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This bill amends the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. The bill does three things. First, it freezes rent. For two years, it will stop all rent increases. Homes will be rented out at the rate currently paid or advertised. For two years, landlords will not be able to charge more than that. From the day this bill starts, the rent will freeze. This will give renters much-needed relief. They will get a guaranteed break and much-needed certainty for two years. After two years, this bill will cap rent increases at two per cent.

The bill also makes sure that the rent freeze and rent cap apply to the home, not to the tenant. This means that if a tenant moves out and a new tenant moves in, the rent is still frozen or capped. Landlords cannot jack up the price from \$600 a week to \$700 a week simply because it sat empty for a day. The bill also stops rent bidding. Landlords will not be able to accept rent higher than the advertised rate.

These sound like big steps. For those struggling to make the rent right now, they are. This will give immediate relief. These steps will let everyone plan for their lives the way people should be able to. They will mean the difference between being able to buy food or not. They will stop people who do not have enough money to meet basic needs from outbidding one another in the *Hunger Games* that is renting in Canberra. This bill will remove a burden of anxiety from the 31 per cent of Canberrans who rent.

These are important steps. They are also simple, smart and obvious steps. Today's bill is an extension of the renters' rights the Greens have already brought in. It is the next step we must take in the face of the crisis. Everyone here has agreed, many times over, that we are in a housing, renting and cost of living crisis. The Greens have worked over many years to set reasonable controls that protect renting Canberrans from the whim of home owners. We have been working to fix the power imbalance that can see renters suffer for raising reasonable concerns. In the ACT we already limit rent increases to one per year and we cap rent increases to 110 per cent of CPI. This is great, but in this runaway market—this housing crisis—it is not enough.

Target inflation—the type of growth that economists say is good—should be two or three per cent, but in recent years the CPI has gone up five per cent, six per cent and seven per cent. It is triple what it should be. Wages are not keeping pace. We need a two per cent cap because the market is not doing it for us and rents have climbed so high that we need to freeze increases for two years. We are asking landlords to skip their next rent increase to keep Canberrans housed. Our renters need certainty. They need a break from ever-rising rents. As all parties here have been emphasising this week, we are in a cost of living crisis, an inequality crisis. Let's freeze rents for two years, rather than the one year we already freeze rents for. Responsible governments cap and freeze rents during a crisis. It happens all the time. They have done it in New York, Scotland and Ireland. Victoria did it during COVID. We have done it too, but the measures we have in place right now are not strong enough to keep people in homes they can afford.

Shane Rattenbury's reforms also tried to stop rent bidding. Our law says landlords cannot ask renters to pay more than the advertised rate. This is fantastic, but tenants can still offer more than the advertised rate and a landlord can accept it. We know this is happening in Canberra. On Tuesday Greens member for Brindabella Laura Nuttall told us about rent bidding for those on average wages. Laura and her two friends rent together. They are a triple-income household and, before Laura got this job, that was three average wages of the kind that young people earn.

Laura Nuttall and her two friends could barely afford to rent between them, and they could not actually get a home at all. They kept lodging forms and missing out, so Laura asked someone with experience in the field how she and her friends could be lucky enough to get one of these very expensive homes. The advice? "Offer more than the advertised rent." Rent is already unaffordable, and if you do not offer even more

than that someone else will and you will miss out. We have brought in protections to try to stop rent bidding, and those protections are not strong enough in a crisis like this. This bill stops rent bidding.

What is it like to be a renter in Canberra right now? Well, it is tough. Greens member for Yerrabi Andrew Braddock has told us the challenges renters face here in Canberra. He was required to move at short notice, and he felt the sense of powerlessness when your home is sold out from underneath you. He had to quickly find a home that was close to his kids' school. He had to pack up all of his family's belongings. He had to help his kids adjust to a new home. That was not so bad for Andrew Braddock. He was able to find another good rental in time because he can afford Canberra's sky-high rents. That is because he is a politician. He is on a high income, as is every other politician in here. I am glad we Greens have some politicians who rent. We need more politicians who rent. One of our problems is that not many do.

The people in power who are making decisions do not suffer the impact of those decisions. It is a landlords' market and tenants are desperate. The ACT is the second most expensive place to rent in Australia. For the average Canberran, less than one per cent of rentals on the market are affordable—less than one per cent. Rents are 14 per cent higher now than they were before COVID. People suffered during COVID. A lot of people lost jobs or businesses. Now they cannot afford to live. High rent means it is difficult for renters to save a deposit. They feel like they will be stuck renting for the rest of their lives. And they are right. In the current market, people under 40 who do not own a home may never own a home.

Essential workers in Canberra spend three-quarters of their income on rent. I am going to pause my list of stats here, because this one tripped me up. There are people in Canberra with full-time jobs doing essential work in our community who spend three-quarters of their income on the roof over their heads! That does not leave enough to pay for food or bills or anything else.

My mum is in a nursing home. I think probably a lot of people in our community understand what nursing homes are like. They are not fun places to be. They are really hard places to work in. People who work in nursing homes are dealing with some of our most vulnerable people on a daily basis. They are working long hours. They are working difficult hours. It breaks my heart that these people cannot afford to live.

There is a wonderful man who works at my mother's nursing home. I am going to call him Steve. That is not his name, but he is not a public figure, so I do not want to use his real name. My mother does not know who I am anymore, but she who knows who Steve is because Steve has been looking after her every day for the last five years. Steve is the best thing in her life and every time she sees him she lights up like a Christmas tree. I could not help wondering as I was preparing this bill: is Steve working for food and board, like people did in the Great Depression? Or is it worse? Is he one of the one of the people in Canberra we heard about yesterday from Greens minister Emma Davidson? Is Steve skipping meals so that he can feed his kids? It makes me angry. It is not the Canberra I grew up in.

Twenty years ago I was renting in Belconnen with two of my friends. I checked in with them the other day. Over the years, we paid \$200, up to \$330, per week for a big,

comfy home that easily fitted all of us, and all of our mates who wanted to come around and visit us. Guess what the median rent in Belconnen is now? It is \$565 per week. It has almost tripled—and that is just the advertised rates. I bet what people are paying in Belconnen is much higher. I have lived in Belconnen most of my life. It is a great place to live. One of the many things I love about it is that it is affordable—or at least it used to be.

How did we get here? Greens Minister Rebecca Vassarotti gave us a good explanation yesterday. We are in an inequality crisis. This is not something that happened overnight, and it is not something that happened to us. It is a systemic crisis caused by federal Liberal and federal Labor Party decisions made over the past two decades. Negative gearing means that dud landlords, people who make a loss on their investment, are rewarded. They pay less tax than those who have to work for a living. This Australian policy is almost unique in the world. It does not increase supply. It means that people who should not be investing invest. They buy houses that already exist and push the price up so high that those who do not have a home can never afford to buy one.

People who negatively gear do not build homes and they do not prompt new construction. They take existing homes off the market. Mr Cocks yesterday criticised the Greens for a lack of basic economic understanding. I urge him to read the excellent ABC article that is online at the moment that explains exactly what negative gearing has done to our economy. It has not driven supply. Capital gains tax concessions reward those who already have investments. Investors make more money from their investments, and they pay less tax. People who have to work for a living do not get these benefits. They just have to pay tax.

Successive governments have stopped building public housing. In 1990, 13 per cent of all housing in the ACT was owned by the government. My parents lived in one of those when they first moved here, because that is what public servants did back then. But our public housing has dropped to around six per cent. This means we do not have enough public housing. We have privatised it. We are using other models to try and cover the need and it is not working. We need much, much more public housing. Rebecca Vassarotti explained this yesterday. We live in a country where the primary investment mechanism is not stocks, not banks, but housing. We have forgotten that everyone needs to live somewhere. A home is a human right. We need policy and law that makes that happen. We do not need more help for investors.

We Greens have been consulting on this bill for the last eight months. We have spoken to Better Renting, ACTCOSS and Everybody's Home. Joel Dignam from Better Renting had a good piece in the *Canberra Times* today, calling for exactly the measures we have put in this bill. We have spoken to academics. We have spoken to the community. We have taken on feedback and worked on this bill. I urge everyone in here to think hard about this bill too, if you care about the cost-of-living crisis that is affecting Canberrans unequally. Please do not dismiss this out of hand.

There are a couple of issues that were raised during consultation that I want to address. Will this bill affect supply? No. We hear a lot about supply in Canberra. It is important. We need enough homes so that everybody has one. I have heard some

people argue against rent control, the kind of simple rent control we have already brought in here. I have heard people say that this will put off investors. I have heard people say it means we will have fewer homes in Canberra. Is that true? No. We have already brought in rent control, and we have more rentals. More investors came into our market, not fewer. That is because Canberra is a great place to be a landlord. Rental returns are increasing and the values of houses are increasing. Landlords are not going to up and leave a great investment.

Will investors leave a house empty because of this bill? No. A landlord would rather earn rent than earn nothing. It does not make sense to keep a rental property empty. That is not how the market works. Will some landlords sell up? I do not think so. But if a landlord sells, the home still exists. It will not stay empty. Someone else will buy it and rent it out or buy it and live in it. This is obvious. It is so obvious; we even heard the Real Estate Institute of the ACT say this. What happens if some of our investors leave the market? House prices will fall. That is okay. They have gone up too high. This means people who do not already own a home are more likely to be able to afford one. It is a good outcome. It would be good to shift people out of rentals into homes they own. But currently we are heading in the wrong direction.

There may be some situations where rent should be increased above the cap. The only one raised in consultation that convinced me was where the landlord has made rent cheap to help out their tenants and now the landlord's circumstances have changed and they need to put their rent closer to market rates. I get that. There are philanthropic landlords out there, although, by far, most investors are charging market rates. Most investors are making as much money as they think they can. That is how a market works.

We have made an exception for philanthropists and others in unique circumstances. Landlords can go to ACAT and get a higher rate approved. They can make their case, and if it is strong ACAT will say yes. This is a really sensible concession for unique circumstances. Landlords have always been able to do that and they will continue to be able to do that under this bill. ACAT is good at this. Only today, ACAT put up a decision in which it said no to a landlord who had raised the rent above our existing caps. ACAT knows exactly how to deal with this situation. We have a good system that can cope with it.

