



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

TENTH ASSEMBLY

3 SEPTEMBER 2024

www.hansard.act.gov.au

Tuesday, 3 September 2024

Dissent from ruling—evidence given by a minister (Statement by Speaker).....	2313
Legislative Assembly—standing orders and social media guidelines (Statement by Speaker)	2314
Petitions:	
Narrabundah—pedestrian crossing—petition 24-24	2315
Charnwood-Dunlop School—playground—petitions 28-24 and 39-24.....	2315
Kaleen and Giralang—crime—petition 32-24	2316
Disability—sensory sensitivities—petition 35-24.....	2316
Workers compensation—petition 40-24.....	2318
Ministerial responses	2318
Roads—Red Hill and Narrabundah—petition 11-24	2318
Kippax—parking—petitions 9-24 and 23-24	2319
Motion to take note of petitions	2321
Charnwood-Dunlop School—playground—petitions 28-24 and 39-24	2321
Kaleen and Giralang—crime—petition 32-24.....	2323
Disability—sensory sensitivities—petition 35-24	2323
Workers compensation—petition 40-24	2325
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	2328
Appropriation Bill 2024-2025.....	2330
Ministerial arrangements	2352
Questions without notice:	
Ginninderry—joint venture partnership	2353
Ginninderry—joint venture partnership	2354
Distinguished visitor	2354
Questions without notice:	
Land—community use	2354
Majura Valley—rural leases	2355
Majura Valley—rural leases	2357
Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct.....	2358
Health—maternity services	2360
Public schools—infrastructure	2361
Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct.....	2362
Alexander Maconochie Centre—deaths in custody	2363
Public schools—religious education	2364
Justice—corrections system	2365
Alexander Maconochie Centre—deaths in custody	2366
Planning—Gungahlin town centre	2367
National Multicultural Festival 2025.....	2368
Supplementary answer to question without notice:	
Digital Health Record system—ACT Integrity Commission.....	2370
Papers.....	2371
Gambling—policy.....	2373
Government—fuel pricing	2394
Papers (Motion to take note of papers)	2407
Appropriation Bill 2024-2025.....	2408

Statements by members:	
Valedictory	2424
Alexander Maconochie Centre—death in custody	2424
Education—policy	2425
Adjournment:	
Dr Gordon Carmichael—tribute	2425
Valedictory	2426
Valedictory	2428
Valedictory	2429
The Assembly adjourned at 6.30 pm.	2431
Schedule of amendment:	
Schedule 1: Appropriation Bill 2024-2025	2432

Tuesday, 3 September 2024

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

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

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

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

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

Dissent from ruling—evidence given by a minister Statement by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: I wish to make a statement concerning the dissent from the Speaker's ruling motion that appears on the Assembly notice paper under Assembly business. Members will recall that the dissent motion followed a question without notice asked by Mr Cain to the Special Minister of State, Mr Steel, concerning words he said which are recorded in the proof *Hansard* and which Mr Steel disputes.

The Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure decided not to list the matter for this week's sitting, preferring instead that I make a statement to the Assembly on the matter and that the order of the day for the dissent motion will lapse at the end of the Tenth Assembly unless the Assembly decides otherwise.

It is clear now that Mr Cain asked his question based on the proof transcript and that he was perfectly entitled to ask that question. It is equally clear that Mr Steel is of the view that the words on the proof transcript do not reflect his recollection of what he said during the estimates committee's proceedings.

From these two positions there were a number of comments and inferences made, causing concern for members on all sides, and I was asked to have members withdraw statements. On reviewing *Hansard*, I was unable to identify comments made across the floor, other than one comment that Ms Cheyne has since withdrawn.

The Clerk has advised me that Hansard has reviewed that part of the estimates committee proceedings and cannot definitively determine what Mr Steel said.

Members, I ask that in the final three sitting days of the Tenth Assembly we consider our words and actions carefully to ensure that they do not breach standing orders 54 and 55, which stipulate that members cannot use offensive words against another member or make imputations of improper motives or personal reflection.

Legislative Assembly—standing orders and social media guidelines

Statement by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: At the end of the Assembly sitting last Thursday, I recognise that there was a vigil being held outside and that certain members had been and were in attendance. Ms Vassarotti returned to the chamber wearing an item of clothing representative of that vigil. At that time Mr Hanson raised a point of order and articulated that other parliaments—namely, the Victorian parliament—had made previous rulings about the use of such symbolic items.

During this point of order and my brief comments in reply, Ms Vassarotti proceeded to willingly and without objection remove the item. As *Hansard* reflects, Ms Vassarotti said, “Happy to take it off,” and proceeded to acknowledge that she had been wearing it outside as she participated in the events outside the Assembly.

It was very disappointing, then, to see that yesterday the minister posted on her social media page inaccurate and disparaging remarks about the way the events took place in this chamber. Ms Vassarotti stated on social media, together with an image of her inside the chamber, wearing the item:

Last week in the ACT parliament Labor and the Liberals told me that it was unacceptable to wear this item in the chamber because it was a symbol of protest. To put it politely, this is outrageous.

Ms Vassarotti went on to say:

It is shameful, and we need to call it out.

Members, I have determined that Ms Vassarotti’s post is not only in breach of the broadcasting guidelines but also a reflection on the ruling of the Speaker, under standing order 73, and an imputation, under standing order 55. Further, paragraph 5.45 of the *Companion to the Standing Orders* articulates that the Speaker’s actions can only be criticised by way of a substantive motion.

In light of this, and given the comments that Ms Vassarotti has made on her social media, I ask that she now apologise in this chamber and before the lunchtime adjournment today delete all references on her social media. I would encourage Ms Vassarotti to reflect on the way that she has unfairly portrayed the events that occurred in this place, particularly her willingness to uphold the rules of this institution inside it and then seeking to conflate those interactions days later in such a way that would give favour to her version of the events on social media at the expense of the accuracy of them.

Ms Vassarotti: I am very happy to apologise. I will reflect. I was certainly upset about what had happened but was happy to comply with your order. I have already deleted the media post, in anticipation of your ruling, and offer my apology.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Narrabundah—pedestrian crossing—petition 24-24

By Ms Lee, from 28 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly:

- That residents of Old Narrabundah must cross Sturt Avenue to access all schools, public, independent, and Catholic for all children year’s 3 and above.
- That the ACT Government encourages active transport methods for school aged children.
- There is no safe ‘on-level’ crossing for school children across Sturt Avenue north of the intersection of Captain Cook Crescent and Sturt Avenue.
- That Sturt Avenue has a posted speed limit in this section of 70km/h.
- That there have been multiple car accidents at the intersection of Sturt Avenue and McMillan Crescent where both pedestrians and vehicle traffic must cross Sturt Avenue.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the ACT Government to install the safest crossing option by either adding an ‘on-level’ crossing on the northern section of Sturt Avenue between Hume Place roundabout and Boolimba Crescent or signalise the McMillan Crescent and Sturt Avenue Intersection with a pedestrian crossing.

Charnwood-Dunlop School—playground—petitions 28-24 and 39-24

By Mr Cain, from 418 and 157 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the Australian Capital Territory draw to the attention of the Assembly:

Charnwood-Dunlop School has only one play space that is currently not suitable for use by all ages or abilities. The playground is currently only suitable for kindergarten-aged children, and it is not all-abilities inclusive as children with mobility aids cannot access the play space.

The P&C has campaigned for more than 18-months to finance the school, but this remains well short of their funding target. The students of Charnwood-Dunlop School deserve an inclusive play space that will be greatly valued by the school community.

Your petitioners, therefore, urge the Assembly to contribute to the P&C-established fund to finance the remaining money required for the construction of the play space at Charnwood-Dunlop School.

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

Kaleen and Giralang—crime—petition 32-24

By Mr Pettersson, from 461 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The residents of Kaleen and Giralang have been experiencing increasing rates of crime including by youth offenders. In particular:

- The residents of Kaleen and Giralang have been experiencing increasing rates of assaults, harassment, drug trafficking, robbery, break and entering;
- Many parents are worried about their children's safety in Kaleen and Giralang;
- Residents regularly report incidents to the police but the police are not adequately resourced to protect the community which has left many residents living in fear and they are not confident that they will receive the protection they need when they need it; and
- Many repeat offenders are known to residents and ACT Policing, but the action being taken is not acting as a deterrent to offenders.

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

- Ensure Police are adequately resourced;
- Ensure the DPP is adequately resourced so Police are confident in referring cases to them;
- Pursue law reform and work towards identifying and implementing novel ways to intervene with youth offenders which promote the safety and well-being of the whole community;
- Install cameras in a number of key locations where youth crime is known to occur; and
- Ensure that all youth offenders and their families are required to be assessed by ACT Child and Youth Protection Services including when provided with a caution.

Disability—sensory sensitivities—petition 35-24

By Miss Nuttall, from 107 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly:

1. Many Canberra residents experience sensory sensitivity to noise including people with autism, ADHD, post-concussion syndrome, sensory processing disorders, PTSD, hearing impairments, misophonia and dementia among others;
2. Sensory sensitivity is often very simple to accommodate. Accommodations can include, but are not limited to turning off background music, having dedicated quiet hours and having a dedicated quiet room or area;
3. While relatively simple to do, accommodating for sensory sensitivity can make a massive difference for many people engaging in their community, whether that's shopping, dining, going to the movies or theatre or accessing government services;
4. For people with sensory sensitivity to noise, participating in public life and engaging with community can often involve constant self-advocacy and constant uncertainty engaging with venues to ensure their sensory needs will be met. At worst, engaging with their community can entail considerable distress when exposed to loud, unpredictable and overwhelming sounds;
5. There are many excellent public, private and community venues and spaces that provide sensory-friendly services, but there is currently no central point of information for those with sensory sensitivity to noise to reliably find out about these services.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to:

1. Develop and maintain a user-friendly database of sensory-friendly venues in the ACT across public, community and private sectors;
2. Ensure the database is in a format accessible to the ACT disability community;
3. Ensure the database gathers and displays information including:
 - a. Presence/absence of background music;
 - b. Willingness to turn off background music when asked;
 - c. Dedicated quiet hours;
 - d. Dedicated quiet room or area;
 - e. Other measures undertaken by venues to accommodate sensory sensitivity to noise.
4. Record relevant information about each venue, including but not limited to venue name, address, contact information, accessibility and specific sensory accommodations offered;
5. Ensure that the database can be organised by type of venue (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores, private practices, community venues and government services);
6. Ensure that the ACT Government liaises with local businesses and community groups to promote the database and list their accommodations;
7. Ensure the database is up-to-date and well-advertised to the community.

Workers compensation—petition 40-24

By **Mrs Kikkert**, from 13 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly

- corrections officer Mr Ashley Martin was injured whilst helping deal with an incident at the Alexander Maconochie in 2020;
- Mr Martin's workers compensation was later terminated by contractor EML, reportedly because he was not on the work roster that day; and
- following this termination, Mr Martin ended his life.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the ACT Government to investigate Mr Martin's workers compensation claim— including the accuracy of information regarding whether he was working at the AMC on the day of his injury— and if any anomalies are found, to:

- order an independent review of the ACT's workers compensation system;
- investigate Employers Mutual Limited (EML) to confirm that it is fit and proper to hold the territory's workers compensation contract; and
- order a coronial inquest into Mr Ashley Martin's death.

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

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Roads—Red Hill and Narrabundah—petition 11-24

By **Ms Cheyne**, Minister for City Services, dated 1 September 2024, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cocks on 25 June 2024, concerning the duplication of Dalrymple Street, Red Hill.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning petition E-PET-011-24, lodged by Mr Ed Cocks MLA, regarding the duplication of Dalrymple Street (southbound) south of Goyder Street, Red Hill/Narrabundah.

The ACT Government takes road safety and residents' amenity seriously and encourages all road users to share responsibility for road safety.

An officer from Transport Canberra and City Services has visited this location during the morning peak period and observed the issue identified. Traffic

congestion is an issue that occurs across the network during morning and afternoon peak periods.

The ACT Government has previously investigated amendments to traffic signal timing at this intersection to help address congestion during the peak. Duplication of the southbound lane of Dalrymple Street would require a reconfiguration of the Dalrymple Street / Hindmarsh Street traffic signals. The first step in considering such works is to undertake a feasibility study to determine the constructability, likely costs, and benefits.

I can confirm that this location is on the ACT Government's list of sites for further investigation of potential improvements. Subject to the findings of these investigations and the completion of a feasibility study, any works that are recommended may be considered for future implementation subject to competing priorities across the Territory.

I can also confirm that nearby schools are participating in TCCS' School Crossing Supervisor (SCS) program. The SCS program assists children in crossing roads safely by directing traffic through instructions. They manage the flow of pedestrians and motorists at the busiest crossings.

Additionally, the Red Hill Primary School is also participating in TCCS' Ride or Walk to School (RWTS) program which is there to support schools to increase walking and riding to school by providing strategies to build awareness and participation in active travel. The RWTS program also encourages parents to participate in part way drop off points which can be utilised by parent/carers to reduce traffic congestion during peak times.

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

Kippax—parking—petitions 9-24 and 23-24

By **Ms Cheyne**, Minister for City Services, undated, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cain on 4 June 2024, concerning the long-term car park at the Kippax Group Centre.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning petitions E-PET-009-24 and PET-023-24, lodged by Mr Peter Cain MLA, regarding the long-term car park at the Kippax Group Centre.

The ACT Government understands the need to provide sufficient parking to support local residents and businesses while balancing the conflicting needs of different parking users.

The ACT Government, through Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS), regularly commissions surveys of government car parking spaces in the city, town centres and selected group centres.

In 2022, TCCS commissioned a survey of government car parking spaces at the Kippax Group Centre. The survey showed out of the 464 public car parking spaces, 67% were utilised during the weekday with the following breakdown:

- a. Short stay (up to 4 hours) – 325 spaces with 64% weekday utilisation;
- b. Long stay (no time restriction) – 92 spaces with 42% weekday utilisation; and
- c. *Other – 47 spaces with 34% weekday utilisation of Disabled spaces. Weekday utilisation was not recorded for all other types of special use spaces.
**(Disabled, loading zone, taxi, motorcycle, pickup/set down, park and ride, permit zones etc)*

The survey indicated that out of the 464 car parking spaces at the Kippax Group Centre, 92 (20%) spaces were long-stay (with no time restriction) while 325 (70%) were short-stay (up to 4 hours), and 47 spaces (10%) were other parking spaces. Of these, 18% (84 spaces) were on-street while 82% (380 spaces) were off-street.

The 2022 parking survey further showed that of the 380 off-street car parking spaces, 75% (284 spaces) were identified as short stay with 64% weekday utilisation, while 21% (80 spaces) were identified as long-stay with 42% weekday utilisation, and 4% (16 spaces) were mobility spaces with 40% weekday utilisation. All 464 spaces captured by the survey of off-street and on-street parking were within 250 metres walking distance to the centre of the Kippax Group Centre.

The ACT Government has instituted several changes in recent years to improve parking arrangements at the Kippax Group Centre and ensure the sufficient availability of parking – both short- and long-term.

In January 2023, in response to community feedback and a parking assessment by TCCS, the Kippax Park and Ride was relocated from the main car park at the Kippax Group Centre to Moyes Crescent, east of the playing fields. This provided an additional 16 long-stay parking spaces in the main Kippax car park.

Information was distributed to businesses and local residents regarding these changes, via on-site signage and online. Communication materials also raised awareness of other long-stay parking in the area, including the large number of spaces a short walk away on Moyes Crescent and in surrounding streets.

In September 2023, the ACT Government made further improvements to the parking at Kippax. This included creating an additional 12 short stay car parking spaces on Kippax Place, behind the shopping centre, through changes to line-marking.

The ACT Government recently reached an agreement with the owners of Kippax Fair Shopping Centre to deliver substantial investment at the shops including more housing and community infrastructure in addition to expanding the shopping centre.

The first stage includes an expansion of the east precinct towards Moyes Crescent and will include the addition of more than 500 new parking spaces. Following completion of this work, upgrading the existing shopping centre will start, which will also incorporate additional parking, including residential parking for about 288 cars. This project is still subject to the development

application process, which will include further opportunities for consultation with the community on the final design.

Given the overall weekday utilisation of car parking spaces at the Kippax Group Centre is 67%, TCCS will continue to monitor the car park use to determine if the utilisation rates have increased and warrant consideration for additional long stay options.

There is one rapid route, five local routes and one shuttle that provide access to Kippax Group Centre by bus, with each of them operating at a 30 minute or better frequency during weekdays. Together, routes 2, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, and 903 provide access to the centre from the nearby suburbs of Strathnairn, Holt, Higgins, Scullin, Page, Hawker, Macgregor, Charnwood, Latham, and Florey. Rapid route 2 also extends beyond Kippax to the Belconnen Town Centre, City, Barton, and Fyshwick at a 15 minute or better frequency on weekdays, providing convenient options for passengers travelling to and from other major centres across Canberra.

Ceasing parking enforcement would only further impact on availability of parking at Kippax. The objectives of enforcement of parking compliance at shopping centres is to ensure equitable public and business amenity as well as ensuring public and vehicular safety in these areas. Access Canberra Parking Operations attends Shopping Centre precincts as part of its routine compliance patrols and in response to complaints. Consistent with this approach, Kippax Group Centre has been attended on 40 occasions since 1 January 2024, with 372 parking infringements issued. Due to the high number of parking non-compliance in and around the Kippax Group Centre, Access Canberra Parking Operations will continue to undertake enforcement to ensure turnover of parking spaces, parking equity and business amenity by addressing illegal and unsafe parking practices in line with community expectations.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Charnwood-Dunlop School—playground—petitions 28-24 and 39-24

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.09): The petition that I have brought to this Assembly draws the attention of this Assembly to the needs of the students for an all-abilities playground at Charnwood-Dunlop School. I have lodged this petition, as presented by the Clerk, with 418 e-petition signatures and 157 paper signatures, totalling 575 signatures. This petition urges the government to make a meaningful and full contribution to the P&C established fund to finance the remaining money required for the construction of an all-abilities play space at Charnwood-Dunlop School.

I do want to thank the principal petitioner, Mrs Jessica Ascione, for raising this matter with me and bringing this petition before the Assembly. Mrs Ascione has been a fantastic and spirited champion for her community. Her tireless work to canvass this

petition deserves the highest gratitude. Without this individual effort we would not have reached the target of 575 signatures, as we have done. I was delighted to sponsor this petition and to call upon the government to urgently meet the needs of this community.

Playgrounds are an essential component of our schools. They are where our children can have fun with their friends, exercise and develop physically, and be energetic and active during their recess and lunch breaks. Playgrounds are a frequent locale of socialisation amongst our children. A good playground is as much a meeting place and learning space as it is a play area.

Charnwood-Dunlop School has only one play space, and it is currently not suitable for use by all ages or all abilities. The current playground is only suitable for kindergarten-age children and is not an all-abilities inclusive playground, as children with mobility aids cannot access the play space. Charnwood-Dunlop School services a significant portion of the west Belconnen community and educates children from all walks of life. Having worked in the education sector for 20 years myself, it saddens me to see that the infrastructure of the school is currently not fit for purpose. For the sake of our children, we can always do better, and we should always strive to do better for our children.

The P&C have campaigned for more than 18 months to finance this playground but remain well short of their funding target. It is a travesty that this government has had 18 months to contribute to appropriating money for this school's play space. Labor and the Greens have had two budget processes to work through making an allocation for this play space. Instead, they have left it to the hardworking parents and friends of Charnwood-Dunlop School to foot a bill that should belong, at least in part, to the government.

Unfortunately, this Labor-Greens government has run itself so far into debt that it can no longer afford suitable monkey bars, slides and play equipment for children of all ages and all abilities. Under an Elizabeth Lee-led government, we will recognise the value of our education system and facilities for our schoolchildren. We want to provide children with the world-class service they deserve, and Charnwood-Dunlop with a quality play space. We want to treat P&C councils and members with the respect that they deserve, and the community will not be left in the dark for 18 months, as has been the case in this instance.

Our recently announced education policy has been incredibly well received by the community and education sector professionals. We will prioritise improved literacy and numeracy and provide better support for our hardworking teachers. We will ensure that all students have access to a well-maintained and safe learning environment, and we will provide better planning of school infrastructure, including classrooms and playgrounds.

ACT Labor recently published their so-called plan for Belconnen, listing each of their electoral commitments. Putting aside that they have had 23 years to develop such policies, one of the policies included is to work with Charnwood-Dunlop School to deliver a new all-abilities playground. That is very pleasing to see, but it is so disappointing to see that they do not give credit to either the Canberra Liberals or

Mrs Ascione for actually driving them to come up with this policy for this west Belconnen school. Shame on them! The Canberra Liberals look forward to further leading the way.

Kaleen and Giralang—crime—petition 32-24

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (10.14): I rise to speak briefly to the crime in Kaleen and Giralang petition that I was happy to facilitate as the sponsoring member. Every Canberran deserves to be safe in their home, their community and our city. By all measures, Canberra is an incredibly safe place to live. However, we are not immune to criminal activity, and some people in Canberra are victims of crime.

Just recently, ACT police responded to reports of a disturbance near a Kaleen shopping centre, where a group of three teenage boys were allegedly assaulting another boy. Following a short search of the area, police located two of the alleged offenders, who were taken into custody and transferred to Belconnen Police Station. There, the police contacted responsible adults for the alleged offenders, who subsequently attended the station. The third boy was also identified, with police attending a residence in Giralang a short time later to speak to him in the company of his mother. All three boys were provided with an official police caution, with no charges laid.

That incident sparked this petition and has started a large community conversation about the criminal justice system and how we can continue the important work of improving public safety. I encourage my constituents to continue to engage in this conversation productively, as they largely have so far. I have endeavoured to listen to all perspectives, and I will always appreciate suggestions from constituents as to how we make our city safer.

For the benefit of *Hansard*, I would like to place on record crime statistics from ACT Policing for Giralang and Kaleen. Assaults by year in Giralang are as follows: in 2022, 14 assaults; in 2023, 12 assaults; in 2024, up to June, six. Assaults by year in Kaleen are: in 2022, eight; in 2023, eight; in 2024, up to June, five. For overall crime by year in Giralang, the statistics are: in 2022, 279; in 2023, 193; in 2024, up to June, 71. For overall crime by year in Kaleen, the statistics are: in 2022, 429; in 2023, 462; in 2024, up to June, 173. I wish to thank the principal petitioner for their work in organising this petition and all of the 461 constituents who have signed it. Thank you.

Disability—sensory sensitivities—petition 35-24

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.16): I rise to speak to the petition for an online database and website of sensory-friendly venues, which I have the privilege of sponsoring. A lot of people go their whole lives without really needing to think about sensory sensitivity to sound. There are things that evoke a visceral response in us, sure, or things that stop us from being able to process what is going on. Possibly, moments in the chamber where everyone is talking at once are the closest we get to experiencing sensory overload, and, possibly, the chamber is where members discover that they also have an auditory processing disorder. But for many of us these things do not come up frequently when we are out in public.

For people with sensory sensitivity to sound—that might be autism, ADHD, post-concussion syndrome, sensory processing disorders, PTSD, hearing impairments, misophonia and dementia—it can be a pretty constant thing to navigate in public spaces. Sound is everywhere, and if you cannot filter it out or if you have a particular reaction to it, you start to notice sound all the time. The feeling when you lose track of conversation because you cannot filter out or distinguish the person in front of you from loud music and ever-present chatter can be one of frustration and helplessness. For some people it is actually a feeling of significant distress.

Imagine if you had to contend with that all the time. Chances are, if you have sensory sensitivity, you face the constant additional step of having to have the conversation with venues, explain the situation and contend with the unknown of how the person running the venue will respond. It can be pretty exhausting, and it is invisible work that most people never have to do or even think about doing. The alternatives are to grin and bear it while you are in significant distress, bring in varyingly expensive and often non-ideal workarounds like specialised earbuds and noise-cancelling headphones or just not go out and engage in public life.

There are a lot of venues in Canberra that are actually fantastic at catering to sensory sensitivity. Catering to sensory sensitivity is a pretty simple thing to do. We have venues that do quiet hours and low lights. We have heaps of shop owners and managers in community spaces who are willing to switch off music, no questions asked. Canberra is a really inclusive city, and the vast, vast majority of people are not just willing but actually eager to do the right thing.

The trouble is that there is no way of getting that information anywhere right now. Every time you go to a venue, you roll the dice, and you know you might have an awkward conversation ahead of you. That is where a couple of excellent community advocates have suggested that the ACT government develop a database of sensory-friendly venues, somewhere to recognise the great work the venues are already doing, and somewhere to become a central point for people with sensory sensitivity to refer to. To be honest, I think people underestimate how access to that central point of information can take a pretty big weight off your chest. It takes the unpredictability out of going out and means that people with sensory sensitivity can trust that they are being seen and that places are willing to take their needs into consideration.

I think a database is also pretty crucial in providing that normalising factor, both for the person with sensory sensitivity and for their family and friends. For people with sensory sensitivity, it means finally being seen and considered in public spaces in a way we have not been. If you are still new to understanding your sensory sensitivity, even just seeing that the government, community and private organisations recognise, care about and list that information is huge.

You might not think much of it, but for a lot of us, getting family to understand our sensory sensitivities requires a lot of vulnerability and a bit of journey. I could have cried with relief the first time my family were cool with me slinking off into another room to eat because eating sounds sent me into fight or flight mode. Please, look up misophonia if this sounds like you. To be able to show family and friends that there

are so many places that recognise and accommodate sensory sensitivity would be a pretty meaningful step.

I would love to thank the lovely Sam Nugent for being an awesome community advocate and being willing to step up as principal petitioner. Mrs Nugent brought this petition forward on behalf of both herself and other community advocates that have reached out to both of us, so this has been a solid team effort. I am really proud to be part of a community that thinks seriously about genuine inclusion. I think the more we do to actively look out for everyone in our community and their needs, the better. Thank you.

Workers compensation—petition 40-24

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (10.21): Today, I stand before you to address a heartbreaking and urgent matter that not only touches the lives of those directly involved but resonates with all of us who value justice, compassion and the wellbeing of every individual in our community. Family and friends of Ashley Martin have gathered here to honour his memory. I would like to acknowledge Mr Martin's wife, Rebecca; his children, Josh, Tyler, Jayden and Takoda; and his close family and friends, Nathan, Dale, Liz and Tori.

Mr Ashley Martin was a dedicated corrections officer, a man who faced unimaginable challenges in his line of duty. Mr Martin, like many of his colleagues, stood on the front lines of a system fraught with chaos and danger. He attended multiple inmate brawls, braved a riot and confronted the terrifying reality of fire within the prison walls. Yet, despite this unwavering commitment and service, he found himself caught in a web of injustice and despair.

Following these traumatic events, our brave corrections officer, Mr Martin, went on medical leave, seeking the rest and recovery he so desperately needed. However, he was met with a shocking blow when the very system he served, the corrections system, and the insurer, denied his compensation, claiming he was not present during the riot. This denial was not only unfounded but a devastating misrepresentation of his experiences.

It was only several weeks ago that I raised in an estimates hearing the significant issue of a man who was dismissed from TCCS after someone had changed his health assessment without his knowledge. Because of that alleged fraud, he was dismissed from work. This man was deeply distressed and depressed. He almost ended his life. What is the ACT government becoming when it changes documents to suit its agenda? It is disgraceful, dishonest and it needs to end.

We must recognise the incredible stress levels that corrections officers endure on a daily basis. They are tasked with maintaining order in an environment that often lacks structure—a significant finding from the inspector of corrections on the incident in 2020 where Ashley Martin was involved. The report revealed that the majority of corrections officers felt ill-equipped and unprepared for the very riots and fires they might face.

From a survey, the inspector of corrections found that 59.5 per cent reported that the AMC emergency instructions were unclear to them, including 20 who had been in the AMC for more than three years; 76.2 per cent reported that they had not participated in a training exercise related to a riot-type incident, including 23 who had been at the AMC for more than three years; and 70.7 per cent reported that their training to respond to the 10 November 2020 incident was ineffective, including 21 who had been at the AMC for more than three years.

Without proper training and support, these dedicated individuals are left vulnerable, facing not just physical threats but emotional and psychological turmoil as well. The reality is stark. The following comments were made by staff in that survey:

The incident has caused a lot of stress for me and again I am deeply disappointed as I haven't been formally debriefed. I am seeking counselling at my own cost ...

Our issued equipment are unsuitable for the purpose, we should be clothed the same as the AFP ...

Some officers were cold and wet outside and at risk of hyperthermia in combination with being hit with objects that included legs of tables.

One corrections officer said:

I was in a position where I had no option but to breathe smoke from burning plastic/foam for up to 6 hours without BA equipment or PPE.

It was a very messy unsafe operation. Multiple officers including myself inhaled copious amounts of toxic smoke due to the limitations on PPE.

quite disappointed with the lack of professional and OHS issues for post incident follow up on the night and after.

(Extension of time granted.) Our officer's tragic fate, his decision to take his own life after being denied compensation, serves as a chilling reminder of the consequences of neglecting the wellbeing of those who protect us, all of you, every single person out there in the community.

Today we are here to call for justice. The petitioners demand a thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding Mr Ashley Martin's death and the treatment he received from the system. It is imperative that we uncover the truth, not only for him but for the countless others who may find themselves in similar situations. His family deserve answers. They deserve to know that their loved one's sacrifice and suffering were not in vain.

We must also advocate for systematic changes that will protect our corrections officers and ensure that they have the resources they need to perform their duties safely and effectively. It is not enough to honour their service with words. We must back those words with actions that prioritise their mental health wellbeing, training and overall wellbeing.

In closing, we need to be united in our call for justice and reform. We owe it to our fallen corrections officers. We owe it to Mr Ashley Martin's grieving family and to every corrections officer who puts their life on the line every single day. A proper investigation is not just necessary; it is a moral imperative. Together, I believe we can ensure that no officer's sacrifice is overlooked and that the system they serve is held accountable. Thank you.

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) (10.28): I wish to speak briefly in response to the petition that Mrs Kikkert has brought today. I also want to acknowledge the staff, family and friends of people who have been through some very difficult experiences at the AMC who are here today.

I remember that incident in 2020, in the first weeks after becoming the justice health minister. I remember taking that phone call that night to say that this was happening at the Alexander Maconochie Centre and knowing that everyone would be doing everything they could to keep everyone safe and to make sure that people were protected. I remember spending the rest of that night worrying about whether everyone was okay and hoping that they would be all right when I came in to hear the updates.

The ACT government is committed to improving safety for everyone in the workforce there, making sure that people are supported to do important and difficult work and making sure that the voices of staff are heard when we are going through the process of how we make those improvements. Quite a number of things have happened over recent years to improve staff safety. The Blueprint for Change process has been really instrumental in making sure that those changes have come from the people who are actually doing the work. We are committed to ensuring that that work continues, and we know that there is still more to do. I look forward to seeing future terms of this Assembly and future governments continuing that work. Thank you.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.30): I would also like to thank Mrs Kikkert for sponsoring this today. I thank all of the family and friends who are here because another man has died by suicide—a man who deserved and should have had the backing of the government and the backing of the system that he dedicated so much of his life to working with.

This is not the first time that we have faced devastating consequences for people who are not appropriately supported. It has happened in our corrections system. We see the impact on paramedics, on firefighters and on police. PTSD has become absolutely rife throughout our critical services. It is not good enough to mouth platitudes and buzzwords and bureaucratic speak. We have to do better at backing the people who are backing our community. I commend the petition that has been brought today and ask that it be taken with the utmost—utmost—respect and action.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 45

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.32): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 45, dated 2 September 2024, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR CAIN: Scrutiny report 45 contains the committee's comments on two bills, 124 pieces of subordinate legislation, proposed amendments to one bill, and four government and member responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Report 30

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.33): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 30—*Inquiry into the administration of bail*, dated 21 August 2024, including a dissenting report (*Mr Cain*), together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 30th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. The report makes 17 recommendations, including that the ACT government qualitatively researches the reasons individuals fail to appear in court, with a view to addressing systemic reasons. A dissenting report was submitted by me. The committee received 15 submissions and the committee conducted a public hearing on Tuesday, 18 June 2024. On behalf of the committee, I thank everyone who contributed to this inquiry and I thank the other members of the committee, Dr Paterson and Mr Braddock, for their cooperative role in coming up with this report.

