



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

11 April 2024

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Friday, 26 April 2024**.

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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 you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Legislative Assembly—unparliamentary language Ruling by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, yesterday, in the debate concerning the transport Canberra fleet, Ms Cheyne made an interjection. That interjection is not in the uncorrected proof *Hansard*, nor was it audible on the playback. Ms Lawder identified the interjection as being, “Stop trying to be a principal; oh, that’s right, you were never one.” The Assistant Speaker then heard various points of order from various members, before deciding to review the transcript and come back to the chamber.

As mentioned, I have examined the proof transcript of the proceedings and the relevant provisions of the Assembly orders. Standing orders 54 and 55 state:

A Member may not use offensive words against the Assembly or any Member thereof or against any member of the judiciary.

All imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on Members shall be considered highly disorderly.

Standing order 57 provides:

When the attention of the Speaker is drawn to words used, the Speaker shall determine whether or not they are offensive or disorderly.

The *Companion to the Standing Orders*, at paragraph 11.77, notes that the Assembly, based on the practice of the House of Representatives and the United Kingdom House of Commons, follows the practice that members can direct a charge against other members, or reflect upon their character or conduct, only upon a substantive motion which admits of a distinct vote of the Assembly.

Having considered the matter raised, and despite *Hansard* not being able to pick up the words initially spoken by Ms Cheyne, I note that Ms Cheyne, in standing to respond to

Ms Lawder's point of order, did not deny that she made that comment. As such, I do believe that Ms Cheyne's comments would be considered a personal reflection of the member under standing order 55, and accordingly I will ask her to withdraw.

Members, I would urge you all, if members consider a member's character is in question, to use the proper forms of the Assembly and move a substantive motion. With that I will call you to withdraw, Ms Cheyne.

Ms Cheyne: I withdraw.

ACT Disability Strategy 2024-33 Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Disability and Minister for Health) (10.04): I am delighted to advise the Assembly of the launch of the 10-year ACT Disability Strategy 2024-33. I needed to wait for Sheree to arrive. I apologise; Sheree is now here to sign for this statement.

The ACT Disability Strategy is the ACT government's commitment to a community that welcomes and values all people with disability. I particularly welcome those who are here with us in the chamber today from the disability community and the carer community.

The strategy aims to support the right of people with disability to full and equal participation in all aspects of community life. This is a strategy for the 80,000 Canberrans with disability—one in five Canberrans—as well as their families, carers, allies and communities. Among Canberrans with disability, just over 40 per cent are employed and more than a quarter have been involved in volunteering in the past 12 months. About 20 per cent of those 80,000 people with a disability are also carers for another person.

Canberrans with disability are active members of our community, but they also experience significant disadvantage and marginalisation. On average, they are worse off financially, less likely to finish school or attend university, less likely to find paid employment, and more likely to experience violence.

We also know that, as it stands, Canberrans with disability do not enjoy the same standard of life that this city offers other Canberrans. The Living Well in the ACT survey found that people with disability feel less of a sense of belonging and inclusion than the community as a whole, make less use of our local green spaces, and find it harder to travel, secure suitable and affordable housing, and access health services.

The ACT Disability Strategy consultation allowed the government to hear the voices that make up these statistics. Through submissions, kitchen table conversations, interviews and group discussions, we heard the stories of Canberrans with disability. People told us about the challenges they face, and their ideas to make our city better.

From April to August 2022, almost 1,000 Canberrans were involved in the consultation. I acknowledge Minister Davidson's commitment to this co-design process and to the principle of "nothing about us, without us". Together, people envisaged a city where

people with disability are recognised, respected and listened to, where universal design is the norm, where reasonable adjustments are part of everyday life, where everyone has fair and equitable access to services, where people feel safe, welcome and accepted in all aspects of their identity.

These themes are reinforced through recent reports and recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the Independent Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The strategy is the blueprint for creating a more inclusive Canberra by making systemic changes to embed consideration of disability in everything that the ACT government does, and by encouraging and activating many parts of the Canberra community to be more inclusive. Implementation of the strategy will occur through three action plans over 10 years. The strategy and accompanying action plans will focus on achieving outcomes against each the 12 wellbeing domains of the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

We want people with disability to have a voice in the development of policy, services, infrastructure and programs, to understand their rights, and to be able to navigate systems with confidence. People with disability should be included in community disaster preparedness, and be safe from violence, neglect and mistreatment. They should be able to access public spaces and services, as well as the natural environment. We want to support people with disability to find suitable and affordable housing, to make workplaces more inclusive, and to ensure more people with disability are employed and experience living standards on par with the rest of the community.