We want to make things fairer and we want help out first home buyers and renters. We do not need to give further help to investors who own lots of properties. Let's be clear here: there are a lot of investors who own a lot of properties. Fifty-one per cent of rental properties are owned by someone who has at least two other houses. We do not need to give further help and tax concessions to these people. We need to help Canberrans find a home that they can afford and that they can stay in.

The Greens are working hard for renters. With Greens in government, we are trying to tackle the crisis we are in. We have improved renters' rights and tackled housing inequality. We have secured record investment in public housing and homelessness services, but we still need more. We have ended no-cause evictions. We have brought in minimum standards for insulation and energy efficiency. This means tenants will not freeze in winter and bake in summer. We have brought in the Rent Relief Fund to

grant up to four weeks rent for those who need it. We brought in the renting book for tenants. We brought in rent control so that landlords cannot increase rents more often than once a year and cannot raise them by more than 110 per cent of CPI.

We have worked on federal issues too. We have called on the federal government to abolish our historic public housing debt and fund more public housing. The Australian Greens negotiated an extra \$3 billion for more public and social housing. That is a fantastic outcome, but these homes will take time to build. That is why we need immediate steps now. This bill is the next logical step, and it is an essential step in this cost of living crisis, in this inequality crisis. This bill will freeze rent rises for two years, rather than the existing one year. This bill will cap rent increases at two per cent, rather than the existing rent cap, which is pinned to CPI. This bill will stop rent bidding, rather than discouraging it.

This bill may mean the difference between buying food or going hungry. That is the choice many Canberrans are being forced to make. This bill will deliver immediate relief for those who need it. If you are listening to this at home, what can you do? DM your local member. Find them at the shops, call them or email them. Talk to your Labor and Liberal reps and tell them what you need. Talk to your Greens reps too. We love to talk to people, but we are already on side with this. We are the party for renters. It is the others you need to convince.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Light rail—stage 2**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (3.32): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) on 7 December 2023, the ACT Labor-Greens Government released their costings and the timeframe for the delivery of light rail stage 2A which included the total cost for stage 2A at \$577 million;
- (b) the ACT Labor-Greens costings of \$577 million does not include the total cost of the work for stage 2A, specifically the cost to raise London Circuit, upgrades to the depot and purchasing more light rail vehicles;
- (c) when including the cost for these elements of light rail stage 2A, the total cost of stage 2A balloons out to over \$800 million for an extension of just 1.7 km;
- (d) the original timeframe for the light rail stage 2A when announced was 2024; and
- (e) the revised timeframe is now early 2028, four years longer than first announced;

(2) further notes that this demonstrates that the ACT Labor-Greens Government have not been upfront with ACT taxpayers over the true cost and timeframe of light rail stage 2A; and

- (3) calls on the Government to table in the Legislative Assembly by the last sitting week:
  - (a) in June 2024, the full costings, including all the enabling work, of light rail stage 2A; and
  - (b) in August 2024, the full costings and timeframe for light rail stage 2B and be upfront with Canberrans on the true cost of this major infrastructure project ahead of the 2024 ACT election.

Here we are again, talking about one of my favourite topics. I love talking about the tram to Woden. Will it ever get there? I do not know that it will, if I am being completely honest, for many different reasons. Obviously, the best reason would be if we won government in October, because we would stop the madness.

Obviously, cost is one of the reasons. That will not quite be enough to scuttle it, on the part of this progressive crew, because this crew has created an art form of spending other people's money. For this crew, money is no object! It does not matter how much you spend, and it does not matter how far you get into debt, because somebody else will pay for it.

Engineering problems could well be the thing that scuttles it. We all know that there are some serious problems with the preferred route. Some of these have been articulated by the National Capital Authority; some of them have not yet. I understand that there are some other problems that are yet to surface. We know that the numbers do not stack up on this project, but this government is too far down the rabbit hole to get out of it, and the lack of transparency has been remarkable. I know Mr Steel will stand up and protest that he has been as transparent as the Perspex that was used to separate us during COVID times, but I just do not think that is the case. Certainly, his governing partners do not agree with that assessment!

Canberrans are drip-fed information on a need-to-know basis, and the powers that be are well and truly aware of the fact that, if we knew the whole story, if every voter in this city knew every detail about the tram project, if we all knew what the genuinely projected costs were, if we all knew about the genuinely highlighted engineering concerns and what this will mean in regard to the delivery date, and if we all knew the actual public transport outcomes, even the most ardent supporters of this project would be reassessing their position.

When it comes to the drip-feeding of information, we all got some insight from the government in December. Because the news was not as positive as they would have liked, it was fed to us at the end of the year, so as to bury it in the pre-holiday news cycle. The figures were a little rubbery, in that the government had the audacity to suggest to the public that the total cost of stage 2A was \$577 million. That is not correct. That is not the total cost. When assessing the cost of this project, we cannot leave out the cost of raising London Circuit. We cannot leave out the cost of upgrading the depot. We cannot leave out the purchasing of more light rail vehicles. We cannot leave out the retrofitting of the existing vehicles with batteries. We could not complete stage 2A without doing those things.



I know that Mr Steel will argue that the raising of London Circuit was a completely separate, unrelated project. But it is simply not the fact. It is not correct. The fact that all of the hoardings around the project describe it as a light-rail-enabling project gives that game away.

When you include the cost of the extras, the cost of stage 2A blows out to well over \$800 million for an expansion of just 1.7 kilometres. Does anyone think that that spending is warranted? Does anyone think that that is great value for money? I am not sure that the current government executive are good judges of what is value for money. I will not go into some of the things in other areas that we discussed in question time. We are going to spend, pretty much, as much for 1.7 kilometres as we did for the entirety of stage 1.

We then get to time frames. The original time frame for stage 2A would have seen a glittering ribbon-cutting ceremony just before the election this year. That was the wrong answer on that one, Madam Speaker; it is not happening. According to the statement from December, stage 2A will now have its glittering ribbon-cutting ceremony just before the next election, in 2028.

You know how the government progresses with deadlines, particularly in the transport space. I dare say we will still be hearing excuses then as to why the Renault diesel buses are still on the road. I seriously think, Madam Speaker, that when they finally conclude their service here in the ACT, we will be able to drive them directly from their final passenger-carrying duties to a vintage motor museum, because they will be well and truly a part of history!

This government has never been up-front and honest with the Canberra community when it comes to stage 2A, and the Auditor-General seems to agree. The *Canberra Times*, in May 2022—I am quoting directly from the paper—stated:

The Auditor-General has warned the ACT government paid “insufficient attention” to an economic analysis for stage 2A of light rail, and should assess the benefits of the entire route to Woden.

That was not said by the Liberals; it was said by the Auditor-General. The *Canberra Times* stated:

Michael Harris said a complete economic analysis of the light rail route between the city and Woden would better capture the project’s true costs and benefits, rather than assessing isolated sections.

He said he was concerned components in the project could be counted in multiple places and in different ways, leading to uncertainty over the true value of the work.

“For transparency purposes and for clarity purposes, a piece of economic analysis that actually incorporated all of those components in one place ... would be a timely exercise to undertake,” Mr Harris said.

Of course, you would remember, Madam Speaker, that the Auditor-General recommended that a fresh business case be undertaken, and the government said,

“Yeah; nah.” That was what they said. That was the response: “Yeah; nah.” They said: “We don’t think we’ll be doing that, thank you very much. There’s nothing to see here. Look over there. There’s a rainbow roundabout. There are lots of other things to look at, but we won’t be looking at this.”

I find it remarkable that, when discussions are had out in the suburbs about what stage 2 will cost in its entirety, and when it will be delivered, most people—certainly, a lot of people these days—refer to the estimates that have been provided by my office. As shadow minister for transport, I laid a cost estimate on the table at the back end of 2022 that we had put a fair bit of work into. I would note that I do not have the directorate at my disposal, and I certainly cannot roll out \$100 million contracts to engineering firms, but we did our best with the resources that we had.

We suggested that stage 2A, including the raising of London Circuit, including the new trams, including the retrofit of existing vehicles and the depot upgrade, would come in at \$343 million. In reality, that was way under the odds. The total cost of all of those things is more than twice the Canberra Liberals’ estimate, and the delivery date estimation of 2026 has already been blown out of the water because it has been pushed back to 2027-28. We know that, after announcing our cost and delivery date estimates for the tram project, which, as I said, we did in late 2022, the transport minister scoffed at our suggestions on those important matters. He suggested that they were plain wrong, and he was right! They were wrong. Our cost and delivery date estimates were way too conservative for stage 2A, and we are assuming now that our estimates for stage 2 in its entirety are also way under!

Certainly, when you factor in the overspend on that original cost estimate of ours on 2A, and if you scope that out against 2B, it is very easy to arrive at a figure in the region of \$4 billion. Our original figure was just over \$3 billion for stage 2, with a delivery date of 2034.

This motion acknowledges that the tram is very much a contested project. We are calling on the government to table in the Assembly by the final sitting week of the term the full costings of stage 2A. Mr Steel could do that today if he wished. I have not had much time to go through the circulated amendment at this stage. I note that the amendment that we were going to see had most of those things in it.

When we say full costs, of course, we do mean the main contract as well as raising London Circuit, as well as all of the enabling works, as well as the purchase of new trams and the retrofitting of the current fleet, because that is what the project costs.

Madam Speaker, imagine, if we announced a bus rapid transport policy and we neglected to include the cost of the buses—if we just did not put them in there, and we just left them out. It would not fly. We might try that, actually, in the lead-up! No, we will not. I say that in jest, because we will be up-front about what everything costs. We will be up-front. To use a transport analogy, when people purchase a ticket, they need to know what the ticket costs and they need to know when they will arrive at their destination. Would you buy a train ticket on trust, not knowing what it is going to cost, which route it is going to take and when it is going to get there? You just would not. The advice from the government would be to say, “We can’t tell you when the train’s going to arrive, but I’d be packing a sleeping bag if I were you”!