I mention briefly my dissenting report, in my capacity as an individual member. The recommendation is something that we obviously did discuss as a committee, but the other members felt they could not accept the recommendation. The recommendation that I would also like to add to this very worthy report is the recommendation that the ACT government legislate to include violent offences in a family or domestic environment in the schedule of offences where there is a presumption against bail.

As we are well aware, breaches of bail have reached an all-time high in our community. There is an unfortunate recollection in the ACT Policing submission to this inquiry of an individual who had breached a family violence order, was granted bail, breached bail and then murdered their partner. Community expectations were clearly not met in such an instance, which happened only a couple of years ago in the ACT. So I would urge the government of the day—whatever government is in term after the October election—to review the administration of bail in this particular area of serious offences committed in a family or domestic environment.

Where a victim returns home from hospital after a violent assault, it is little comfort to them that the offender is out in the community. I believe our justice system and our legal system should more strongly consider the impact on victims, the expectations of our community and whether someone who commits a violent act, particularly in a domestic relationship, deserves to be out in the community awaiting in trial—in particular, the impact on victims, knowing that their assailant is out in the community. I have briefly recollected and summarised a police submission where the victim might themselves become a fatal victim of such an offender.

I again thank the secretariat for their professional work in support of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety committee right throughout the term that I was involved with the committee as its chair. I thank the secretariat for their professional support and again thank fellow committee members: the deputy chair, Dr Paterson; and Mr Braddock. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statement by chair

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.37): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. On Tuesday, 27 August—last week—following the tabling of Scrutiny report 44, Dr Paterson advised the chamber that she was absent from the JACS Committee meeting that considered the referral of the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2024 and resolved to not undertake an inquiry. That was on 3 July 2024. Dr Paterson further advised the Assembly that, at the next JACS Committee meeting, she unsuccessfully moved a motion to conduct an inquiry into the issues raised in the bill.

On Wednesday, 28 August 2024, Dr Paterson provided an apology to the committee as her statements were a potential disclosure of committee proceedings. At a private meeting on 2 September 2024, the committee considered Dr Paterson's apology, in line with the procedures in standing order 242, and resolved to accept Dr Paterson's apology, noting that it was a disclosure of committee proceedings but that the disclosure did not have a tendency to substantially interfere with the work of the committee.

The disclosure of committee proceedings has a risk of discouraging free and open discussion of committee business. The committee advises that future committees discuss what disclosures would be a substantial interference in committee business to achieve a common understanding in order to preserve free and open discussions.

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025]

Debate resumed from 29 August 2024.

Detail stage

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, I remind you that, in the debate of order of the day No 1, you can discuss order of the day No 2 as well.

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate—Part 1.5.

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) (10.40): Today, I speak on this matter in my capacity as the Minister for Sport and Recreation to talk about the ongoing work of the government and new initiatives that have been funded in this budget.

I will address initiatives in both the Economic Development Directorate section of the sport and recreation portfolio and the City Services section of the portfolio. Through this budget, the ACT government is committing to expand and upgrade sporting infrastructure around Canberra. This budget provides more than \$900,000 for the detailed planning and design of the expanded and upgraded Belconnen Basketball Stadium in collaboration with Basketball ACT. This is the next step towards having this project under construction. Construction funding for this project is provisioned in the budget.

The upgrade and refurbishment of the Jamison pavilion oval is a project which will benefit both player and umpire experiences for rugby, cricket and AFL players. The upgrades will provide for the refurbishment of the existing pavilion, improve the toilet and canteen facilities, and provide the entirely new pavilion which will have female-friendly change rooms, making the oval more inclusive for everyone. I look forward to seeing the design and construction of this \$1.4 million investment in community sport by the ACT government.

Expanding lighting is one of the best ways that the government can increase the amount of available training and playing time at ACT government ovals for our community sports. It also means that in summer, when it is hotter, sports can take advantage of training and playing in the cooler time of the evenings. That is why the ACT government has budgeted more than \$300,000 to light the rectangle rugby field at the Gordon District Playing Fields. This upgrade to the district ovals will supplement the rebuild of the pavilion after multiple arson attacks which left it unusable. I am excited to tell the chamber today that the rebuild of the pavilion will be complete as of close of business today. This budget also provides for stage 1

construction of the Stromlo District Playing Fields which will consist of two rectangular playing fields, an AFL Oval, LED lighting and a pavilion.

The day-to-day work of the Sport and Recreation officials supports community sports clubs, as well as those aspiring to compete as elite athletes. While it would take hours to cover the excellent work of directorate officials in this speech, I wish to touch briefly on the work of the ACT Academy of Sport, ACTAS. Similar to the Australian Institute of Sport, though on a rather smaller scale, ACTAS provides Canberran athletes with specific programs and training facilities to help with their development. There are nutrition, medical, coaching and other supports available. At any given time, there are over 100 Canberran athletes being supported to achieve their goals by the ACT government via the team at ACTAS. Sixteen ACTAS supported athletes, including seven ACTAS graduates, competed at the Olympic Games in Paris and brought home four medals, including one gold medal. I take the chance today to congratulate all of these athletes on their performances in Paris.

This government is committed to our ever-growing community and particularly our sports sector, and I look forward to working with the sector to continue expanding and improving ACT government facilities as part of a re-elected Labor government from October.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (10.43): I rise to speak to the appropriation for the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate in my capacity as the Minister for Skills and Training and Special Minister of State. This budget invests in jobs for the future and building the skills and the workforce that we will need to deliver on our commitment to transition the ACT to net zero emissions by 2045. We know that we will need an additional 1,280 electricians and at least 270 more electrical engineers before then to meet our ambition. That is why the budget has increased the subsidy for new apprentices commencing their apprenticeship in electrotechnology. It will see the subsidy increase from \$12,810 to \$18,810, representing a 90 per cent subsidy for the certificate III course. This \$8.8 million investment over the next four years supports our broader Integrated Energy Plan and will support more electricians to be trained here in Canberra and work for our local industry, and it supports our commitment to net zero emissions.

Our budget also makes progress on delivering the National Skills Agreement and funds Australia's first centre of excellence which will be focused on electric vehicles. This will be established at the Canberra Institute of Technology's Fyshwick campus and will foster a partnership between the Australian government, the ACT government, industry and universities to grow the skills needed to support the emerging electric vehicle industry, including the electric heavy vehicle industry. The new centre of excellence will increase the capacity to deliver high-quality and innovative training. It will grow the number of skilled workers required to service light and heavy electric vehicles and support the increased capability to deliver electric vehicle training right across Australia. It will increase participation and the upskilling of priority cohorts, particularly women, First Nations people and people in regional and remote areas, and it will support the development of higher

apprenticeship pathways to address qualification gaps and growth of the skilled net zero emissions workforce.

The budget also invests \$49 million to support the government's continued commitment to digitise within government services, improving digital capabilities across the ACT public service and continuing the government's investment in cyber and data security. The budget provides funding to establish new frameworks across the ACT public service for the delivery of digital programs and continues to fund the important ACT digital program.

We are also continuing to fund a key project that I was pleased to announce earlier this year alongside the federal Minister for Government Services, Bill Shorten, and Minister Stephen-Smith: the Birth of a Child project. The Birth of a Child pilot aims to make it easier for parents who have just had a newborn at ACT hospitals to register their child for a range of government services by telling the government once about their information, with that information then being used to register for around seven government services, both ACT and federal services. It means that they will have to provide their information only once, and then we can use it to lighten the load on parents who, of course, have other priorities with a newborn.

This budget also invests \$27 million to make the ACT Cyber Security Centre a permanent feature of the ACT government's digital capabilities. This will maintain our robust cybersecurity defences and keep us ever vigilant in the protection of citizen data and broader ACT government data. According to the 2024 report *Digital lives of Australians*, 77 per cent of Australians experienced a cybersecurity threat in the past year alone. This figure underlines the critical role of cybersecurity and the need for ongoing investment in this area. We will also invest \$8 million in the ACT Data Analytics Centre to allow us to support better data management across government.

These investments build on the strong investments our government has already made over past budgets and also across the skills and training sector. It represents our commitment to supporting more jobs, supporting more training and delivering more government services online.

Before I close, I just want to remark on the comments made by the opposition in the debate last week in relation to government procurement and the changes to the Government Procurement Act that were passed through the Assembly in February last year. They made the accusation that we had not updated information in a timely way about those changes, particularly insofar as they affect small business. Actually, information is up to date on the Tenders ACT and Procurement ACT websites. The changes that we supported in the Assembly, which were not supported by the opposition, will make it easier for businesses to engage with the government, particularly by aligning some of the quotation thresholds with New South Wales. It is disappointing that the opposition continues to not support those changes but criticises the government around updating information about the changes, which they did not support in this place. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate—Part 1.6.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.50): Road congestion is a critical issue across my electorate. From Farrer to Deakin and Garran to Duffy, Labor's decade of disruption is just getting started, but nowhere is road congestion more intensely felt than in the Molonglo Valley. Google traffic data shows that, for people in Molonglo, road congestion is getting worse. From well before what we would traditionally consider peak hour, you can be stuck, sitting in your car at traffic lights. It is not just inconvenient; it is also expensive, wasteful, and frustrating.

That is why I have fought hard to push the government into finally signing contracts to build the Molonglo River Bridge on John Gorton Drive. It is why I have fought hard and invested my own money into the campaign to get the government to finally come to the table and agree to establish a Molonglo town centre. I am appalled at the way that this government is again disingenuously treating people in Molonglo on the matter of traffic. The so-called Parkway-Drive Connector is effectively going to be, for a very long time, Canberra's biggest cul-de-sac.

This government is repeating exactly the same mistakes it has made throughout Molonglo's development. When traffic is already a critical problem, this government is looking at a 15-year timeframe to complete this critical piece of infrastructure. That means that all of the traffic problems that we face in the Molonglo Valley are going to get worse. Fifteen years is far too long to look at finally delivering a piece of infrastructure the government should have known was going to be needed years ago. It is not good enough.

It was revealed in their responses to questions taken on notice during the estimates period and it was revealed in the Infrastructure Plan that, when they finally announced that they are going to build this great big project and finally connect the Molonglo Valley to the old east-west connector, as they previously called it, what they actually promised was a plan for a plan. Nothing in what they are planning to do for Molonglo Valley traffic involves anything to do with building. What they have committed to is simply a plan for a plan. There are no design works and there is no plan for how they would actually construct a connection to the pathway. It is, once again, nothing but spin, and the people in Molonglo are going to miss out and be left with Canberra's biggest cul-de-sac!

People in Canberra deserve a government that treats them better and with more respect when it comes to transport. People in Molonglo should not be stuck in their cars for hours on end just because this government cannot get its act together and plan ahead.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (10.53): I am very pleased to speak today in support of the appropriation for the Transport and Canberra City Services Directorate in my capacity as Minister for Transport. The ACT has experienced remarkable growth over the last decade and our population is expected to reach half a million by 2027. To accommodate this growth, it is critical that we continue to invest in the capacity of our transport network. To do so, the budget

invests in initiatives to increase choice and accessibility in transport options for Canberrans and assists in reducing traffic congestion and emissions as we grow.

Transport Canberra has an ambitious plan to transition our bus fleet to zero emissions by 2040 or earlier. We have already bought electric buses with batteries that charge overnight, delivering on our election commitment from last term to replace the oldest and most polluting buses in the Transport Canberra fleet. Canberrans see more and more of these electric buses on the road, delivering clean, quiet and more comfortable services to Canberrans. As of this month, our in-service fleet is now fully compliant with accessibility standards under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Major works are underway to electrify Woden and Tuggeranong bus depots to provide the charging capacity for new battery electric buses as they arrive and to support ongoing expansion of the zero-emissions fleet. High-voltage feeders are being installed at the Woden and Tuggeranong depots and are on track for completion in time for electric bus arrivals. Notably, people travelling through Canberra's south, along Athllon Drive in Phillip and in Tuggeranong, would have seen the construction activity that has been occurring as those high-voltage feeders are being dragged through, and people travelling on Athllon Drive in Phillip would have seen the new Woden bus depot, which has progressed rapidly and is very close to completion. This facility, when it opens at the end of the year, will accommodate up to 100 buses and provide extensive maintenance facilities and will be ready for garaging the zero-emissions bus fleet in Tuggeranong.

Complementing this is the construction of the new Woden interchange to create a public transport facility for buses and light rail, once it arrives in Woden. The new interchange is scheduled for completion next year and will support active travel by providing secure bike enclosures, weather protection canopies and high-quality paving to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for all commuters accessing and transferring between services in Woden.

With these works near completion, the ACT government is getting on with the job of planning Canberra's next depot in the north to enable further expansion of the bus fleet and network, and the budget invests in studies to progress planning for the future fourth depot. Detailed planning ensures that the depot will deliver transport benefits whilst also managing the environmental matters and ecological matters that will be considered through that work.

The ACT government has also budgeted to revisit the feasibility work of the Belconnen to City transport corridor. This is one of the busiest corridors in Canberra. This work will be used to update the old feasibility study to determine whether further upgrades and treatments along the route could improve the current bus network and will also ensure readiness for future light rail stages, particularly the stage to Belconnen. This work will support the longer term health and wellbeing of Canberrans by ensuring appropriate opportunities for active transport connections, as well as public transport in this area. There is quite a lot of work happening in key precincts along this transport corridor, whether it is at the University of Canberra, the AIS, CIT Bruce or the Bruce hospital precinct.

Funding has also been provided for MyWay+, particularly making sure that, as we switch over the hardware from the old MyWay system to MyWay+, we can allow for a fare-free period for all public transport passengers to support the commencement of MyWay+ later this year, from November. This will support the transition of existing customers to the new system, and it is also an important cost-of-living measure at this particular time.

Funding has also been provided to maintain a flexible transport service while the ACT government continues to progress the implementation of a new online booking solution. We hope that this will deliver a more effective service to more people, in terms of a shortened booking window and access to more services, and it will aid in realising a more effective on-demand transport concept for the people of Canberra.

We understand that a sense of safety and security is a critical element for supporting public transport as a first choice at all hours of the day and night. The ACT government, through the budget, is also investing in CCTV camera replacement and expanded coverage at bus interchanges so that the community can continue to travel with confidence, especially whilst waiting for buses at key interchange locations.

Through targeted investment in safety, inclusivity, sustainability and operational efficiency, we are paving the way for a more resilient and efficient public transport system. We understand that Canberrans need a range of different transport options to suit their needs, whether travelling by public transport, car, bike or on foot, or a combination of those. Minister Cheyne will talk quite a bit about it in her remarks. It is really great to see the continued investment by our government in relation to road transport. The matched funding from the Commonwealth to look at new road connections to support our growing region, particularly in my electorate of Murrumbidgee, in the Molonglo Valley through the Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector, is an important step in undertaking the next step in design. This is what you do with infrastructure projects: you undertake the design in order to then get on with the construction. Labor has also made some tangible commitments to get work done to progress these projects which are important for Molonglo Valley.

I was delighted to recently visit the construction work that is happening on the Molonglo River Bridge and the John Gorton Drive extension. Work is really progressing. The piers are going in at the Molonglo River level to support the new span of the bridge which will provide the connection at the north. But it is also important that we look at additional connections, particularly the connection through to the new town centre which, as a result of the planning work that we have done, is getting underway, particularly with the NCA currently considering changes to the National Capital Plan to recognise the growth of the Molonglo Valley. That was of course something that we presented to the Legislative Assembly last week. Obviously, our government supported the changes to the Territory Plan, even though those on the opposition voted against it, including recognition that Molonglo should have a town centre. I will leave it there.

I commend this part of the budget to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.01): Let's talk about transport. With respect to the Greens minister, Emma Davidson, I do not often quote her, but she spoke earlier in this debate in the health space, and she started by saying something that I thought was extremely pertinent. Ms Davidson started by saying that the reality for this government, and indeed every government, is that there are not enough resources to fund all of the things that should be funded. Budgets, for every government, are a juggling exercise because we will never have sufficient money to spend on everything that it should probably be spent on.

I think that was a fair assessment. She thinks I am going to attack her, and I am not! I am just saying that it was a fair assessment. Her statement, basically, was that it all comes down to priorities, and territory budgets are defined as much by what the government does not spend sufficient money on as by the things that they do spend it on. Transport is a classic example of this.

Although the broader transport debate straddles another budget line, Major Projects—and, clearly, I will have a bit to say about the absurdly expensive tram extension to Woden—in regard to transport generally, the upcoming \$4 billion worth of expenditure on the tram to Woden is the starkest example of misguided priorities. As we say in so many conversations out in the community, it is the opportunity cost of that \$4,000 million that has the biggest effect on the wider community.

Although this is a debate on the budget handed down by this government earlier in the term, the reality is that, as we are just weeks out from the election, and as transport is such a heavily contested space, it is impossible for me, as an opposition member, to not pitch this debate as an “us versus them” scenario. All parties are trying to garner electoral support for the poll in October, and it is impossible to remove yourself from that fact.

As far as the debate on this line goes, it is becoming a little bit like *Groundhog Day* here—another budget handed down, another TCCS budget statement that paints a picture that Minister Steel is doing a superb job as transport minister; that he is, in fact, the greatest thing to happen to Transport Canberra since sliced bread! But that is just not the case. Under the long and lazy reign of Labor and the Greens in Canberra, the public transport network in Canberra has deteriorated, despite the tram. We have seen services cut left, right and centre in order to drive more traffic onto the tram. He is not going to admit it, but, under this government, the failings of the transport network have also driven Canberrans to return to the private motor vehicle en masse because this government has gutted our once-nation-leading bus network.

Under this government, the number of buses on the roads has reduced over a period of time. In 1991—I know I am going back a while, but I think it is pertinent to mention it—ACTION had 463 buses on the road, yet, in 2024, when Canberra's population has significantly increased, there are only 447 buses in the Transport Canberra fleet. The delayed MyWay+ rollout, the delayed Woden bus depot, the delayed bus fleet electrification, the deferred stage 2B of the tram, the deferred stage 2A of the tram: these are just a number of the failures of a minister and a government that are tired, arrogant and in sore need of change.

I can well remember that, when my team announced our transport plan back in April, Minister Steel and ACT Labor were laughing. They found it amusing. They, as you would expect, said, “These guys have no idea.” I am not sure whether they stopped laughing when the ACT Greens announced their transport plan, which was very similar to ours—apart, obviously, from a commitment to the tram. I certainly would have loved to have been a fly on the wall in the Steel office when he realised that their transport plan was a slightly worse copy of ours. Imitation, as they say, Mr Assistant Speaker, is the sincerest form of flattery. And we are flattered.

Under our transport plan, we will deliver a greener and better-connected public transport network sooner than either of the other parties in this place. Minister Steel said that ACT Labor deliver more electric buses than anyone else, but that is simply not the case; it is not. Our transport plan clearly states that an additional 500 buses would be required over the next decade. If we scope that out, on an even-time procurement, it means 200 over the term.

Despite all of the head-in-the-sand rhetoric from those opposite, Canberra is in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. I found it fascinating that, when the minister was talking about free bus travel, which was forced upon them because they have no other option, he said, “It’s part of the cost of living; we’re doing it, and that’s one of the reasons.” But hang on for a second; I can remember the Liberals putting forward a motion in this space and it was deemed to be impossible to do, and there was no way that it could be done. Now, all of a sudden, it is a matter of saying, “That’s one of the reasons we’re doing it.”

It is becoming more and more expensive to own a car in Canberra, thanks to the anti-car policies of those opposite. A Canberra Liberals government will put a fare cap on public transport to provide some relief to struggling families. The Barr-Rattenbury government ruled that out, stating that public transport is already affordable and that it does not need a cap like the one we are speaking of.

We are the only party seeking to legislate a service guarantee on our public transport network. A future Liberal government will deliver a transport network in consultation with Canberrans. We will engage very quickly in genuine consultation with the public, as opposed to how, currently, the government simply tell Canberrans what they want. We would implement upgrades across the network, not just the buses; we would integrate active travel infrastructure with the busiest bus stops, interchanges and light rail stops.

As part of our proposed upgrades, a Canberra Liberals government will provide smart, connected bus stops with real-time electronic information. We will also commit to more regular, genuine and effective community consultation about service delivery. Unlike the current government, we will actively listen to the community and our customers, remain open to ideas at all times, provide information without spin, plan with transparency, and deliver with efficiency.

Of course, we have heard the minister talk about the successes in the transport sector. It is really about how you pitch it, isn’t it? The minister spoke about the successes he

has had with MyWay+ and how it is on track for a November implementation. Is it really? Once we get past the election, if you fail that one, it does not really matter because we will be past October. I have spoken numerous times in this place about the history of the new integrated ticketing system. People will know what we have said. On 4 July 2016, the then transport minister, Meegan Fitzharris, said that a feasibility study had commenced to identify options to upgrade or replace the MyWay system. That is more than eight years ago. For those who struggle with the numbers, we are talking about 2,978 days since the study was commenced, and we are still waiting.

The 2017-18 budget allocated \$2.1 million to progress the procurement of an integrated ticketing system. In 2018, tenders were sought for an implementation in 2019-20. Flashforward to early 2020 and the newly minted transport minister, Mr Steel, said that the process was well underway to replace both MyWay and NXTBus. However, this slowed to a halt by November in that year—surprisingly, straight after the election.

It was not until February 2023 that NEC Australia was announced as the successful bidder on the contract, with a November 2024 implementation date. It is worth noting that the MyWay and NXTBus system run on the Optus 3G network. The implementation date is totally unrelated to the 3G shutdown, as is the free travel period taking place over the election campaign.

Under Minister Steel, the procurement of new buses has been badly mismanaged. The old Renault diesel fleet remained in service for years. Although they are officially now retired, I think they have conceded that there may be a few that sneak out on school runs.

You would think that Minister Steel would have learned from this calamity and sought to better plan the fleet procurement needs of Transport Canberra, but the CNG buses are the ones now giving us grief. They were once the mainstay of the Transport Canberra low-emissions fleet. They are now reaching the end of their service life, and, unlike the Renaults, the end of service life is fixed. Once they get to the end, they are at the end. Once again, Canberra's public transport network has been let down by this minister, who has failed on a number of occasions.

I want to leave you with this, Mr Assistant Speaker. *(Second speaking period taken.)* Minister Steel likes to run around town suggesting that if the Canberra Liberals win government in October we will privatise public transport in the ACT, in an attempt to scare the voters, because that is all that he has. He has nothing else. It is like the "Mediscare" campaign in 2016. I want to point out, as I have on numerous occasions, that there is no possible way that we are privatising the buses in Canberra, and the only two parties that are seeking to privatise public transport here in the ACT are Labor and the Greens.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.12): I rise to speak as the ACT Greens spokesperson for animal welfare. I seek the indulgence of members in the chamber, as some of these matters may stray a little bit into EPSDD territory, but, for the sake of expedience, you will only hear from me once on this topic.

The ACT Greens are glad to see the government consistently supporting the establishment of the new RSPCA facility in Pialligo. We were concerned previously at the level of communication from the government to the RSPCA, especially when the facility's capacity issues have been seriously pressing, and the wellbeing of animals at the shelter has been at stake.

The government response to the estimates recommendations assured us that the site was being built in collaboration with the RSPCA, and we sincerely hope that this is the level of communication that will be provided to them going forward. Transparency here is essential so that everyone knows where they stand.

The speed at which the RSPCA facility is being built is concerningly slow. Of course, we understand that there have been complications with the Pialligo site, including the discovery of the striped legless lizard. However, the wellbeing of animals and more support for the many people who give so much of their time to care for them should be a priority for the government. We are eager to see the ACT government work swiftly to plan and construct the RSPCA facility as soon as practicable. In the meantime, we should consider what supports we can give to the RSPCA and other animal shelters to make sure we are looking after animals in humane, fit-for-purpose conditions.

Without wishing to stray too far into EPSDD territory, but not wanting to take up members' time by repeating myself, I am proud to see the ACT government providing \$74,000 over two years to support Wildlife ACT with veterinary needs. We know that the RSPCA is also likely to play a role in supporting injured wildlife, once they secure their new facility. For now, the funding to provide wildlife vet support is a good step, and it will hopefully provide the care needed while the RSPCA is moving. Hopefully, going forward, the ACT government will continue that support in order to provide the best possible care for Canberra wildlife.

The welfare of animals is crucial, whether they are a beloved companion animal in a domestic space or our beautiful wildlife. We should ensure that our systems are working together to promote animal welfare across Canberra.

With respect to domestic animals and pets, in particular, I want to urge the government to ensure that owning pets does not become a class issue. We are worried that this is already happening and that it will require us to take action as soon as possible. We are seeing shelters reporting all-time record levels of people surrendering pets, with the cost-of-living crisis being one of the main reasons cited.

The ACT has made good progress in being a territory where the barriers to owning pets are less than elsewhere, such as the work we have done to ensure that renters can stay with their beloved pets. However, we need to ensure that there is financial support to help people address the inevitable cost of having a pet and supporting them properly. I do not want Canberra to be a city where people have to choose between owning a pet or eating three meals a day and paying their bills. It seems, tragically, that there is a danger of this happening. Pets are a class issue, and we need to budget accordingly.

Lastly, the Greens support the full implementation of the Cat Plan, and we would like to see the necessary funding be made available. All Canberrans should be able to afford to take care of pets. We also know that cats in particular can have a devastating ecological impact on the beautiful Canberra environment, if they are not managed properly. The move to provide financial assistance for the desexing of pets is a good one, and I would love to see that plan expanded.

I also urge the government to increase funding for municipal rangers, in order to provide better support to the Canberra community and ensure that all domestic animals in the ACT are cared for.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.16): I would like to speak in my capacity as ACT Greens spokesperson for transport, active travel and the circular economy. Unfortunately, this budget does not deliver the transformative changes that we need from TCCS this year.

In relation to buses, we have seen a reduction in targets for electric buses. We have plans without commitments for a Belco busway and a fourth bus depot, but no significant increase in funding for paths. We have some more creative accounting on how much money we are spending on paths and active travel, and a lack of commitment to speed up the delivery of light rail stage 2.

We are also not seeing the kinds of expenditure and project delivery that we need to make sure that we are transforming our economy to a circular economy as quickly as possible, and that we are addressing the now over 70 per cent of emissions that come from transport and waste.

The budget does not do a lot that is significant for buses. Here is what it does: it commits a small amount of funding towards a feasibility study for the Belco busway, to get our buses moving quicker through the network and to get rid of the bottlenecks on Canberra's busiest bus corridor. That is good news.

We know Canberra's bus network sees 60,000 boardings each weekday and that more than 30 per cent of those are using the R2, R3 and R4. Those three rapid routes currently are not reaching their full potential because they are stuck in traffic on roads like College Street, Haydon Drive and Belconnen Way.

The ACT Greens want to get Canberra's busiest buses out of traffic by providing dedicated bus lanes in that really important Belconnen to city bus corridor. By getting our busiest buses out of traffic, we can shorten journey times and we can increase the number of services provided across Canberra. We can improve bus services for everyone, and we can help traffic flows across the whole city. But with only \$400,000 being spent by Labor on a study, we will not see those improvements on the ground until 2027, as was agreed by the ACT Legislative Assembly in November.

We have an allocation of \$100,000 to plan for a new north side bus depot in Mitchell, but the transport minister's September 2020 Zero-Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra said that that depot would be open in 2026, so it looks like we are tracking behind schedule. We think that it should open when it was originally intended to open. It should open as a 100 per cent electric bus depot, and it should be

done as soon as possible, so that we can get our electric bus fleet growing, so that we can improve our bus services across the city at the same time and so that we can reduce TCCS and city-wide emissions. It looks to us like that project might be delayed by four years, given we are only starting the planning now.

We also saw the minister trying to avoid committing to electric bus fleet targets in the budget. It was a fairly strange discussion, for those of us who were there. The 2022-23 budget said we would have 50 electric buses on the road that year. The 2023-24 budget said that, by the end of the year, we would have 60, and now the target has been revised down to 56.

We had a pretty robust discussion about whether a target was a target and what the target was. Unfortunately, it is clear that, whether or not you call things targets, Labor is not meeting them. We do not have a clear pathway to get those electric buses on the roads. We need to get on with it. We need to set those targets. We need to fund our public transport properly, and we need to make sure that we are doing this quickly so that more than three per cent of journeys in Canberra are made using the bus or light rail.

We also saw only a small uplift in funding for new paths and for maintaining our existing paths. This is a problem for a lot of Canberrans at the moment. I welcome the partial insourcing of some of our path maintenance teams; I think that is a really good move. We should go further and continue insourcing. But we still do not have enough ongoing funding for path maintenance in the ACT.

The Greens think that base path maintenance funding should go from \$5 million a year to \$15 million a year. That is how much we need to keep our ageing suburban paths in good repair and to get more people walking, riding and rolling around our city. It will let more people make better choices that will help their everyday lives, that will save them money, that will improve their health and that will help our climate.

We also know that TCCS built 21 kilometres of new path in 2023-24. Almost 15 kilometres of that was not built by TCCS; it was built by developers and gifted to TCCS. We cannot upgrade our path network this slowly and with a patchwork approach when development occurs. We need a proactive program to build, expand and maintain. The Greens have committed to a total budget of \$20 million per year for new paths and to fill in the missing links. We think that is the amount that we need to give us a path network that we can use.

We are disappointed to see the continuation of multiyear reports and program funding, where big sums of money that look to us like they are being spent on roads are claimed to be spent on active travel. The bulk of that spending does not do a lot to help somebody who is actually walking or riding around Canberra.

I will pick one example, which is the clearest example and also a really large example. The Monaro Highway is a road duplication. That road duplication already has a price tag of more than \$230 million, and that price tag will grow to \$500 million, or half a billion, according to the latest infrastructure update. More realistically, we think that price will probably be higher than half a billion dollars, and it looks to us like that road project is mainly a project that benefits New South Wales residents. There is an

active travel component of that road project, which makes up \$16 million of the claimed \$94 million that is being spent on active travel. That \$16 million will not produce a single metre of usable path or usable bike lane in that project. Once the stage of the \$230 million road project is completed, we will still not have any bike lanes or bike paths for that \$16 million, yet it is claimed to be a major component of our active travel budget.

It will generate some earthworks on the side of the road that in future can be used to create a separated path, if we have the funding in future years to build that path, which, of course, we do not yet know. With respect to the claim that that is a major component of our active travel budget, it is road spending. Please just report it as road spending. We would prefer to see much better transparency on these expenditures; even better, we would prefer to see more paths and separated lanes actually being built. This would help a lot more Canberrans a lot more quickly.

The Greens would prefer to improve paths and buses and bring light rail to the whole city much more quickly. We think that is our priority at the moment. That is in line with the travel hierarchy. Every government in Australia says they support the travel hierarchy, where we put active and public transport at the top and we put private car travel at the bottom. But when you look at our funding priorities, we have flipped them. We are spending most of our money on roads. We are spending quite a lot of our money on roads but claiming that we are spending it on something else. We are spending a really small proportion on our public and active travel. I think that is why we are not seeing as many people using our public and active travel as we would like.

I would also like to make a brief comment about our circular economy expenditure. There is a lot in the circular economy. We have been lagging behind on recycling; recycling rates have stagnated here for over a decade, and there is a lot of work to do.

We were disappointed not to see more transformative funding and more transformative directions in this budget. I will pick one example: we still do not have our FOGO facility. We know that FOGO facility will not be built, under Labor's plan, until 2026 at the earliest, and we have not seen any change in this year's budget papers regarding that. We know that a lot of people are delivering food and organics recycling services to householders without building a really large and expensive multimillion-dollar capital works composting facility.

Some of the places in Australia that are doing this include the Cooma council, Goulburn Mulwaree Council, the Central Coast Council and the City of Sydney. Some of those councils are using ACT businesses to deliver those services. I have seen a press release in the last couple of days from the Western Australian government, who are also moving in this direction. They are now delivering a grants program to help businesses set up FOGO—food and organics—recycling facilities so that they can deliver a broad-scale household recycling program without building a major, expensive composting facility.

We were supportive of a composting facility by 2023, but if we cannot have it until 2026 or later, and if Labor is not committed to building it, we think it is time to look at other options.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.25): I rise today to speak on Appropriation Bill 2024-2025, specifically relating to city services. I know the minister in her speech will be touting investment in things like footpath maintenance, mowing, street sweeping, playgrounds and roads. Investment in these areas is important. We all acknowledge that. I regularly get many messages from Canberrans expressing dismay at the state of suburban maintenance. This is nothing new; it has been like this for years. Many other members have spoken in this place about the number of contacts they get from constituents on these basic local suburban maintenance issues as well. As Canberra grows, so does our need to extend our park and cycle network and to provide more playgrounds and recreation infrastructure. There are also more areas to mow, for example, and more roads to maintain due to potholes et cetera. So it is only natural to assume that investment and expenditure in these areas would continue apace with the growth of these areas. But that does not appear to be the case.