Our vision is for people with disability being visible and valued members of the ACT community, living a life free from discrimination, and the wider community being aware of the needs of people with disability and knowing how to act towards people with disability. We will continue to support people with disability to access health care and education at all stages of life, including through the Disability Health Strategy and the Inclusive Education Strategy.

The Wellbeing Framework focus areas will guide each of the action plans for the Disability Strategy. The first action plan, which is being launched alongside the strategy, is supported by investment of more than \$5½ million to build foundations for change by responding to the immediate needs we heard through consultation—fostering disability pride, promoting inclusion, and establishing evaluation and continual improvement.

The first action plan has been developed as a two-year plan in recognition of the significant work currently occurring in disability reform. While it draws on key themes from the disability royal commission and NDIS review, it does not form the ACT government's response; rather, it is intended to build lasting foundations to support future work. The ACT government will consider and respond to the royal commission and NDIS review recommendations separately, and future action plans provide one mechanism to enact these responses.

Importantly, as an early response to the NDIS review, the national cabinet has agreed to implement foundational support to be jointly commissioned by the commonwealth and states and territories for all people with disability, including those who do not have

access to the NDIS. Several of the proposed areas of foundational supports touch on themes raised in the listening report for the Disability Strategy and will no doubt form part of future action plans.

In the first action plan, we are committing to improving the way the ACT government interacts with the disability community. We will establish an ACT government accessible communications hub, which will involve modernising communications across ACT government, including by employing an Easy English specialist and an Auslan interpreter, and reviewing the Your Say platform so that more people with disability can take part in consultation and engagement. We will also establish a disability liaison officer position for Access Canberra to provide whole-of-government accessible information and reasonable adjustment to support callers, and to foster a cultural shift to supporting people with disability engaging with Access Canberra.

In addition, Housing ACT will improve the experience for people with disability engaging with it by establishing a disability liaison officer position to support enhanced communication, reasonable adjustments and staff confidence in supporting people with disability; as well as ensuring that new Housing ACT stock will meet or exceed accessibility standards for new builds. We will investigate options to establish a disability housing information and advisory service to provide a one-stop housing hub for people with disability.

We will lead by example to make the ACT public service a more inclusive workplace by developing an ACTPS diversity and inclusion strategy in consultation with ACTPS staff with disability. We will also set an initial target of nine per cent of ACTPS employees, including the executive staff, being people with disability. Better data will mean people with disability and the government will be able to see what is happening over time and whether service quality is improving.

We heard through the listening report that the data we have does not give us enough information about the experience of people with disability. We will improve data collection across the ACT government by developing an approach that is consistent across government and makes sense for the people with disability who are being asked the questions.

The first action plan will also establish a disability strategy governance group to advise on and monitor implementation of the strategy and the action plans, which will be led by people with disability. It is my hope that the disability strategy governance group will be a strong mechanism to hold government to account on the commitments we have made through the strategy and the first action plan.

We are stronger when we work with our community sector partners to improve the lives of Canberrans with disability. We will increase the disability inclusion grant funding pool to enable more community groups, organisations and small businesses to receive financial support to address attitudinal, communication and physical barriers to access and inclusion.

We will also expand the International Day of People with Disability grants to fund people with disability and their representative organisations to run disability-led events,

initiatives and activities that deliver positive change for people with disability and the wider community. We will explore options to transition ACT government engagement with the International Day of People with Disability to ensure that the annual celebration of disability pride is community-led and controlled.

One of the key themes of the listening report was the importance of people with disability being able to access inclusive supports. We will support First Nations people with disability to receive culturally safe, inclusive and community-controlled services. We will work with the community sector to deliver a peer support program to improve the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people with disability.

To provide a more inclusive Canberra, we have also committed to developing an ACT neurodiversity strategy, in close consultation with neurodivergent Canberrans and their families and carers that upholds the social model of disability and human rights principles and aligns with other relevant strategies and policies. I want to recognise Michael Pettersson for bringing a motion on this issue to the Assembly last September.

Safety was a key theme of the royal commission, which all governments have committed to responding to by mid-2024. We have heard clearly, in our own consultations, about the importance of providing support for the safety of people with disability. That is why the first action plan includes actions to support frontline crisis services to build disability understanding and responsiveness through developing disability access and inclusion plans, and support for training to upskill domestic, family and sexual violence sector workers in supporting people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence.

In summary, the ACT Disability Strategy will support the government to meet our commitments under Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31, respond to recommendations of the disability royal commission and the Independent Review of the NDIS, and respond to local opportunities and challenges raised through extensive community consultation.