Most importantly, this motion gives the government yet another opportunity to come clean with all of us and reveal the full costings and time frame for the tram stage 2 in its entirety. I know there has been some robust discussion between offices about this. I get the sense that we might get some movement here. We may get some movement. Should this motion not succeed, Canberrans should feel free to assume that the Canberra Liberals' estimates are correct. I would point out that our revised estimate of the cost of stage 2 in its entirety is \$4 billion—that is \$4,000 million. Someone asked me about this on a social media platform that I will not name. There was a bit of comment about this—the \$4 billion. Someone said, “How many electric buses could you buy with \$4 billion?” One of the aggressive responders said, “It'd probably only be about 20 or 30 buses.” I corrected them and said, “It's actually 5,000.”

Obviously, if you had 5,000 buses, you would not know what to do with them, but I wanted to put the figure into context. I know there is charging infrastructure and there are drivers; it is almost ludicrous to suggest it. People need to understand that, if you were spending \$4 billion and you were just buying electric buses—and, yes, supply issues may come into it; I would think, Mr Steel, that supply chain issues would come into it—5,000 buses is what you would buy with \$4 billion. Yes, there would be supply chain issues, but I reckon they would be here before 2034, just quietly. The ball is in your court, Minister, and in your court, Ms Clay.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (3.44): I welcome the opportunity to talk about light rail and how the government is building a better public transport network for Canberra.

Today, what we have heard from the Canberra Liberals is yet another position on light rail. It has flipped around quite a bit over the decades. Despite Ms Lee saying that she supported stage 2A of light rail, the Canberra Liberals have come in here today and basically said that they do not support it. There has been yet another backflip in relation to their position on light rail.

I am always happy to talk about light rail. I am always fascinated by the Canberra Liberals constantly reminding the community—particularly during election years—that our government has a vision for our growing city, with a plan for better public transport through future-focused investment in a mass transit system in light rail, and that they do not.

The ACT government has been up-front and transparent with the community on the costs associated with light rail. We have done that in an unparalleled way. Other state governments have not done that for their projects, but we have. I have continuously said that we would publish light rail costs and time frames once contracts were signed and procurement was finalised, to ensure that the territory was in the best position to achieve value for money. And that is exactly what we have done. I have not checked this, but I am pretty sure that I have confirmed that in more speeches than I can count on one hand, all of which have been in response to the same Liberal motions, which have been regurgitated over and over again in this term.

The ACT government has publicly announced every contract associated with the delivery of light rail that has been signed. It has published all executed contracts on the ACT contracts register.

On 1 July 2022, I announced that a contract had been signed for the raising of London Circuit—a key enabling project for light rail, but one that sits on its own in terms of the benefits it provides for the community. As confirmed in my amendment, the delivery phase cost for raising London Circuit is \$81.7 million, and the contract for this project was published on the ACT contracts register on 21 July 2022.

This standalone project does not just support the delivery of light rail; it supports a number of key projects in the city and will enable better connections to the Acton waterfront, clearly, for pedestrians. It will create a better environment for cyclists, walkers and public transport, and it provides better access between the city and the lake.

One month later, on 9 August 2022, I announced that a contract had been entered into with Canberra Metro to provide five new light rail vehicles. It was to modify the existing light rail fleet of 14 vehicles to be retrofitted with on-board batteries, so that all vehicles can operate on the wire-free extension—not just for 2A but also 2B—and to expand the existing light rail depot at Mitchell to house and maintain the larger fleet of LRVs. The delivery phase cost of this LRV and depot contract is \$129.6 million, and the contract for this project was published on the ACT contracts register on 9 August 2022.

I have previously advised that the depot work was expected to be completed by mid-2024, but I am very pleased to confirm that this work is already ahead of schedule and is on track to be completed in the next couple of months, ready to receive the first new LRV later this year.

On 7 December last year, we announced that the major works contract for the delivery of light rail stage 2A had been signed. The delivery phase cost of the project is \$575.3 million, and the contracts were published on 10 January 2024.

Mr Parton has conveniently skipped over the fact that the commonwealth government has also announced a contribution to this project to help pay for and fund better public transport for Canberra, with an additional \$125 million of funding in stage 2A, to bring the total commonwealth contribution for the project to \$343.9 million. At that announcement with the federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Catherine King, she commended the ACT government for our management and planning for the project, saying, “This is what you’re supposed to do with infrastructure. You do the environmental approvals, you do the planning approvals, and then you start work on the capital in that process.” That is exactly what they have done with this stage 2A, and what they will do with 2B. As it gets closer to having an understanding of what the costs are for stage 2B, I am sure we will again talk constructively with the commonwealth about what we know is a very important project for the ACT.

Under a Liberal government, Canberrans would not benefit from this kind of federal government investment, because the Liberals do not have a transport policy or solution for which to seek funding. They think that Canberrans should be satisfied with a bus service that will gradually get slower and slower, as Canberra’s population grows and traffic congestion gets worse on our road network—a bus service that will not shift patronage and will not drive the same land use benefits as light rail. We know that light rail will support more people living and working close to accessible transit. We need an integrated public transport system with mass transit at its core.

In regard to the project timing for stage 2A, I can almost read word for word from my speech responding to Mr Parton's motion in September last year. In 2019, the ACT government did release the stage 2A business case and a promotional report, both of which stated that operations would commence in 2024.

This goes to the question by Mr Parton in the Assembly. In July 2020, right at the start of the considerable impact of the pandemic and the issues that it created for the infrastructure and transport sector, I was very clear in making an announcement and advising the community that, although we had been working closely with Canberra Metro and had environmental approvals underway, contracts would not be signed in that term, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is one thing to go back and look at historic statements in 2019, prior to the announcement that we made that we would not be signing contracts in that term of government for the project. That has resulted in a different time line for the project. We have been up-front about that. Since then, I have continuously stated that the time line for services commencing on stage 2A would be determined through procurement. That has been provided to Mr Parton on numerous occasions, including in speeches and in amendments to his various motions, last September, in the 2023-24 estimates hearings, and in my amendment to Mr Parton's motion in November 2022.

I did exactly what I have always said I would do. I informed the community of the time line for delivering stage 2A straight after the signing of the major works contract. On 7 December we announced that work was planned to commence on stage 2A in late 2024, with light rail services commencing from January 2028.

In regard to stage 2B, the ACT government has always said that this is a major and complex project for the territory—perhaps the most complex in the country, because of all of the planning approval pathways that this project has, which no other project has. That is why we have committed to constructing the first segment of light rail between the city and Commonwealth Park. It was yet another announcement that we made—I think this one was way back in 2019 as well—to get on with the stage 2A project, a simpler project, while we continued to work through the environmental approvals required for the stage 2B section to Woden.

With the stage 2A contract now signed, the ACT government is shifting its focus to the progression of early design and planning activities for stage 2B, as we have always promised to do. We have invested \$50 million in the ACT budget for 2023-24 to progress a comprehensive assessment of the environmental and heritage impacts through the delivery of an environmental impact statement.

The Liberals criticise how long it would take us to build this important, complex infrastructure for our growing city, but they would never build it—ever! They have no plans for public transport, other than to oppose it. They would not even consider a business case for the project—something that we will consider for the stage 2B project once we have gone through those planning approvals. They are just saying, “No, we won't even consider a business case. We're going to rule it out now.”

To move more people more efficiently around our rapidly growing city, we need to prepare our transport system now, not when congestion and traffic impacts will in fact be worse, decades down the track. That is exactly what the ACT government is doing,

as a future-focused government. We are committed to building sustainable, reliable transport, and the mass transit infrastructure that our rapidly growing city needs.

My amendment that I will move in a moment outlines how the ACT government has been up-front and transparent with the community on the costs and time frames for delivering stage 2A. It calls on the ACT government to continue doing what we have already committed to do—getting on with delivering light rail to Woden. We want to continue to provide updates to the community on the delivery of light rail to Woden.

The proposed amendment to Mr Parton’s motion calls on the government to report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of the Tenth Assembly in 2024, with an update on the progress of delivering light rail stage 2B. I can confirm that the ACT government has already started progressing design and planning approvals work on stage 2B. We will have more to say about that soon. We are currently progressing the development of the detailed environmental impact statement, which is a key part of the first phase of the development of this project. We are expecting that the draft EIS will be out for public consultation by the end of the year, and we are expecting it to be finalised and approved in quarter 2 of 2025.

This project is complex, and future stages and phases are dependent on decisions which are out of our government’s control. The time frames are dependent on various third-party external stakeholders. It is well known in the community that this project runs through the parliamentary triangle. It requires the National Capital Authority’s approval. It requires department of environment approval through the EPBC process, and the development of an EIS. It will also require both houses of parliament to support the project.

The time frame is also dependent on procurement processes. I have always said that this is critical to determining both costs and the time frames, which are in the contract as terms of the contract. I will not mislead the community—because we have not gone through those processes yet—by providing speculative project dates in the Assembly today which are outside the ACT government’s control. That would erode trust in the project and the government. I am not going to lie to the people of Canberra. We have been up-front that we need to go through these processes, and we are going to move, milestone by milestone, through each of the planning processes to be able to get this project moving.