Some of the most consistent concerns residents bring up with me and others include broken footpaths, obstructed footpaths, debris-littered footpaths, missing links, overgrown grass, leaf-filled gutters and recurring potholes in our roads. Residents told me they do not see things improving and that the state of their suburbs does not meet their expectation for basic city services, especially when they reflect on the increases they have been seeing in their rates bills. But what else can you expect from this government, which has a long history of neglecting basic local services?

I have brought many motions to this place over the years about basic local services. One of the really interesting things is that it is very difficult to compare apples with apples, because the metrics, the measures and the KPIs, if you like, in the annual reports keep changing. For example, in the most recent motion I brought here, I talked about the distance of concrete and asphalt paths that were maintained, because that was one of the few consistent measures that I could find in order to compare. I think it is done deliberately to make comparison difficult, and it is not only in the city services area, may I add.

Of course, as the weather warms up, it will be interesting to see if the so-called additional resources allocated to the mowing team are able to meet demand or whether still more resources will be required, as they have been in recent years. We have seen a number of estimates committee reports indicate that there should be a permanent increase in the mowing resources—not surge capacity, for example. That has been a common theme. Most recently, we have seen an insourcing of mowing resources—not necessarily an increase but an insourcing, which is quite a different thing.

Briefly, I will move on to recommendation 58 from the estimates committee report, which was the need to expedite the building of the new materials-recycling facility in Hume as soon as possible. Obviously, you have to plan this facility that will meet the needs of the ACT today and also have the capacity to meet the needs of Canberra, as it is a growing city and continues to grow. But we do need to have this facility in place as soon as possible to reduce the cost, both economic and environmental, of managing the ACT's recyclable waste. Trucking it interstate is an expensive and not a very environmentally sustainable solution. The need to build the new MRF has also meant some delays in rolling out the FOGO collection more broadly and the need to build a FOGO recycling centre, which we now know will not be available until at

least 2026, based on current estimates. But we all know what promises from this government are like.

When we are talking about waste management, recommendation 12 states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that potentially affected residents are always advised of upcoming works at the Mugga Lane Resource Management Centre, including if works have been delayed so issues may be ongoing for some time.

I have raised this issue over and over again in my nearly 12 years here. For a good 10 years I have been talking about issues with the smell coming from the tip area. The government response to this recommendation is, "This is existing government policy." Why then are we inundated with complaints about the smell from the tip area from residents of Chisholm, Fadden, Gilmore, Gowrie and Macarthur more recently when they have had issues with the odour? I have said many times that if residents know about it and they know that it is a defined timeframe they will be accepting and they will be understanding. When they do not know about it or it drags on for months longer than they are told it would that is when residents start getting angry. It might be existing government policy but who is ensuring that it takes place? It is the residents who suffer.

Does the government really think that residents check the City Services website about recycling and waste before they think about hanging out their washing, before they think about opening their windows or before they think about inviting their friends over for a barbecue? Do you really think that is what people will be doing? The way that this has been managed is just not good enough. The government might be letterboxing notifications to residents about Mugga Lane landfill, but these are useless unless they are received in a timely manner. There is no point letterboxing something, say, in March, saying that things will be finished by June and then the smell continues in July or August. Residents deserve better than this. They need to be told in a timely manner and, if there is a delay, they need another round of letterboxing explaining that the smell might persist and a new estimate of when it might be completed.

Briefly, let me talk about roads. Road maintenance has repeatedly come under scrutiny in recent years, partly because we have had a lot of rain. Whilst most recently we have not seen the widespread pothole issues of previous years, the quality of our road surfaces remains an issue for Canberrans. Proactive maintenance and timely repairs must remain a priority. It is worth noting that there are still pothole related damage claims yet to be paid. Resolving these for affected Canberrans is long overdue.

I note that probably two years ago now there was a power outage in Farrer and, within six months, Evoenergy had paid all claims relating to the surge that damaged a whole lot of electrical equipment in households. I believe the Chief Minister, Minister Rattenbury and other MLAs wrote to Evoenergy saying, "You must pay these claims out quickly. It is not fair that you keep people waiting for months." This was done within six months and yet about two years later, this government has not finished dealing with pothole related claims. It is quite disgraceful, and it is hypocritical that they say one thing to Evoenergy about paying out claims for damaged electrical equipment and another thing when it comes to their own actions.

You also see the same thing about paying your rates. If you are late paying your rates, the government charges you interest. But if the government is late paying you for a claim is there any interest? No. In a cost-of-living crisis, if someone, some family, has to shell out \$800 to replace the tyres on their car, that is a huge impost on a family with a couple of kids. There is enough going on in their lives and enough pressure about where they spend their money without these sudden and unexpected incidents where they have to shell out a lot of money and then wait a very, very long time to be paid out by the government, let alone the stress of having to get all the documentation together and to keep ringing up and calling about the claims. We heard about people who were told, “If you keep ringing that is only going to delay your claim.” What kind of a customer service response is that from the government? It is disgraceful.

Also on roads, in terms of duplication, we have heard that, with the Athllon Drive duplication, there is no actual money in the budget yet to duplicate the road. It is associated works at this point. This is a “one day, maybe, possibly, perhaps” promise that this government made in 2016 and 2020 and still has not delivered on and still has not allocated money to actually physically duplicate the road. And, of course, if the Greens had their way, they would not duplicate Athllon Drive at all, because they do not care about Tuggeranong residents and they do not care about people from much further away from the city for whom using a bike is not really a feasible way for them to get into the city for work. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

In summary, the neglect of our basic local services continues under the management or, should I say, mismanagement of this Labor and Greens government. I can assure you that a Liberal government would always prioritise basic local services. Everyone gets excited about new announcements and shiny new things, but promises are empty unless you actually deliver on them. We do need upgraded playgrounds, and we do need local shopping centre upgrades and dog parks, and waiting for them to happen is what Canberrans get frustrated by.

The community wants to see these projects delivered. For example, we are still waiting on the delivery of a new purpose-built RSPCA facility in Pialligo, which has had slow progress. We are seeing very slow progress, if any at all, on the delivery of the Lanyon dog park. I spoke about this just the other day and said that, whilst Tuggeranong has the highest rate of dog ownership in the ACT and Gungahlin has the lowest rate of dog ownership in the ACT, Tuggeranong currently has one dog park and Gungahlin as two dog parks—and that is great. But, in light of the 2020 promise to deliver a new dog park in Gungahlin and a new dog park in Lanyon, the government is now going ahead with the one in Gungahlin, and the people in Lanyon are still waiting. This is another example of those empty promises. There is nothing new and nothing exciting in this budget.

Mr Steel interjecting—

MS LAWDER: Mr Steel cannot control himself. Despite having been heard in silence himself, he likes to interject. But, luckily for him, I have 13 grandchildren, and I am quite used to speaking while there are a lot of interjections happening. It does not bother me in the slightest. So, he can say whatever he likes and it will not put me off

one little bit. So please continue, Mr Steel. All it does is demonstrate your lack of restraint and your lack of self-control while I am speaking.

In this budget, it is more of the same: sprucing about investment and making promises but not actually delivering. That is what is business as usual for this government. That is what they like to do. It is clear that City Services needs more from this government than it is currently getting.

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) (11.38): City Services are fundamental to supporting how we live, work and enjoy our city every day. Road and active travel networks, great parks and green spaces as well as quality amenities for residents do not happen by accident. They come about because we invest in them and because of the hard work of our terrific teams in TCCS.

This budget has seen an increased focus on city services priorities for 2024-25 and beyond. With \$5.824 million committed towards a new baseline of city maintenance, we are ensuring the continuation of a 10-person inhouse traffic management crew to provide traffic management control for our mowing, litter picking, weed control and tree maintenance teams. This crew's work has helped to maximise the safety of roadside workers and to minimise the inconvenience for both workers and road and path users during maintenance activities. This commitment includes \$2.678 million towards planning, planting and watering of our young trees through our targeted tree planting program to achieve 30 per cent urban tree canopy cover in Canberra by 2045.

We also value our fantastic volunteers and have provided \$800,000 over the next four years to continue the Adopt-A-Park program to support City Services and the community in creating and maintaining these beautiful spaces. This year's Adopt-A-Park program opened for applications yesterday and, in partnership with Minister Vassarotti, this program has a focus this year on meeting a priority shared across government and community—that being tackling pest plant species.

Funding has also been provided for 10 full-time positions and eight additional mowers to deliver an expanded baseline capacity in our mowing teams—and a shout out to those teams, whose official season began yesterday on one of the windiest days that Canberra has ever seen. I think it is a reminder to all of us about the extraordinary conditions that our frontline workers are faced with every single day. Today is much nicer, thankfully. In the low season, these crews assist with horticultural work across the city, including weeding, road edging and maintenance.

A \$2.5 million investment will deliver new toilets at Evatt Shops and Ruth Park in Coombs, an upgraded toilet at Mawson Shops and support the delivery of a new toilet near Bizant Street in Amaroo as part of the Yerrabi Ponds upgrade. Over \$2 million will drive renewal of our city's playgrounds and skateparks, including safety improvement works, mulch and rubber soft fall top-ups and a program of regular audits and inspections.

We are expanding our food organics and garden organics pilot to include an additional 1,172 apartments, supporting our residents to reduce waste and to drive down

greenhouse gas emissions. Last week we launched this expansion at the Kilburn complex in Bruce with the chair of their body corporate executive committee Lorna Gordon. I am pleased that apartment households in both Bruce and Tuggeranong will benefit from this initiative. This allows us to get data from another area of Canberra by expanding to Tuggeranong and it increases our understanding of how complexes engage with FOGO, in addition to enhancing relationships with strata managers—a crucial part for the success of FOGO.

I do note that Ms Clay believes that there are other opportunities and other businesses that we could be partnering with to speed things along without a facility. But I would note, with some regret, of course, that we do have a business, Capital Scraps, that ran, I believe, as a pilot, which announced in just the last month or so that it was not continuing. This was a business, I believe, that Ms Clay previously referenced as an example of what we could be going with instead of a facility. Yet my understanding is that this business was not able to go on, because it lacked a facility itself.

I think this underlines why our FOGO facility makes sense. It is why we are committed to it. That work is underway and, in the meantime, we have increased the number of households that can participate in this program—and I for one am envious. Work continues towards delivering a new recycling facility for Canberra, creating higher-quality recycled products and reducing the amount of waste in landfill. We are also investing \$950,000 in master planning of upgrades to the Mugga and Hume Resource Management Centres to ensure that these sites are well managed into the future.

We continue to plan for priority roadworks identified in the Gungahlin Transport Plan to manage traffic growth and to improve safety and travel times. We are commencing early planning for Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector for the Molonglo Valley. Mr Cocks's contribution was just odd: planning requires funding. What does he want us to do—just plonk a road down? Very weird. Anyway, additional funding for the duplication of Gundaroo Drive between Ginninderra Drive and the Barton Highway, as well as road improvements along Beltana Road in Pialligo have been provided to get these projects completed, and completed well—noting that they have also suffered from some extreme weather conditions that have changed the soil composition over time. I commend those persons working on those projects for their agility.

Work continues on Athllon Drive, with the duplication of 2.4 kilometres of Athllon Drive between Sulwood Drive and Drakeford Drive, as part of a joint funding initiative with the federal government. These works will include active travel improvements, such as new lighting, construction of missing path links and path widening, to provide alternate access options during construction. Enabling works on the southern section will also include utility relocations. This will involve water and sewer works as well as relocating, realigning or undergrounding overhead electricity cables. Again, this is not necessarily the sexy stuff that people like to see with the new shiny infrastructure, but it is actually the works that are some of the most critical and without them, our city would cease to function. So, while it may not look like that there is work occurring in the way that people would like it to, these enabling works are some of the most fundamental works that we undertake. I give a particular big shoutout to our Roads ACT teams, who do a lot of engagement on this work. We will also replace 37 guide signs along the Barton Highway and continue small-scale path network improvements, line marking, construction of missing path links, lighting

infill and the design of high-priority active travel links and deliver an increased 2024-25 road resurfacing program.

The ACT government and I personally remain committed to delivering Project Home in partnership with the RSPCA. The ACT government has made clear to the RSPCA directly and publicly that \$40 million has been budgeted to support the delivery of this project. For context and comparison, RSPCA South Australia's new campus has been constructed using \$28 million from the sale of its administration building and animal shelter, in addition to \$3 million from community donations. This funding to Project Home is in addition to the hundreds of thousands of dollars of services that we purchase from RSPCA ACT each year.

It is true that all animal rehoming organisations are struggling. For the first time ever, this year, we created a grants program for our animal rehoming organisations. It closed recently and I am hoping we can advise successful organisations about the grant they are receiving before caretaker, given those urgent pressures that they are under. This is in addition to funding for desexing.

Regarding pothole claims, all of those have been actioned. The only ones that have not been paid are because they are still being discussing with the claimant—for example, because we are waiting on some further evidence or receipts or where the claim is disputed. I think it is irresponsible to suggest that the ACT government should just hand out money without evidence or cause. Again, we greatly appreciate the team that has been working through these claims and the volume of them. I note that we have also been undertaking preventative work across our city.

It is a fact that we do have ageing infrastructure, and that is why we have been investing right across our city. It is these vital investments that provide the foundation for a strong, vibrant city that we are all proud to call home. I want to acknowledge the teams across City Services who I have had the pleasure to get to know, particularly in the last eight and a bit months. I so appreciate how welcoming they have been, the incredible hard work they undertake, particularly those in the frontline services, and their extraordinary patience as I have asked countless questions of them, whether directly or indirectly—I did not know what a Toro was in December last year; I do know now—from our libraries to our public land use teams, from weed spraying and weed removal to litter picking to tree planting, from mowing to traffic management and emergency road response, from the Fix My Street triage team to the domestic animal services, from Capital Linen Service to the Tree Protection Unit, from waste management to infrastructure and development coordination, from cemeteries and the crematorium to our street-sweepers, from the temporary traffic management teams to the Yarralumla Nursery, from urban treescapes to our stormwater and dam inspectors—and everyone in between.

I do want to single out the communications unit, and all those who contribute content to it, whether it is the internal newsletter or the external product. They really have undertaken some work this year which I believe and feel has received universal acclaim, including the establishment of CBRTails on Instagram, which was an initiative from staff within DAS, and the weekly maintenance page. The weekly maintenance page is something I had hoped we would be able to do. It is improving all the time, and it has certainly exceeded my expectations.

I would also like to give a very big shoutout to our DLO, Ash Savage, who has just been terrific. There is no other word for it. She works incredibly hard and is lightning fast. With her positive attitude and the joy and humour that she brings to our office, it is always a delight when she is present. She is effective every single day of the week. Through you, Mr Assistant Speaker, I want to say to Ash: thank you for coming on board this year. You have been nothing short of remarkable.

I want to finish by acknowledging some very sad news for City Services. In just the last few weeks there have been three crew members who have died: David Francis, from the Civic depot; Wayne Davis, from the Dickson depot; and Ray Healey, from, I think, the Kambah or maybe Calwell depot. I will be attending Wayne's funeral this afternoon. Wayne and Ray, in particular, were very committed mowers. I do not think it is lost on anybody that, with the beginning of the mowing season, these crews were very much looking forward to getting stuck into it and getting ahead of the potential La Nina, the loss of these two larger-than-life colleagues, people who have been so kind to me—I was speaking to Ray directly at a barbecue the other week—is certainly felt. My thoughts are so deeply shared with David, Wayne and Ray's families—committed men who have a large network of colleagues across City Services. I think it is fair to say that our Place Management Crews are grieving, and I want to acknowledge that, particularly in this tough time.

It is very easy to look at the service, the product or the output and sometimes forget that these are humans, these are real people, behind this. I know that Wayne committed decades of his life to mowing. Those from Tuggeranong may have recognised Ray because each year around Christmas time he would dress up as Santa. Indeed, he was known as Santa, and certainly helped bring some spirit and joy to people's lives over many, many years—that Santa does indeed exist and he mows the grass in Canberra. I know that Wayne, Ray and David's colleagues will very dearly miss them. My thoughts extend to their colleagues and to their many family members and friends during this very difficult time.

On that, I commend this element of the budget to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.7.

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) (11.52): I will speak briefly in my capacity as Minister for Human Rights. This budget continues the government's commitment to strengthening human rights and to protecting some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

The ACT government is continuing the phased implementation of relevant recommendations of the Projects Assisting Victims' Experience and Recovery Review, or PAVER, and building on the work from the last three budgets since that report was tabled. This budget boosts the Victims Services Scheme and Financial Assistance Scheme by \$9.5 million over four years to meet the increased demand and

to support timely access to therapeutic services. This will be partially funded through court-imposed and traffic infringement levies created as part of the 2023-24 budget.

We are also providing extra support for victim-survivors of sexual assault. As part of the response to the Sexual Assault (Police) Review and building on the recommendations from the 2021 *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report, we will be providing additional funding—and I expect there will be more to say about that soon. This will enable services to continue providing critical services for victim-survivors, particularly as they engage with the criminal justice system, so they can access the holistic, trauma-informed supports they need when they need them.

Finally, recognising the expanded functions of the Human Rights Commission, we are providing \$791,000 over four years for ICT and whole-of-commission information management system. In the 20th year of our Human Rights Act, the ACT government has built a strong culture of protecting and promoting human rights. This budget is one that builds on that culture and enables the commission to continue leading in this space.

I would again like to acknowledge the extraordinary people in the JACS Directorate who have assisted me throughout this term—more than assisted me; they have led some of the most incredible reforms. In many ways, I have just been lucky to be on the journey with them. I am very grateful to them and to each of the commissioners at the Human Rights Commission. They are outstanding people, and it is just a joy and genuinely fascinating and a delight to be able to work so closely with people who are so passionate and who turn human rights into real and meaningful outcomes for people every single day. To you and your teams, I say a very big thank you.

I commend this part of the budget to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (11.55): I rise today to speak to my shadow portfolio areas of emergency services and police. Let me begin with the situation in the Gungahlin JESC. There was funding in the 2021-22 budget for its refurbishment—at a total of \$8.2 million. This sum has increased to a little over \$11 million since then. I have observed that something that we see constantly with this government are cost blow-outs, caused mainly by delays and inaction. Why has it taken so long for the Gungahlin JESC to be fully completed? Previously, there were promises that the JESC would be completed in 2022 and then again in 2023. Recently, in a response to a question on notice, the minister said that all refurbishments were going to be due in the middle of this year and then the RFS and SES were going to move to Mitchell in the middle of this year. Yet here we are in September and the RFS is still in a demountable at the back of Gungahlin JESC; SES are still in Belconnen; and the Mitchell station is not yet completed.

In speaking with RFS and members of the SES, I am aware they are not necessarily happy with their station in Mitchell. It is not suitable for a rapid egress for fire in emergency situations that may occur in Yerrabi. Travelling from Mitchell to the top of Bonner or Forde will take some time and delay—which I think is the hallmark of this government and anything that it touches. Whether it is building a building or putting in place a proposal for the RFS and SES to fit in Mitchell, the government does not take into account what is actually required.

I was also disappointed with the minister's response to a question about the fire and emergency levy, stating it was not his responsibility. What this levy means for people and businesses who are suffering under the current cost-of-living crisis is yet another major hike in their rates—a 5.6 per cent increase to homeowners and an even bigger increase for businesses—and this minister does not make it his business to understand what is going on. This increase is higher than the consumer price index and the wage price index.

Turning the focus to policing, as is often the case with this government, there are massive delays and a lack of specific detail. Why not give the detail in the budget estimates and state where this money is actually going to be spent? But it would appear there is a reason, as we discovered during the estimates hearings—as some of the policing infrastructure upgrades planned and announced in the budget were from a 2018 audit. No wonder they were trying to hide that information six years ago, and they are only now fixing some of the issues. I have to say that it is long overdue for these issues to be addressed. There are always delays, as with the Gungahlin JESC. It took the ACT police walking out of the station for it to be finally fixed. Even now they are waiting for the other services to move out to become a police station alone. This was promised back in 2019, but they are still waiting. I am happy to say that Canberra Liberals will make it a priority to transition the Gungahlin JESC to be a standalone police station.

Overall, it is a disappointing budget for the police and emergency services, with no real increases in funding for new projects—just the same tired ideas and lots of promises but, when you dig down, there is not much substance.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (12.00): I rise to speak to Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 as it pertains to the Attorney-General's portfolio under the JACS Directorate, or part 1.7 of the bill. The measures contained in this budget reflect the tiredness and complacency of this Attorney-General and Labor-Greens ministers. Upholding justice and promoting community safety is at the heart of good government; yet the ACT justice system has never experienced a period as difficult as this term under a Labor-Green government. Under the heat of the national spotlight, the many failures of ACT Labor and the ACT Greens in public administration in our justice system were exposed for the whole nation to see—especially, the fallout from the Sofronoff inquiry.

Meanwhile, everyday Canberrans suffer the consequences of diminished resourcing for crime prevention and community safety, including, as a result, the lowest spending on police services in the nation and decriminalisation of possession of hard drugs. The ACT has the lowest number of police per capita in the nation, the lowest police funding per capita in the nation, the lowest clearance rates for property crime in the nation and the lowest satisfaction of people who have had contact with police in the nation. This Labor-Greens government and these budgetary measures are simply not good enough to fix the many problems that Labor and Greens ministers have created and allowed to fester. Every Canberran deserves to feel safe in their community, in their home, in their neighbourhood. This is not disputable. But this Labor-Greens government has continually let Canberrans down in this respect.

An Elizabeth Lee-led Canberra Liberals government will reprioritise community safety for all Canberrans and build a stronger justice system which promotes greater

efficiency and accessibility. We will amend the bail laws to protect frontline workers, our community's true heroes. We will actually introduce electronic monitoring of serious offenders on bail, unlike those opposite who have talked about doing this on many occasions but have never actually done it yet. We will introduce a new offence for breaching bail conditions—especially important given that the number of ACT bail breaches has reached a three-year high. We will repeal drug decriminalisation laws with respect to possession of hard drugs like heroin and ice to realign our drug laws with community expectations. We will maintain the age of criminal responsibility at 12 years, stopping with the planned increase at 14 years, which is not supported by evidence. We will crack down on dangerous driving to prevent further tragic deaths on our roads as a result of culpable driving behaviours. We will bring in Jack's Law to better protect our community from knife-related crimes and introduce a standalone offence for coward punch attacks. We will recruit 200 new police officers by 2028 and deliver new and upgraded police stations.

The Canberra Liberals are committed to making our city safer by implementing these policies in an Elizabeth Lee-led Canberra Liberal government. These policies will bring our laws back into line with community expectations and build a stronger justice system. Our measures are capable of improving community safety, but this government's budget is not. This budget contains recycled and duplicitous announcements. Most notably, “the additional magistrate for the ACT Magistrates Court”—and that is a quote—was a headline budget line. Yet the Attorney-General confirmed during estimates that this measure is not as it was advertised as it merely refers to additional resources to the ACT Magistrates Court—predominantly, support staff. You do not get much more misleading than that!

These Labor-Greens ministers have lost the plot and are not delivering what the community expects. Fortunately, Canberrans have a fresh opportunity to have a government from this October that will prioritise justice and community safety to keep our community safer. An Elizabeth Lee-led Canberra Liberals government is necessary to save our justice system and community from this current government. Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Cain. In your remarks you used the word “duplicitous”. That word is unparliamentary and I ask that you withdraw it.

Mr Cain: I withdraw.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Cain.

Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.05 to 2 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, Minister Cheyne is away from question time today, attending a funeral, so Minister Steel will take questions on the city services portfolio,

and I will endeavour to respond to questions in Minister Cheyne's other portfolios: arts, culture and the creative economy, human rights, government services and regulatory reform.

Questions without notice **Ginninderry—joint venture partnership**

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, answers to questions in estimates indicate that Riverview Projects has not provided any additional equity to the Ginninderry joint venture, while the Suburban Land Agency has contributed more than \$115 million. Questions taken on notice also indicate that the government estimates that Riverview Projects stands to make more than \$487 million in profit, as well as an additional \$85.8 million from additional contracts that Riverview Projects hold in relation to this joint venture, which includes their sales and marketing contract. During estimates it was also revealed that the SLA are currently discussing variations to the 99-year agreement with Riverview Projects. Minister, why is Riverview Projects receiving over half a billion dollars in profit from this joint venture when the SLA appears to be contributing all the equity and wearing all the risk?

MS BERRY: I have provided answers to a number of questions on notice on this particular issue, in particular during estimates. I will take the question on notice, but I am confident that that information has been provided to the Leader of the Opposition.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MS LEE: Minister, what benefits does the joint venture provide Canberrans, given that it is their money which has funded all additional equity payments, and it appears that Riverview have provided none?

MS BERRY: The Ginninderry joint venture has released 1,550 dwellings since its inception. It has 115 affordable dwellings, 22 community dwellings and 53 public housing dwellings. In a few years it will have a new primary school. It has parks and it has a community centre. There are currently 2,200 residents living in Ginninderry at the moment. Those are the benefits that our community is receiving and those benefits will continue to be received as part of the joint venture.

MR PARTON: Minister, what changes to the 99-year contract are you reviewing with Riverview Projects?

MS BERRY: I do not have that information to hand. It might not be available at this stage. Those discussions might not have occurred with the SLA. I will take the question on notice and see whether there is any further detail to be provided. However, as I said, I have responded to a number of questions on notice, and I direct members to those.

Ginninderry—joint venture partnership

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, answers to questions in estimates—so we have received them—indicate that Riverview Projects has not provided any additional equity to the Ginninderry Joint Venture, whilst the SLA has contributed more than \$115 million, yet the Ginninderry Joint Venture stands to make more than half a billion dollars in profit through this joint venture and other contracts which, as reported in the media, “may not comply with the government’s own procurement rules”. It was also revealed that more than 32 conflicts of interest have been reported as a part of this joint venture. Minister, has the Ginninderry Joint Venture project been independently reviewed to guarantee that this agreement has been carried out with transparency and integrity and is in line with your government’s own procurement rules?

MS BERRY: The joint venture agreement is continuously being reviewed by the Suburban Land Agency.

MS LEE: Minister, are you confident that the 99-year agreement, which provides Riverview Projects with half a billion dollars in profit, complies with your own government’s rules when it comes to procurement?

MS BERRY: Yes; I am confident. I should say that the ACT government encourages and regularly receives reports or declarations of any conflicts of interest from the Ginninderry Joint Venture, their partners and the Suburban Land Agency, and, as I said, the agreement is constantly being reviewed.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you rule out that lobbying played a significant part in providing this 99-year contract which provides substantial financial benefits to Riverview Projects?

MS BERRY: I was not around when the project was first considered by the government. However, I would suggest that there probably was some kind of lobbying, as there is from any stakeholder that wants to do work with the government, but that would have occurred well before my time in this place.

Distinguished visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, could I just let you know that we have a guest in the chamber this afternoon: Dr Mark Robinson, who is a member of the Queensland parliament. Welcome to Canberra and the ACT Assembly. I hope our members behave while you are here!

Dr Robinson thereupon entered the chamber and was seated accordingly.

**Questions without notice
Land—community use**

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, what is the government doing to ensure more land is available for community uses in the ACT?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. Just recently I released the Statement of Planning Priorities, where we acknowledged the need to continually assess our community needs throughout the ACT; that also includes the need for places of religious worship to meet the needs of our diverse communities. I was very pleased recently to announce the ACT government has released an expression of interest for a range of community facility blocks in Canberra. These will provide an opportunity for community organisations to come forward and to be able to express their interest and demonstrate the need they have in their community to deliver a place of community activity, a place of community worship, a place for religious-associated use, or, indeed, for aged care. There are initially six blocks identified: in Gungahlin, Chisolm, Evatt, Kambah and Gowrie, as well as a block that has been identified in the new Molonglo town centre.

MS ORR: Minister, how will the EOI process provide a fair opportunity for a range of community groups to submit their interest?

MR STEEL: The government can sell community-zoned land to community organisations through a two-stage sales process, commencing with the expression of interest. This is a process that I set up that is fair—when I previously had policy responsibility for this area. This has been reflected in the recent Statement of Planning Priorities, which identified the release of land for community facilities. Expression of interest is aimed to improve transparency in the process, to hear from all potential organisations that may be interested in development on the land and to identify an organisation whose proposal best meets a range of criteria, including benefit to the community and financial viability. Depending on the type of lease being granted and the number of shortlisted respondents, the second stage of the sale process will then go into a request for tender stage.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how can interested groups indicate their interest to the government?

MR STEEL: I encourage any interested community organisations to engage with the expression of interest process, which is available now on Tenders ACT. Any interested community groups will have the opportunity to download the documentation, put together a case and submit their proposal to the government for consideration. Since taking on the planning portfolio, I understand that more than 20 organisations, including sporting, community, multicultural and religious groups have already registered their interest with the ACT government for the release of community land, showing there is continuing demand for space to deliver new community facilities. I am pleased there is now another opportunity for community facilities land for those organisations to express their interest in, and I am sure there will be further opportunities as the Planning Directorate continues to look at opportunities for other blocks that are zoned for community facilities in Canberra as well.

Majura Valley—rural leases

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, I refer to recent media reporting in relation to your lease offer to the Majura Valley farmers. The reports have said that you intend to offer a lease agreement and that you only

commenced lease negotiations with the commonwealth in August, despite Senator Katy Gallagher giving in-principle support to the land transfer back in March, allowing Defence to negotiate with the ACT. Senator Gallagher then wrote to the farmers in June advising that Defence was still waiting for the ACT to get the approval to start negotiations, three months after she gave in-principle support. This ongoing uncertainty is causing significant stress to the farmers. Minister, why was approval for formal negotiations only given in August if the commonwealth gave in-principal support back in March?

MR STEEL: The ACT government has been in constant discussions with the commonwealth for some time—certainly well before March—in relation to providing certainty for the Majura Valley farmers about their land tenure arrangements. Of course, it was only recently, when we had a change in federal government, that this discussion even became possible. The coalition simply would not engage with the ACT in relation to resolving the issue of the split blocks in Majura Valley. It was great to have that letter, which enabled us to start the formal stages of the negotiation in March. Of course, during the negotiations, there will be stages where the ACT government will need to seek legal advice and consider that advice in responding to the commonwealth.

Ms Lee: Point of order, Madam Speaker. I have been listening to the minister rabbit on for a minute now. Ms Castley's question was very clear, asking why approval for the formal negotiations was only given in August. I ask you to ask the minister to be direct.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the minister is responding to the timing of the propositions.

Ms Berry: My point of order is on Ms Lee's point of order, referring to the Minister for Planning's "rabbiting on" about something. I want to seek your guidance on that.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am just going to remind everybody to be mindful of their language over the final two days of sittings. Mr Steel, you have 20 seconds.

MR STEEL: There will be times when we will need to consider legal advice. Of course, we have been talking with the commonwealth in some detail—the most recent meeting between officials was, I believe, on 21 August this year—discussing some of the more detailed conditions that might be attached to the degazettal of commonwealth land, which is ultimately required to enable us to offer longer-term leases.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you commit to finalising the leases with the Majura Valley farmers before the caretaker period commences?

MR STEEL: No, and I have been very clear about why that is the case—because it requires the degazettal of national land to be able to provide them with 25-year leases without a withdrawal clause, so that they can have certainty about the future use of this land in the Majura Valley. The intention that I have—and that I have indicated to the Majura Valley farmers—is that I want to give proper legal effect to the future land

tenure arrangements in the Majura Valley. In order to do that, we need to have the commonwealth degazette the land.

I have also spoken on the phone to the occupants, indicating to them that there may be a need to have special purpose legislation brought in to the Legislative Assembly and passed through the Legislative Assembly to be able to issue a lease that provides that legal certainty. Once the degazettal happens, it is certainly the intention, in discussions that I have been having with the planning directorate, that they would brief an incoming government about the best way to provide proper legal certainty and effect to the 25-year leases for the Majura farmers for any incoming government.

MR CAIN: Minister, why can't you alleviate the stress that this is causing these hardworking farmers and follow through on the promise you made?