The ACT Disability Strategy is part of a suite of interconnected strategies, including the ACT Inclusive Education Strategy 2024-34, the ACT Disability Health Strategy 2024-33, and the ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019-29. Taken together, these strategies aim for the ACT to be a more accessible and inclusive society where people with disability can fully participate in all aspects of community life. These strategies demonstrate our commitment to the social model of disability and a whole-of-government response to promoting and protecting the rights and needs of people with disability.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy. I say to the current and past members of the Disability Reference Group, some of whom are here today, that I have appreciated your guidance and feedback, and I am looking forward to continuing to work with you to implement these actions as well as our broader disability reform work.

I say to the Office for Disability in the Community Services Directorate, also represented in the chamber here today, that I know today will be a day of joy and, no

doubt, relief for you, too. Thank you for your hard work, especially during the last few months, as we worked together to finalise the strategy and first action plan. Since coming back into the portfolio, I have heard from many stakeholders how much they also value the work that you do.

I also thank the many members of the wider ACT public service who have contributed to the development of the Disability Strategy, as well as their own strategies. Thank you to the excellent Sheree Murray, who is here today, for providing the Auslan interpretation.

Thank you also to my colleagues across the Assembly for your input into the strategy and first action plan, as well as your own commitments to disability inclusion, whether through other strategies, private members' business—not least, Ms Orr's Disability Inclusion Bill that is currently before the Assembly—or through your engagement with your constituents. It is heartening to know that so many in this place are committed to improving outcomes for people with disability. Again, I want particularly to recognise Minister Davidson, who led this work almost to its completion and who can take a lot of credit for the final product.

Most importantly, I thank the nearly 1,000 people with disability, carers, service providers and allies who contributed to the consultation. This strategy is what it is because of you and the insights you shared, and our city is better for your contribution.

In closing, I want to acknowledge not only those who are here today but those who are watching online and who might be coming in later for the formal launch of the strategy. I am excited to continue to progress the important work of disability inclusion for all Canberrans, and commend the strategy to the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

ACT Disability Strategy 2024-2033, including First ACT Disability Action Plan 2024-2026.

ACT Disability Strategy 2024-2033 and First ACT Disability Action Plan 2024-2026—

Easy English, dated April 2024.

Ministerial statement, 11 April 2024.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Population Health) (10.21): As the former Minister for Disability, I was so happy to deliver a consultation process co-designed by people with disability and led by people with disability. Nothing about us, without us: this is the approach we took, and it is why the strategy that has resulted from the consultation is ambitious and transformative, and it is the reason why the consultation was held up as the gold standard for ACT community engagement. For a strategy that sets the ACT government agenda on accessibility and inclusion for people with disability for the next decade, that is exactly how it should be done.

There are over 80,000 people with disability in the ACT. There are over 50,000 carers. More than one-third of all households in the ACT include a person with disability. Over 40 per cent of people with disability are in paid work, 27 per cent are volunteering, 36 per cent regularly attend community events or groups, and 18 per cent of people with disability are carers for others.

People with disability are active in our community. You may not always know who they are. Not everyone can safely identify as being a person with disability, and they should not have to, but they are here, and they make our community a better place to be.

But people with disability who want to be in paid employment are twice as likely to be unemployed. Rates of financial distress are twice as high for people with disability, and the average income for a person with disability is around half that of a person without disability. Rates of psychological distress are more than five times as high for people with disability.

More than 1,000 people participated in the consultations for this strategy. Every time I stepped out of my front door during that period, someone would tell me how important this consultation was and how much they appreciated the way in which it was facilitated and supported. Every conversation was led by a person with disability. The process was co-designed with the Disability Reference Group members.

There were submissions via survey, written submissions, kitchen table conversations, 33 public forums in person and online, including with Auslan interpreters, and two forums facilitated by family carers. There were one-on-one conversations, a student voice creative competition, video submissions, voting for the top three actions at the Disability Expo, focused conversations on the intersections between disability and the LGBTIQ+ community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including two yarning circles, culturally diverse community members, and the experience of being a carer.

My personal favourite moments in seeing all of those submissions were the audio submissions from students, being in forums led by DRG members with diverse disabilities, including Graham Downie, Kerry Snell and Ben Zarew, seeing the different ways in which people facilitate and lead conversations that enable inclusion for everyone, and the book launch for the listening report.

With some of those key asks, the top five areas for action included healthcare provision. The Disability Health Strategy will specifically address this in detail. I refer also to disability supports and services, and I will continue to advocate for what is needed in NDIS reforms and the building of an ecosystem that includes good foundational supports. Another key ask is having a safe and accessible home. I am hearing what you are telling me about needing more public housing and ensuring that specialist disability accommodation funding is used effectively to make those homes accessible, as well as accessible and affordable private rental homes and increasing home ownership. Another key ask is having a voice, and making sure that our Disability Reference Group members are recompensed at a fair level for the work that they do to help government understand and be responsive to the real experience and needs of disability. Another ask is employment—meaningful careers that pay a livable wage and are respected and valued by all of us.