However, I commit to undertaking the necessary work to provide the Assembly with an update by the end of this term on the delivery of the light rail stage 2B project. I look forward to updating the Assembly on the delivery of this important, city-shaping project later this year. I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT Government has been upfront and transparent with the community on the costs associated with Light Rail, and has continuously committed to publishing light rail costs once contracts are signed and the procurement is finalised, to ensure the Territory is in the best position to achieve value for money;

- (b) the ACT Government has published all executed contracts associated with the delivery of light rail on the ACT Contracts Register;
  - (c) on 7 December 2023, the ACT Government announced the major works contract for the delivery of Light Rail Stage 2A had been signed, and the contracts were published on 10 January 2024. The delivery phase cost for the project is \$575.3 million;
  - (d) on 9 August 2022, the ACT Government announced a contract had been signed for five new light rail vehicles, retrofitting batteries on the existing fleet, and expanding the light rail depot, and the contract was published on 9 August 2022. The delivery phase cost for this contract is \$129.6 million;
  - (e) on 1 July 2022, the ACT Government announced a contract had been signed for the raising of London Circuit, which provides substantial city improvements and enables light rail, and the contract was published on 21 July 2022. The delivery phase cost for this project is \$81.7 million; and
  - (f) Commonwealth Government announced an additional \$125 million in funding for Light Rail Stage 2A as part of the 2024-25 MYEFO Budget to maintain the 50 per cent joint funding contribution. This brings the total committed Commonwealth funding for Light Rail Stage 2A to \$343.9 million;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) on 24 November 2022, Minister Steel amended Mr Parton's motion to note "the specific delivery timeframe for LRS2a commencing operations is subject to receiving Works Approval from the National Capital Authority, signing a contract with the ACT Government's delivery partner, and finalising an agreed construction program";
  - (b) on 20 September 2023, Minister Steel amended Mr Parton's motion to note "Minister Steel has continued to state that the timeline for services commencing on Light Rail Stage 2a (LRS2a) will be determined through the procurement, including during 2023-24 Estimates Hearings."; and
  - (c) on 7 December 2023, the ACT Government announced work is planned to commence on Light Rail Stage 2A in late 2024, with services commencing from January 2028, following the signing of the major works contract; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue with the delivery of light rail to Woden;
  - (b) publish estimated costs and timings for LRS2B once contracts are signed and the procurement is finalised to ensure the Territory is in the best position to achieve value for money;
  - (c) continue to release business cases and contracts for future stages of light rail;
  - (d) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of the 10th Assembly in 2024 with an update on the progress of delivering Light Rail Stage 2B, including:
    - (i) indicative milestones and timeframes for the delivery of Light Rail Stage 2B project;

- (ii) the current indicative alignment;
- (iii) an update on discussions with the NCA and other relevant Australian Government stakeholders on the project timeframe, milestones and alignment; and
- (iv) an estimated completion date for Light Rail Stage 2B.”.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.56): I rise to speak for the ACT Greens in response to Mr Parton’s motion regarding the light rail stage 2 costings and timings. I would like to thank Mr Parton and Minister Steel for their productive discussions on this motion. I have been negotiating for days with the minister and his office, and I would like to thank them for working with us to get an amendment that we are really happy to support.

I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this motion. I do not agree with him on everything. The Greens are committed to light rail. We want to see it go to Woden, Belconnen and all around Canberra as soon as possible. The Canberra Liberals do not share that view, but we all want transparency. We want to know how this project is going and when it will be finished.

By my count, we have debated at least 10 Liberal light rail motions in this term. That is a lot of motions, but light rail matters. I hear this out in the community. I hear it through the media. I hear it in this parliament. Light rail really matters to people, because they need convenient public transport, and they need it now.

Canberrans are getting tired of waiting. We want to know what is going on with 2B, and I am happy to see Minister Steel’s amendment to Mr Parton’s motion, which makes that clear. Minister Steel has said that, by the last sitting day of this term, he will release indicative milestones and time frames for the delivery of light rail stage 2B; the current indicative alignment; an update on discussions with the NCA and other relevant Australian government stakeholders on the project time frame, milestones and alignment; and an estimated completion date for light rail stage 2B to Woden. This is really good news. It is particularly important as we approach the third light rail stage 2 election. It is the third time that people will be voting for a project that still feels a long way off. We have the Gungahlin to Civic connection, and we love it. When do we get the Woden connection?

I was a little disturbed to read the Chief Minister’s comments recently that undermined this project. He made these comments to Riotact on Monday about light rail:

And so yes, we did prioritise the Canberra hospital expansion. And that project will be completed this year. It’s a big project. It’s bigger than light rail Stage 2A.

The hospital should be built. Of course, it should be. But the ACT government should be able to do both projects. We should be able to walk and chew gum. Other cities can. Funding was announced for Gold Coast light rail stage 1 in 2009. They are estimating completion of Gold Coast light rail stage 3 in 2025. That is what we want to see here, but we are looking at our city to Woden stage taking about as long as it took to build three stages of light rail on the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast do not have to deal with the NCA—and I am sure they are really glad about that!—but they are still



constrained by the same east coast Australian infrastructure market, the same COVID supply challenges and the same labour market challenges, and they are managing to get their project delivered.

Transparency also matters, and that is why I am pleased to see that a very transparent amendment has been put up by Minister Steel. We have all of the costings—we have had all of the costings for 2A on a regular basis, and we have another update on that now—and we have transparency on when we will be hearing about milestones. This is really important. It is important in our governing agreement with our partners, and it is important for our freedom of information laws. Canberrans value transparency. I am pleased that our government is being transparent on light rail costings. I know that it does not meet Mr Parton's requests, but the government is putting out all of the information it can as soon as it can, without upsetting commercial negotiations. Light rail stage 2A costs are out; they are public. 2B and future stages will be public as soon as they can be.

We have had that argument in here many times before. I have run businesses. I understand that, with costings for light rail stage 2B, it may not be suitable to publish them ahead of contract signing, because it might prejudice the ability of the territory to achieve value for money. You cannot get a good deal if you have told the supplier how much you are willing to pay. That is particularly true when you are dealing with a single-source procurement. But we can tell Canberrans when they are likely to get light rail. We have done that in the past, and I am really glad that today's motion and amendment mean that we will do that again.

Here are some of the commitments that we have made before. In June 2018, the Gungahlin to Woden via Barton light rail update was published. The stated deadline for light rail to Woden was to commence operations in 2023-24. In May 2019, Chief Minister Andrew Barr announced that light rail stage 2 to Woden would be delayed until 2025 due to the failure of federal Labor to be elected. On 7 February 2023, Minister Steel identified that light rail stage 2B would be completed in 2029. He stated, "We will be systematically working through each of the milestones with our technical design partners on board to deliver light rail to Woden in this decade."

Today, I am pleased that we have a commitment for another update. Before the end of this term, Canberrans will know what needs to happen, who we are talking to, what they are saying, and when we will get it to Woden. They will also know exactly what the planned alignment will be. They will know how we are going with negotiating our way through the parliamentary triangle. They will know when they are getting light rail. This is information that Canberrans rightly expect, and I am really pleased to see that the transport minister will provide it.

We have also looked at the proposed amendments that Mr Parton has circulated to Minister Steel's amendment. Those amendments are really just a rehashing of old ground and asking for costings that we cannot make public whilst negotiations are on foot. So the Greens are not able to support those amendments. We are happy to support Minister Steel's amendment to Mr Parton's motion.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.02), by leave: I move the amendments circulated in my name to Mr Steel's amendment together:

1. Omit paragraph (3)(d).
2. Add after paragraph (3)(d)(iv): “(v) an estimated cost for Stage 2B and all associated works and costs.”.

I am glad we are getting some movement. We are going about as slowly as the project to Commonwealth Park, but we are getting some movement. We are getting some movement in terms of some transparency. Far be it from me to contribute to any tension between the governing parties, but it is most pleasing to me that there are some things that we have called on that potentially are going to be delivered to us that would not have been delivered to us unless we had agitated in this way. I think that is really, really cool.

I have moved amendments to Mr Steel’s amendment because—as you can imagine and as Mr Steel would well know—it is impossible for us to support an amendment that says, “continue with the delivery of light rail to Woden”. I know that Ms Clay has already referred to this particular clause, but I do wish to add at the end, “an estimated cost for stage 2B and all associated works and costs”.

Question put:

That **Mr Parton**’s amendments to **Mr Steel**’s proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Peter Cain  
Leanne Castley  
Jeremy Hanson  
Elizabeth Kikkert  
Nicole Lawder  
Elizabeth Lee  
James Milligan  
Mark Parton

Noes 15

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

Question resolved in the negative.

**Mr Parton**’s amendments to **Mr Steel**’s proposed amendment negatived.

**Mr Steel**’s amendment agreed to.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Cain): The question now is that Mr Parton’s motion as amended be agreed to.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.09): I just want to note that Mr Steel made the suggestion in his speech that somehow the Canberra Liberals have changed their position on stage 2A of the tram. I think he was intimating that we were pulling the pin on stage 2A of the tram. That is incorrect. It is absolutely incorrect. I want to make it abundantly clear that if the Liberals are elected in October, stage 2A of this project will continue. We will not be ceasing stage 2A.

Mr Steel spoke about the commonwealth contribution to stage 2A. I would note that, even with the federal injection of funds for this project, as a territory we are still spending much more than we had all anticipated on this project! With regard to stage 2B, they talk about it being a fifty-fifty partnership. I just wonder if Mr Steel will be seeking a contribution from the feds of \$2 billion, because that is what would be required!

If indeed that is the case, I wonder how that would affect commonwealth funding on any other infrastructure project that is needed in the ACT. Even on Planet Barr, with this fifty-fifty partnership—which we all consider to be extremely unlikely when the numbers get up to \$4,000 million—if the feds are gifting us \$2 billion I think it is warranted for every Canberran to ask: if there is \$2 billion going to this red elephant, what else is missing out? On so many levels, when it comes to this disastrous project, it gets down to opportunity cost!

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Transport Canberra—south-side bus services**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.11): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) increasing public transport patronage should be one of the key jobs of the Minister for Transport;
  - (b) pursuing policies to reduce car use and prioritise public transport are a means to tackle congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and to create a more liveable city;
  - (c) faster public transport travel times are an enormous factor in convincing people to take public transport over the private motor vehicle;
  - (d) should stage 2B of the tram ever be completed, the travel time between Woden and Civic will be up to 15 minutes slower than the current rapid bus run, with the addition of bus to tram transfer time at Woden interchange;
  - (e) the completion of stage 2B would necessitate the cancellation of the R4 and R5 bus routes, at least between Woden and Civic, because the much quicker bus routes would be a more attractive travel option than the tram;
  - (f) public transport travel times for most southside journeys are likely to increase should stage 2B ever be completed; and
  - (g) Canberra had one of the highest percentages of public transport usage nationally in the 1980s by simply running a better-connected bus network; and
- (2) calls on the Government as a matter of urgency to:
  - (a) publicly admit that the R4 and R5 services will not continue if stage 2B of the tram is ever completed;

- (b) publicly admit that most public transport travel times from the south will increase if stage 2B of the tram is ever completed; and
- (c) examine ways to decrease travel times in our public transport network and report the findings back to the Assembly at the end of July 2024.