MR STEEL: Because I am not the commonwealth, I cannot make a decision to degazette the land. That is what is required to give legal certainty to these farmers in the Majura Valley. In order to issue a lease, national land needs to be degazetted and transferred to the territory, and the territory, potentially through legislation, needs to be able to issue a 25-year lease. That cannot be done right at the moment, and it cannot be done before caretaker. But what I have said to them is that we are clear about our intention that the ACT government will offer a 25-year lease with no withdrawal so that they continue their agribusiness activities in the Majura Valley in the future once the commonwealth has degazetted the national land portion of these split blocks.

Majura Valley—rural leases

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Business. Minister, back in December 2022 you promised the Majura Valley farmers that you would work with the Department of Defence and get their leases renewed. Last month, nearly two years on from that commitment it has now been reported that the fine print does not provide assurance of an actual lease renewal and that formal negotiations have only just commenced. As Minister for Business, do you continue to back the farmers to obtain these lease renewals to enable them to operate and run their businesses like any other rural lease holder?

MR STEEL: I will take the question, Madam Speaker. In relation to the specific conditions in the leases, I certainly encourage the Majura Valley farmers to discuss these matters with the Planning Directorate. I have written to them, and we certainly understand from most of those farmers that they want to continue their agribusiness activities. They have been saying for some time to the ACT government that they want certainty to be able to invest and continue their agribusiness activities in the Majura Valley. Certainly, the intention of the ACT government is for them to do that through providing them with a 25-year lease with a no-withdrawal clause so that we are not taking back their lease during those 25 years, so that they can continue their business activities.

It was a surprise to hear that there may be other intentions, potentially not to continue some of those agribusiness activities, but I have been advised by the directorate that

the original leases prior to 2004, in fact, included a restriction that the lessee must not assign or transfer the lease without having obtained the written consent of the ACT Planning and Land Authority. So, the intention of having a similar clause is to make sure that these leases are not provided to a developer who wants to develop the lease for a land use other than agribusiness. We want to make sure that these leases are there for the rural uses of the occupants of the Majura Valley. Indeed, there would not be any issue with transferring it to someone within their family or as part of a deceased estate. We have been clear about that.

MS CASTLEY: I will try again, because this is about business, and I am asking the minister if he can commit to advocating for the Majura Valley farmers to have this issue resolved before caretaker provisions kick in.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, just to be clear, Ms Castley was directing this question to the Minister for Business, but, as allowed, Mr Steel is choosing to respond.

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I refer her to the answers that I gave to the earlier question, where I have been very clear that this requires a degazettal of national land, which is not within the ACT government's control. Therefore, it will be up to the commonwealth to do that, and potentially for us, in a future term of this Assembly, to consider special purpose legislation to give proper and legal effect those leases. And given that we are in the last sitting week of this term that is not going to be possible this term.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR CAIN: Minister for Business, Minister Gentleman, do you have confidence in Minister Steel's handling of this matter, given the concerns that farmers have raised this week?

MR GENTLEMAN: I certainly do have confidence in Minister Steel's handling of this issue. It has been ongoing for many years, and, as we know, these split blocks, partially owned by the ACT government and partially owned by the commonwealth, cannot be sold until, of course, we get the degazettal. It is very clear. It is a bit like trying to build a busway across commonwealth land without permission! One must talk to the National Capital Authority. In this case, we must talk to the commonwealth and ensure that we can get the degazettal, purchase the land and sell it to the Majura farmers.

Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct

MR CAIN: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, the Auditor-General recently published report No 6 of 2024, which inquired into the Public Trustee and Guardian's failed ICT renewal program. The report found that the Public Trustee and Guardian had misappropriated the funds from the guarantee and reserve account towards the ICT program. Disturbingly, the Auditor-General found that "it is questionable whether the Public Trustee and Guardian's use of funds from the

guarantee and reserve account for its ICT renewal activities was legal”. Attorney-General, have you taken any steps to refer any alleged instances of corruption within the Public Trustee and Guardian to the Integrity Commission, or taken any disciplinary action against any of the officials involved?

MR RATTENBURY: I am aware that the Auditor-General has tabled that report and that it focuses on a period from 2016 to 2023. As Mr Cain has noted, it is critical of the management of the program and the ICT activities. In particular, the audit raises concerns with planning and design, budgeting, governance, procurement and implementation.

While the findings of the report are disappointing, the report also identifies actions and directions of the Public Trustee and Guardian since 2023 that appear to be addressing some of the audit findings. One thing I can assure the community is that those matters are being taken very seriously and that we will be following through on the findings of the Auditor-General—

Ms Lee: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MR RATTENBURY: I have a minute and 20 seconds. I am getting to the point.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is a point of order. Resume your seat, Mr Rattenbury.

Ms Lee: The point of order is that Mr Cain’s question was very specifically about whether there have been any referrals to the Integrity Commission or disciplinary action.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister is also talking about actions since 2023. You have the call, Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: Fine, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: You’re done?

Ms Lee: So he wasn’t getting to it.

Mr Rattenbury: I was, but if you interrupt me like that—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Steel: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think I can assume what your point of order is. Members, we will have no exchange like that across the floor.

Mr Steel: It is about constant interruptions, and that is also against the standing orders.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you for reminding me.

Ms Lawder: A point of order, Madam Speaker. With respect to Mr Rattenbury's comment, points of order are part of our standing orders. It is not an interruption, and it does not mean that a minister might just sit down. It is a quite legitimate and perfectly valid way of asking a question about the question that you have asked.

MADAM SPEAKER: As I say, members, we have two days to go, and our esteemed colleague from Queensland is being educated in ACT politics. Mr Cain, you have the call.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, were you aware of these actions by the Public Trustee and Guardian prior to the release of the Auditor-General's report?

MR RATTENBURY: No, I was not. Going to Mr Cain's earlier question, I will be looking at the findings of the Auditor-General, and I am seeking advice from the agency on what further steps might need to be taken.

MR COCKS: Attorney-General, did you at any point seek advice from the Public Trustee and Guardian on the costings of the customer relationship management system; if not, why not?

MR RATTENBURY: I have, over time, a reasonably regular briefing program with the Public Trustee and Guardian. The sort of matters identified by the Auditor-General did not come to light during those conversations.

Health—maternity services

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last February this Assembly passed my motion that called on the government to collaborate with the maternity reference group and the University of Canberra to conduct early design and feasibility before August 2024 to establish a co-designed, midwife-led freestanding birth centre, located alongside or fully separate from the new north-side hospital. Can you please provide the Assembly with an update on the early design you have committed to?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. As she would have seen from my media release in July, that work is underway. Targeted stakeholder engagement on the feasibility work commenced in August and will conclude in the coming weeks. That engagement is focused on understanding perspectives on the role of a standalone, alongside or freestanding birth centre; understanding perspectives on feasibility and options to meet community needs; and discussing views on the location of a birth centre.

This includes engagement with the maternity-in-focus stakeholder pool, which includes consumers, with two in-person and two online focus groups held; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, including the Birthing on Country cultural advisory group and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services; and the health workforce, including consultation with Canberra Hospital, North Canberra Hospital and peak bodies, clinical colleges and universities.

The engagement outcomes will form part of the overall feasibility study. This study will deliver recommendations on how a birth centre should be delivered, in conjunction with the planning for the new north-side hospital. The study will consider the potential for other birth centre models—for example, a standalone facility in the

community that is not on a hospital campus. I think Ms Clay and I would both agree that the new north-side hospital will need to have a birth centre. The question is not whether the new north-side hospital will have a birth centre; the question is whether there are other models that could complement that. I think she would be extremely disappointed if the new north-side hospital did not have a birth centre, so that is certainly part of the feasibility study.

MS CLAY: Minister, when will you be deciding whether there will be a freestanding birth centre as part of this work?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The birth centre feasibility study is expected to be completed by late 2024. That is also the time when Major Projects Canberra will be closing off the request for tender for the preferred contractors for very early contractor involvement in the new north-side hospital project. That process should be finalised by February 2025. That work will continue alongside the north-side hospital work. That will of course be a matter for the incoming government.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will there continue to be a birth centre inside the new north-side hospital, as there currently is, in addition to the freestanding birth centre, for people who are risked out of birthing in the freestanding birth centre, or will people in that situation have no choice but to deliver within the standard hospital birth suites, with no continuity of care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I answered that question in my first response. The question for the new north-side hospital, I fully expect, will be whether a birth centre is integrated into the hospital, whether it is alongside the hospital—as it is at Townsville University Hospital, which I visited and met with the team there—or whether it is separately located on the new north-side hospital campus. The work to inform that decision-making is the work that I have been talking about.

Public schools—infrastructure

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, what is the ACT government doing to ensure every ACT public school is a great school?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for that question. The ACT government continues to invest in our public schools to ensure that they are great places to learn and great places to work. The most recent ACT budget includes nearly \$30 million for smaller scale upgrades across the existing ACT public schools we know and love.

The majority of this funding has been allocated to 61 projects across 44 public schools following an open application process. These projects include improved classrooms, upgrades to improve accessibility, new and upgraded outdoor learning areas, new and upgraded walkways, access ramps, landscaping works, improved staff facilities and improved administration areas. The remainder of the funding will be allocated towards high-priority school upgrades as they are identified throughout the coming year. There will be a particular focus on prioritising inclusive upgrades that ensure ACT public schools continue to meet the needs of all students.

This funding is part of the ACT government's investment of around \$100 million in renewing and upgrading public schools across Canberra in this term of government. This funding is in addition to other investments we are making in renewing ACT public school infrastructure, including our programs for heating and cooling upgrades and roof replacements across ACT public schools to improve thermal comfort and efficiencies and our investment in designing and constructing 17 new and expanded schools across the city's growth areas.

DR PATERSON: Minister, can you update the Assembly on how the ACT government is working to make ACT public school infrastructure more inclusive?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. Late last year, the ACT government released a 10-year road map to build a more inclusive education system. Infrastructure is one of the seven focus areas in the Inclusive Education Strategy. The ACT government is building an education system that supports all children, no matter their background or life circumstances, to overcome and achieve. We know investing in safe, fit-for-purpose and inclusive infrastructure is key to encourage learning and belonging at school. Inclusive infrastructure is more than making buildings physically accessible. Learning environments need to be welcoming and accessible to diverse learners, including children and young people with sensory processing needs and intellectual disability; they should develop the whole child or young person intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically and culturally.

The ACT government has a central program fund to deliver inclusive infrastructure upgrades. Each year, a minimum of \$4 million from the Asset Renewal Program is allocated to inclusive upgrades. Infrastructure projects are supported by the principles of universal design. These works centre on the needs of individual students. Decisions around investments are made with the support of recommendations from the Education Directorate's Allied Health team.

MS LEE: Minister, why have you broken your promise to the Majura school community by going back on your word in terms of the modernisation project there?

MS BERRY: I have not. I have met with the Majura P&C community, and we have already discussed a potential way forward, and they have been happy with the way that the government has responded at this point in time.

Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct

MR CAIN: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, the Auditor-General recently published Report No 6 of 2024, which inquired into the Public Trustee and Guardian's failed ICT renewal program. The report highlights numerous deficiencies, and found that:

Documentation associated with the procurement of the three software vendors shows non-compliance with the requirements of the *Government Procurement Act 2001* and non-conformance with Government Procurement Framework expectations and an acceptable minimum standard of administrative practice.

Attorney-General, when did you first become aware of issues around the Public Trustee and Guardian's ICT renewal project?

MR RATTENBURY: The issues that Mr Cain has identified came to my attention through the Auditor-General's reporting process.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, have you sought advice from the Public Trustee and Guardian as to why they would consider that your government's procurement processes did not apply to them?

MR RATTENBURY: The findings in this report cover a period of a former leader of that office. There is now a different leader of that office, so I am not in a position to ask that question of the occupant of the position at the time.

MR COCKS: Attorney-General, how many other entities across your government operate with the belief that they are above the law?

MR RATTENBURY: It is clearly unacceptable for any of our public sector organisations, or parts of government agencies, to operate outside of the law. The government and all the ministers in the cabinet are very clear of our expectation that public service agencies follow the rules that are prescribed under various acts, and of course, there are disciplinary processes available where public servants step outside the rules.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: I think members of the opposition know full well what those options are, ranging from public service disciplinary processes through to the Integrity Commission.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—deaths in custody

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Corrections and Justice Health. Minister, I refer to the most recent death in custody at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Minister, did drugs play a role in last week's tragedy and was the inmate found with drug-taking paraphernalia?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. This is a very distressing time. Whenever there is a loss of life, family and friends and people who have known the person will really be feeling it. So my thoughts are with them.

This particular incident has already been referred for investigation by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services and by WorkSafe, and it is also a matter for the police. So I cannot make any further comment at this time about what might be the circumstances. But I am very thankful that we have processes that enable full and thorough investigations to take place so that we can fully understand the circumstances that led to this tragic event.

MR PARTON: Minister, is there a wider problem here involving illicit drugs and access to them at the AMC?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question, but I think what he is looking for there is an answer that would go to pre-empting the findings of investigations that are currently underway. It is important—

Ms Lawder: Point of order, Madam Speaker. Does parliamentary privilege mean that the minister should answer a question like that? It is not about the specifics of the case—

Mr Steel: Point of order, Madam Speaker. Ms Lawder is debating the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will go to Ms Davidson. There is a question there on broad policy, and I would take you to that response, please.

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. While I cannot speak to the circumstances of this particular case while it is currently under investigation, it is important to note that there are a number of issues that go to safety for people in places like the Alexander Maconochie Centre. It is particularly helpful that we have organisations like the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services who are able to advise us and give us recommendations on where changes might be needed. That is why these investigations are so important.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what assurances can you give to Canberrans that drugs are not being smuggled into AMC?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. I think it would not be realistic to think that there is any environment in the ACT where such things could be prevented with complete assurance. We do our best to reduce the supply of illicit substances in high-risk environments, but we also need to take into account the recommendations of our Inspector of Correctional Services and other reviews that have taken place on how we can improve safety. That is not necessarily just about supply; it is also about what kinds of wellbeing programs are available to people and what kinds of harm reduction measures we can put in place to protect people's wellbeing and safety.

Public schools—religious education

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, under the Religious Education in ACT Public Schools policy, I understand that students are entitled to religious classes, which should be organised for a reasonable time, which is defined as no more than 40 minutes for one lesson or seven hours per school term as negotiated by the principal.

What guidance is available to teachers and principals to determine when these classes can be held, and is this a case of either/or, or is it the case that they must fulfil both the less-than-40-minutes and the less-than-seven-hours requirements?

MS BERRY: It is up to the school principal and timetabling at that specific school around any religious education that might be offered at a school community. Those

decisions are made locally; however, the Education Directorate is always available to provide additional support should that be required during these processes.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what efforts and supports are available from the ACT Education Directorate to support teachers to ensure that classes are held with minimal disruption to standard classroom activities?

MS BERRY: As I said in my first answer, these are specific to an individual school's circumstances and timetabling, so school principals will make those decisions based on those matters and the operations of their schools, as I said, in those circumstances. There may be a variety of reasons where there might be different kinds of support required. The Education Directorate is there to be able to provide that advice in whatever varied form it comes to them.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a supplementary question. Minister, when will the Religious education in ACT public schools policy be reviewed, and who will be consulted as part of that review?

MS BERRY: There is no intention at this point in time to review that section of the Education Act.

Justice—corrections system

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Corrections and Justice Health. Minister, Julie Tongs, the head of Winnunga Nimmityjah, is quoted in the *Canberra Times*, after last week's tragedy, as saying:

There's lots of things that aren't right—

in our corrections system—

that keep getting covered up, and until we rip the scab off, we're not going to change anything," she said.

First Nations people make up only about two per cent of the population of Canberra but more than one-quarter of the prison population. Additionally, our recidivism rates are the worst in the country. Minister, why do you continue to fail so badly in the administration of a corrections system which so tragically lets down some individuals and their families and also fails the entire city with such poor broad outcomes?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. What we are talking about here is the need for further investment and more action to reduce the number of First Nations people who end up in our justice system. That is why the justice reinvestment strategy phase 2 that was launched today is so important—so that we can really address those underlying causes of why people might be engaging in behaviour that brings them to the attention of the justice system not just once but multiple times throughout their lifetime.

If we are able to continue to invest in those programs that we know work, like the justice housing program, like alternative bail support sites and like the drug and

alcohol sentencing list, we will be able to continue to make a difference in reducing those issues.

MR PARTON: Minister, for how long has the government had the independent review into the over-representation of Indigenous people in the ACT criminal justice system, and when will it actually be released?

MR RATTENBURY: I will take the response to that question, Madam Speaker. The report is being provided to me. The government received it quite recently. I cannot think of the exact date. It will be released before the caretaker period commences.

MS LAWDER: Minister, how many more young men will need to die in custody for this government and for you, as minister, to live up to your human rights obligations?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. Every loss of life is a tragedy, and every loss of life has a ripple effect for the person's family, friends and community. That is why it is so important that we have independent investigations that help us to understand what can be done differently, and that we then act on the recommendations that come from those investigations. I will continue to do everything I can to seek the resources necessary to implement the recommendations that come from investigations such as these. We will continue to do everything that we can to improve that situation.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—deaths in custody

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Corrections and Justice Health. Minister, the recent inquest into the death of a detainee in February 2022, combined with the critical incident report by the Inspector of Correctional Services, highlights the unsafe cells with known vulnerabilities to self-harm. The coroner found that the ACT government placed a prisoner with known vulnerabilities to suicide attempts in an unsafe cell the day before he took his own life.

In May 2020 it was identified that the doors at the AMC's management and crisis support units were no longer fit for purpose and were tagged for urgent replacement. The Inspector of Correctional Services noted that the rear cell door design flaw was reported by AMC facilities management in 2015, and another design fault was identified in 2020. Minister, why was the 2015 risk not addressed before 2024, given that this was the risk that enabled a detainee to take his life?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. The rectification works to the rear cell doors in the management unit were completed on 31 May 2022 and consisted of work to reduce the risk of horizontal bars being able to be used as ligature points. Cross braces were added to fasten the Lexan panels to the crossbars, and the foam tape previously used was replaced with anti-pick sealant. It is noted that there are no prison-specific national standards relating to harm minimisation of infrastructure. However, the work completed was in line with Victoria's Department of Justice and Community Safety cell and fire safety guidelines, as the most relevant reference.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many detainees attempted self-harm between 2015 and 2024 due to the two risks identified in the reports and not dealt with because of budget constraints?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. I think that to answer that question would require some significant work to look at what data we have and to be able to appropriately identify any of those situations. If what Mr Parton is talking about is specific to the doors, the details I have provided about the rectification works would certainly indicate that this is not something that we would expect to be an ongoing issue.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will risks of this nature identified in the future be actioned quicker than two years—in some cases—and up to nine years in others?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. Each time there is an investigation into a specific incident, there are recommendations that go to the specifics of how we can reduce the risks of a recurrence of an incident. Different rectification works and infrastructure works will have different time requirements and resourcing requirements attached to them. I am reminded as well that we are talking about an environment that is not like getting your average tradie to come out and fix something, as you would do at home. It is a very specific environment that people are working in there. It is very important that the work is done—

Mr Parton: A point of order, Madam Speaker. It is simply on relevance. The question specifically asked whether these sorts of issues would be actioned quicker than two years. I hope that the minister can be relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: She is referring to timelines and different activities and issues within the facility. You have 50-odd seconds left, Ms Davidson.

MS DAVIDSON: When we are talking about changes to, or rectification of, infrastructure works within a high-risk and highly specialised environment, it is really important that we are working in accordance with the relevant standards and that the work is undertaken by appropriately skilled people to be able to do that highly specialised work. The time and resources required for any specific rectification works to that kind of infrastructure would have to be determined based on what is requested.

Planning—Gungahlin town centre

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister responsible for the Suburban Land Agency. Minister, the Gungahlin Town Centre East Design and Place Framework was released last week. I am interested in how much space will be made available for commercial use that will help drive economic activity and employment in the Gungahlin town centre?

MS BERRY: These are the early stages of the planning processes for Gungahlin town centre east. There has been significant community consultation, which has fed in to the design and framework that was released on Friday. So there is no detail at this point in time on the specific question that Mr Braddock has raised.

MR BRADDOCK: Does the government have a vision for the Gungahlin town centre—that it is more than just a dormitory suburb?

MS BERRY: I do not think it is a dormitory suburb. Whilst it is not an area that is dear to my heart, I know it is to Ms Orr and Mr Pettersson. They are both very fond of it and talk in great detail about their electorate of Yerrabi and the Gungahlin town centre. I know that one of the things that is of great interest to a town planner like Ms Orr is Linear Park, which was also released as part of the design work and framework plan and came directly out of the mouths of the people who are part of the consultations there. I know that she and Mr Pettersson will be keen to see this work as it progresses, and, of course, there will be plenty more conversations to have on YourSay.

MS CLAY: Minister, how many square metres of land will be available for community use in the Gungahlin town centre?

MS BERRY: As I said, this design framework has just been released as part of the first batch of consultations with the community. There are more conversations to have, and I am sure that there will be many more ideas about the Gungahlin town centre going forward. As I said, this is the first part of that process and there will be plenty more opportunities for conversations about that project for the Gungahlin community.

National Multicultural Festival 2025

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, will the National Multicultural Festival take place again in 2025?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his very strong interest in our multicultural society of the ACT. I am happy to announce the festival will continue in 2025, Madam Speaker—just a little bit earlier.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, we have an important announcement.

MR GENTLEMAN: The festival will take place between 7 and 9 February. For its 27th year this iconic three-day event will bring together and show case the vast and growing cultural and linguistic diversity of Canberra.

The festival celebrates the culture, history and heritage of multicultural communities, through sharing food, song and dance. Crowds can expect a largely similar footprint to 2024, with the event planned to span right across the city. As a government we are very proud to again to be delivering the country's biggest and most successful celebration of diversity. In the budget, we have committed \$1.7 million over this financial year to coordinate and deliver the celebration of this festival, and significant funding is invested in ongoing delivery and future growth of the festival to ensure it remains the most successful and celebrated multicultural festival across Australia. The investment covers, for example, proportionate sustainability and public safety measures, appropriate staff and operational resources, and investments in accessibility. The event is just one way our government embraces diversity and continues to support and recognise the significant value that our proud multicultural communities contribute to the city.

The festival is a large-scale visual representation of this government's ongoing commitment to ensure the ACT is an inclusive, harmonious and supportive place for all people to belong.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the 2025 festival progressing?

MR GENTLEMAN: Preparations for the 2025 festival are already well underway. Applications for community performers, stall holders and grants have now all closed. The government has received a lot of great applications, with over 300 stall applications, 29 cultural showcase applications and over 260 applications from community performers. It is wonderful to see the interest and passion from community members looking to participate in the festival. We are currently viewing the many applications and look forward to releasing the outcomes in due course. I can tell you now that it is very exciting to see what is in store for next year.

In the background, we are progressing contracts and procurement processes, and liaising with experts to improve accessibility for all attendees and working hard to implement the feedback we have received from stakeholders. Learning from the success of this year's event we will certainly again carefully consider noise management and the placement of stages in the lead up to February's festival. Registration for the volunteer program will open shortly this year. If you love the event as much as we do, putting your hand up to volunteer is a great way to get more involved in 2025.

MS ORR: Minister, how does the National Multicultural Festival benefit Canberra?

MR GENTLEMAN: I know Ms Orr enjoys the festival as well. The festival, of course, benefits Canberra in many ways from a celebration of diverse cultures to the significant economic benefits. The National Multicultural Festival is such a wonderful and fun event, and it has become a much loved feature of Canberra's cultural and social calendar.

Looking back at the record-breaking 2024 festival, there were more than 170 cultures represented; over 417,000 people attended (up from 380,000 in 2023), and over 19,000 people from outside the ACT travelled specifically for this event, which generated 33,000 visitor nights. All up, the 2024 three-day event contributed over \$21.2 million to the ACT economy. It is the highest economic benefit in the festival's proud 26-year history.

In addition to the significant contribution to the economy, crowds just love the event, of course. You do not have to look very far to spot the smiles and hear the laughs of Canberrans of all ages enjoying the festivities. So from the dancers, entertainers and cultural parade to the array of lunches and desserts available from all across the globe, the festival truly offers something for everyone. It is such a unique opportunity to be immersed in and learn about hundreds of different cultures without leaving our very own multicultural city. But do not just take my word for it, Madam Speaker; this year, attendees gave a satisfaction rating of 4.3 stars, out of five, and 88 per cent of attendees said they were likely to return for the 2025 festival.

Finally, the festival also offers an opportunity for locals and travellers to share, learn and celebrate cultures. It is an important recognition of the strength of our multicultural society.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper; thank you, Madam Speaker.

Supplementary answer to question without notice Digital Health Record system—ACT Integrity Commission

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Last week, I took a question on notice regarding whether or not matters related to financial management in the Digital Solutions Division of the ACT Health Directorate had previously been referred to the Integrity Commission prior to becoming public in July.

I have consulted with the commissioner, who has noted that this issue is somewhat clouded by the terms of section 297 of the Integrity Commission Act 2018, in particular, the definition of protected information. The legal advice I received last week via the directorate, I think it is fair to say, took a conservative view in relation to this definition. As members would be aware, I would not be in a position to table advice that is subject to legal professional privilege.

However, reflecting on the matter over the weekend, I determined it would be only fair to the directorate, given the aspersions that were being cast by the opposition, to seek further advice directly from the commissioner. I am pleased to say that the commissioner has advised that he has no objection to me making the following statement about the advice provided to me by the Director-General of the ACT Health Directorate on this matter.

The Director-General has briefed me that senior ACT Health Directorate officials met with the CEO of the Integrity Commission on 20 February 2024 to discuss the serious issues in governance and financial management practices identified in the Digital Solutions Division. I am advised that at that time the ACT Health Directorate had found no evidence of serious or systemic corruption requiring a mandatory referral to the commission. Rather, the directorate was concerned that the issues identified may facilitate an environment where fraud or corruption could occur undetected and as such, in the interest of transparency, wanted to provide the commission with this information.

I understand that the directorate officials advised the commission that a program of work was underway within the directorate to strengthen governance and financial management controls and that a further assurance review of the DHR program was being commissioned to support a planned ACT Audit Office performance audit of the program. I am advised that, at the time, directorate officials agreed to provide the commission with further updates on the assurance review and the program of work to strengthen the directorate's internal controls. I understand this did not occur until July, when the draft assurance review was received and the Interim Director-General raised his concerns with the commission.

The directorate received the draft report of the KPMG assurance review on the evening of 25 July 2024. The then Interim Director-General has advised that the report was provided to the commission the following day and that he also met with the commission CEO on that day. This information indicates that the Director-General, Interim Director-General and senior officials were aware of their reporting obligations and the type of issues that can give rise to an increased risk of corrupt conduct and that they proactively engaged with the commission.

If there is any question about whether officials met their reporting obligations in full, no doubt this will be considered in the course of the Integrity Commission investigation. For now, I encourage those opposite to remember that all the commissioner has said to date is that he has received a referral and is investigating the matters that have been referred. I reiterate his advice that no adverse inferences should be drawn about any individual while the commission conducts its investigation.

Papers

Madam Speaker presented the following papers:

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—
Correspondence—

Bills—Not inquired into—

Crimes (Anti-Consorting) Amendment Bill 2024—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 2 September 2024.

Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Bill 2024—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 2 September 2024.

Estimates 2024-2025—Select Committee, pursuant to standing order 253A—

Answers to Question Taken on Notice—

No 178, dated 28 August 2024.

No 184, dated 30 August 2024.

Schedule of questions answered after the dissolution of the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025, dated 3 September 2024.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to section 20—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 1 January to 30 June 2024, dated 25 August 2024, prepared by Bill Campbell AO KC.

Mr Gentleman, pursuant to standing order 211, presented the following papers:

Public Sector Management Standards, pursuant to section 56—Engagements of Long-term Senior Executive Service Members—1 March to 31 August 2024, dated September 2024.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 1)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-256 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 2)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-257 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 3)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-258 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 4)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-259 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 5)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-260 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 6)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-261 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 7)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-262 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2024 (No 8)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-263 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act—

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board)
Appointment 2024 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2024-265 (LR,
19 August 2024).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board)
Appointment 2024 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2024-266 (LR,
19 August 2024).

Education Act—Education Amendment Regulation 2024 (No 2)—Subordinate
Law SL2024-19 (LR, 26 August 2024).

Emergencies Act—Emergencies (Multi-Hazard Advisory Council Members)
Appointment 2024 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2024-264 (LR,
19 August 2024).

Magistrates Court Act—Magistrates Court (Professional Engineers
Infringement Notices) Regulation 2024—Subordinate Law SL2024-18 (LR,
26 August 2024).

Racing Act—Racing Appeals Tribunal Appointment 2024 (No 1)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2024-252 (LR, 15 August 2024).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Vehicle Registration
and Related Fees Determination 2024 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument
DI2024-251 (LR, 15 August 2024).

University of Canberra Act—

University of Canberra Council Appointment 2024 (No 2)—Disallowable
Instrument DI2024-253 (LR, 19 August 2024).

University of Canberra Council Appointment 2024 (No 3)—Disallowable
Instrument DI2024-254 (LR, 19 August 2024).

University of Canberra Council Appointment 2024 (No 4)—Disallowable
Instrument DI2024-255 (LR, 19 August 2024).

Gambling—policy

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the severe and debilitating effect that gambling has on the lives of its victims, particularly where derived from electronic gaming machines (poker machines);
- (b) that gambling reform is a wicked problem and a divisive issue for ACT politics, over which a significant amount of lobbying occurs;
- (c) the risks of new technologies involving big data and behavioural analytics, powered by artificial intelligence, which stand to exacerbate harm if left unregulated by the Government;
- (d) the ACT Minister for Gaming recently said that “the ACT Labor Party has avoided, delayed, and ultimately rejected the best-practice [pokies harm reduction] reforms” that were presented to it in Government;
- (e) that the ACT Labor Party has a conflict of interest on gambling policy that is derived from its:
 - (i) associations with the Canberra Labor Club group, which operates for the express purpose of promoting the Australian Labor Party, and which operates 436 poker machines across four venues, representing 12 percent of all machines in the ACT;
 - (ii) historic financial arrangements whereby the profits from poker machine operations at the Canberra Labor Club were used to fund the operations of the ACT Labor Party;
 - (iii) current financial arrangements whereby the operations of the ACT Labor Party are funded from the investment returns of the 1973 Foundation, which according to disclosures to Elections ACT, was established using capital transfers from the Canberra Labor Club amounting to \$3,600,000 in 2011-2012 and \$2,500,000 in 2013-2014, totalling at least \$6,100,000. The ACT Labor Party have received over \$4,400,000 in funding from this investment vehicle since 2011-2012; and
 - (iv) governance arrangements over the Canberra Labor Club which see it nominate a majority of the Club’s board of directors;
- (f) that this conflict of interest results in the ACT Labor Party being impossibly compromised on gambling policy; and
- (g) that the Canberra Labor Club, despite being the beneficiary of ACT Government revenue diversification grants, has become a property developer that has built a block of apartments in Braddon and a hotel at its Belconnen site, but still operates the same number of poker machines as in 2019; and

(2) calls on the ACT Labor Party to:

- (a) sever all of its connections to the Canberra Labor Club to eliminate its conflict of interest; and

- (b) donate \$6,100,000 to the Alliance for Gambling Reform – an amount equivalent to that derived from poker machines to establish the 1973 Foundation.

This is a tale of power, control and consequences. To understand how we have got to where we are today, we need to take a step back and rewind almost four years to the start of the Tenth Assembly. The two parties agreed to the following item in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, in appendix 1.E.3:

Establish a rigorous, across-venue self-exclusion regime across the ACT for people experiencing harm from gaming, with significant penalties for breaches. This exclusion regime will align with or exceed reforms currently progressing in NSW to allow exclusion by family members.

That is what the two parties agreed to, and every single Labor and Greens member in this place signed this agreement. It seems that some of those signatures had more intent behind them than others. The Greens gaming minister, Mr Rattenbury, on multiple occasions presented a proposal to achieve this objective. However, at every turn, he has been met with avoidance, delay and rejection from the Labor Party.

I do not want to spend too long on the topic of the CMS, because we will deal with it in a lot more detail on Thursday, but it is worth reminding ourselves of what it is. A centralised monitoring system is a basic regulatory tool that lets a government keep tabs on poker machines. Originally implemented for tax purposes, they have been operated on the premise that the gambling industry is one that cannot be trusted to properly self-regulate, self-monitor and correctly report their tax obligations.

The local gambling industry has managed to convince successive Labor ministers since the year 2000 that the ACT is somehow different and can be trusted to do the right thing, never mind any evidence to the contrary. It is time to talk about how I think this came about.

Here in the ACT, the Labor Party do not simply get lobbied by the gambling industry; they themselves are part of it. They have done some work to mask those connections over the years, but the fact remains that, including under electoral law, the Canberra Labor Club and the ACT Labor Party are associated entities, and intrinsically linked.

The Labor Club was originally set up for the express purpose of supporting the Labor Party, including financially. For decades, a slice of the club's gambling profits would be used to fund the Labor Party, and in a manner to which they became accustomed and reliant upon.

Over time, it became increasingly apparent how much gambling harm was occurring at these venues and how much people were pointing to the flow of money between the club and the party as evidence of Labor's conflict of interest. There was a push forming to ban donations from gambling licence holders. Labor therefore fiddled with their arrangements.

The 1973 Foundation was established on 21 October 2010. The following financial year—the public record of Elections ACT does not say precisely when—\$3.6 million

in capital was transferred from the Labor Club to the foundation. That was followed up in 2013-14 with an additional \$2.5 million injection, meaning that the Labor Party had used the profits of gambling harm to establish a \$6.1 million investment vehicle. It would give the appearance that their finances were no longer being derived from gambling harm but instead from other, more legitimate sources. You could say that the money had been washed.

Labor are trust fund children, benefiting from the profits of gambling harm. Regardless of what you might like to call it, it leaves the Labor Party forever indebted to their gambling assets.

To this day, the Labor Party continue to appoint a majority of directors to the Labor Club's board, people who they do not need to tell what to do. That is how corporate appointments work in our capitalist market economy, after all. The club continues to operate for the implied benefit of the Labor Party, and the club can move resolutions in support of the club at Labor Party conferences, including ones straight from the gaming industry's playbook.

It is also worth remembering that, while the tap has been turned off on the flow of money between the club and the party for the time being, there is nothing stopping such transfers being turned on again. There is nothing stopping the transfer of assets from other undertakings, like their new property development or hotel enterprises flowing across, all made possible by the liquidity provided by the pokie machines.

Their income also includes government grants designed to help make the clubs less dependent on pokie machine revenue—not that they are actually giving up the machines or living with less revenue from the existing machines.

This is where things get scary. We are increasingly realising that the association between the number of pokie machines and the harm they inflict is rather loose. It does not really matter how many pokie machines a club has, as long as it is not zero; it is about how they are used. A massive amount of research has been done on floor plans, game design, lights, sounds and hospitality, all for the express purpose of increasing the amount of time people spend sitting in front of the pokie machines.

With the advent of big data, facial recognition software and behavioural analytics powered by artificial intelligence, the potential for harm to be wrought from gaming machines has been massively supercharged. A club could quite feasibly halve the number of machines it has, pocket the payouts from handing the licences back to the government, and make just as much, if not more, money from the optimised machines that they retain.

The challenge to that model, powered by big data, are systems which monitor the machines in the same way. The same technology that allows gambling operators to seduce and entice also allows government to intervene and put up guardrails. But to do that, you need a regulatory backbone—a centralised monitoring system. For the first time, big data is allowing for a technology that would genuinely threaten the profitability of the pokies by genuinely preventing gambling harm. The gambling industry fears it, the clubs fear it and Labor fears it.

If we are to deal effectively with Labor in the future, they need to properly kick the habit and get through rehab. To kick that habit, they need to sever the ties to pokie machines, either by having the Labor Club divest from them or by cutting the ties to the Labor Club. Either will do. My only interest is in severing the governance connection between the two.

For the rehabilitation, they need to empower the advocates of harm reduction by giving them the proceeds from gambling that they profit from today. That is \$6.1 million in capital, by my calculations. That is what I am calling for today.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (3.09): Labor will not be supporting Mr Braddock's motion this afternoon. The motion, and indeed some of the language contained in Mr Braddock's speech, is provocative, defamatory and unreasonable, and is not the sort of contribution that lends itself to any potential to forge a consensus on gaming reform.

We are in the final sitting week of this Assembly, and I have been around politics long enough to know that, as we get closer to election day, the rhetoric increases and the level of political discourse often degenerates. I think we have a prime example of that in this motion. We are only debating this motion because the amendments to the Gaming Machine Act that Mr Braddock was proposing to move in two days were unconstitutional. This is a disappointing contribution to what should be a more serious debate about a shared pathway to reform.

In the spirit of trying to find a pathway to reform, we have been able to reach agreement on a number of issues with the Greens political party. So I can advise the Assembly, following—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I am having trouble hearing, so if you two want to have a discussion, can you please take it outside.

MR BARR: I can advise the Assembly that there has been an agreement reached with the Greens political party on a number of reforms to reduce the harm caused—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Gentlemen, please, go.

MR BARR: You have got to go outside, please. I know we are in the final week, but the level of poor behaviour in this place is setting a record for the time I have been in here.

Labor has reached an agreement with the Greens political party on a number of reforms to reduce the harm caused by electronic gaming machines in the territory. As outlined in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, and delivered by the Minister for Gaming, we have a piece of legislation before this place—which we will debate before we conclude these sittings—to reduce the number of machines further

to 3,500, recognising that before this process of machine-number reduction began we had nearly 5,000 machines in the territory. On a per capita basis, we had one of the highest proportions of gaming machines to residents of any jurisdiction anywhere in the world.

That is now no longer the case, and we believe that further reductions in the number of gaming machines in the territory, combined with other measures, are an appropriate way forward. Some of the other measures that we have been able to reach agreement on with the Greens political party include a regulated reduction in operating hours for EGMs to allow them to operate between 10 am and 2 am. That means EGMs would not be able to operate between 2 am and 10 am each day. This will provide a mandated break in play and would reduce harm, something that both parties can agree on.

Further, both parties have agreed to the establishment of an independent inquiry to assist in advising government on the steps necessary to develop and implement a club industry revenue, activity and worker transition plan.

I am hopeful that these initial steps can then lead to further work on practical measures to reduce harms caused by gambling addiction, while supporting a sustainable community club sector. I believe these initial reforms are a welcome step forward and open the door to further reforms in the next term of the Assembly.

Beyond these areas of agreement, we, as the Labor Party, would support the introduction of further harm reduction measures, such as continued progressive reduction in the number of gaming machines in the territory to 1,000 machines by 2045; the introduction of account-based, cashless gaming, covering both Keno and EGMs, with player activity statements in real time; the ability to delay access to winnings; mandatory delay top-up mechanisms; pop-up public health messaging and support service information; mandatory pre-commitment, including a daily, monthly and yearly loss limit established at the time of setting up an account—if the default amount is reached, the account will not permit further gambling; mandatory breaks in play, including a mandated 15-minute break in play after an hour of continuous play; self-exclusion from gambling where users will be excluded from participating in EGM gambling; and a framework for third-party exclusions to also be explored.

We believe these measures will reduce harm and that they can be put in place without a central monitoring system. Whilst we recognise the potential merits of a CMS, several practical concerns have been raised that will need further work to address. These include how a CMS would operate within a framework of ongoing machine number reductions in the territory; how the cost of implementation and ongoing operation of a CMS could be reduced; the cost-sharing arrangements between the club industry and taxpayers in the implementation and ongoing operation of a CMS; and the interaction with nearby New South Wales venues, given the ability to circumvent an ACT CMS through access to unlinked machines just across the border in New South Wales.

These are issues that we would like to see adequately addressed before we could support the implementation of a CMS. Discussion on these matters is ongoing, and workable solutions may be found in a future Legislative Assembly, but this will only occur in an environment where these issues are put on the table and are discussed in a way that is sensible and practical. Those discussions have been ongoing, and they

have resulted in some progress—progress that was outlined in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. Some of this will be achieved in this term of government.

Other areas, like the CMS, were not explicitly part of the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. From here, it is important that the areas of agreement are quickly progressed. Judging by the amendment that Mr Parton has moved in relation to the inquiry, there would appear to be unanimous agreement that that pathway should be pursued, and I welcome that.

I also welcome a commitment to further reduce the number of machines to 3,500 by passing the bill that the Minister for Gaming has introduced and that we will debate this week. We strongly support that. We also welcome the agreement with the Greens political party to take a more immediate step to reduce harm by further restricting the hours of operation of EGMs. That can be done by regulation and could come into effect, following a period of a regulatory impact statement, early in 2025—many years ahead of some of the other elements of harm reduction that we are talking about; it should be possible to progress this in the next term of the Assembly. So the fundamental premise of Mr Braddock’s provocative motion, that reform is not possible, is proven false by the outcomes already achieved and the pathway that lies ahead.

Politics is the art of compromise. I know that is difficult weeks ahead of an election, but I am pleased—and I acknowledge the work that Mr Rattenbury, I and our colleagues have achieved—to be able to make this commitment this afternoon. I acknowledge there are still points of difference—and there are. They can be worked through, but they are not going to be worked through in an environment like the one Mr Braddock has created this afternoon.

People can choose many different approaches in politics. Generally speaking, provocative, defamatory approaches do not yield outcomes. I make that observation after several decades of active political life. So my commitment, and the commitment of my Labor colleagues, is to work towards the program that we have outlined. There is much common ground, possibly even with Mr Parton and the Liberals, on some elements of this.

I think the community expects that, where we can find agreement, we move forward. But the community also accepts that there are legitimate reasons for disagreement and that the costs associated with particular courses of action need to be considered.

Fundamental for the Labor party is the suite of harm reduction measures that I have spoken about and a continued reduction in the number of gaming machines in the territory. That is what we will work towards, and we welcome the support of any other members in this place that want to see that agenda implemented.

For these reasons, we will not support Mr Braddock’s motion today, but we do stand ready to continue to work with Assembly members to implement further harm reduction measures.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.21): Isn’t this a fascinating piece of theatre that is playing out before us? Every election year here in the ACT we see a faux divorce play out between Labor and the Greens as they seek to pretend to the electorate that, as political parties, they have an entirely different agenda to each other. Well, this time it

is kind of real. The relationship between the two governing parties has broken down to its lowest point in the century so far. Given that Labor and the Greens are the ones actually flying the plane, it is a bit scary for all the passengers.

In the last three weeks, we have seen amendments from Mr Braddock to the now heavily contentious gaming machine surrender bill. That bill has now become a battleground between Labor and the Greens in the gaming space, as Mr Rattenbury and Dr Paterson flex their policy muscles and put on a show. They put on show their ideological dogma while—you could be forgiven for believing—they are both seeking to destroy the entire club sector to appease their progressive bases.

One of Mr Braddock's amendments sought to force the ACT Labor Party to sever all of its ties with the Labor Clubs here in Canberra. The amendment has apparently been ruled by the Government Solicitor's office to be full of legal holes, to the point of being unenforceable. So we now find that previous legislative amendment before us in the form of a motion, even though the Greens know full well that if it were passed it cannot be implemented.

The other thing that fascinates me with this is that is always about the Labor Clubs. Given that this is the only place where there is still any formal relationship between the Labor Party and the CFMEU, I wonder why the Tradies is not included. But I guess, given the rhetoric at that heavily attended event in Woden, they are probably more with you blokes at the moment than with them.

In this motion, we see the worst in the relationship between the two governing partners on show, and it is not terribly becoming. It is difficult to have this debate today without a view to a debate coming later in the week on the gaming machines surrender bill. The Canberra Liberals are deeply concerned that we, as a parliament, are on the verge of passing laws that were simply drawn up as a part of the political gamesmanship playing out between Labor and the Greens. I don't know that that is how we should do it.

We are concerned that many jobs will be lost and an entire sector sacrificed to satisfy the desire of Labor and the Greens to have a loud squabble in this space. So the Canberra Liberals are standing back and attempting to arrive at a sensible conclusion. Then hopefully the three of us—

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MR PARTON: Mr Rattenbury giggles, but I don't know that anyone can question that my negotiation in this space has genuinely been aimed at arriving at a sensible conclusion. I am proposing that we agree, and I know Mr Barr has already made mention of it, to an independent inquiry into the clubs and gaming space. And I have proposed an extensive terms of reference.

As such, I would like to move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after paragraph (1)(g), substitute:

“(h) the Greens want to implement a Central Monitoring System funded by clubs;

- (i) Labor's machine reduction amendments would severely impact the sector; and
 - (j) the reaction from clubs is that either one of these policy proposals will lead to the entire collapse of the sector;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) the Government has made many commitments regarding club diversification yet failed to achieve any of them;
 - (b) the community clubs sector in the ACT supports hundreds of community organisations;
 - (c) there are 43 licensed clubs in the ACT employing over 1,700 staff and supporting huge local supply chains in food and beverage;
 - (d) clubs manage and maintain much sporting infrastructure including 400 hectares of greenspace for community use and support nearly 400 sporting groups;
 - (e) over the last decade clubs provided over \$150 million in community contributions;
 - (f) clubs contributed over \$300 million in gaming taxes in that same period; and
 - (g) during the Covid period, Canberrans flocked to Queanbeyan clubs during the 6-week period when ACT clubs were closed;
- (3) calls on the ACT Labor Party to:
- (a) sever all of its connections to the Canberra Labor Club to eliminate its conflict of interest; and
 - (b) donate \$6,100,000 to the Alliance for Gambling Reform – an amount equivalent to that derived from poker machines to establish the 1973 Foundation; and
- (4) further calls on the ACT Government to establish an independent inquiry into the future of the ACT club industry. This inquiry would examine and make recommendations in relation to:
- (a) potential changes to taxes, charges and regulations which are inhibiting the sector's ability to diversify businesses;
 - (b) skills requirements and training, including specific training support programs for employees who may need to exit the industry through industry rationalisation;
 - (c) practical options, timelines, and assistance measures for helping the sector significantly reduce its reliance on electronic gambling machine (EGM) revenue;
 - (d) adoption of evidence based, evaluated harm minimisation initiatives that are scale appropriate in terms of technology options and financial implications;
 - (e) the community contribution scheme and how it's impact can be maximised;
 - (f) mechanisms for establishing an ongoing transitional funding model to support industry and related community activities over a 20-year period;

- (g) determining the real financial contribution the ACT licensed community club sector contributes to the ACT economy, Government, the community, and sporting sectors, especially with respect to facilities management;
- (h) the cross border economic relationship between the ACT and NSW jurisdictions in terms of the revenue generated by the clubs sector and any negative impacts to the ACT economy to the benefit of the ACT adjacent communities in NSW should regulations inhibit the viability of clubs in the ACT;
- (i) the value of harmonisation between NSW and ACT regulation on harm minimisation objectives and the role positive or otherwise the ACT club industry plays in minimising gambling harm;
- (j) examining the extent to which the ACT Government needs to focus on online and other forms of gambling;
- (k) review the extent to which ACT Government EGM gambling harm initiatives encourage a move to other gambling types rather than reduce the incidence of gambling harm; and
- (l) investigate any possible conflict of interest arising from the connection between the ACT Labor Party and the Labor Clubs in Canberra.”.

The Canberra Liberals are the only party in this Assembly that is genuinely mindful of the huge commitment that our clubs make to this city. As a Tuggeranong resident, I cannot imagine the southside without the Vikings Clubs, the Southern Cross Club, the Calwell Club and the Burns Club. I haven't missed anyone?

There is never a month goes by when I do not frequent at least one of those venues, for so many reasons. They form the centrepiece of entertainment and hospitality in the valley, and Tuggeranong would be a much less vibrant place without their existence. Dr Paterson asserts that, if the clubs did not have poker machines, they could somehow provide all of the same services that they do now. That is fairytale stuff; they simply could not.

Indeed, the Molonglo Valley will never get to experience the positive impacts of clubs, because of the change to law that Dr Paterson passed in this place earlier in the term. Our clubs are so much a part of the fabric of Canberra, and, if Labor and the Greens have their way, we will be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We will be cooking the goose that laid the golden eggs. And the only reason we will be doing it is to appease a voter base.

We are happy for our Labor and Greens colleagues to slug it out in this motion. As such, in my amendments I have left all of Mr Braddock's motion as it stands. I have left it there. It is time right now to inject some common sense into the debate and call for an independent inquiry into this space.

We need to have a real conversation about taxes and charges, about things that are inhibiting the sector's ability to diversify. We need to have a real conversation about skills requirements and training. We need to have a conversation about practical options, timelines and assistance measures for helping the sector significantly reduce its reliance on EGM revenue.

We need the adoption of evidence-based, evaluated, harm minimisation initiatives that are scale appropriate in terms of technology options and financial implications. It is something which I think is often disregarded in discussions in this place about this area. We are a small city, and we have got to consider scale. We need to examine the Community Contribution Scheme and how its impact can be maximised. We need to determine the real financial contribution that the ACT licensed club sector contributes to the ACT economy, because it is massive. It is massive, particularly when it comes to the community and sporting sectors, and especially with respect to facilities management.

Mr Barr made mention of the fact that we are an island within New South Wales and that, to some extent, whatever we do can be usurped by organisations just over the border. We need to examine the cross-border economic relationship between the ACT and New South Wales in terms of the revenue generated by the clubs sector and any negative impacts to the ACT economy to the benefit of the ACT-adjacent communities in New South Wales.

We need to examine the potential value of harmonisation between New South Wales and ACT regulation on harm minimisation objectives. We are going to have a discussion about central monitoring systems, and I would point out that, of course, they have one going on in New South Wales. Mr Barr has already made mention of the fact that whatever we set up here would not necessarily dovetail with New South Wales, so why are we not heading in the direction of a harmonisation involving the two jurisdictions, so that we can piggyback on that? I know that there have been very early conversations about the potential for that happening, at least in club land, and I just wonder why that is not being considered.

We need to be examining the extent to which the ACT government needs to focus on online and other forms of gambling. We need to review the extent to which ACT government EGM gambling-harm initiatives encourage a move to other gambling types, because, at the end of the day, we just want to make life better for individuals. We do not want to push them to something else. We need to investigate more about it.

We need to investigate any possible conflict of interest arising from the connection between the ACT Labor Party and the Labor Clubs in Canberra. I appreciate the points that Mr Braddock makes in this space, but let us, at an inquiry level, have a look at it. We all understand the history of the 1973 Foundation. I have to say, I sometimes wonder why there was not a decision made to just separate completely and then the argument would be done, but that is up to the Labor Party to sort out.

I understand—it has sort of been suggested by Mr Barr—that Clubs ACT wrote to the Chief Minister regarding a potential inquiry of this nature. My understanding is that the response was quite positive. So I genuinely put this amendment on the table in the hope that we can arrive at a sensible conclusion. Thank you.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.30): I rise to speak to Mr Braddock's motion. I will start by saying exactly what this is. It is a juvenile political stunt. It demonstrates perfectly what the ACT Greens' priorities are—taking political hits, rather than actually reducing gambling harm. By your own admission, Mr Braddock, the amendments that you and your party went public with could easily be challenged

in a court and would cost the taxpayer significantly, so you have pivoted to this stunt of a motion.

There is not much to say on this motion. ACT Labor has not accepted donations from the ACT Labor Club for over 10 years. It is a lucky thing that track records of what people and parties have delivered here are all on the public record, and it is a funny coincidence that gambling harm reform firmly came to a halt over the last four years under a Greens minister.

In the Ninth Assembly, Labor Minister Ramsay reduced the number of authorisations in the territory by more than 1,000 and there was significant reform to the club community contributions scheme. The Chief Minister introduced the betting operations tax and has since increased the tax to 25 per cent. This led to Sportsbet removing their “bets with mates” feature, a very harmful feature, from Canberra consumers.

I introduced a bill last year, which was passed in February, so that the Molonglo Valley and other undeveloped areas of Canberra would never see pokies in their communities. The only bill that Minister Rattenbury has passed this term was the club refuge bill. Under Minister Rattenbury, EGM authorisations have reduced by around 100; however, there are now more machines in operation in the territory than there were in November 2020. Minister Rattenbury and the ACT Greens have not introduced or passed a single piece of legislation or motion in this place in this term to reduce gambling harm.

The ACT Greens have a central monitoring system on the table. The *Canberra Times* yesterday stated:

Mr Rattenbury has previously said that the system would cost less than 5 per cent of poker machines profits over the next 20 years.

That number is approximately \$180 million. Minister Rattenbury also was at pains to stress, through texting, to the ABC yesterday that it was “less than one year’s revenue from machines”. That is also around \$180 million. According to Minister Rattenbury, a CMS costs around \$180 million. I do not think anybody here needs to be told that that is an extortionate cost. Going to the point of my line of questioning to the minister for the last 2½ years, it fundamentally confirms that investment in a CMS is an investment in poker machines. Purchasing a CMS will lock machines into the territory for decades to come—and for what outcomes? To stop a few people that, instead of going from the Hellenic Club to the Mawson Raiders Club, would have to go from the Hellenic Club to Queanbeyan. That is \$180 million to add an extra few kilometres onto someone’s drive.

Labor’s vision is of a territory with minimal access to machines. The research shows that the closer you live in proximity to poker machines, the more likely you are to participate in poker machine play and to experience harm. Research evidence suggests that people living in the towers at Woden are nearly six per cent more likely to experience gambling harm than someone living in the Molonglo Valley.

ACT Labor recognises that this is a long-term plan to address harm. We also need short-term measures such as cashless gaming, along with a raft of harm reduction

measures. These measures will also face the Queanbeyan issue, but they will not cost \$180 million.

Clubs have already been proactive in their engagement in the cashless gaming space. I know of at least one club that has said to Minister Rattenbury over this term that they would have been happy to have been a cashless trial site, but there has been no interest from the minister.

The ACT Greens only woke up this year to the fact that they committed to addressing gambling harm at the last election. Unfortunately, I do not believe it was my questioning and challenging them on policy debates that woke them up; it was the forthcoming election.

What we have heard over the last few months from Minister Rattenbury and colleagues is that it is Labor holding up reform, but every story has two sides. From my perspective, questioning a Greens policy position of \$180 million expenditure has exposed a rigid, inflexible party that prioritises ideology and grandstanding over practical solutions and evidence. The current motion is a case in evidence.

I would also like to rebut Mr Braddock's words in his speech when he said that the gambling industry cannot be trusted to monitor themselves. I am not sure what he thinks a central monitoring system is or who would be the central monitor. In all other states and all other jurisdictions, the central monitoring system is run by the gambling industry—Tabcorp, in many states. This would mean handing over \$180 million to the gambling industry to monitor the gambling industry.

The harm experienced by people in the territory from pokies is an incredibly serious issue and one that I have been committed to for nearly two decades. Unfortunately, it is an issue that is absolutely lost in these political games that the Greens prefer to play. Thirty-one per cent of Canberrans experience gambling harm. Right now, one in three people who are sitting at EGMs in Canberra—and, believe me, there are many people sitting at a pokie machine right now—are experiencing harm. Instead of debating legislation to reduce that harm and save people's lives and livelihoods, we are here discussing this motion.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (3.36): I rise today to speak in support of Mr Braddock's motion regarding reducing gambling harm. It seeks to break the nexus that is potentially impacting on our government's ability to implement meaningful and evidence-based reform.

I come to this debate having worked for many years to achieve gambling reform, in an attempt to protect the community from products that are designed to be addictive and which have done incredible damage to many individuals and families in the ACT. In my work in the community sector and on ACAT, I have seen the real-life impacts of gambling harms on people's lives, which prompted my work and passion in this area.

I have sat on the Gambling and Racing Commission board in a designated position with gambling harm expertise and pushed for the commission to take a public health approach to gambling harm. When I became concerned that the regulator could not effectively deal with gambling harm due to the policy and governance settings,

I resigned from the commission. In doing this, I noted that the government was doing a good job, but the settings were highly problematic. I was keen to advocate for changes in government policy.

Following this, I co-founded the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance with a group of like-minded advocates committed to ensuring that we got better policy around gambling harm. Research commissioned by the alliance found that, contrary to the vision of ourselves as a progressive community, in the area of gambling regulations we were laggards, influenced significantly by our location in the middle of New South Wales, the pokie capital of the world. It was surprising to learn just how far behind we were, with little and poor regulation. The alliance also commissioned research to identify some of the key tools and mechanisms that could reduce gambling harm.

We also found that the community was with us. Community sentiment research commissioned found that, overwhelmingly, there was support from the community to bring in much stronger laws to regulate poker machines. Despite this, there is no doubt that reform in this area is incredibly difficult. We are up against powerful vested interests with deep pockets—money, essentially, that has come from the depths of human despair.

The seminal Productivity Commission report of 2010 laid out some of the key things that were needed. They essentially said that a core component was to tackle the design features of a product designed to be addictive. We also saw at a national level the furious attacks led by an industry hell-bent on protecting profits and stopping regulation.

However, over the last two decades we have seen some reforms. Previously, ACT Labor suggested that pokie machine licences should be increased according to the population—yes, a bit like doctors—and now there is a begrudging understanding that there is a need not only to limit growth but to reduce numbers.

Let us remember how we got this reform around the reduction in numbers. Let us reflect on the minimal shifts we have seen. It has been because of the ACT Greens pushing for reform. The reduction in pokie machine numbers occurred due to the parliamentary agreement in the Ninth Assembly, which included the Greens' proposal to reduce numbers. This happened after Labor decided to conduct negotiations on pokie reform—having said specifically that they would not do this—via the media in the lead-up to finalising the agreement. We were able to get this reform into the negotiated agreement.

Again, in the lead-up to the 2020 election, the ACT Greens took a strong platform to the election, including additional reform to progress, in this term of government, a further reduction in numbers and to deal with the design features of machines. Particularly in a jurisdiction where we essentially have mini-casinos in our suburbs, there is no doubt that less machines can help, and particularly when we can achieve pokie-free venues.

However, we often see that, when numbers in a venue are reduced, the practical effect is that the remaining machines become more profitable. When we are looking at a timeframe of 20 years, we need to recognise the harm being done by the machines while they remain on the floors of clubs all over Canberra.

I am the mum of two young men who have recently turned 18. I have seen firsthand the predatory behaviour of the gambling industry towards them and their friends. This industry has successfully socialised and normalised gambling, both online and in real life. These young people, and all young people across Canberra, do not have 20 years to wait to deliver half-hearted reform through a reduction in numbers. Thankfully, in my household's case, they have a parent who has countered the inducements with evidence and warnings, but many households do not have this.

For many years, the evidence has been that some of the most impactful ways we can reduce harm involve dealing with the design features that make pokies addictive. In more recent times, opportunities to make mechanisms such as self-exclusion actually work have also emerged.

The last two elections have seen the ACT Greens bring strong, evidence-based reform to the table. Some of these reforms have hit significant technical barriers. It could be suggested that designers of machines have made it far more difficult than it has needed to be. That is why identification of the use of tools such as a central monitoring system to deliver harm minimisation mechanisms is a really exciting possibility.

It is useful to reflect that it is pretty unbelievable that a multimillion-dollar industry is operating on a manual, paper-based system. We are the only place in Australia where this is the case. This is an industry that has significant integrity risks, and it is pretty extraordinary that the industry has been able to duck the costs associated with appropriate management of these products.

However, we now have a situation where there is further incentive to introduce a system that will also facilitate significant opportunities to reduce harm, not in 20 years but in two years, yet we have been stalled in moving this option forward. I wonder why.

I commend this motion to the Assembly.

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) (3.44): The motion from Mr Braddock today is not just rhetoric; it is an important policy issue that we need to debate. Minister Rattenbury has previously noted in this place that the 2019 ACT Gambling Survey found that approximately 34,000 ACT adults are at-risk gamblers. The Productivity Commission's report *Gambling*, in 2010, highlighted that an increase in the rate of gambling harm is associated with the increasing density of gaming machines.

There is a clear relationship between domestic violence and the density of pokies in our community. Research published in 2017 shows that police recorded 20 per cent fewer domestic and family violence incidents and 30 per cent fewer domestic violence assaults in postcodes with no pokies compared to postcodes with at least 75 machines per 10,000 people in Victoria. Gambling addiction fuels domestic and family violence, resulting in more frequent and more severe incidents of violence.

According to a study published in the journal of the Society for the Study of Addiction on 21 August this year, Australians lose more money on gambling per capita than any other country in the world, and 90 per cent of that is spent on pokies.

Gambling has real impacts across our community. According to the study, each 10 per cent increase in annual gambling expenditure in New South Wales is associated with a 7.4 per cent increase in assaults, a 10.5 per cent increase in break-and-enter dwelling offences, a 10.3 per cent increase in break-and-enter non-dwelling offences, an 11 per cent increase in motor vehicle theft offences, an 8.2 per cent increase in theft from motor vehicle offences, and a 7.4 per cent increase in fraud offences. It is not just New South Wales that has this issue.

I had a conversation some years ago with a Victorian police detective. When he went on shift in the Melbourne CBD, he said his quickest way of finding someone who was actually in the act of committing an offence, like breaking into a car, was to just go for a walk near the casino. That sounds like something I would expect to hear. It is a pretty well-known problem. Many years ago, I used to actually park my car next to the local police station between the two biggest pokies venues in Woden while I worked in the town centre all day. My car was broken into so frequently that I used to leave the glove box open and empty and did not even bother fixing the door locks anymore.

A study published in the *Lancet* in December 2023 found that 4.2 per cent of suicides in Victoria were because of gambling. Studies in Sweden published in November 2023 showed that gambling dependence is associated with higher risks of cardiovascular disease, respiratory related disease and diabetes. In addition, based on the induction screening questions for new arrivals at the Alexander Maconochie Centre by Corrective Services, I expect that there are at least eight or nine people in the AMC right now who would tell us, if their voices were able to be heard in this place, that gambling is a contributing factor to the offences that they were charged with.

In my work in Canberra, I have seen the impact of gambling harm on families who are unable to put food on the table or maintain their housing, community organisations who have experienced losses from fraud, and people who have ended up in the justice system because of their addiction to gambling. Reducing the number of machines in our communities will make a real difference to the outcomes of people's lives and to the ACT budget. We can make a real difference in harm reduction by implementing cashless gaming and a central monitoring system, while also reducing machine numbers. We can do both.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for his tireless work on reducing the harm of gambling through every method available to us and for always doing this through consultation with gambling harm reduction advocates, clubs and the Canberra community. His patience, thorough policy work and attention to the detail of how to make these changes most effective, and persistence in trying to overcome every barrier put in front of him—and I note that our Attorney-General cannot bring a bill to this place without cabinet agreement—is a demonstration of his commitment to good outcomes, as well as the right process to get there. It is a privilege to work with an Attorney-General with his skill and integrity.

It would be good if the Labor political party were able to find a way to work with us and support the harm reduction work that we have been trying to achieve during our time in government by implementing a central monitoring system in addition to other

harm reduction measures and machine number reductions. This is an issue about which I think good policy is more important than politics. I would welcome members of any political party working with us so that, together, we can reduce gambling harm in the community through evidence based and best practice measures, including the CMS.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (3.49): I rise in support of Mr Braddock's motion today. Why have we ended up in the position where we have to formally call on the ACT Labor Party to sever its connections with poker machines? It is not a position we wanted to end up in, but events have shown that this is necessary. The Labor Party, and Labor members of government, have shown that they are unable to approach gambling policy in a reasonable and evidence based way. Their approach to gambling has been characterised by inertia and resistance for many years. The Greens have managed to lock in harm reduction measures, primarily by reducing the number of poker machine licences in the ACT.

Contrary to the version of this view that has been presented by Dr Paterson this afternoon, we have reduced numbers from over 5,000 in 2015 to about 3,700 today. That is because the Greens put it into parliamentary agreements. We needed to lock in those changes through those parliamentary agreements. I will talk more about machine reductions shortly. It has become clear that it is not a sufficient strategy for reducing harm. It is really in this term of government that Labor's compromised approach to gambling policy has been exposed. It has reached an untenable point. I had hoped that in this term of government we could make strong progress on gambling reform. I have been the ACT's gaming minister and, with access to the latest research and developments, with the expertise of the JACS Directorate, and with information and advice provided by community sector representatives and experts, I developed a proposal for the government to consider. That proposal is best practice, costed and expert endorsed, and it is one that would most effectively reduce gambling harm from pokies.

I have talked about this before, but, to reiterate, the proposal would introduce mandatory account based gambling for pokies, mandatory loss limits and time limits would apply to anyone who wants to use ACT poker machines, and a central monitoring system would link pokies to make harm reduction measures effective and territory wide. The proposal I have presented is universally lauded by credible harm reduction advocates as an effective way to protect people from gambling harm from poker machines. It is what the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance is calling for, it is what the national Alliance for Gambling Reform is calling for, it is what the ANU Centre for Gambling Research endorses as the way to reduce harm, and it is what the Justice and Community Safety Directorate researched and developed as an effective proposal.