I love it when they do a Jason Bourne marathon on the telly. I love it. I love cracking out the drink of choice and a packet of Samboy chips and having a bit of a squiz—or a *Die Hard* marathon. There is nothing that beats *Die Hard* when you see the three of them all together. Probably the only thing better than a Bourne marathon or a *Die Hard* marathon is a tram motion marathon. I think this is what, back in the Mix 106.3 days, I would have called a double play! That is what we would have called it.

Let's talk about public transport and let's talk about the job that, in theory, Mr Steel and I share—that is, increasing public transport patronage. That is one of the key aspects for the transport minister, for the shadow minister and for the Greens spokesperson, because I know it is very dear to her heart. Potentially, our biggest aim should be to grow public transport patronage. We—all of us—should be doing whatever we can to get more people out of their cars and onto public transport, because it is important. I know it is, Mr Steel knows it is and Ms Clay knows it is.

I know that our speeches here have a vastly different tone. Mr Assistant Speaker Cain, I do not know if you have noticed, but Ms Clay talks often about the climate emergency and I do not so much. But, strangely, we share very similar goals when it comes to public transport patronage. It is very clear to the Canberra Liberals that the more we get people out of their private cars and onto public transport the better the city. I want to make it clear that we are not talking about a radical Greens agenda. We are just talking about 21st century reality. We believe that people should remain free to drive their cars, should they wish. We are talking about tackling congestion, about air pollution and emissions reduction and generally creating a more livable city, but we believe that the best way to get people out of their private cars is not to penalise people for driving cars but to make public transport more attractive. That is our vision: if we make public transport more attractive to more people, ultimately more people will make that choice. I can see Dr Paterson agrees as well, just by the look on her face.

It is a well-known fact that faster public transport times are an enormous factor in convincing people to make the switch from private motor vehicles. I rode the bus on Monday between Woden and Civic, as I do often, but on Monday I ran the little stopwatch on the journey. It took 14 minutes from the time the bus left the interchange to it pulling into the ACT Legislative Assembly. Fourteen minutes. Granted, we got a pretty good run with traffic lights; we had some luck with the lights. But this journey occurred in what would be considered the morning peak and it included diversions for roadworks caused by the raising of London Circuit. It took just 14 minutes.

If I were making that journey on the tram, it would take twice as long. That is not based on any estimates out of my office; that is based on the official government travel time estimation. I know that we will hear this, probably from both Ms Clay and Mr Steel, and I understand that the tram is not supposed to absolutely replicate the bus service. I understand that the tram will also service stops along the way that are currently not serviced by the bus. I get that. But herein lies the big problem: once the tram has been

completed to Woden—if it ever is—there is no possible way that you could keep on running those R4 and R5 services along Adelaide Avenue. You just could not do it.

Here is the picture, here is the scenario that I want you to think about, Mr Assistant Speaker. If you are a commuter waiting at the Woden interchange and you have a choice of riding either a 15-minute bus or a half-hour tram, what are you going to go with? Nobody, except Bill Gemmell, probably DC Haars and probably Jack D, is riding the tram. Why would you choose to—

**Dr Paterson:** I would be on it.

**MR PARTON:** Mr Braddock has indicated he probably would too. So we have a bunch of rent-a-crowd people just to prove that somebody was prepared to take an extra 15 minutes out of their day to do this!

But, in all seriousness, why would anybody choose to double their travel time? You just would not do it. It is a given that the R4 and R5 would need to either become bookend routes and terminate at the Woden interchange or get to the city via a different way than Adelaide Avenue. You can guarantee that if they get to Civic via a route other than Adelaide Avenue it is going to be markedly slower. It is going to be markedly slower and, indeed, it needs to be markedly slower because otherwise no-one would take the tram. Why are we spending \$4 billion and you are going to have to cancel these routes? It just does not make any sense.

Given that so many public transport journeys from the south have as their final leg the Adelaide Avenue run, most public transport travel times will increase as a consequence of the tram. I refer to a publication on the Scientific Reports website from 2020 that is called “Disparities in travel times between car and transit”. This study of four major cities showed that using public transport takes, on average, 1.4 to 2.6 times longer than driving a car. This varies during an average weekday by location and time of day, but it did not vary much from the cities they chose. Sydney was one of them. There was a Brazilian city I cannot remember. Anyway, the study says:

A primary driver of public transport ridership growth is the reduction of users’ perceived marginal cost, including travel time. That is far more important even than fare cost. Travel time is also a key performance indicator for the quantification of public transport service quality.

The report continues:

In a review paper, Redman ... summarised studies of public transport improvement strategies ... and found that most studies focused on speed—

and reducing travel time—

for increasing ... ridership. In a New York study, a 15-minute shorter commuting time corresponded to about 25% higher ridership ...

With a 15-minute shorter rider time, patronage goes up 25 per cent. They did not do the study on what happens if you increase the journey time by 15 minutes, because why would you do that? Why would you be increasing it? Who would do that? We

would do it; we would do it here. The same study included results of a post-trip questionnaire from car users and they said overwhelmingly that shorter travel times were one of the factors that would get them out of their private motor vehicle.

Let's start focusing on public transport policy that actually delivers public transport outcomes. It is amazing that, despite all of the evidence, we are about to trash one of the most successful bus routes in our city and replace it with a tram that will add 15 minutes at least to the journey. That does not factor in the changeover time from bus to tram at Woden and vice versa at the other end. Whichever way you spin it, if the tram is ever completed to Woden, the public transport travel times for most south-siders will increase, and they will increase quite markedly. That disparity will become ludicrously large if ever the tram somehow makes it to Tuggeranong.

I note that in recent months there have been more flyers—flyers that taxpayers have paid for—going into letterboxes in Tuggeranong to tell people that the tram is coming to Tuggeranong. Sorry; light rail is coming to Tuggeranong. This is what I tell so many Brindabella constituents, at the door, in Tuggeranong: if the tram to Woden is going to take over half an hour and you are talking at least another half an hour to Tuggeranong, you are talking an hour or more to Tuggeranong. Given that Tuggeranong is not a town centre, it is out on the western edge, most public transport journeys to Civic and beyond would involve a 15 or 20-minute bus journey to Tuggeranong town centre and then a change of mode before a tram journey of more than hour to Civic. So we are talking about three hours on public transport every day—three hours in a city of 440,000 people.

Should the tram ever be built to Tuggeranong, for me in Theodore—and I guess this is all a little academic because it would be 2050 or 2060 or 2070—I would be in the extraordinary situation, living in one of the outer suburbs, where I could save an hour's travel time every day by simply riding the bike from one of the outer suburbs, rather than going on a multibillion-dollar public transport system! What are we doing here, Mr Assistant Speaker. Is this going to drive public transport patronage higher?

I would also note that back in the 1980s Canberra had one of the highest percentages of public transport usage nationally. We did not have a tram, so how did we do it? Ms Clay knows how we did it. Mr Steel knows, but he does not want to talk about it. We did it by simply running a better connected bus network. That is what we did. We did it by getting people to where they wanted to go when they wanted to get there. We did not have to lay tracks to do it. We did not have to wait for NCA approval. We did not have to do so many of the things that we are doing now.

We can do it again. If the Canberra Liberals win the election this year, that is exactly what we will be doing. We will be laying out public transport policy that is actually focused on public transport outcomes. It is not going to be based on planning outcomes. It is not going to be based on building apartment towers along Adelaide Avenue. It is going to be about actually getting people from where they are to where they want to be, when they want to get there.

This motion calls on the government to publicly admit that they will have to either dismantle or radically change the R4 and R5 services if stage 2B of the tram is ever completed. If the R4 and R5 remain in name, there is no possible way that they can be

as efficient as they currently are; otherwise, nobody would choose to ride the tram except for Dr Paterson, Mr Braddock and Mr Steel on a day when he did not have too many meetings!

As a consequence, let's publicly admit that most public transport travel times from the south will increase if stage 2 of the tram is ever completed. And let's do what they are doing in Berlin, let's do what they are doing in Stockholm, let's do what they are doing in New York and get serious about finding ways to decrease travel times on our public transport network. We are serious about growing public transport patronage. I am not sure that Mr Steel and ACT Labor are.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (4.24): The response to Mr Parton really has written itself, in terms of the issues he has raised and the Liberals' plan for a bus system that takes us back to the 1980s, when Canberra's population was much smaller. The job of transport planners is to plan into the future for a city that is going to be over 780,000 people by 2060.

This means that we have to invest in an integrated public transport network which brings together all transport modes, including light rail, buses, active travel, ride share and private vehicles. The territory's population is increasing rapidly. To avoid the congestion problems faced by other cities, we do need to proactively build a transport network that our growing city needs. Mass transit light rail is central to the ACT government's future-focused plan to deliver an integrated public transport network that meets the needs of that future population growth and supports a sustainable and livable city for all Canberrans.

As I have said many times now, the government has committed to extending the light rail line south to establish Canberra's north-south mass transit public transport spine. The extension of light rail to Woden will provide Canberrans on the south side with the same high-quality, frequent and reliable services that have been provided to north-side Canberrans with the delivery of light rail stage 1, which has been incredibly successful. Mr Parton and the Canberra Liberals want to deny every south-sider the same benefits. Buses will still play an important role in providing services to the suburbs and will closely integrate with light rail, but they cannot deliver the mass transit system that Canberra needs as our population grows.

Once again the Liberals have today attempted to argue against the benefits of extending light rail as well as its contribution to significantly reducing the number of cars on our roads and the harmful emissions they create. Mr Parton paraphrased outcomes from a 2010 study on rail service improvements referenced in a research review of the quality attributes of public transport. I will remind Mr Parton of the other attributes of public transport services which the review identified as key to encouraging a modal shift from private motor vehicles: reliability, frequency, accessibility, comfort and convenience. I will add another one: capacity. That is the ability to move more people more efficiently around the city, not to mention the other benefits that we know light rail brings in supporting more homes and more places of business next to stops as well. That is a benefit that buses do not deliver.

Light rail services have unmatched reliability, compared to buses and private vehicles. Unlike buses, light rail does not get stuck in traffic and is not impacted by vehicle

collisions on the road network as frequently. It also has priority through traffic intersections, which reduces or removes the time spent waiting at traffic lights. This is a light rail system, not a tram that we are talking about. This has been proven on light rail stage 1, with services consistently achieving 99.5 per cent of service availability and 99 per cent service punctuality. That is to say, of the scheduled services, which run every 15 minutes at a minimum and every six minutes during peak times, over 99.5 per cent are delivered and over 99 per cent arrive within two minutes of their scheduled arrival times.

The most recent light rail customer satisfaction survey demonstrates that the most common reason for using light rail continues to be its convenience. It also reaffirms the value its passengers place on the service, with efficiency, comfort, accessibility and reliability being the top reported reasons for the 98 per cent of responders who reported being satisfied with light rail services. Light rail has been a major catalyst for people choosing public transport over private motor vehicles. Its popularity cannot be ignored, with around one in five of all trips on Canberra's entire public transport network, including light rail and buses, made on light rail. That is just under the patronage of Canberra's top three rapid bus routes combined.

Mr Parton has put forward motion after motion, trying to justify his real motive for stopping the delivery of light rail stage 2B. I would like to thank Mr Parton for providing an ongoing opportunity to highlight statistics which consistently send a clear message on the positive impact that light rail is having in attracting people to public transport. I agree: our aim here is to improve patronage on public transport. There are also significant other benefits from light rail.

Road count data on high-use areas along the light rail corridor has shown a significant reduction in motor vehicles undertaking travel in these areas. At the intersection of Northbourne Avenue and Macarthur Avenue, light rail stage 1 has contributed to a 28 per cent reduction in the total daily volume of motor vehicles in 2023, compared to 2016. Building light rail does not just benefit light rail customers; every car off the road reduces congestion, frees up parking and benefits everyone who uses the road transport network.

The future light rail route to Woden will extend the benefits realised in light rail stage 1 to the nearly 20,000 adjacent residents and provide them with access to high-frequency mass transit services into the city and further into Dickson and Gungahlin, because this is an extension of an existing network. The line will be integrated with rapid and route bus services, and will provide, as Mr Parton has acknowledged today for the first time, access to rapid transport for the residents of Deakin, Hughes, Curtin north, Yarralumla and Forrest, who do not have access to rapid bus stops currently because the infrastructure is not there. Light rail will build it.

I have said it before and I will say it again: the ACT government is delivering an integrated public transport network and will continue to provide public transport users with direct bus services from the south side to the city, following the completion of light rail stage 2B. I am happy to say it again; I have said it on a number of occasions: there will still be rapid services that go directly to the city through the south side. I will continue to disagree with the ridiculous, ongoing proposition that the Liberals keep on putting forward that the ACT government should retain the existing bus network as it operates currently and not make any changes or improvements to better



connect and integrate with other transport modes, including mass transit light rail, active travel, park and ride—you name it.

The government will continue to make changes to the bus network to integrate services with mass transit light rail and leverage the benefits of both public transport modes. These changes will be made through evidence-based decision-making. We will look at the data. We will look at the public transport patronage in the household travel survey data. Customer feedback will also be considered, and we will look closely at the integration benefits with other transport modes.

We fully expect that there will be rapid buses running from the south side directly to the city as part of the future transport network. I have said that now, I think, three times in this debate. I am happy to say it again if it is needed for the opposition. There will also be bus services, though they will be integrated with the mass transit line because, for the first time, we will be able to open up new connections in the network that do not currently exist. This network will be prepared before operations commence on light rail stage 2B, to ensure that the network is contemporary at the time.

With the ACT growing faster than every other city in the country, we need to prepare our transport system now, not when congestion and traffic impacts will in fact be worse, in the decades down the track. We are not looking at the 1980s. We are looking into the future. The only solution the Liberals have for Canberra's future transport needs by 2060 is to do nothing. The Liberals have never and will never support light rail. The opposition has no plans for public transport other than opposing it, no transport solutions, no policies, no investment in infrastructure, no light rail and no desire for change, despite a growing city.

If we do not change, then the livability of our city will become worse. It will not be the 15-minute city that Mr Parton was referring to anymore. Congestion will change our city for the worse if we do not change our public transport investment and invest in mass transit. To move more people around more efficiently in the future, we need to prepare our transport system now. That is what the ACT government are doing with our future-focused investment. We are committed to delivering the infrastructure our growing city needs, now and in the future, and we will continue to deliver our comprehensive, integrated transport plan.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.34): I am speaking about Mr Parton's motion on the impact of light rail stage 2B on the bus network. The ACT Greens will not be supporting this motion. We have looked at it really carefully, and we cannot support the framing or the facts as set out. The ACT Greens support light rail stage 2B to Woden. We also want to improve our city-wide bus network to make public transport journeys better for everyone. Canberra needs both.

Where do people work and live? What are their public transport needs? Why do they choose to use public transport or choose not to? I want to put some numbers into this discussion for the south side, and these are different numbers from the ones in Mr Parton's motion.

More Woden and Tuggeranong district residents work in Barton, Parkes south of the lake, Deakin, Forrest, Yarralumla, Curtin and Hughes than work in Civic. We have

6,804 south-siders who commute to Civic. We have 8,265 south-siders who commute to those other areas. If light rail makes access easier and quicker for people working in Barton, Parkes south of the lake, Deakin, Forrest, Yarralumla, Curtin and Hughes, it has helped more people. Even if some south-siders have a slightly slower trip from Woden to Civic, many more will have a faster trip to the places they need to go. It will be quicker for more people.

This will also free up bus kilometres. That means we can put those buses and those drivers onto different south side routes, and we can provide better services. Light rail to Woden will make access to the ANU easier for many south-siders by passing on the west side of London Circuit. There are more than 900 Woden and Tuggeranong residents who work in Acton. There are many thousands more students who study there, and all of these south-siders will benefit from light rail.

Light rail to Woden will enable a lot of new housing closer to jobs, on a high frequency public transport route, in a way that the bus simply will not. This is what we need to be doing: transit-oriented planning. We commit to this over and over again, and this is how we do it. The Woden to city rapid bus has not led to new housing. People do not trust a bus route to be there in another 30 years. They do not build on that basis. They do not make life choices about where to live, work and whether to buy a car based on buses; but they can do that, and they do do that, based on light rail. We have already seen it with stage 1. Light rail will lead to tens of thousands of much needed infill homes and provide more shops and businesses with support for those new residents. The bus just does not do that.

The Mecone study looked at this issue. That study was pretty modest in some areas, but it did identify a potential for more than 15,000 additional homes on the stage 2B corridor across 20 years. We could get more than that—at least 15,000 more homes than we would reasonably expect—if we just ran the bus. Those 15,000 homes will need to be built somewhere else if we do not build down there. Where are we going to build them? In grasslands and bushland on the outskirts of Canberra and locking in a big expensive car commute each day?

If these homes are built in new areas, government has to provide buses, roads, power and water. We will create much more traffic than if those homes were built with a fixed rail line right next to them, and it will cost government a lot to build those new suburbs and service them. It will cost residents a lot. It will provide poor housing that is a long way away from jobs and services, and it will be a bad outcome for the climate and the environment.

People in transit-oriented homes—homes on good light rail corridors—are much more likely to use public transport. They will live closer to the city, the parliamentary triangle and Woden. They will have much shorter commutes and better quality of life than if we force them all to live on the outskirts of Canberra or in Googong.

This Liberal motion proposes to cut tens of thousands of homes out from the places that people want to live in. It will block people from accessing frequent and reliable public transport. It will stop them from living closer to where they work, and it will give them long commutes.

What are the barriers to public transport use? Journey times are a factor in why people do or do not commute via public transport. They are only one factor, and small differences in timing do not affect most people's choices. Some of the other factors are frequency, reliability and comfort. Mr Parton's general comment on journey times being a factor are real, and they are worthwhile, but they are part of a greater picture. They also ignore the fact that not all public transport users in the south side live in the Woden bus interchange and commute to the city bus interchange. In fact, the vast majority of people are not doing that.

Let's say you are a south-sider who works in the city at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, just off London Circuit. How long is your commute from the Woden interchange right now? Your bus takes 18 minutes to get you to the city interchange. Then you have got an eight-minute walk to your office from the bus stop outside of Smith's. What will happen when light rail stage 2 takes you from Woden to the new Edinburgh Avenue stop? Let's say, for the sake of argument, that the new light rail takes 23 minutes to go from Woden to the Edinburgh stop. You jump off light rail. You have got a two-minute walk to your office. You just saved a minute compared to your current commute. This is the problem with simplifying one part of the commute, rather than looking at the whole journey, where people live, where people work and how they are moving around. The bus journey time is not a whole commute, and very few people are going from interchange to interchange. You need to look at where people live, where they work, where they start and where they end their trip, if you want to see what that whole commute looks like.

Mr Parton surely knows a lot of Tuggeranong residents who work in the city and might be worried about how light rail stage 2 will affect their commute. I checked the ABS 2021 census numbers, and there are around 4,290 of them. But 3,432 live in Tuggeranong and commute to Phillip. If the bus that currently runs all the way to Civic is able to run more frequently between Phillip and the suburbs of Tuggeranong, all of those residents will get a better public transport service. They may not catch light rail, but the bus they catch will be quicker and more frequent thanks to light rail. In fact, the ability to redirect buses that previously serviced the light rail corridor is one major benefit. It will better support suburban services. It will increase frequency, and it will allow us to operate more connections.

Some public transport users might have a longer commute by a few minutes. Most will have a shorter one. That is not the only thing to look at. Light rail stage 2 will shape the Woden to City corridor. It will give us more housing close to jobs and services, and it will give tens of thousands of people more sustainable commutes and better transport options. It will give people more connections than they have now via the light rail and the new buses that will be available thanks to that light rail.