It is important to emphasise that the Labor Party's reaction to this proposal has been somewhat odd. I do not know whether to use the words recalcitrant, obstructionist, dismissive or undermining, but there has been a lot of wasted time and effort. Members may have seen my public comments where I said that my Greens colleagues and I always endeavour to work closely with Labor Party colleagues to achieve progressive outcomes for the community. But gambling reform has evoked a strange

reaction, and now we are forced to call it out, because Labor seems to have a difficult position on this issue. The Labor Party's response has really lacked evidence and has been especially political, in my view. I cannot get support for the measures that I put forward as gaming minister.

The Chief Minister commented publicly, saying that the Greens are coming out with last-minute ad hoc proposals close to the election. Nothing could be further from the truth. The proposals were developed over the course of this term and taken to government for endorsement repeatedly. We are not talking about this because of the election; we are talking about this because this term of government is about to end and the Labor Party still has not supported the reforms, despite my best efforts and working well within the process. Time is almost up and, when this type of obstruction occurs, it does need to be called out.

The Labor Party blocked and dismissed the best practice harm reduction proposal and instead decided to endorse an alternative proposal. In fact, the new Labor Party election commitment is the first one I can recall. That surprise proposal usurped the government and cabinet process. That policy was put out in a hasty and non-consultative fashion. You can tell by the reaction of the clubs; they said they were completely blindsided. It is as though Labor desperately needed to avoid the good harm reduction initiatives that were making their way through government processes. As the minister working on this issue, that is what it looks like. It is like Labor said, "Quick, let's dodge this policy by whipping out our own substitute." The key part of the Labor gambling policy is to reduce the number of electronic gaming machines to 1,000 over the next 20 years. That is two decades, or five terms of the Assembly.

One of the important things to understand about reducing the number of pokies is that, on its own, it is not going to protect people from harm. Reducing the number of pokies, even by large amounts, does not necessarily lead to a reduction in expenditure or harm. I recently took the opportunity to meet with Dr Charles Livingstone, one of Australia's foremost gambling researchers, and asked him for the latest research on this question. Does reducing machine numbers reduce harm? He was very clear that the research showed that simply reducing numbers, even by a large amount, does not necessarily lead to a reduction in harm. He talked about numerous examples that have been studied from around the world, including Australia, where machine numbers were reduced, but expenditure stayed the same or increased. The machine reductions did not correlate with reduced harm, and that has been the same pattern in the territory. Dr Livingstone also pointed out the machines tend to migrate to areas of disadvantage. It is like they magically know how to cause the most harm. If you still have 3,000, 2,000 or 1000 machines, there is going to be a lot of harm occurring, unless you put the proper protections on them, like the ones that I have been working on, developing and calling for. I add for the record that Dr Livingstone also told me that the best way forward was to introduce the initiatives that I proposed to government.

Under Labor's proposal, machine numbers will be reduced over 20 years. That means there will be thousands of pokies around the city in the coming decades and they will continue causing harm to Canberrans, probably not even at a reduced rate. Those thousands of machines need guard rails on them to protect people from harm. The Labor proposal also does not ensure universality of harm reduction, which is essential to give these measures efficacy. To achieve this universality, we need a central

monitoring system, or a CMS. It is the essential backbone to harm reduction measures like loss limits, and so far we do not have agreement to develop such a proposal.

The national Alliance for Gambling Reform critiqued ACT Labor's proposal, saying that it lacked the centralised monitoring system to link together venues and allow binding and default loss limits. The founder of the Hope Project and co-chair of Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance was more direct in her criticism. She pointed out that it would leave a high level of gambling harm in the territory for decades. She said that this approach must leave Canberra's gambling industry "rubbing its hands together with glee".

One reason Labor have said they do not support this necessary and effective CMS is the cost. My response, as has been noted today, is that the pokies earn clubs around \$180 million to \$190 million a year, every single year, in net gaming machine revenue. Members of cabinet have seen preliminary costings and know that for a fraction of those profits we can have a CMS to protect people from harm. What Dr Paterson did not mention in her observations on costing is the point I was making: it was a 20-year cost to operate the system.

Why are we not willing to invest in measures to stop the pernicious community harm from poker machines? That is a values question for every member of this place. I know where the Greens members stand. I also point out to anyone concerned about costs that the alternative policy undoubtedly has a cost as well. Despite a range of public commentary about costs, we have not seen that revelation. Where are the detailed costings for that policy? Let us scrutinise in them full.

I have been challenged with: "Where are your costings?" They have gone to the cabinet process. Everyone in this place understands that that puts limits on me, and I have been steadfast in endeavouring to stick to those rules. Let us understand it in full and make sure that we are having an honest conversation about it. To answer the question: there are no published costs for the alternative proposal, despite it being used to displace the effective and costed proposal that I have presented.

I think Mr Braddock's motion seeks to draw on an important theory. He highlights the continuing compromise in connection to poker machines through the Labor Club's operation of hundreds of poker machines—436 licences; around 12 per cent of the ACT's poker machines. In relation to this issue, I will quote Dr Charles Livingstone again, who I mentioned earlier. He said publicly about Labor's connection to pokies money:

It raises a significant conflict of interest for the Labor Party ... to actually be regulating gambling machines when the party has a really powerful vested interest. They're impossibly compromised.

That is the basis of this motion today. For all of the commentary on the motivations for this motion, that is the core of it. I am pleased to see that there is now discussion and that we may be able to make progress in the future. We are committed to that. Out the other side of this, we will need to knuckle down and keep trying to work, but we have a long way to go. I am frustrated that we have not been able to make progress in this term, because we could have, and there is one clear reason why we have not.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.59), by leave: I move the following amendments to Mr Parton’s proposed amendment, together:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(h), substitute: “the Greens want to implement a Central Monitoring System funded by the clubs in possible conjunction with the ACT Government;”.
2. In paragraph (1)(j), omit “clubs”, substitute “ClubsACT”.
3. In paragraph (2)(a), omit “any”, substitute “many”.

I would like to thank Mr Parton for proposed his amendment. Okay, sure, they are not the words I might necessarily use, but in the spirit of getting the Canberra Liberals’ support for the core concepts I can agree with him on some small amendments for accuracy, and they form the basis of the amendments I have circulated in my name.

On Mr Parton’s proposed 1(h) I want to emphasise that the Greens do not actually mind how the CMS is funded. The budgetary constraints on the government helping to pay for it, or even fully paying for it, for that matter, are, interestingly, ones for the Treasurer. That is open to him to resolve.

As for Mr Parton’s 1(j), I would like it to be clarified that ClubsACT, who are the ones who are doomsaying the sector, do not necessarily speak for all clubs and most certainly not for those who have been without pokies for some time, such as the Polish Club or the Irish Club. Therefore, I am seeking to clarify exactly who is making that statement.

On Mr Parton’s 2(a), I want to be clear that the achievements here are not necessarily zero. There is a lot we would like to have done and that I can accept we failed to achieve, but as long as the legislation passes on Thursday we can still see the conclusion of the voluntary and compulsory surrender scheme to bring the number of machines in the territory down to 3,500. Thank you.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.01): I will be very brief and say that we will be supporting the Braddock amendments. Some of it is not quite accurate. I have spoken to a lot of clubs about the duelling amendments from Greens and Labor and I think they all are extremely concerned, but that is cool. We are happy to let that ride.

Mr Barr spoke earlier about changes that need to be made in this sector. He signalled changes to hours of operation for poker machines. I would like to put on the record that the Canberra Liberals are certainly happy to embrace that. Obviously, submissions would have to be made with regard to regulatory impact, but we certainly do not have any qualms whatsoever with that. Maybe, after discussions like this, the three entities here are potentially getting to consensus on more things than we were some time ago. Let us hope that is the case.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (4.02): Strip away all of the grandstanding and there is actually some progress. I welcome Mr Parton’s support of that further harm reduction measure. I could spend the rest of the afternoon taking issue with certain elements of the commentary that we have just heard in this debate, but I will not. I will make a few brief observations.

The propensity to load everything on the Treasurer and the taxpayer to avoid hard decisions is one that I have experienced a lot in this role. I think anyone who is the Treasurer always will. A value for money assessment is something that is undertaken regardless of whether the cost of a CMS is borne entirely by Canberra taxpayers, entirely by the club sector or by some combination of the two; \$180 million is not an insubstantial amount of money, so it does demand a degree of scrutiny. I think that is reasonable. I would be stunned if any member in this place thought that \$180 million would fly through, regardless of who was paying, on a single pass. Yes, what we have heard today does demonstrate that there is a higher level of rigour and scrutiny in relation to public expenditure, and so there should be.

In relation to this figure being in the public arena, I am glad it now is. I wrote to the gaming minister some time ago, authorising its release. It is now in the public arena, and that is a good thing because it might sharpen the focus on why \$180 million, so easily got around simply by going across the border, is a legitimate issue to debate, and why I raised it in my opening remarks. When you are investing that much money, you want it to work. The suggestion that there would be no other guardrails around gaming machines, as part of the policy that we have put forward, is manifestly untrue. I outlined in great detail the measures that we would intend to complement an ongoing reduction in the number of machines.

Essentially, what we are all arguing about in the end is: will it be possible to have some form of lower cost CMS as we reduce the number of machines? I have put this forward multiple times—multiple times—so I reject any assertion that we have not engaged in this debate. The substantive issue is: how do we reduce the number of machines and reduce ongoing harm, and do it sooner rather than later? What we have achieved out of this afternoon, and a number of robust conversations over the last several months, is some progress.

Policymaking can be difficult. Sometimes you do not want to see how the sausage is made. What we are endeavouring to do, and the commitment that I have made and that my colleagues have made, is to continue to talk and to try to make some progress. I am pleased that we have got somewhere. There is more to do. Hopefully, out of this afternoon's debate, further progress may be possible in the future.

Whilst we will not be supporting the amendments or the substantive motion, I accept that the numbers will be against us and it will pass. We will remain committed to the implementation of the policy that we have announced. Again, I repeat the call that those who want to see fewer poker machines in this jurisdiction can support that pathway, together with guardrails on the machines as they are reduced. We should be able to do that in a way that supports the ongoing viability of our community club sector.

That means a gradual transition. It means finding alternative revenue sources. And it means being honest about who is paying and how. Inevitably, that job falls to the Treasurer, doesn't it? Again, I will accept that responsibility and try and find a way through this. We have made some progress today, but the balance of this issue is clearly one that will feature in this election campaign and will sit in the future, with the next Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (4.08): I stand up to reflect on something that I do furiously agree with the Chief Minister on, and that is the necessity of value for money. We now have a range of figures flying around. As in many of these debates, they get zipped around. What is fair to reflect is that the figure we are now discussing, the \$180 million—it is actually less than that, but it is in that ballpark—is also a preliminary costing.

I have been in a difficult position, trying to walk the line on these things. We hear other ministers say, “I cannot put these things out yet,” and: “You’ve got to see the politics on these things as well. You can release the costing on your one but not others.” Let us be frank about that. But, as we judge this, let us reflect on the fact that it is a 20-year operating cost. It is a 20-year cost. It is the set-up cost, plus 20 years of operation. In that time there will be \$3.6 billion of net gaming machine revenue—\$3.6 billion, on current projections. So let us not kid ourselves what we are talking about here.

Let us not kid ourselves about the fact that the alternative proposal also has a cost. At a minimum, on current prices of \$15,000 a licence, it will be \$37.5 million just to buy the licences back. What we know from the club sector is that they think they should be paid more for them, so that number just goes up. And then, if there are to be guardrails—and I am pleased to hear that there will be—that is not cost free, whether it is a digital wallet or some other account-based system which is vaguely referenced.

So, yes, we do need to have a value for money conversation. We need to understand that the number that is out there is a preliminary number. There is a lot to pin on the design features. But if we are going to talk about the cost, let us have an honest conversation where the alternative proposal also gets costed; then we can start to have an apples and apples conversation.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 10

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Braddock’s amendments to **Mr Parton’s** proposed amendment agreed to.

Question put:

That **Mr Parton's** amendment, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15		Noes 10	
Andrew Braddock	Nicole Lawder	Andrew Barr	Chris Steel
Peter Cain	Elizabeth Lee	Yvette Berry	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Leanne Castley	James Milligan	Joy Burch	
Jo Clay	Laura Nuttall	Tara Cheyne	
Ed Cocks	Mark Parton	Mick Gentleman	
Emma Davidson	Shane Rattenbury	Suzanne Orr	
Jeremy Hanson	Rebecca Vassarotti	Marisa Paterson	
Elizabeth Kikkert		Michael Petterson	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Parton's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Government—fuel pricing

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.17): I move

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) Canberra is in a cost-of-living crisis, with the cost of basic goods and services, including petrol, becoming increasingly expensive;
- (b) the most recent Australian Competition and Consumer Commission report on the Australian petrol market, from March 2024, shows that Canberra had the highest average quarterly retail petrol price of any capital city in Australia;
- (c) the report found that throughout 2023, Canberra had the highest average retail petrol price of any capital city in the country;
- (d) according to the FuelPrice Australia website, Canberra's retail petrol price, over the last week, is the highest out of all the capital cities in Australia; and
- (e) according to FuelCheck, petrol prices in Canberra are, on average, 13 cents per litre higher than in Queanbeyan;

(2) further notes:

- (a) on 14 February 2019, the Legislative Assembly established the Select Committee on Fuel Pricing which would, among other things, consider reasons for significant pricing discrepancies within the ACT when compared to other Australian communities and capital cities;
- (b) the Select Committee's report, which was tabled in September 2019, found:

- (i) annual average petrol prices in Canberra were higher than prices in the five largest capital cities between 2012-13 and 2018-19;
 - (ii) Canberra petrol prices were consistently higher than those in Sydney and in other surrounding towns between 2012-13 and 2018-19; and
 - (iii) that it is apparent that the ACT fuel market is not meeting consumer expectations;
- (c) the Select Committee recommended, inter alia, that the Assembly establish a standing committee to monitor fuel pricing and competition in the ACT;
- (d) in its response to the Select Committee report, the ACT Government said “the Government considers the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC) is the most appropriate body to undertake this role in the Territory”;
- (e) in February 2020, the Chief Minister announced the establishment of a fuel price watchdog which the ACT Government would commission to undertake ongoing analysis and reporting on the ACT fuel market to increase transparency and place a continuing eye on fuel prices in the Territory;
- (f) that the ACT Government failed to task the ICRC with the role of monitoring, reporting and analysis of the ACT fuel market;
- (g) that the ACT Government failed to establish a fuel price watchdog; and
- (h) as a result of its inaction, Canberrans continue to pay higher petrol prices than those of any other capital city in Australia; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) report back to the Assembly on 5 September 2024 on the progress of establishing a fuel price watchdog, and the commissioning of the ICRC to undertake ongoing monitoring, reporting and analysis of the ACT fuel market; and
 - (b) apologise to Canberrans for failing to implement measures in the Territory that would have likely led to lower petrol prices for Canberrans, particularly during this worsening cost-of-living crisis.

When my colleagues and I are out and about talking to Canberrans, the cost of living is an issue that is consistently being raised with us. I have spoken numerous times in this chamber about the increases to rates, taxes and charges that this Labor-Greens government has slugged Canberrans with. But another issue that is consistently being raised with us is why fuel prices in Canberra are so expensive. Everyone that talks to us about this has the same story: that they can pretty much drive 10 or 15 minutes down the road to Queanbeyan and fill up their tank for at least 10 to 15 cents cheaper than they can in Canberra. To be honest, I struggle to answer that question for them, because it does seem to be a great mystery—one of many when it comes to petrol prices in the ACT.

The ACCC report on the Australian petroleum market which was released in June this year makes some interesting findings. It showed that Canberra had the highest average quarterly retail petrol price of any capital city in Australia and that, when petrol prices had eased in Hobart and Darwin over the last quarter prices, in Canberra had

increased. It showed that the high petrol prices in Canberra were long term. It found that, throughout 2023, Canberra had the highest average petrol price of any capital city in the country.

Last week, when I stood in this place, in bringing my cost-of-living motion—a motion that not a single member from Labor and the Greens supported—I highlighted some sobering figures from the *ACTCOSS 2024 ACT cost of living report*. The cost-of-living crisis in Canberra is worsening. Not only is it worsening but its impact is deepening on the Canberrans who are already doing it tough—and these high petrol prices are contributing to that.

What we saw last week from this heartless government was a clear demonstration of just how out of touch it is with what is happening outside this place and its utter denial about how tough things are out in the community. Every Labor and Greens member who contributed to the debate on my cost-of-living motion stood here in this very chamber and congratulated themselves for concessions they say are helping those Canberrans who need it the most. They even went further and took all the credit for some commonwealth supports which, apparently, according to them, magically only appeared under the federal Labor government. But there is one thing they actually can take credit for—one thing that, either through inaction or deliberate policy decisions they have made that they are responsible for—and that is the higher petrol prices that Canberrans keep having to pay.

Back in 2019, this Assembly established the Select Committee on Fuel Pricing that would, among other things, consider reasons for significant pricing discrepancies within the ACT when compared to the two other Australian communities and other capital cities. The select committee heard from a range of witnesses, including individual fuel retailers, community groups, the ACCC and industry groups. In September 2019, the select committee tabled its report, which made a number of findings, including that annual average petrol prices in Canberra were higher than prices in the five largest capital cities between 2012-13 and 2018-19, that Canberra petrol prices were consistently higher than those in Sydney and in other surrounding towns between 2012-13 and 2018-19, and that it is apparent that the ACT fuel market is not meeting consumer expectations.

In its final report, the select committee made a number of recommendations—the first one being that the Assembly establish a standing committee to monitor fuel price and competition in the ACT. The reasoning behind this recommendation was evidence that showed that, when there is scrutiny on petrol prices, prices do come down. In December the Labor-Greens government tabled its response to the select committee's report. The government agreed in principle to recommendation 1 and said:

We note that the benefits of scrutiny of the market was supported by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, who have suggested that lower prices observed in Canberra in April and May 2019 may have been influenced by the Select Committee's inquiry.

However, rather than establishing a separate Assembly committee to undertake this role, as recommended by the select committee, Mr Barr's response was:

The government considers the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC) is the most appropriate body to undertake this role in the Territory. The Government will consider arrangements for engaging the ICRC to undertake the recommended monitoring, reporting and analysis role for the ACT fuel market.

So what we have is Mr Barr acknowledging that, when there is scrutiny on petrol prices, as was the case during the select committee inquiry, we do see petrol prices going down. In acknowledging that, Mr Barr said that the ICRC would be the most appropriate body to undertake the role. I do not disagree with that. The ICRC is well equipped and well positioned to undertake the recommended monitoring, reporting and analysis for the ACT fuel market, just as Mr Barr said in his response.

Mr Barr went further. In February 2020, he announced that he would establish a fuel price watchdog. At the time, he said that the government would establish an oversight body to monitor the ACT fuel market, encouraged by the fact prices went down last year's two inquiries. At the time, Mr Barr announced that the government would also commission ongoing analysis and reporting on the ACT fuel market to increase transparency and place a continuing eye on fuel prices in the territory. That was February 2020.

I acknowledge that shortly after this announcement the pandemic struck and obviously that became the primary focus of governments all around the world. In fact, fuel prices actually did come down during the pandemic—a very welcomed relief for all Canberrans; indeed, a welcome relief for all Australians. So I guess we could understand that this commitment, this promise, to the people of Canberra, was pushed aside as we all struggled with the pandemic. But we are now more than four years on—in fact, almost five years on—and many Canberrans are facing the worst cost-of-living crisis they have ever experienced. And, guess what, nothing further on addressing fuel pricing has been done. Mr Barr has not tasked the ICRC with the role, in his own words, to “undertake a monitoring, reporting and analysis role for the ACT fuel market,” as he said he would in December 2019. This was confirmed in stark evidence during recent estimates hearings when the ICRC Commissioner confirmed that Mr Barr had not only failed to task them with the role of fuel price monitoring, reporting and analysis but also had never asked them to look at fuel prices again following their 2019 report.

When we asked the commissioner what actions the ICRC had taken in relation to petrol prices in the ACT the commissioner said, “Petrol is not one of those things that we have an ongoing role in.” He went on to say: “But we have not had any involvement in it since we did that report a few years back.” And Mr Barr has not established a fuel price watchdog to monitor the fuel market, as he said, in February 2020. So, aside from getting the New South Wales FuelCheck scheme extended to the ACT, he has done nothing—and it is Canberrans who have all paid the price, literally.

When Mr Barr was recently asked about rising petrol prices in Canberra and the impact that they were having on the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, Mr Barr's response showed how totally out of touch he is. His solution was to tell Canberrans, who are

struggling to put food on the table or turning their heaters off in the winter to save on electricity, that they should just buy an electric vehicle instead. His answer to rising petrol costs is to not do what he promised to do, not what he even acknowledged would be likely to bring down petrol prices. No, his answer was to suggest people buy an EV with an average price tag of between \$60,000 and \$90,000. How incredibly out of touch is this?

Last week in this place, we debated the long list of broken promises that this Labor-Greens government has made to the people of Canberra. The defence that we heard from Mr Barr was beyond belief. He blamed everything and everybody for his government's multitude of failures and, in what I can only describe as a bizarre brain fart, he even tried to accuse the opposition of not delivering on election promises. I thought that was just downright bizarre. I am sure when we hear Mr Barr's response to this motion there will be excuse after excuse after excuse. It is, after all, what all Canberrans are used to.

Mr Barr leads a government which has been in office for 23 years. That is over two decades. Mr Barr himself acknowledged that, when there is scrutiny on petrol prices, as there was during the 2019 Assembly inquiry and ICRC inquiry, petrol prices do come down. It was Mr Barr himself who suggested that the ICRC would be the best agency to take on the fuel price monitoring role. But he has done nothing. So every time Canberrans fill up at the petrol station, looking as the cost keeps ticking over, they can thank Mr Barr, who chose to do nothing. Every time they drive through Queanbeyan and Yass and see those lower petrol prices advertised, they can thank Mr Barr, who chose to do nothing. And every time they are looking at their household budgets deciding what to cut this fortnight, they can thank Mr Barr, who chose to do nothing.

This government has once again failed each and every Canberran. It is now time for Mr Barr to front up and explain why he sat on his hands for over four years and did nothing to help rising petrol prices. It is now time to apologise to each and every Canberran for his inaction. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (4.28): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) Australia is experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, with the cost of basic goods and services, including petrol, becoming more expensive;
- (b) this is due to exogenous shocks and a period of high inflation;
- (c) the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) March quarter 2024 *Report on the Australian petroleum market* found Canberra's average retail petrol prices to be 202.0 cents per litre;
- (d) petrol prices increase and decrease in regular patterns in our largest capital cities due to pricing policies, not changes in the wholesale cost of fuel – this cycle does not occur in Canberra, Hobart or Darwin;

- (e) the Australian Institute of Petroleum’s Weekly Petrol Prices Report for the week ending 1 September highlights a Metropolitan Average Price of 189.2 cents per litre in Canberra – over 8 cents lower than Sydney’s at 197.3, and over 10 cents lower than Brisbane’s at 199.6; and
 - (f) before the Government’s intervention, Canberrans were unfairly paying up to 25 cents per litre more than Sydney motorists;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) on 14 February 2019, the Assembly established the Select Committee on Fuel Pricing which considered reasons for significant pricing discrepancies within the ACT when compared to other capital cities;
 - (b) the Select Committee’s report found:
 - (i) annual average petrol prices in Canberra were higher than prices in the five largest capital cities between 2012-2013 and 2018-2019;
 - (ii) Canberra petrol prices were consistently higher than those in Sydney and in other surrounding towns between 2012-2013;
 - (iii) the ACT fuel market was not meeting consumer expectations;
 - (c) on 22 February 2019 the Chief Minister made a referral to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission to undertake a factual analysis of petrol prices and competition in the ACT;
 - (d) prior to the Chief Minister’s intervention, the March quarter 2020 ACCC Report showed on average Canberrans were paying 14.2 cents per litre more than Sydney motorists;
 - (e) the Chief Minister wrote to major fuel operators on 20 April 2020 highlighting unnecessarily high retail margins and indicating the Government was willing to introduce price regulations if the issue was not addressed;
 - (f) the Chief Minister subsequently wrote to major fuel operators on several occasions to remind retailers of the Government’s position and their responsibility to bring pricing in line with other metropolitan centres; and
 - (g) following the intervention, the June quarter 2022 ACCC report revealed that in 2021-2022 Canberrans were paying prices comparable to Sydney;
- (3) acknowledges:
- (a) on 4 November 2022, the Government announced the introduction of the FuelCheck scheme for a 6-month pilot, at no cost to the ACT;
 - (b) during the pilot, consumers enjoyed savings on average of 11 cents per litre on standard unleaded; and
 - (c) in October 2023 the Government committed to the continuation of the scheme, given the fuel price benefits accruing to ACT motorists; and
- (4) calls on the Government to:
- (a) recommit to the continuation of the FuelCheck scheme at no cost to ACT taxpayers; and
 - (b) continue to monitor petrol pricing to ensure retailers do not reinstate unnecessarily high retail margins.”.

The amendment that I have moved reflects both the current circumstances in the territory's fuel market and the work that the government has successfully done to curb price gouging in the market. There is no doubt the cost-of-living crisis being experienced across the country is deeply impacting many families in our community and that petrol prices are part of this. I have not missed the interesting timing of this motion, though, coming only days after the most recent Australian Consumer Petroleum Report for the week ending 1 September, which shows that Canberra's metropolitan petrol prices are 8.1c a litre lower than Sydney and 10c a litre lower than Brisbane!

Historically, Canberrans were paying up to 25c a litre more than Sydney motorists. In 2019, the Select Committee on Fuel Pricing found what Canberrans knew to be true: that they were paying significantly higher prices than metropolitan centres like Sydney and Brisbane and that the market was not meeting expectations. I made a referral to the ICRC, as Ms Lee has indicated, in February 2019 to undertake a factual analysis of the market. The ICRC found that prices in Canberra were consistently higher than other metropolitan centres and that retailer margins were at a level that made Canberra petrol stations far more profitable than those in Sydney. The March quarter 2020 ACCC report showed that, on average, Canberrans were paying 14.2c a litre more than Sydney motorists.

I wrote to all of the major fuel operators in April 2020, highlighting these higher retail margins and unexplained differentials with other major metro regions and, in that correspondence, made it very clear that the government was willing to implement price regulation measures to force the price down. Interestingly, we then saw prices rapidly start to fall and begin to match those in major metropolitan centres. Indeed the June quarter 2022 ACCC report revealed that, over the fiscal year 2021-22, Canberrans were paying prices comparable to those in Sydney.

I say, for the benefit of those opposite, being the party that professes to be the party of the unfettered free market, that we are not influenced by price gouging. Petrol prices are, of course, primarily determined by market forces outside the direct control of the government. The gap between the terminal gate prices and prices at the bowser are determined by retailing costs that include transport, administration and marketing, the costs of running a station, international prices and, importantly for Canberra, sales volumes. I will come back to that matter. There is also the cost of transportation and the high level of competition.

The ACCC, who regularly monitor petrol markets for the government, have found that, alongside Hobart and Darwin, Canberra does not experience what could be described as the saw-tooth petrol price cycle that occurs in other cities. They refer—it is on their website—to a petrol price cycle being a movement in the retail price from a low point or a trough to a high point or peak, and to the following low point. Effectively, when looked at graphically, it looks like a saw-tooth. I quote: "Petrol price cycles do not occur in Canberra, Hobart and Darwin." That is partly to do with the volume of sales in these three smaller markets. That is why the government uses the primary lever available to us to put downward pressure on prices; that is, increased competition and increased consumer awareness.

In November 2022, we introduced FuelCheck. We worked in partnership with the New South Wales government. I want to acknowledge the former New South Wales government, and particularly the former minister, Victor Dominello, for the good work that occurred, and I also thank my ministerial colleagues here, who worked on that.

FuelCheck came about following intensive negotiations between the ACT and New South Wales governments, at no cost to territory residents. We made the case, which was accepted by the then New South Wales government, that tens of thousands of New South Wales residents travel to the ACT every day for school, work, shopping, entertainment and appointments. Extending FuelCheck to the ACT, of course, benefited residents in both jurisdictions. By providing a tool that provides real-time information on prices, transparency was increased for motorists, giving the power of full information, and it provided an easy answer and an easy way for motorists to shop around based on price. That is exactly the advice that the ACCC have provided in their most recent quarterly report. They encouraged consumers to use FuelCheck and highlighted that in the quarter Canberrans could save on average 10c a litre.

In November 2023, due to the benefits being experienced by consumers from FuelCheck, the government announced the continuation of the scheme. I am advised by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, which has been tasked with monitoring pricing and the rationale for changes, that currently fuel prices do not represent price gouging, or breaches in competition law or consumer regulation. The most recent data that shows Sydney prices are nearly 10c higher than those in Canberra at the moment would tend to reflect that finding. Because we do not have a cycle and we have a lower volume of sales, prices do not fluctuate as much in the ACT as they do in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development and the ACCC watch petrol prices carefully to ensure retailers are not reinstating profiteering retail margins. Should structural and unjustified higher retail margins show any signs of returning, price regulation remains an active option for government. The legislation is there to regulate the retail margin.

Retailers should be aware that the anti-market behaviour that occurred before my intervention in 2020 will not be accepted by Canberrans and will not be accepted by the government. Both the ACCC and the ACT government are watching. We get a weekly report on how prices in the ACT compare with other metropolitan areas, with the national average and with other retail areas. That is provided and it is publicly accessible every week. The Australian Institute of Petroleum provides that data on a weekly basis. The ACCC has oversight, and so too has the ACT government. We will continue to encourage competition in the market to put downward pressure on prices.

It is also fair to observe that, increasingly, there are alternatives to petrol and diesel-fuel vehicles and that prices continue to fall for those vehicles. It is not too far away—a matter of years—before there will be price parity because of the significant increase in the volume of production of electric vehicles.

I note that, personally, the Leader of the Opposition drives an EV. Not everyone can afford an EV; that is true. Not everyone can, and there will be a situation, even at price parity and beyond, where not everyone will be able to afford a new car. Increasingly, the second-hand market will deliver more affordable EVs, but, at the moment, even though the ACT sees the highest take-up of any state or territory, electric vehicles are still a significant minority of the overall fleet.

It remains important to have the legislative mechanism to impact retail margins. It is important that there is ongoing weekly oversight. It is important that the ACCC continue to play a role, particularly as it relates to international and national impacts, and it is important that consumers have access through FuelCheck to real-time local information.

It is also important to note that, unlike Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, Canberra, Hobart and Darwin do not have the wild price cycles, because the volume of fuel sold in our smaller markets does not support such a retail model. There will be times, like now, when the price in Sydney is significantly higher than it is in Canberra, and there will be other times, at the discounting end of the Sydney cycle, when petrol will be more expensive here than it is in Sydney. Importantly, the metric that we are focused on is the retail margin and how the ACT compares to the national average. Those are areas of weekly focus. Undoubtedly, consumers have a daily, and even hourly, focus through FuelCheck.

Having made those observations in relation to how price monitoring works, who is undertaking it, its frequency and the ability for consumers in real time to use the technology that is available, I commend the amendment that I have moved to Ms Lee's motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.40): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic that has been provided by Ms Lee moving this motion in the Assembly today.

As the Chief Minister has just outlined, the ACT government has acted to monitor fuel prices and to make more information available for consumers about petrol costs. Our collaboration with the New South Wales government on FuelCheck has been ongoing since 2022. FuelCheck provides consumers with real-time information about fuel prices at service stations across the ACT.

Since the introduction of FuelCheck, petrol prices in Canberra have been mostly consistent with the national average. Between November 2022 and July 2024, the average retail petrol price in Canberra was 194.5c per litre, marginally higher than the national average of 191c per litre. By shopping around with FuelCheck, Canberra motorists were able to enjoy average savings of 15.2c per litre on standard unleaded, or more for premium unleaded or diesel, and to pay less than the national average price for their fuel.

Of course, as the Chief Minister has noted in his amendment, we also have the latest information that has just come out in the Australian Institute of Petroleum weekly petrol prices report for the week ending 1 September, highlighting a metropolitan average price of 189.2c per litre in Canberra, over 8c lower than Sydney's at 197.3c, and over 10c lower than Brisbane's at 199.6c.