What we need, and what the Greens have been calling for for years, is a city-wide light rail network and a fully electronic and expanded bus fleet which is delivered by providing the new Woden depot and two additional north side depots and by increasing the number of buses and drivers. We need all these things. The delays to the project worry us, but the project itself is sound.

The ACT Greens support light rail stage 2 as a way to improve south side public transport connectivity. It is a way to improve the city-wide public transport network, and that is why we cannot support this motion today.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.41): I could not resist Mr Parton’s double play! I was not planning to talk on this one, but, as one of the very few members who actually does catch the light rail regularly in this place, I wanted to make a personal contribution as well as a contribution as a representative, because, I have to say, the people of Gungahlin have entirely embraced the light rail. They have got on board. They have seen the light rail replace what was one of the most heavily patronaged bus routes with the red rapids that used to be stuck in traffic going up and down Northbourne Avenue every single day. They have got on board light rail and embraced it.

One of the key questions I keep getting as a representative is, “When will I be able to catch light rail from my home in Gungahlin”—

**Mr Parton:** To Tuggeranong!

**MR BRADDOCK:** Not quite that far. They do not want to go to Tuggeranong, Mr Parton; they just want to get to the triangle. They are just trying to get to where they work, and they can see the benefits that would flow if they would be able to catch light rail from Gungahlin through to the national triangle. Because, unfortunately, one of the realities of Gungahlin is that there is nowhere near enough employment located within the town centre to be able to meet the size of the population of the district. A lot of those people have to leave the Gungahlin district every single day in order to engage in employment. And where are they going? A lot of them are going to the national capital triangle; hence, that is a frequent question I receive as a representative.

I will now speak more from a personal perspective: as I mentioned, I am one of the few members who does catch the light rail, and I also speak as a fat, balding middle-aged guy! There is a way I incorporate light rail into how I do my commute. I ride my bike to the city when I can, if I do not have other events. But let’s face it, getting back up the hill to Gungahlin can be a little bit challenging at times. You know what? I just take the bike, I put it on light rail and then I ride that final distance from the town centre to my home. Do you know what the beautiful thing is? The majority of the Gungahlin district is within a five-kilometre distance of that light rail. And five kilometres is the secret distance, as Pedal Power, as many cycling advocates and as I am sure Mr Parton, would be aware of—five kilometres is the distance where you can do an easy bike commute without working up a sweat and feeling like you are going an extreme distance and needing change facilities.

This is how we can incorporate active travel. It is not about light rail going to every single part of the city. It is about incorporating the different means of active transport so that people will be able to get their exercise—and hopefully get into a little bit of shape, which is what I am trying to do—and be able to get to where they want to go. That is the beauty of light rail, and that is why I wanted to speak today.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.44), in reply: Mr Steel is wrong! There is more! Mr Steel is wrong about us wanting to deny the southside what the northside has. Obviously, that is not what we want to do. He has already done that in that this government has ripped the guts out of the bus network, particularly on the southside. So I would say to the minister, “Don’t come down here and talk to me about denying services to south-siders, because they complain about it to me all the time”.

Your obsession with the tram has meant that you have absolutely neglected the electrification and modernisation of the bus network, as evidenced by the fact that you are still running 30-year-old Renault diesel buses that are absolutely non-compliant. I note that Mr McHugh suggested on the radio yesterday that, technically, you were not in breach because no one had complained at that stage. We will see what happens in coming days.

Mr Steel has said that there will still be rapid buses directly to the city. But he is not going to say where they will go, of course! Where do you think they will go? Because there is no way, if they go any other way, that those buses would be as rapid as the current rapid route; they are just not going to be as fast. You could call them rapids if you want! You could call them the “RF4” and the “RF5”—relatively fast. Just “relatively” fast—not quite as fast as they used to be, but the RF4 and the RF5.

Ms Clay in her speech pretty much indicated that this entire project is not about public transport outcomes. It is actually about planning outcomes. This has nothing to do with getting people to where they want to go, when they want to go there. It is about cramming as many people as they possibly can in as many multistorey apartments as they possibly can. Ms Clay and Mr Steel and Mr Barr do not want people having backyards.

*Mr Barr interjecting—*

They just do not. Indeed, say if people choose to go and purchase in, for argument’s sake, south Tralee—I am just going to throw that one out there as a possible. Based on comments made publicly by Mr Steel, they are not even going to properly consider how those people will commute into Canberra. Because we do not want to cater for pesky families who want a backyard! We only want to look after those apartment dwellers! That is what we want to do! That is all I have got to say on this, because I think Mr Barr is over me.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Peter Cain  
Leanne Castley  
Jeremy Hanson  
Elizabeth Kikkert  
Nicole Lawder  
Elizabeth Lee  
James Milligan  
Mark Parton

Noes 15

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

Question resolved in the negative.

## Papers

### Motion to take note of papers

Motion (by **Madam Speaker**) agreed to:

That the papers presented under standing order 211 during presentation of papers in the routine of business, be noted.

## Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 (No 2)

**Mr Barr**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement and the following supplementary papers:

Budget 2023-2024—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 13—

Budget Review, dated February 2024.

Supplementary Budget Papers, dated February 2024.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (4.53): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Appropriate Bill 2023-2024 (No 2). This bill provides for total appropriations of \$453 million, including net controlled recurrent payments of \$216.1 million; capital injection of \$219.2 million; payments to be made on behalf of the territory of \$13.2 million; and Treasurer's advance of \$4.5 million.

Madam Speaker, through this appropriation bill the government seeks to make investments that continue to support economic growth in the territory, to deliver services that are important to the wellbeing of Canberrans and to support our most vulnerable. Some of the major areas of investment will see the government increase funding to provide better care for our community, to deliver improvements to the bus network whilst keeping bus fares low, and to improve the pay and working conditions for our school assistants. Through a targeted and well-planned infrastructure investment, we are ensuring that the needs of Canberra's growing population will be met.

I also take the opportunity this afternoon to present the 2023-24 budget review. The review updates the Assembly and the community on how the government continues to deliver essential services and high quality community amenities.

We are increasing capacity and capability in our health system, with additional funding for the Canberra Hospital expansion project and an increase in the number of frontline paramedics. We are progressing the construction of the CIT campus in

Woden and the delivery of light rail stage 2A—the topic of this afternoon—that strengthens our public transport network. We are also continuing to provide additional support for our most vulnerable, with further investment in public, social and affordable housing; more funding for our out-of-home care services for children and young people; and extending rent relief for those in need.

Turning now to the economy, I can advise the Assembly that the outlook for the territory economy remains positive. I am pleased to report that economic growth was stronger than expected in the fiscal year 2022-23, with the territory's gross state product increasing by 4.3 per cent, which was well above its long-run average of 3.5 per cent. Perhaps not surprisingly, GSP growth is forecast to moderate somewhat in the fiscal year 2023-24, but I am pleased to report the outlook is stronger than expected at the time of the 2023-24 budget.

Further, the December quarterly inflation figures showed that inflation is easing. Canberra had the third lowest through-the-year inflation rate in the nation at 3.7 per cent, and quarterly inflation in the December quarter was only 0.4 of 1 per cent. We will continue to watch this closely alongside interest rate settings, which are not captured in the ABS data. We are forecasting inflation to ease further through the 2024 calendar year. We are also expecting a recovery in household consumption and growth in real wages, with that really picking up pace in the fiscal year 2025-26. Madam Speaker, we recognise the importance of the fairer tax cuts that will come into effect on 1 July 2024, and the impact they will have in driving these macro outcomes.

The government remains optimistic about the territory's economic outlook ahead and the fiscal policy settings that are in place. We are optimistic that we will continue to progress delivery of infrastructure for our city's future. We will continue to invest in quality public health and education outcomes, and we will continue to support households through the current but, fortunately, easing inflation challenge.

Madam Speaker, in the current fiscal year, the headline net operating balance is lower than expected at the time of the budget. This is largely due to reductions in the goods and services tax, which are being experienced by many states and territories; reductions in payroll tax revenue; and increased health and housing expenditure. The outlook over the forward estimates, though, continues to see an improvement—a considerable improvement—as consumer sentiment recovers through the fiscal year 2024-25 and beyond. I commend the budget review and the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 (No 2) to the Assembly.

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

## **Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024 (No 2)**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (4.59): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to be able to table this Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024 (No 2). The bill is the mechanism for the appropriation of money for the Office of the Legislative Assembly. I can advise the Assembly that the bill provides for total appropriations of \$94,000 for the Office of the Legislative Assembly. This is to meet the outcomes of the enterprise bargaining process that has recently concluded. With that, I commend this \$94,000 appropriation bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Public Accounts—Standing Committee Reference**

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

That, notwithstanding the provisions of standing orders 174, 175 and 176, the Appropriation Bill 2023-24 (No 2) and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-24 (No 2) be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to decide whether or not to undertake an inquiry, and, should the committee decide to inquire, the reporting date will be 8 March 2024.

This committee reporting date will allow over four weeks for the committee to inquire into the bill, or bills if they choose, which is consistent with past practice, whilst ensuring the timely passing of the supplementary appropriation to support government operations.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Statements by members Municipal services—tree removal Scullin—playground**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (5.01): I rise to follow up on four failed government commitments in my electorate. I was assured on 3 February 2023 that a tree overhanging Parkes Way was anticipated to be removed by June 2023, and the tree still remains. I was assured on 15 March 2023 that a tree behind No 3 and No 5 Arkell Place in Charnwood would be removed by April 2023, and the tree still remains. In September 2023, I received a request from two residents on one street to help them remove trees that were planted on the nature strips in front of their homes. On 30 November 2023, the government committed to remove them. However, the trees still remain.



Finally, in November 2023, the then-minister rejected a request from 90 residents to fix and upgrade the tired and neglected Duigan Street playground. The minister declined to commit to this and said there were no plans to upgrade the playground and that maintenance issues would be addressed as they were identified. Well, the tyre swing at the playground collapsed just this week. This park is in need of an upgrade and the community have voiced their concern. I call on the government, on my constituents' behalf, to keep their commitments and to revise their decision to not upgrade the Duigan Street park in Scullin.

### **Municipal services—tree removal**

**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) (5.03): I just want to quickly respond to Mrs Kikkert's comments, especially given I have been visiting with the Urban Treescapes teams and understand their operations. Perhaps I can shed some light on some of the delays with removing some of those branches and trees.

I think we are all well aware that we have had yet another very difficult weather season on top of several years of very difficult weather seasons. It means that there is a backlog of work. It does not mean that we have not kept our promises or that the teams have not been working incredibly hard. But, for somewhere like Parkes Way, to remove those branches results in having to close the road. So you could certainly understand that to be able to do that we are looking for either a good time of year and/or several requests that we need to prune branches back if we are going to disrupt traffic in such a significant way. I anticipate that is what has happened with Parkes Way. I would need to get some advice on the others, but, now that Mrs Kikkert has aired them here, I will review the transcript and see what further advice I can give her. I do not believe I have received correspondence since I became minister.

### **Education—Future of Education Equity Fund**

**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) (5.04): Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition said that the Future of Education Equity Fund did not even provide assistance to the minimum number of children that are living in poverty in the ACT. I want to take the chance today to clarify that any school student living in poverty in the ACT is eligible for the fund. The ACT Education Directorate and public servants are the experts and are implementing the fund and promoting the fund to families so that they know that the support is available for them.

I rise to clarify this point because this message is so important to get out into the community. Anyone living in poverty in the ACT with a child from preschool to year 12 is eligible for the ACT government's Future of Education Equity Fund. They will receive more financial support than they would under the Canberra Liberals' voucher system. ACT Labor is providing double the support being offered by the Canberra Liberals to families with primary school students for school related expenses, and

triple that to families with high school or college students, because when you target assistance you can provide more to those who need it most.

I also ask that, if the Leader of the Opposition receives representations from constituents like the ones she referred to yesterday about difficulties in filling out application forms, I encourage her to send those to my office so that I can make sure that the people that she is referring to are being provided with the support that they deserve.

*Discussion concluded.*

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### **Women—Fearless Women mentor program**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (5.06): Today it is my pleasure to highlight an exceptional organisation that serves as a guiding force for young women and girls in our community. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Fearless Women for their unwavering commitment to nurturing a sense of belonging and empowerment amongst our young women. I would like to welcome many of those involved with Fearless Women who are joining us in the gallery today.

Established in 2020, Fearless Women is a non-profit organisation with DGR status, just in case you would like to donate. They operate in the ACT and its environs under the leadership of their chair, Gai Brodtmann, and the CEO, Glenda Stevens. The organisation delivers complementary education, mentorship and counselling programs tailored for young women aged 10 to 25. They create an inclusive and secure space where participants can fortify their self-belief, inner strength and resilience.

In the ACT, our young women grapple with psychological distress rates surpassing those in any other part of the country. Fearless Women takes proactive measures, intervening early with support, role modelling, skills development and a nurturing community to mitigate the need for expensive and prolonged mental health services. Research from the Australian National University underscores the distinct response of girls and young women to risk factors, emphasising their heightened engagement in gender-specific programs. Fearless Women meets their needs with targeted programs, ensuring accessibility to all without financial burden.

The demand for Fearless Women's programs has seen a significant surge. Since the unveiling of the mentor and education programs in July 2022, over 250 young women have sought to participate in the Mentor Program, grappling with psychological distress stemming from isolation, anorexia, domestic violence, addiction, and family or school challenges. Additionally, Fearless Women received over 220 requests for the proposed counselling program, highlighting the pressing need for accessible mental health services. The education program embodied in the Fearless Future

sessions has positively impacted over 4,900 students in the ACT in government schools, with additional requests for the Let's Talk About program in 2024.

The impact of Fearless Women is evident through the positive transformations witnessed in participants, strengthened communication skills, enhanced emotional understanding, and increased engagement in academic and professional pursuits. An evaluation by Cornerstone Change Management in November 2022 reaffirms the effectiveness of Fearless Women's programs, attesting to their contribution to healthy relationships, personal resilience and the emergence of fearless women.

Fearless Women, as an organisation, champions the future wellbeing of our young women with the aim of building a community where young women are healthy, socially engaged and equipped to create a lasting impact. I invite any member here who would like to learn more about Fearless Women to join us in the reception room when the Assembly rises to talk with members of Fearless Women.

Lastly, I would like to once again express my appreciation to CEO, Glenda Stevens; the chair, Gai Brodtmann; and the entire Fearless Women team for their remarkable work in transforming the lives of girls and young women. Your efforts are shaping the future of fearless women here in the ACT. I encourage everyone to familiarise themselves with this great organisation, discover how they can support it and join their journey of making a difference.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Lawder, and well done to the fearless women in the gallery.

### **Multicultural communities—Australia Day celebrations**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (5.11): I want to give a big shout-out to the Federation of Chinese Community of Canberra for hosting an amazing Australia Day celebration. Their creativity, warmth and unity made a beautiful event truly memorable. As part of Australia's diverse cultural tapestry, their contribution to an Australia Day concert was fantastic.

Another big shout-out goes to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community for joining in the celebration of Australia Day. Thank you for hosting a beautiful dinner with the community and for a great panel. Each delivered a wonderful speech on the night. Thank you to the Ahmadiyya community for bringing the community together on Australia Day.

Finally, I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the vibrant and dynamic African community for their celebration of Australia Day. Thank you to Charles Koker and his team for putting together an amazing celebration and a barbecue with music and dance at Yerrabi Park.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.12 pm until Tuesday, 19 March 2024 at 10 am.**

## Questions without notice taken on notice

### North Canberra Hospital—workplace culture

**Ms Stephen-Smith** (*in reply to a question and a supplementary question by Ms Castley on Wednesday, 29 November 2023*):

- 1) Between 3 July to 29 November 2023, 67 employees left North Canberra Hospital (NCH).

Unit Name	Separations
Allied Health and Palliative Care	19
Corporate and Finance	8
Medical and Mental Health	13
Medical Services	1
Nursing and Midwifery	8
People and Culture	3
Surgical Division	7
Women and Children's	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>

### Rural Fire Services—location

**Mr Gentleman** (*in reply to a question by Mr Milligan on Tuesday, 6 February 2024*):

As at 6 February 2024 of the \$8.2 million budgeted a total of \$1.759 million has been spent against the new ACTRFS and SES Station in Mitchell and a further \$0.524 million has been spent on interim works at the Gungahlin JESC.

### Planning—Macgregor

**Mr Steel** (*in reply to a question by Ms Clay and a supplementary question by Miss Nuttall on Wednesday, 7 February 2024*):

I thank the member for their question, which I have taken on notice.

Access Canberra operates a risk-based compliance approach which enables the targeting of resources to those areas where they are most needed and will be most effective. This approach involves a series of steps to identify and assess risks and to then apply the most appropriate regulatory tool to control the risk. This means that resource allocation and enforcement responses are determined based on priorities determined through risk assessment.

In the 2022-2023 financial year, Access Canberra received 964 complaints in relation to planning matters, all of which were investigated.

I am informed that Access Canberra has no record of any concerns regarding block 9 section 140 MacGregor. However, in response to the matter raised, Access Canberra's Rapid Regulatory Response Team undertook an assessment of the block to determine crown lease provisions, title ownership and history. Following this assessment, an officer contacted the lessee on 9 February 2024. The lessee advised the previous tenant had vacated the property and that they have maintenance and cleaning works underway.

On 20 February 2023 Access Canberra contacted the owner again who advised that unwanted vegetation has been removed from the site, the building is being cleaned and the interior refitting will be commencing soon. The lessee is also looking at scheduling mowing works noting the large size of the block that continued mowing works will be required. The lessee is seeking to have the building occupied as soon as possible.

There is no requirement for enforcement action, however Access Canberra will continue to monitor the property as necessary. Canberrans can raise their concerns directly to Access Canberra online at <https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/contact-us/feedback-and-complaints> or by calling 13 22 81.

### **Transport Canberra—accessibility of buses**

**Ms Cheyne** (*in reply to a supplementary question by Mr Milligan on Wednesday, 7 February 2024*):

Transport Canberra have liaised with the Australian Human Rights Commission in relation to the bus fleet.

### **Cotter Dam—maintenance**

**Mr Barr** (*in reply to a question by Ms Lee on Wednesday, 7 February 2024*):

I have sought advice from Icon Water and their answer to the Member's question is as follows:

Rolled Compacted Concrete (RCC) monolith structures are generally susceptible to cracking due to their inherent properties and the nature of construction. As such, detailed designs pre-emptively include control elements which are factored into the composition of the structure and the construction process to manage this risk.

In the case of Cotter Dam, cracks were identified during the construction and filling stage of the reservoir prior to completion of the defects liability period. The contract was finalised in October 2015 after the completion of the defect liability period, during which all defects identified were addressed and remedied as per the contract.

There were no visible significant cracks identified after the end of the defects liability period and no further geological issues have been identified following the completion of the Enlarged Cotter Dam (ECD). Further, based on independent reviews and inspection, no concerns have been raised with respect to either the structural integrity of the Cotter Dam structure or its performance.

### **ACT Health—Digital Health Record system**

**Ms Stephen-Smith** (*in reply to a question by Ms Castley on Thursday, 8 February 2024*):

Of the 231 referrals which were identified as not going through to the DHR via Aether, 115 had been received through another mechanism before the issue was identified. This means there were 116 referrals which were identified as not having been received into the DHR that needed to be “replayed”.

I am advised by CHS that the delay in receiving these referrals varied between patients, and some patients remain on the waitlist. It is therefore not possible to definitively answer this question.

It should also be noted that some patients had multiple referrals, so 116 referrals does not mean 116 patients.

**Ms Stephen-Smith** (*in reply to a supplementary question by Ms Castley on Thursday, 8 February 2024*):

Canberra Health Services is not aware of any legal action which has been taken.