This is positive news. Certainly, for Canberrans who are looking to make savings on their petrol, FuelCheck is a really powerful way to make significant savings. Those price differences can apply over some surprisingly short distances, and it is definitely worth it for people to check out those opportunities. Of course, it is pretty simple to do so with the app.

It is also important to reflect that the price of fuel is likely to continue to be a significant cost for households, no matter what monitoring we have in place or FuelCheck apps and the like. Figures from the Australian Automobile Association suggest that fuel costs Canberra households approximately \$102 a week. That is a significant expense for a household. Their figures do have us slightly cheaper than Sydney and Brisbane, and close to the same amounts for other capital cities.

The ACT is not alone in the cost of petrol being a significant household expense. But the bottom line is that it is a significant expense. Obviously, that is an average. There will be households who are spending significantly more than that, where they have to travel further for work or for other household needs. That is an important point to reflect on. Where people are facing a lot of budget pressure across a whole lot of points, petrol is certainly one of those factors.

FuelCheck is one way that we can assist consumers to make informed decisions about their budget and to keep those costs down as much as they can. I heard Ms Lee's comments about this. It is important to think about what else we can do to help Canberrans to minimise those fuel costs. For the Greens, that is about making sure people have viable alternatives to needing to take a petrol vehicle for every trip. There are a range of ways that that can play out. We know Canberrans need to get around. They need to get to work and to school. They want to have a social life and play sport on the weekends. All of these are important things. Making sure that there are other ways to travel around Canberra is important. That involves the full spectrum of things.

To pre-empt the likely mockery that will come from the other side of the chamber in making these points—they are important points—there is no single solution to anybody's transport needs. It is about having options that you can use, depending on the circumstances of the time, the task, the distance and all of those things. We need to make sure that it is easy for Canberrans to walk and cycle for those shorter journeys. It is not only free, generally, but it is great for your health and for the climate.

We want better active travel routes and options to make it easier for people to walk and cycle around our city. We are making progress, and we want to do much more. Public transport will be an option for some people for some journeys. Taking the light rail or the bus is another way to save money. We are committed to enhancing public transport. Again, we have seen progress through particularly the expansion of light rail. It means people can have a choice not to have to drive for every single trip.

Transport Canberra has monthly fare caps of 40 paid trips. For an adult with no concessions, that is \$128.80 a month or \$1,545.60 per annum. If we compare that to household car costs in the ACT of \$23,338 per annum, we can see that, even for medium-size families, cars are a significant expense. If we can enable a household to

perhaps need one, and not two, and replace it with some of these other options, that is a serious cost-of-living saving. We need to make sure those options are there.

Of course, there has been a discussion about EVs. They have significantly cheaper running costs. Where we can get those lower priced vehicles into the market, where we can get second-hand vehicles into the market, that will be suitable for some households as well. Certainly, the ACT government's incentives are making that easier for more people.

In terms of the central issue in Ms Lee's motion, which is how to help Canberrans to minimise the cost of the travel they need to do in this city, there are a range of ways. There is the work that has already been done around the use of FuelCheck, and the pressure that the Chief Minister has outlined in his amendment on the various fuel companies. Canberrans can shop around through being able to access the information and get those savings that can be available to them by targeting those better-value petrol stations. It is also about having alternatives. All of these things are part of the solution, and we are committed to working on all of them.

The amendment moved by the Chief Minister is one that the Greens will support. I think he has laid out important facts that are perhaps not reflected in the original motion. We are certainly agreeable to the call for the government to continue the use of the FuelCheck scheme for ACT residents and continue to monitor petrol pricing to ensure that we are not seeing Canberrans unfairly gouged because people think there is some opportunity to get an extra buck out of residents of this city. We will be supporting the amendment today.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.48): I rise today to speak in support of Ms Lee's motion on the notice paper that pertains to fuel prices in the ACT. I commend her advocacy for everyday Canberrans during this cost-of-living crisis. It is good that at least one party leader in this place is so minded. Canberrans have experienced amongst the highest fuel prices in the states and territories in Australia for far too long. In a cost-of-living crisis, the Labor-Green government has incubated a hostile climate for consumers that is making it tough for Canberrans.

Members would be aware that a select committee published a report in 2019 that addressed the high cost of petrol and diesel in the ACT. The report made several recommendations, among other things, that if implemented would relieve the cost of fuel for Canberrans and encourage price competition among retailers. The report mentioned a finding of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission that annual average petrol prices in Canberra were between 5.2c and 7.1c per litre higher than prices in the five largest cities over the last three financial years.

In August 2022, I moved a motion in this Assembly, in my previous capacity as shadow minister for regulatory services, calling for the government to procure or establish a digital app that tracks fuel prices. In my motion, I used the recommendations of the committee report as I understood that a lot of research and evidence had informed the recommendations. The app would compare prices for all registered retail fuel providers in the ACT, which would increase competitiveness among fuel retailers by implementing price transparency, provide ACT residents with

choice and transparency and provide accessible customer-oriented provision of government services.

From the perspective of reducing red tape, reducing regulatory burden and enabling levers that could support a more robust market, I and the Canberra Liberals knew that the FuelCheck app made sense. While the ACT government could not admit it, the Labor-Greens eventually agreed with this Canberra Liberals motion, after opposing it in the first instance. Later that same year, the scheme was implemented in the ACT, with the New South Wales Perrottet Liberal government expanding the same app used in New South Wales to the ACT. This demonstrates the capacity for change when the Labor-Greens government take a proactive approach by listening to the Canberra Liberals. Despite Mr Barr's greatest attempts to obstruct the motion moved by the Canberra Liberals, the Labor-Greens government could not ignore the very obvious. The proposed app made sense, and I am glad the Labor-Greens followed the Canberra Liberals in introducing this change.

Unfortunately, the Labor-Greens government remain bereft of ideas when it comes to cost-of-living relief. Since this reform, which generously fell into their laps from the New South Wales Liberal government and the Canberra Liberals, unfortunately, Mr Barr has failed to introduce a fuel price watchdog nor to commission the ICRC to monitor, report and analyse ACT fuel marking. Mr Barr has had five years to appropriately action the recommendations of this report and pull levers to relieve the ACT's high cost of living; instead, allowing high fuel prices to further exacerbate costs to ACT consumers.

As of yesterday, the ACT continued to have the highest fuel prices in the country. The ACT has the highest fuel prices in the country, tied only with the Northern Territory. WA residents are paying 12c less per litre for fuel than the average ACT resident. I commend Ms Lee for bringing this motion to this Assembly, and I want to assure Canberrans that an Elizabeth Lee-led Canberra Liberals government will deliver relief in this cost-of-living crisis.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.52): What we saw in response to my motion from Mr Barr was, of course, typical. It was, of course, straight out of the ACT Labor playbook. In his very first line in his speech he spruiked everything that his government has apparently done to address high petrol prices—though we really should not be surprised by Mr Barr's response to my motion.

Mr Barr spoke at length about the market and all of the factors that go into what impacts petrol prices. It was interesting that he obviously has not acknowledged the other factor that goes into that, which is of course the ACT government charges and taxes that are applied to any local business here. We hear from local businesses time and time again about the overburdensome red tape that has been imposed by this government. Even in the construction sector, we saw 125 new regulations last year alone, for example. We hear from businesses, including those who run petrol stations, about the incredible cost of running a business, literally within the borders of the ACT, and the taxes and charges that have been imposed on them. So there are factors that are within the ACT government policy levers that this Labor-Greens government continues to deny and refuses to pull.

Mr Barr also spoke about Hobart and Darwin in comparison to Canberra as the jurisdictions that do not necessarily keep the records in relation to the prices going up and down because of the volume of petrol that is sold here. Obviously, in reading his prepared statement, he missed that I acknowledged—and, in fact, the ACCC report confirmed—that, even when Hobart and Darwin saw some prices easing, Canberra still saw an increase. So I will just repeat that, because it is clear that Mr Barr missed that reference.

It also does not explain the fact that Canberrans are paying more for petrol and they no longer accept the remoteness argument. They just do not. The reason is that they just have to go across the border to Queanbeyan or to Yass and go, “Hold on; how is it that governments can say that the reason that we are paying more in Canberra is because of the remoteness and yet residents in Goulburn and residents in Yass are able to fill up their tank for between 10c and 15c less?” It is easy to compare to Sydney and say, “There are times when we are 10c less than Sydney.” What are you expecting people to do? Do you expect Canberrans to drive to Sydney so they can fill up their tank for 10c cheaper when it is cheaper at that time and then drive back? Is that what this government expects?

This is, again, demonstrative, firstly, of ministers who refuse to take any responsibility for any inaction and/or deliberate government policy decisions that have been taken that have done nothing to save Canberrans when it comes to petrol prices and, secondly, demonstrative of a government that has broken promises. We are talking about a recommendation that Mr Barr himself made, that the ICRC would be best placed to undertake this important role in monitoring, reporting and analysing the ACT fuel market. This was a suggestion made by Mr Barr himself in response to the select committee’s report on petrol pricing. We are also talking about the fact that it was Mr Barr himself who admitted and observed that, when there is scrutiny over the market, prices do come down and, in fact, that they saw it come down during the period when the inquiries were actually on.

Then he sort of started to go on and I think he got confused. It was a really weird combination of the ACCC data and the economic directorate who—what?—weekly keeps an eye on things. It is important to know that the entire purpose of the recommendation by the select committee was about the scrutiny aspect of it and about how it did have an impact—an observation that Mr Barr himself made. I do not know what the point is when you are sort of going, “Hey, look at the ACCC data.” The ACCC’s role is not to scrutinise the ACT fuel market. They obviously have an important role in collecting data so we can see, but their role is not to deliver scrutiny over the ACT fuel market.

Mr Rattenbury said that the central issue for my motion is that we need to ensure that Canberrans have options for travel that is not expensive. While that is true, the central issue that he seems to have missed is that Canberrans can see clearly that they are paying more for petrol than those just across the border and they have every reason, every right and every justification to ask why.

So, today, in response to my motion, Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury have both just confirmed a broken promise to get the ICRC to undertake the monitoring, reporting and analysis role for the ACT fuel market. That is what we have been able to get from this.

Mr Rattenbury spoke at length about having enough options so that Canberrans can travel for cheaper. It is of course the usual response that you expect from the Greens—which of course is car-shaming. He has talked about, “Let’s make sure that we encourage people to get on public transport. Let’s encourage people to engage in active travel,” while conveniently leaving out the fact that he is been at the helm of a government that has eroded the public bus system to the extent where his Greens party got shamed into doing a poor copycat of the Canberra Liberals people-focused public transport policy. Even the Greens party decided, “You know what, mate; you have been in there a long time and you talk the talk but, when it comes down to it, we have people who cannot have public transport because of the decisions that you have made.” Even his own party have come to him and said, “It’s not going to fly.”

What Canberrans can take from this debate is that only a Canberra Liberals government will take seriously the cost-of-living crisis that is plaguing so many Canberrans who are doing it incredibly tough. What Canberrans can take from this debate is that we have seen yet another example of where Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury blatantly break policies and say one thing and deliver nothing at all. Their response to higher petrol prices is, once again, as they double down, “Go and buy an EV.” This is not the government that Canberrans deserve or need during a cost-of-living crisis, and in October they will have the opportunity to kick them out.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 16

Noes 9

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.7.

Debate resumed.

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) (5.06): I am proud to speak in support of the 2024-25 budget. It is an ACT government priority to maintain Canberra as a safe and secure city to live, and Canberrans remain confident in our police and emergency service to be there when they are needed the most.

As the ACT continues to grow, this government continues making targeted, sustainable investment that ensures our emergency services are ready to meet the dynamic needs of our growing and diverse community. The budget will provide more than \$450 million in investments to the ACT emergency services. The investment builds on the sustained substantial investments made by the government and includes \$1.89 million for ACT Policing and \$3.4 million for the Emergency Services Agency and, as part of a broader \$7.661 million investment for ongoing support, a second Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response, or PACER, team. This mental health emergency response program provides an integrated model of care bringing together police, paramedics and mental health clinicians. The PACER model has proved invaluable in addressing mental health crises, offering faster assessments, connecting individuals with vital community resources and reducing the strain on frontline emergency response teams.

The budget will also include new initiatives, worth \$4.5 million over four years, for police and emergency services infrastructure, including \$417,000 in capital funding and \$72,000 to conduct atmospheric testing across all ESA sites; test 11 state emergency service and RFS sites for diesel particulate matter; and capital works to upgrade ventilation systems in selected RFS and SES sites to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those that use those facilities. There is \$3.988 million in funding to provide capital upgrades and restoration across a range of ACT Policing facilities. This includes remediation works to resolve water ingress in the city station, upgrades to the HVAC systems at the city and Winchester Building and associated refurbishment of admin and office spaces, uplifting and improving these facilities for the workforce.

Finally, the budget sees an investment of \$996,000 for discovery and design work under phase 1 of the ACTs participation in the National Firearms Register. The NFR will enable state and territory jurisdictions to share accurate near real-time information on firearms and firearm license holders and comprehensive visibility of the movements of firearms, reducing the number of guns entering the illicit weapons

market. This will enable ACT Police to better manage risk to their safety in engaging with members of the public and investigating crime. The NFR was developed by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission to improve community and law enforcement safety. Its success relies on the participation of all states and territories. To support the implementation of the NFR in the ACT, the commonwealth has committed to meet 75 per cent of the ACT's costs of developing the systems necessarily to participate in the NFR.

As stated, this year's budget builds on previous substantial investments into ACT Policing and emergency services. This has included the unprecedented commitment to enhance community safety, investing \$107 million in the recruitment, training and equipping of 126 ACT Policing personnel; planning and design of additional emergency service sites, including the joint fire and rescue and ACT ambulance stations in Casey; the continued implementation of the ACT Ambulance Service's comprehensive modernised and sustainable service plan; delivering more responsive and patient-centric services; and continued funding to improve information and communication technology to better prepare the territory for the challenges of population growth and more frequent and intensive natural disasters.

I am proud that this budget reflects our government's commitment to ensuring the safety and security of Canberrans, and I commend the bill to the Assembly.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.11): I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 2432*].

This amendment seeks to end the \$41 million public subsidy given by the ACT government to the horse racing industry under the 2022 MOU. The ACT Greens oppose this MOU and oppose providing any public funds to the horse racing industry. We do not think the horse racing industry is providing a public good. We do not think it should be half funded by the public. In order to allow the industry to organise itself, and to ensure that people and animals involved are properly cared for during the transition, we propose that no further MOUs should be made. We further propose that the current funding should be phased out.

This is the third time I have put up a budget amendment on this issue. I am running amendments to phase out the funding over the five years of the MOU. In 2022, I put up an amendment to reduce funding by 20 per cent. In 2023 I put up an amendment to reduce funding by 40 per cent. Both times, ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals voted these down. ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals voted to keep funding the horse racing industry with public money.

This year I am putting up an amendment to reduce funding by 60 per cent. Here are my reasons. The horse racing industry has lost its social licence. In 2022, when I tabled my first amendment, Riotact probed the polls. They asked, "Do you think the ACT taxpayer should support the horse racing industry?" and 1,525 readers voted. Seventy-four per cent of people voted no. The social licence has run out for racing. Three in four Canberrans think the horse racing industry has lost its social licence. Our community does not want to support this industry. They certainly do not want to support it with their money.

This special funding deal lacks scrutiny and transparency. Since 2013, over \$100 million of public funds has been spent or pledged to the horse racing industry under special MOUs. That is over \$100 million with almost no public scrutiny. These funding deals did not run through any kind of grant process. They did not run through a procurement. They did not have to go through a commissioning process. There was no competitive process to decide whether this industry provides the best service or whether this was the best use of public money. Up until very recently there was not even transparency about the deal itself. Previous MOUs were not public. They did not appear on any website. They were not published. There was not usually a line item in the ACT budget to say how much public money was being given to the horse racing industry. It was buried in consolidated amounts. The deals were struck outside of any competitive process and with very little public knowledge.

The current MOU is a public document. This is a really good thing. I suspect that is one of the reasons that people are now so angry about it. They may have been angry before, but they did not know. Now they know how their money is being spent, so the funds are now at least transparent, but they are still allocated outside of any public tender or competitive grant process and outside of any commissioning process.

These are not even annual decisions like most budget decisions. We are constantly told that community groups and arts organisations and various sectors cannot possibly get long-term funding. We are told that budgets are annual and that funding has to be annual. Any funding decision that is not annual needs a very special case made out and probably has to run through a commissioning process or a major public procurement—unless you are the horse racing industry, in which case you can get a five year recurrent fund deal locked in with indexation.

Let us talk about that indexation. The horse racing MOU has permanent indexation built in. The indexation is pinned to CPI. It is CPI minus 0.5 per cent, and it is automatic. Personally, I think if an organisation is worth funding long-term, they should have that funding indexed; it is only fair, otherwise, they go backwards. But the indexation rule is not applied consistently. Across our arts, sports and community sectors, indexation is a really vexed question—some get it, some do not. Many have to lobby for indexation and only get it after an extensive media campaign. Where they get it at all, it often falls short of increased costs. Many organisations do not know if they are getting indexation or not, and, as it is discretionary, they cannot budget for it. Sometimes it is handed out for part of a year only, and sometimes indexation is even announced as a funding increase. But the horse racing industry get this as a right under their MOU. They do not have to beg, and I do not remember seeing a press release each year boasting about how that funding for the horse racing industry was increased again or how they got a record level of public funds this year.

This funding is out of step with the sports sector. Each year the ACT government funds the ACT Brumbies with \$1.8 million and the Canberra Raiders get \$2.6 million. Canberra United get a comparably small \$250,000 per year, plus they are getting a one-off \$200,000 this year, after a fierce public campaign to get a financial lifeline, with a petition tabled by my colleague Laura Nuttall. Community sport and recreation groups can apply for funding under the Club Enhancement Program. Grant recipients get up to \$20,000 each. In 2024 the successful recipients got a combined amount,

between all of them, of \$226,850. There is also a sports Industry Partnership Program for around 14 major sport associations, and between them they got \$1.3 million. There is a State Organisation Support Program for sports groups with a total funding pool of around \$180,000.

If you add up all of those amounts together—the public funding we give to the Brumbies, the Raiders, Canberra United and what every single community sport and recreation club and sports Industry Partnership Program and State Organisation Support Program gets—for over 30 sporting community and professional groups, you will find that the horse racing industry gets more than all of them combined. ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals have decided that the horse racing industry is worth more public support than the Brumbies, the Raiders, Canberra United and all of our community and professional sports groups combined.

This funding is out of step with the arts sector. Our arts organisations are struggling to survive. Costs are rising, leaving organisations struggling to maintain facilities, roll out programs and pay proper wages to artists and arts workers. Many of the arts organisations in Canberra recently signed an open letter pointing out their funding shortfalls. Under this budget, all of our arts centres and arts organisations had to share in a funding pool of \$8 million. That is what they got between them. That is also less than the horse racing industry got. We could literally double the arts budget if we reallocated those public funds. ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals have decided that the horse racing industry is worth more public support than the entire arts sector.

This funding is out of step with the community sector. I am sure every MLA in here has heard the same calls I have. Our community sector is struggling as it never has before. The cost-of-living crisis means more people need their services, and at the same time the cost to provide those services has gone up. We have heard a lot of calls from the community sector during estimates to increase funds. One in particular asked how the horse racing industry got their funding. He said the increase in funding that his entire organisation was asking for, to provide essential safety services to the Canberra community, was less than the indexation given to the horse racing industry—not less than their funds, it was of course far less than the funds given to the horse racing industry. It was less than the CPI index on those funds! He was told by a Labor committee member:

... you are losing me on that one. That is a bit silly and we do not have a lot of time, so we are not going down that path.

I do not think it is a silly question. I think it is a good point and I think it is entirely appropriate to talk about that during an estimates hearing. How does a community sector organisation get the kind of funding deal that ACT Labor gives to the horse racing industry?

Let us talk about tax. We often hear from the horse racing sector about the contribution they make to tax. The ACT government collects a tax on betting. That tax is not collected from ACT horse racing alone. It comes from golf, rugby, motorcross, horse racing in other states, and many other activities all around Australia. I have spoken about this issue in the past, so I will be brief.

The Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, or ICRC, first looked at this over a decade ago. They said that ACT horse racing contributed a small and diminishing amount to our betting taxes. I checked the *Australian Gambling Statistics* a while ago. It indicated around \$250,000 is generated in betting operations tax from bets placed by ACT residents on ACT horse racing. I confirmed this with the Treasurer in estimates in 2022. I put to him the figure of \$250,000. He said:

I imagine it would be something like that. It is a tiny amount of the total point of consumption tax; that is correct.

But they do not get a tiny amount of public funding. They have received and been pledged over \$100 million in public funds under their MOUs!

Now, what about jobs in the horse racing industry? The Canberra Racing Club often talks about the jobs they create. I have been estimating jobs out at Thoroughbred Park at around 20 jobs per year. I based that on reported wages and salaries in annual reports. I would like to take the opportunity to correct the record. I got the figure wrong. It looks like they create around two FTE jobs at Thoroughbred Park. (*Extension of time granted.*) I got that FTE figure from the Canberra Racing Club's *Economic and Social Impact of Thoroughbred Racing in the ACT* report. They are required to produce that report under the MOU. It is not a public document. It should be a public document. I have obtained a copy under FOI and I have started wading through it. The report says they have created jobs with about 3,440 hours of labour each year at Thoroughbred Park. Based on a 38-hour work week this is less than two FTE positions. I am struggling to add these figures up and I have put these numbers to the Canberra Racing Club. I am yet to hear back from them, but whether it is two jobs or 20 jobs out at Thoroughbred Bred, there are not many FTEs created at that racecourse.

What about jobs more broadly? The horse racing industry does create jobs. Again, I have looked at the figures in their economic impact report. In that report they seem to be claiming to create more jobs against ABS classification codes than the ABS says exist, in total, in those classification codes. For instance, for jobs in sports and physical recreation administrative services, it looks like the horse racing industry claims to create every single one of those jobs. It looks like the horse racing industry thinks they are responsible for every job in sports administration. I am still wading through these numbers. I have put this information to the Canberra Racing Club. I am really keen to have a chat to make sure that we can all get our facts straight, but indirectly or directly, I do not think that industry can be creating more jobs than actually exist in the ABS categorisations.

What about the broader economic impact from the horse racing industry? I spoke to the Treasurer about this in estimates in 2022, and again, I will quote directly from the Treasurer. He said this about the economic contribution from the horse racing industry:

... there is clearly a degree of economic activity. There will be various expectations around modelling of what that economic contribution is. Invariably, those who seek to boost the industry's status will overstate that economic contribution and those who seek to end the industry will seek to understate it ... My view, for what it is worth, is that the industry tends to overstate the economic contribution.

The economic impact report produced by the horse racing industry stated a pretty high economic contribution. It claimed that expenditure generated by thoroughbred racing in the ACT was worth around \$81 million. That is clearly not direct expenditure from an organisation with less than \$14 million in turnover. It is also not that big when you compare it to other sectors. The ACT's creative industries contribute \$2.9 billion to our local economy, so \$81 million is not a lot. Even if we take it as reported, noting the Treasurer's word of caution that the horse racing industry tends to overstate their economic contribution, the vast majority of that contribution—60 per cent—is from gambling and from ads about gambling.

There are lots of conversations about gambling harm and gambling advertising at the moment. That is their major economic contribution, according to their own report. I will restate that. The major economic contribution from the ACT racing industry comes from gambling and gambling ads. Do you think most Canberrans support this, or would they prefer to support economic contributions associated with the arts, with sport or with the community sector, or even health or education or the environment? Setting aside that the primary contribution appears to come from gambling and gambling advertising, their economic impact dollar per dollar is also quite low. For every \$1 spent here, they contribute less than \$1 to our local economy. More of that money leaves the ACT than is spent here.

Why is the ACT government propping up a dying industry? There are a lot of reasons I do not think ACT government should be funding horseracing. One of them is that I do not think it is the role of government to prop up an industry that is on the way out—particularly an industry that has lost its social licence.

I have gone through the annual reports for Thoroughbred Park for the last four years from 2019-20, up until 2022-23. These are public documents. They paint a pretty dire picture of where the industry is at. The Canberra Racing Club is delivering some worrying financial results. In the last four years, the ACT government has half-funded the racetrack. During those last four years, and despite our generous funding, they went from a small surplus to a deficit. The 2021-22 deficit was \$327,000. Last year's deficit was \$1.12 million. Cash reserves are dropping. Reserves are half that of what they were four years ago. Their total expenses are rising. Their total liabilities are rising. Liabilities have more than doubled in the last four years.

Attendance is dropping. The Spring Canberra Racing Carnival used to be a two-day event. They have collapsed it into a one-day event. Four years ago, it got around 10,000 people, and last year, it had around 7,000. Those numbers are a fraction of the attendance figures we see in other Canberra events. Floriade gets over 430,000. The folk festival gets 30,000 in a bad year and 50,000 in a good one. Summernats gets over 120,000 attendees. So attendance of 7,000, or even 10,000, at the Canberra Racing Carnival is quite small. Some traditional racing events have been cancelled altogether. In 2022-23, the TAB Canberra Cup did not meet financial expectations and will not be run again, according to their annual report. Their membership is dropping. Four years ago they had over 1,150 members. Last year this had dropped to 1,002.

Most of Canberra Racing Club's numbers are dropping. But one in particular has increased. Their payments to key management personnel have increased from \$200,000 in 2019-20 to \$976,000 in 2022-23. This is a pretty sharp increase. It is also

a really big slice from a \$14 million budget. I am not going to go into the reasons behind it. I have asked what they are and I will leave it up to the Canberra Racing Club to provide more information if they would like to, but it is another sign of an organisation that is in trouble.

Does this sound like an industry with a bright future that the government should be supporting, or does it sound like an industry on the way out that the government should help to transition, to make sure we look after the workers and the animals involved? If the tobacco industry came to us and said they were not viable unless we covered half their operating costs and, by the way, most of their financial figures were moving in the wrong direction, would we give them more and more funding in order to save jobs? Or would we use our public funding to support jobs in areas that provide public benefit?

What is this MOU money being used for? I, of course, cannot say dollar for dollar where the MOU funding goes, but here is what I can say. The 2022-23 MOU provided \$6.8 million of public funds to the Canberra Racing Club. That year, the Canberra Racing Club gave out \$5.96 million in prize money and \$976,000 in payments to key management personnel. It looks an awful lot like the public are funding horseracing prize money and CEO salaries.

Public funds should be used for public purposes. They should be used to benefit the community. They should not be used to benefit any one particular industry, particularly one that is not providing a community benefit, and particularly one that has lost its social license. I do not think this MOU funding meets the standards of our Canberra community. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.29): We will not be supporting this amendment. Never mind the social licence; the Greens have lost their adult licence. They have descended into childish, attention-seeking stunts and, honestly, this is juvenile. It is getting silly now.

What we are seeing play out here is the reason why the Greens are not anywhere near the steering wheel of any other jurisdiction. They talk about race clubs overstating economic benefit. I cannot remove myself from the fact that the Greens are continually overstating their collective IQ. Ms Clay talks about the financial figures heading in the wrong direction, and I think she would be right. She talked about the funding for race clubs here being out of step. Indeed, the funding for race clubs is out of step with every other jurisdiction in Australia.

We will not be supporting this amendment, and I am sick of having this argument. Horseracing is a part of the fabric of Australia. Horseracing, harness racing and greyhound racing: none of these is the sport of kings, as is often claimed by Ms Clay and others. These are the sports of battlers. Their ranks are full of minimum-wage battlers, many of whom do not hold the skills to gain employment in other areas.

We understand that the Greens hate Australia; we get that. But we kind of like it, and we will not be seeking to make a change in this space. The allocation of funding from government, which is much lower than the allocation to every other comparable race

club in New South Wales, and indeed much lower than any other jurisdiction in the country, provides direct and indirect employment to 500 people.

In the past, Ms Clay and her band of progressive warriors have failed to understand that most of the funding to the race club is returned to the community through prize money. They seem to believe that, when it comes to assessing how many jobs are created, we just need to consider the people directly employed by the Racing Club and the Harness Racing Club.

Ms Clay talked about the attendance figures. I can tell you that the total attendance for events conducted by the Canberra race club for the year is tracking towards 100,000. It is far in excess of, for argument's sake, the National Folk Festival.

The other aspect of this funding that Ms Clay and her activist mob fail to comprehend is that, in their belief—and I know we have been through this before—only turnover on ACT racing should be taken into account when it comes to the return to government, and it is just ludicrous.

When we consider the money that is returned to the ACT government coffers through the point of consumption gaming tax, or the betting operations tax, as we call it, you cannot just consider the ACT events; you must consider all racing, harness racing and greyhound turnover. Canberrans bet a hell of a lot on horseracing in Melbourne and Sydney. We do not gather a portion of those taxes and return them to Victoria and New South Wales. We do not do that. We do not say, “This was on the Melbourne Cup, so we'd better send it back to Victoria.” We do not do that, any more than Victoria or New South Wales do. They do not return the portion of POC that they get from our events. They just do not. It is ridiculous.

You have to consider the turnover of the racing codes as a whole. The betting operations tax returns tens of millions of dollars to the ACT coffers, and most of that money comes from betting on racing codes, irrespective of whether the events are held here or elsewhere. Do we write to the Queensland government and ask them for our cut of their turnover on Canberra races? No, we do not do that. It is just ridiculous.

I would point out that the remaining ACT racing codes, the ones that you have not banned yet, receive the lowest per capita funding of any jurisdiction in this country, despite the ACT government being the highest recipient of wagering revenue per capita in the country. The Thoroughbred Park product is beamed around the world to 68 countries. When the race club goes down the path, as it is now, of establishing a potential long-term revenue stream, what do the Greens do? They say, “You can't do that either.”

We will not be supporting this amendment. I kind of wish you guys would find another hobby. Your obsession with horseracing is getting a little weird.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (5.34): We will not be supporting the amendment either. I will speak to the JACS section of the Appropriation Bill more broadly as Special Minister of State in my remarks.

In June 2022, the government entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Canberra Racing Club and the Canberra Harness Racing Club. This covered a five-year period from July 2022 through to June 2027, establishing a performance framework for the ongoing viability, integrity, governance, accountability and efficiency of the industry, including animal welfare obligations.

It covers a range of issues, including the basis and timing of government funding for the racing clubs, the parties' administrative responsibilities and performance reporting obligations. The MOU requires the clubs to participate in the Joint Racing Industry and Government Committee, the JRIGC, as a forum to consult with government on industry topics and report on the performance framework.

Funding under the MOU is calculated based on the budget funding proposed in the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission *Investigation into the ACT racing industry—final report* from 2011. However, the indexation is, as Ms Clay mentioned, set at CPI minus 0.5 per cent. Under the terms of the MOU, the Canberra Racing Club receives 85.72 per cent of the annual funding, and the Canberra Harness Racing Club receives 14.28 per cent.

The ACT government continues to work with the Canberra Racing Club and the Harness Racing Club on fulfilling their objectives as outlined in the MOU between the clubs and the government. We have made substantial progress on the delivery of key performance indicators under the MOU. This work has been facilitated by the JRIGC.

This includes the development of independent economic reporting and analysis of the club's contributions to the Canberra community. I want to acknowledge Canberra Racing Club's efforts to continue to diversify their revenue streams and support the local businesses in their supply chains, as well as their new event offerings, such as the Festival of Speed. With the clubs continuing to meet their KPIs as identified under the MOU, we have been continuing to deliver budget-funded investment as agreed.

Another important aspect of the ACT government's work with the Canberra Racing Club has been the establishment of the Thoroughbred Park Housing and Revitalisation Committee. The role of this committee is to provide advice to government about the redevelopment of the Canberra Racing Club and deliver an integrated project that supports additional housing and commercial activities at Thoroughbred Park. The committee is also preparing advice for government on options for the development, including the optimal delivery model and potential declaration of an urban renewal site.

We believe in a sustainable future for the Canberra horseracing industry. We have outlined and continue to advocate for the diversification of their business, and the racing clubs have continued to take this on board.

I think that the position of everyone in the Assembly is well known. However, we should continue to work in a positive way to facilitate the development outcomes that will strengthen this approach. The Greens' proposal for redevelopment would see the end of the horseracing industry in Canberra. It discounts the local jobs and businesses that are supported by the horseracing industry here in the ACT. As a general principle,

it is best to find ways to deliver an outcome that benefits everyone involved. I think we can have a solution that supports Thoroughbred Park as a nation-leading equine and commercial precinct while delivering thousands of new homes at the same time.

We are also looking at this redevelopment as an opportunity to further the master planning work at EPIC, which primarily involves co-locating the harness racing club onto the same site at Thoroughbred Park. It is disappointing that the Greens continue to pull this stunt through an amendment every year. Only this time we know that they are seeking to amend the JACS appropriation to reduce investment provided to the clubs by 60 per cent. This continued waste of the Assembly's time, knowing full well that they did not have the support of the Assembly to pursue this course of action, should simply be called out for what it is. The Greens want to ban horse racing. It is a disingenuous way to have a conversation about the club's revenue base and it does not support the government's and the club's own ambitions to diversify their income streams.

Continuing to hide behind the facade of appropriation reduction and suggestions of forcible acquisition of their site through just terms is a pretty gross abuse of government power and decision-making power. To suggest that the government use those powers to acquire an asset from one property developer to sell it to another property developer because you do not want the former to succeed will not be looked on favourably by the Canberra community. There is a way to deliver an outcome that benefits all parties involved in this process, and that is the path that the ACT government will continue to pursue.

I do not support Ms Clay's amendments and commend the original JACS appropriation to the Assembly.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Population Health) (5.40): I speak today as Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, both to this appropriation and Ms Clay's amendment. This budget continues to invest in programs that will support the needs of people in the justice system and make our community safer for everyone.

Housing is a key consideration when decisions are being made about bail, community corrections orders in sentencing, and parole. Having stable housing can support a person to be able to comply with their orders and reduces the risk of further harmful behaviour. When a person does not have access to stable housing that is appropriate to their needs, they are more likely to end up incarcerated or have a longer period of incarceration. At an average cost of \$543.19 per detainee per day in the ACT in 2022 to 2023, incarceration is without doubt the most expensive way to solve the homelessness problem.

The Justice Housing Program, which was evaluated by the ANU in 2023, was found to be successful in reducing recidivism. This is why there is \$5.154 million in this budget to continue and expand the Justice Housing Program. The funding includes \$3.881 million over two years for community housing providers to manage the properties and community support organisations to provide trauma-informed, gender-responsive and culturally-appropriate support services during occupancy, and

follow-up support after exiting the program; \$322,000 over two years for infrastructure costs, including maintenance, insurance, and other government charges for the existing 12 properties; and \$951,000 for ACT Corrective Services staff to manage the program.

In addition to this, the budget provides funding of \$9.49 million for continuation of the following programs to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our prisons: \$3.41 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations delivering empowerment yarning circles, the Yarrabi Bamirr family-centric program, Ngurrambai Bail Support, and the On Country program; \$598,000 for ACT Corrective Services' alternative reporting sites; \$2.279 million for the expansion of the Circle Sentencing Court, including payments to panel members; and \$3.203 million for continued funding of the First Nations Justice Branch within the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, which goes to Priority Reform Three in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: transforming government organisations.

Finally, this budget also provides \$616,000 for disability liaison officers within the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, the Aboriginal Legal Service, and Victim Support ACT. Disability liaison officers within these community sector organisations are an important commitment within the Disability Justice Strategy for inclusion and equitable justice for people with disability. Within the network of DLOs that make up the disability justice community of practice, these are the only positions that specifically work with people with disability who have been victims of crime or victim-survivors of domestic or family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I am very pleased to be able to speak to this clause of the appropriation bill in this year's budget. I spoke to this clause in last year's debate, which I am sure you will recall as cheerfully as I do, but, unfortunately, I was not a minister with administrative arrangements for corrections at the time, so I did not have the opportunity to say all the things that I wanted to say about justice reinvestment and the radical love philosophy that is truly at the heart of justice reinvestment. But here we are again, and this time I am blessed with the opportunity to talk about this important issue that affects all of us in the community. If we are serious about being a human rights jurisdiction, if we are serious about reducing recidivism, if we are serious about reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prisons, and if we are serious about improving community safety, then we must prioritise justice reinvestment.

Justice reinvestment is not just about the elements of the budget that are funded from the justice and community safety portfolio; it is also about taking a trauma-informed, gender-responsive and culturally appropriate approach to the underlying causes of behaviour that is harmful to the person and to others in our community. The only way to be tough on crime is to be courageous about ending poverty.

In both the last term of this Assembly and in this term of the Assembly, we have seen significantly increased investment in mental health services, drug and alcohol services with a harm reduction approach that treats drug use as a health issue, homelessness

services, family support to reduce the impacts of domestic and family violence, functional family therapy programs to reduce harmful behaviour in young people at risk of ending up in the justice system, and disability support services. As a result, we have seen a reduction in the number of offences reported to police each year, from 2018 onwards. There is more to do, but today's launch of phase 2 of the Justice Reinvestment Strategy tells us that we are heading in the right direction.

I checked the police data last night. I hope that someone can take some notes for Mr Parton because I have some data now. In 2017, there were 48,579 offences reported to police and infringements issued. In 2018, there were 44,200. In 2019, there were 43,171. In 2020, there were 41,285. In 2021, there were 36,111. In 2022, there were 33,449. In 2023, there were 33,804 offences reported and infringements issued, which was 14,775 fewer than in 2017. Already in the first half of 2024, we have seen 3,161 fewer offences reported than for the same period last year. Comparing 2023 with 2017, we have seen reductions in reported offences of stolen motor vehicles, burglary, property damage, theft other than stolen motor vehicles, and other offences. We have also seen fewer traffic and criminal infringements issued. There is still more work to do as we have seen increases in offences of assault, sexual assault and robbery between 2017 and 2023, and that is why we need to continue to understand what works and do more of it. I commend our Attorney-General, Minister Rattenbury, for his ongoing commitment and today's launch of phase 2 of the Justice Reinvestment Strategy for the ACT.

Justice reinvestment works. It works to make our community safer, and it works to improve people's life outcomes. If we are going to talk about justice and community safety, and if we are going to talk about justice reinvestment as the approach we are taking, we also need to acknowledge the important investments in this year's budget in mental health, drug harm reduction, homelessness services, and supporting victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

These investments include, for example, the youth foyer at the new CIT Woden campus, training for ACT Policing and courts to build knowledge and understanding of coercive control and strengthening access to restorative justice programs. It includes \$15 million over four years for mental health programs, including some of our most at-risk children under 12 years old, people with mental health conditions at risk of homelessness, and people with mental health conditions exiting a period of detention, so that they can transition safely back into the community.

There is funding to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and trauma services for young people and to help build a culturally responsive capacity across our mental health sector. There is funding for continued drug harm reduction services.

Kamala Harris said, "Public safety depends on public trust. It depends on people believing they will be treated fairly and transparently." It is not fair to incarcerate a person because we do not have the right integrated mental health and drug and alcohol services, because our justice system is not accessible for or inclusive of the needs of people with disability, or because there is not enough housing and our prison has become a homelessness service of last resort.

The fair thing to do is to invest in services in the community so that fewer people engage in behaviour that brings them into contact with the justice system and so that, for people who do have a period of incarceration, it is brief and not repeated. That is why a responsible government invests in preventing harmful behaviour, not just in dealing with offending that has already happened. That is why our investments in health and social services in this budget are also important right now.

Those opposite will tell you that the only way to improve community safety is to lock up more people. That is a way of thinking that belongs in the past, because when the cause of behaviour that creates a community safety risk is unmet needs for housing, health and social services, the only way to improve community safety is to ensure that we improve access to those basic things that people need to live a healthy, meaningful, pro-social life. I know that this is difficult to accept when those unmet needs result in some very challenging behaviour. If we keep in mind Dr Cornel West's advice to "pursue justice with love in your heart", we stand a much better chance at creating a community that is safer for all of us.

I would like to make some comments about the amendment moved by Ms Clay. I have heard a number of community sector organisations delivering important work in health and social services and support for parents and grandparents express deep frustration that they have to beg for funding increases to address the increased volume and complexity of work that they are expected to do for our growing population, yet the horseracing industry keeps getting handed subsidies through the ACT budget.

What does horseracing deliver for our community? It delivers more gambling. Ms Clay has talked about how little revenue that generates for ACT taxpayers. Madam Speaker, let me tell you what it costs us. Addictive gambling, including on horseracing, costs our community in the consequences for people's physical and mental health and wellbeing, domestic and family violence, and criminal offences. That is why Ms Clay's amendments to remove ACT government funding for the horseracing industry are important.

The other two parties in this place tell us that they prioritise health and wellbeing and that they want to reduce domestic and family violence in our community. They tell us that they are very worried about crime rates. It is time to put their money where their mouth is and make the right choice for Canberrans: end government funding for destructive and harmful, addictive gambling and instead invest that money in things that will actually improve health and wellbeing in our community.

The days of the old parties in this place just doing the same thing every year, continuing to fund things that people in our community do not want to see getting taxpayer funds while we still have waitlists for health and social services, and thinking that nobody is going to notice or do anything about it, need to end.

If other members in this room are unhappy that I am criticising the policy positions of the two old parties that continue to support this horseracing industry subsidy, I suggest that they get a better policy, because none will be free until the old ways are over.

Question put:

That **Ms Clay's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

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

Noes 19

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (5.55): I would like to speak briefly in support of this element of appropriation in this year's budget for the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. It provides a range of important investments that will continue to support the justice system here in the ACT and drive community safety.

We have seen \$9.49 million over three years for continuation of initiatives seeking to reduce the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system. This is an incredibly important investment. We continue to see high levels of over-representation. We will shortly receive the first phase of the report, as I mentioned in question time today, from the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, looking into over-representation in the ACT. This will be an important read for all members of the Assembly and all aspiring members of the Assembly to contemplate what we do next when it comes to reducing over-representation.

There is also just a bit over \$2.7 million provided over two years to enable the ACT's community legal assistance sector to provide critical programs and services to vulnerable members of the community. It is hard to overstate the importance of our community legal assistance programs and organisations and the role they provide in enabling people to get access to justice in our community. Most often they are supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our community. The ACT government is proud of their work and proud to be able to support them through the financing that we provide, from the Women's Legal Centre through to Legal Aid and

all of the other organisations that operate in this space. They are doing important and often really innovative work that makes a real difference for our community.

The ACT government will provide nearly \$1.5 million over four years to provide additional resourcing for the ACT Magistrates Court, the Family Violence Court and the Children's Court to address the increased number of lodgements and the complexity of matters and to support the timely delivery of justice services for the community.

There are resources provided over four years to boost the Restorative Justice Unit, with \$506,000 to address the current waitlist for restorative justice services. This is a program of work that consistently scores extremely high and positive feedback from people who access its services. With the addition of phase 3 of this work that brought in family and sexual violence matters to be eligible matters for restorative justice, we saw some growth in the wait time. This was because these matters are more complex and they take more time to process. In response to that feedback, the government has provided resources to ensure those wait times are reduced. For this program to be most effective, we do not want to see people waiting too long to access the process. I am pleased to be able to provide those resources, as well as \$299,000 in capital funding to upgrade the unit's information and communications technology to ensure that it meets its legislative record-keeping and reporting requirements.

Today, as Minister Davidson has touched on, I, along with Minister Gentleman and Minister Davidson, launched the second phase of the Reducing Recidivism by 25 per cent by 2025 strategy. I reported to the community and the members of the public who came to the event that we have seen real success from phase 1. We have seen a reduction, from the baseline mark in 2018-19 to the most recent report on government services data, of 19.6 per cent in recidivism or repeat offending here in the ACT. This is very encouraging. We are not quite at a reduction of 25 per cent, but there is still time. The point I would make is that what this data shows is that the sorts of programs that are being funded through the government's justice reinvestment agenda are having a significant impact on making our community safer.

We are talking about people who are involved with recidivism. We are talking about people who are often repeatedly in our courts, not just one-off recidivism. A cohort of people we see coming through the system in the ACT are people who have been through our courts time and time again. To see that group of people coming out of the justice system means we are having a real impact on offending here in the ACT by reducing it and we are making our community safer, in addition to ensuring that the people who have offended previously are actually getting a better life.

This budget contains, as one bit of particular funding for this phase of the work, \$344,000 to fund community engagement and co-design of the Justice Futures Fund to support the delivery of community-led programs focused on addressing gaps in the justice system and improving criminal justice system outcomes. The emphasis I would put here is on the community-led programs. One of the parts of the success of the strategy to reduce recidivism is the partnership with key community organisations: Yeddung Mura in Tuggeranong, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services in Narrabundah, and the Aboriginal Legal Service—a range of

organisations that are key partners in helping the government and partnering with the government to reduce offending in the ACT and strengthen our community by providing alternative services and diversions to ensure that people's contact with the criminal justice system is reduced.

In a similar vein, this year's budget contains \$616,000 over two years to support improved access and inclusion across the justice system by providing disability liaison officers within the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, the Aboriginal Legal Service and Victim Support ACT. We know through the Disability Justice Strategy that we see an over-representation of people with various forms of disability in the justice system. These resources help fund the continuation of important work under that Disability Justice Strategy to meet the goals of that strategy and provide support to vulnerable members of our community. There is a range of other initiatives in this year's budget.

I note the comments, which were obviously not complimentary of the government, from Mr Cain in relation to this line item in the budget. He made his dismay clear. What I heard in those remarks was a tendency for business as usual and an extraordinary lack of curiosity and imagination by simply saying that the Canberra Liberals intend to pursue what is commonly recognised as a law and order approach. In his articulation of the Canberra Liberals' intent, I did not hear a single observation around seeking to think about how we do criminal justice differently, in a way that tackles some of the long-term criminalisation issues that we know exist in our community.

Mr Cain: Check our policies on our website. We have a good package out there.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, please!

MR RATTENBURY: Not a single element was articulated in the chamber today that gave us any sense of trying to innovate and do things differently.

Finally, mindful of the hour, I just note that, outside of the justice system, this budget contains some other important funding, particularly \$1.64 million in 2024-25 to extend the operation of the Rent Relief Fund for a further year to assist vulnerable Canberrans experiencing rental stress or financial hardship due to the current rental market conditions and rising cost-of-living challenges.

I have touched on a few of the elements of the work being delivered through the Justice and Community Safety Directorate's appropriation. There is, of course, much more. I have only spoken to some of the new initiatives. A whole lot of other underlying work and funding sits under this line of appropriation. I commend it to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Community Services Directorate—Part 1.8.

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

Statements by members

Valedictory

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (6.04): I would like to take this opportunity at the end of this parliamentary term to thank my constituents in Kurrajong, in the central Canberra areas in the north, the south and the CBD, for the great honour of representing them in this place. I thank all of my Assembly colleagues, particularly those within the Labor team and cabinet, but also all members of this place for the contribution that they have all made to our democracy.

Madam Speaker, I thank you particularly for your stewardship of this chamber. We can be a very difficult group to manage at times, and this week particularly has demonstrated that.

I thank the public servants, particularly in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, but also those across the service areas where I have had the opportunity to work, particularly Major Projects Canberra, the City Renewal Authority and the Suburban Land Agency.

I thank all members of the Legislative Assembly staff—everyone who makes this place function and without whom we could not operate a functioning parliament. Thank you.

Last but not least, in the 30 seconds that remain, I particularly thank and acknowledge all of my staff in the Chief Minister's office. They work incredibly hard to hold all the cabinet and government processes together. You are only ever as good in this place as the staff that you have around you, so, to my team, thank you so much. There is a lot of hard work ahead of us. I hope we are successful in the election, and I look forward to working with them all into the future.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—death in custody

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (6.06): I rise to speak on behalf of the Canberra Liberals about the most recent death of an inmate at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and to assure the family and friends of the deceased that our thoughts are with them. My understanding is that a very close relative of the deceased man was in the gallery earlier for Mrs Kikkert's petition.

This is a story of historic trauma which has led to a cycle of self-medication and associated crime which, in turn, has led to a journey in and out of incarceration, and ultimately led to the death of a young man. It is the story of heartbreak and immense tragedy. It is impossible to understand the emotion around this meaningless loss of life. We are talking about a troubled young man who has been let down by a system which was supposed to look after him, a system that failed to help him to help himself, and we are genuinely crushed by the outcome. A lot of things will be said, and obviously there is an inquest, but I just want to again point to Julie Tongs from Winnunga Nimmityjah who speaks of a wide inquiry into corrections and the justice system. It is difficult to argue with her. Things must change.

Education—policy

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.07): I want to mention some elements of our education policy package that was recently announced by Elizabeth Lee, our Canberra Liberals leader and shadow education minister. It is so important that Canberra children receive the best education possible to give them the best chance of thriving and life. It is a delight for me, as a former educator, to advocate for the amazing evidence-driven and people-focused education policy announced by Ms Lee.

The Canberra Liberals will prioritise improved literacy, numeracy and better support for our hardworking teachers and will ensure that all students have access to a well-maintained and safe learning environment. We will introduce a behaviour curriculum for students to ensure disruptive and problematic behaviour is dealt with appropriately to the benefit of both students and teachers. Canberra school students and teachers deserve a fresh opportunity to thrive under an Elizabeth Lee led Canberra Liberals government. It is my view, as a former educator, as I said—a high school maths teacher, general secondary school teacher and principal of two other schools—to endorse and really applaud the education policy of the Canberra Liberals leader, and I thank her for presenting this to the community.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr Gordon Carmichael—tribute

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Planning, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for Transport and Special Minister of State) (6.09): It is with deep sorrow that I rise to offer my condolences to the family of Dr Gordon Carmichael of Chapman, ACT. I acknowledge his family who have joined us in the chamber tonight.

Gordon was a local family man, a distinguished ANU demographer, a man of faith and a man of football. Born in Manchester, England, in 1948, he grew up in New Zealand where he developed a love of football, cricket and other sports and went on to study at the University of Auckland, where he met his wife, Gloria. They were together for 56 years. He moved to Australia to undertake his PhD in philosophy and demography at the Australian National University in 1979, and he raised his family in Hughes, Mawson and then in Chapman. Gordon Carmichael is well-known in our community on the south side as the founder of the Woden Valley Soccer Club in 1989, an amalgamation of the Melrose, Phillip and West Woden football clubs. Across 30 years, he served as a coach, the president from 1998 to 2001, a referee, a referee coordinator, and a kit manager of his family club, volunteering far beyond his son's junior football years.

Gordon was one of those rare selfless people who volunteered tirelessly so that thousands of kids at Woden, like me, could participate in playing the beautiful game

of football. He would spend hours watching the games of new referees and providing knowledgeable advice and tips on how to improve. Gordon was about a fair go for all players and just wanted to see them enjoy themselves. I remember that his generosity once extended to gifting a shirt of his beloved Premier League club, Manchester United, to one of the hardest working players on our team in our off-season training camp. As fellow club administrator and coach Tony Olivera joked at the time, “I personally wouldn’t be seen dead in that shirt!” As an Arsenal supporter, I had to agree, but I am sure Gordon will still always wear the Red Devils shirt.

Gordon’s son remarked at his memorial service last week that his dad was always the most reasonable and respected person in the room. It is one of the reasons Gordon’s reffing came with such authority. You knew he was fair, and he knew the rules almost as though he wrote them himself, just like he did the club’s by-laws.

My dad, Phil Steel, who was a referee coordinator, used to say to me as a kid after the matches, “Gordon is the first person setting up in the morning, at 6 am, putting up the nets, and the last one packing up the nets in the evening when it’s getting dark. He deserves an Order of Australia.” Other club officials, like Tony Olivera, said exactly the same thing at his service. It is no wonder Gordon was nominated as the ACT Local Hero in the Australian of the Year Awards in 2010 for his work as a club administrator and was recognised as a life member of Capital Football. After those bitterly freezing cold winter days at Mawson and Chifley in the early days, I think it was recognition well-deserved.

Gordon’s contribution outside of football is also significant—his work in demography as a key member of the Australian National University’s School of Demography from the beginning and also his work at the Institute of Family Studies. Gordon made outstanding contributions to family demography through the Australian Family Project. His monographic book, *With this ring: first marriage patterns, trends and prospects in Australia*, made a major contribution to the understanding of sexuality and partnering. Gordon was a generous mentor to referees at his local soccer clubs, but he was also a generous supervisor to PhD students who continue to work in vital fields.

To his wife, Gloria, and his family—Rebecca and Stefan are here with us, as well as Leo and Katherine—I know I will miss seeing Gordon around Mawson in the club house that he helped build. I know he will miss seeing you, Leo, playing soccer in the sky blue and red, and soon in the navy shorts, and I know he will miss the family that he loved so dearly. I know that he will miss contributing to the community that he loved through his research and his involvement in the Baptist Church and football. Gordon’s legacy of support for the development and enjoyment of youngsters through the sport of football lives on in our community through the Woden Valley Soccer Club and the thousands of players who have benefited from it.

As a junior footballer from decades ago, club patron and member for Murrumbidgee, and on behalf of the ACT government, thank you, Gordon, for the impact that you made on so many lives in the Woden Valley and the broader Australian community.

Valedictory

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (6.14): I think I can safely say that the Tenth Assembly has not been boring. I was afforded the privilege by my

colleagues to lead the Canberra Liberals this term, and it certainly has been quite a journey. Being in opposition is hard and it builds a special kind of resilience to lose every single vote in this chamber, except today, and keep up the fight every day, but we do it because we know it is the right thing to do. We do it because this Labor-Greens government needs to be held to account, and we do it because we know that our chance is not far away.

I know this is the time that we usually reflect on some of our achievements and notable happenings throughout the term. I could talk about one of my proudest moments, which was initiating and enshrining into law an Australian first in criminalising stealthing, or the most emotional moment when we as a parliament formally recognised Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day, or the countless frustrating moments with ministers not answering basic questions so as to not be held accountable. All of those moments ran through my head as I was preparing for my valedictory this year, but what really stuck out to me were the private moments that no-one else saw—the ones that made me stop and remember that the decisions that we make in this place can and do impact on the lives of the community that we serve. That is why it is so important to continue to not only listen, listen and listen but also never lose sight of why we are here.

My first thanks will always be to the people of Kurrajong who afforded me the privilege to be their voice once again this term. I hope I have served them well. For me, this term has been marked with many firsts and, in a way, I hope many lasts. I was elected leader and was thrust into all of the additional responsibilities that come with the role, which I relished, and there were others—let's just say that you have to accept them as part of the job. It is certainly not a role that I could have done alone.

To the team at our party division, Adam, Jarrod, Peter, Kathryn, Josh, Kieran, Amanda, Louise and Tamara, who served the party so well during this term, thank you. To the voluntary wing of the party, led by our president Nick, and before him John, and all the members of the management committee, thank you for your service to our party and our movement. It is not easy being a Liberal in Canberra, and you all do it voluntarily.

Through you, Madam Speaker, to all of the OLA staff, thank you for the essential work that you do for democracy in the capital. To all our staffers across the entire political spectrum, thank you for the work that you do to make every one of us look good a lot of the time without much recognition or thanks.

In my own office, led by my Chief of Staff, Bronwyn, I thank Kelli, Dean, Liam, Scotty, Ben, Albert, Gabbi, Jonathon and Bec. Thank you for everything you do in keeping me sane at times, and for being an oasis of humour and support in what sometimes feels like the wild, wild west of politics. I also acknowledge the permanent staff who worked with me throughout the term: Sue, Liam, Amy, Paddy, Anastasiya, Georgia, Brendan, Alex and Luke.

It is an incredible honour being elected to lead our party this term. I acknowledge and thank the Canberra Liberals team, Leanne, Mark, Peter, Ed, James, Jeremy and Elizabeth. I acknowledge Giulia Jones, and of course our Nicole.

None of us in this place would be able to do what we do without our own personal network of support. I am so incredibly grateful and humbled to have one of the best. Most Canberrans know that my parents have been a fixture in my various campaigns in the past, and now they are grandparents of two. Dad is still working full-time in Sydney, and mum comes down every week to help look after Ava. I am forever grateful for their unwavering support, love and encouragement of me and what I do. My sisters, Rosa and Sara, have always had my back, and I know the sacrifices that they have made in their own lives so that I can do what I do.

This term was also a big one for our family with the arrival of our second daughter, Ava, last year. Both of my girls have never known life without me running from one thing to another, missing yet another drop-off or pick-up or yet another medical appointment, and sometimes see me for the first and only time in a day on the news. They are as strong and stubborn as they are beautiful and sassy, and I am incredibly proud of them.

Nathan, thank you for being there every step of the whirlwind journey of where my life takes us and our family. I do not acknowledge it enough, but I am incredibly grateful for the sacrifices that you have made and for always putting the needs of our family before yours so that I can do what I do. I love the family that we have created together, and I know that, whatever happens after 19 October, our life will be even crazier and more beautiful than ever before.

Valedictory

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (6.19): I rise to make a few remarks as we hurtle towards the end of the 10th term of the ACT Legislative Assembly. It has been the privilege of my life to serve in this parliament. Every day I have been grateful for the faith that the electors of the ACT, and specifically the great electorate of Kurrajong, have placed in me to represent them and make things better for them. Every day I have strived to honour this commitment. This is the hardest job I have ever had and the most amazing one. I marvel at the amazing people I meet and get to work with on a daily basis. The decisions that we make in this local parliament make a difference to people's lives. We are responsible for essential services and also for how we ensure this city is shaped in a way that our future community needs are met.

There are so many achievements that I am proud of. In reflecting on these, it is important to remember that they are collective achievements—the fruition of the amazing work of community members and dedicated public servants, as well as the contributions of our officers. I thank the incredible public servants that I have worked with over the last four years and who have worked to turn our plans and visions into a reality for our community. I thank those in EPSDD, Housing ACT, MPC and our DLOs. Thank you for your commitment, passion and diligence. You have made Canberra better.

We have done all of this as part of a shared government. This is part of a commitment to do things differently and to govern in a way to get the best outcomes for the

community. Shared government is challenging, but I think it is important and it is well worth it. I would particularly like to thank the Labor ministers and all parliamentary colleagues. I particularly acknowledge Ms Burch and Ms Lawder, who are retiring. I wish you all the very best in the next part of your journey.

I thank my Greens colleagues and friends in the Greens party room. We have had some really dark times this term, but what an incredible journey we have been on. Thank you for your talents, your wisdom, your partnership and your friendship. I would like to particularly thank the extraordinary staff that I have—one of the best teams: Imogen, Alia, Jordan, Sumithri, Connor, Scott, Ella, and previously Paula, Ben, Emily and Adriana. It has been a joy to come to work each day and work with such an amazingly talented, clever and fun team. I could not have survived without you.

When you are elected to parliament, you dedicate much of your working hours to serving your community, but you come as people with friends and family. I would like to thank my family so much for sharing me over the last four years. You are my centre and my greatest love. Finally, I want to thank the community, and particularly the electors of Kurrajong. As I move through the beautiful electorate of Kurrajong, meeting special people and seeing the incredible work that is done, I am so thankful for the place that I call home.

As we enter the festival of democracy, be kind, be engaged, and look after yourself and each other, and hopefully I will see you here again.

Valedictory

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) (6.22): In my first speech in this place I promised to be committed, available and accessible, to be energetic and hardworking and to get things done. While that first speech was some time ago, this is the promise and standard to which I continue to hold myself, and it is for others to assess me against that in a number of weeks time. I hope everyone knows that I have not taken any day for granted. It has been a privilege to be in this role for another term.

The most common question I was asked in my first term was, “Is it what you expected?” That question always stumped me because I had not known what to expect. Ironically, that question has dried up this term—a term which has been unlike anything I expected. We knew there would be at least two new members in this chamber, and it turned out to be eight. Almost a third of the chamber turned over and three more seats have changed since. I was the only person to enter cabinet this term from the back bench, and I was and remain the youngest cabinet member in the Tenth Assembly. The uncertainty of 2020 felt tenfold in 2021, culminating in a lockdown, the effects of which are still being felt in predictable and unpredictable ways. It was personally devastating to announce that the National Multicultural Festival was not going ahead twice.

Much too much of this term for me was characterised by personal darkness. It is very difficult to function when the first thought that pervades your consciousness each day on waking is “I want to die.” But that is the deep depression that I was in for a

considerable amount of time. Fortunately, there has been so much light, and, with the support of my extraordinary team, colleagues, community and the public service, there has been so much positive change, including: the success of the Amp It Up! Funding; major Discrimination Act reforms; the Multiculturalism Act; the Statement of Ambition for the arts; a new Belconnen Service Centre; the best ever National Multicultural Festival; shops; dog parks; playgrounds; roads; major suburban infrastructure investment; new bridges at Umbagog; increased noise limits in the city; surrogacy reforms; changes to the disability parking permit to assist more families; increased arts funding; the first stage of the Lake Ginninderra path upgrades; Access Canberra SMS reminders and a new website; and the unveiling of an artwork honouring Susan Ryan AO—just the beginning of our correction to our heavily male-dominated arts collection.

The term also saw a human rights complaints mechanism; the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Initiative at Access Canberra and ACT Libraries; an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People's Commissioner, and advocate before that; organ donation acknowledgement on death certificates; considerable support for all venues with a liquor licence; our biggest New Year's Eve ever; commemorative certificates for early pregnancy loss; Hoodoo Gurus at Symphony in the Park; life-changing amendments to the Births, Deaths And Marriages Registration Amendment Act; a right to a healthy environment; accreditation as an advanced welcoming city; bookable appointments at Access Canberra; a life site for the Socceroos; a Canberra business strategy; restoration of territory rights; and voluntary assisted dying legislation.

These are the achievements, but what sits behind all of that is not just the people but also all the processes, the day to day and the things that sometimes we take for granted including grants, many of which are assessed by panels painstakingly; compliance work; cleaning; maintenance; events which sometimes just seem to happen, but are an extraordinary achievement; awards; inspections; audits; budget bids; speech writing; admin; and meetings.

I would like to thank the many DLOs who have assisted us this term: Karen Kennedy, Kellie Bradley, Gez Hodgson, Morgan Potter, Jenna Huggett, Louise Bartram, Isabelle Howse, Alistair Dunstan, Kylie Beer, Fiona Gavagan, Michelle Bamford, Liana Brozic, Ashleigh Savage, Andrew Butters, Tom Credeman, Rachel Grant, Anna Christoff, Lauren Cunningham and Andrea Stewart. I also want to thank those who have been in my office for the short-term, longer-term and those who have departed—Ellie Brahman, Anna Taxis, Joe Saunders, Sheldon Fenning and Katherine Harrington—and my current team, many of whom have been with me for a long time: Jonah Morris, Jemma Cavanagh, James Adams, Nick Argy, Naomi Treloar and Michael Liu. I have the best team around. (*Extension of time granted.*)

I do have the best team around. It is very difficult to put into words how much they mean to me and how much they have to put up with. They are incredibly special people, and I hope that they look back on these achievements and the day-to-day and the camaraderie with a lot of joy, a lot of good spirit and good will and that these experiences all stand them in good stead for whatever comes next.

I would also particularly like to thank the Chief Minister's office, who have been amazing and just so helpful this entire term, even when I know that I have been the biggest pain around. To the Assembly staff—speaking of me being painful!—thank you for your guidance, support and good humour, whether it is the OLA Library reminding me that I need to request through the website, or I am seeking some advice about what order we need to be moving amendments. Every day, it is extraordinary and there is so much more that goes on behind the scenes that I have no idea about. Thank you for making us look good. To you, Madam Speaker: I know that you do not want much attention on you, so perhaps I will save it for another speech.

To my gorgeous friends, who keep me grounded, who back me and who put up with me: you are that light in my life. To my family, especially to Deb and to James, to Bailey my dog and to our new dog Bucky: I love you all so deeply. When I think about light in my life and life-changing light, that is the sparkle that really exists and keeps me going.

Finally, to the people of Ginninderra, I said it in 2020 and I will say it again: you are just the most generous bunch of people around. What the people of Belconnen and the Ginninderra electorate do each day, the pride they have in their community, the connections across community and who we are and what we can do together never ceases to amaze me. It has been the biggest privilege to continue to serve you. I have more work to do. I have unfinished business, and I hope I do get that chance to continue it next term.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.30 pm.

Schedule of amendment

Schedule 1

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025

Amendment moved by Ms Clay

2

Schedule 1, part 1.7

Page 5—

omit part 1.7, substitute

Part 1.7	461 465 000	51 867 000	266 384 256	779 716 256
Justice and Community Safety Directorate				