We see those five actions reflected in the first action plan and the strategy. There will be a disability liaison officer at Housing ACT. There will be more support for self-advocacy for people with disability, funding to support students in years 10 to 12 to access work experience placements in the ACT, and building understanding and responsiveness to the needs of people with disability across ACT government and in the business and broader community, as well as reshaping the International Day of People with Disability program through disability pride grants.

I want to thank Minister Stephen-Smith for ensuring that this strategy and first action plan have received such a significant level of funding and that the actions reflect what the community said was most important to them and can be linked directly back to the consultation listening report. It has been a huge amount of work and it is very much appreciated.

Most of all, I want to thank everyone who participated in the consultation that has led to this strategy. You literally wrote a book. Thank you especially to Graham Downie and Alarna Moscaritolo for their proof-reading and their editing work, and to Renee Heaton, as the DRG chair, who wrote the foreword.

I thank all of the ACT Disability Reference Group members in the lead-up to and during the consultations—Renee Heaton, who has led the DRG as chair with grace and determination to see the group's vision come through during a very busy period of multiple consultations, C Moore, the deputy chair, Ajar Sana, Ben Zarew, Craig Wallace, Alarna Moscaritolo, Erika Lyons, Graham Downie, Katie Shoemack, Kerry Snell, Nic Stuart, Patrice Soward, Sharon Ding, Deborah Eades and Louise Bannister.

In addition, I thank the facilitators during the consultation, Dominic Golding, Dougie Herd—if we cannot be a republic, I would have you as my king—Kat Reed, Lyn Wu, the brilliantly talented Ruth O'Brien, Wayne Herbert and Yenn Purkis. Also, I thank the facilitators during the consultation, Dominic Golding, Dougie Herd—if we cannot be a republic, I would have you as my king—Kat Reed, Lyn Wu, the brilliantly talented Ruth O'Brien, Wayne Herbert, and Yenn Purkis.

I thank the community organisations that hosted conversations—Women with Disabilities ACT, Health Care Consumers Association, Rights and Inclusion Australia, National Disability Services, Meridian ACT, Canberra Blind Society, ACT Council on the Ageing, Mental Health Community Coalition, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, Carers ACT and Belconnen Arts Centre.

Finally, I thank the Office for Disability at the Community Services Directorate. The work that you have done over the past couple of years to get us to this point is seen, it is valued and it is making a real difference to the lives of people with disability, their families and carers, and our whole community. Our whole community is better for having people with disability seen, heard, understood and loved for all that they do and all that they are.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MADAM SPEAKER: I thank the Auslan interpreter for her assistance.

Estimates 2024-2025—Select Committee Appointment

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.29): I move:

- (1) a Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025 be appointed to examine the expenditure proposals contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024-2025, the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025 and any revenue estimates proposed by the Government in the 2024-2025 Budget and prepare a report to the Assembly;
- (2) the Committee be composed of:
 - (a) one Member to be nominated by the Labor Party;
 - (b) one Member to be nominated by the Liberal Party; and
 - (c) one Member to be nominated by the ACT Greens;to be notified in writing to the Speaker within two hours of this motion passing;
- (3) a Liberal Party member shall be elected Chair of the Committee by the Committee;
- (4) funds be provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the Committee to facilitate the analysis of the Budget and the preparation of the report of the Committee;
- (5) the Committee is to report by Friday, 23 August 2024;
- (6) if the Assembly is not sitting when the Committee has completed its inquiry, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publishing and circulation; and
- (7) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

As members will know, this is a pretty standard motion that gets moved each year to establish the estimates committee—a select committee to look at the budget handed down by the Treasurer. As I understand it, the budget will be handed down in late June this year. Estimates are an important part of scrutiny of the government, giving members of the community the opportunity to look at where the spending is and make their comments. It is in the public interest, and it is incumbent on all of us here in the Assembly, to ensure that those checks and balances are in place.

The timings are always tight—getting tighter all the time—and especially in an election year, when many people do not wish to spend as much time in the Assembly and in committees. They would prefer to be out campaigning. However, that does not take anything away from the importance of scrutinising a budget. This allows members of the estimates committee and other members to ask for explanations from ministers and officials relating to the items of proposed expenditure. I think it is important that we give it the time that it needs so that we can scrutinise the spending, providing checks and balances and making sure that the public have the opportunity to make comment on the budget. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (10.31): I will be moving an amendment, which I believe is being circulated as I speak, inserting a commencement date for the estimates committee and also revising the reporting date for the estimates committee, to reflect the government's need to respond to the report prior to the sitting week. Otherwise we are supportive of the motion put forward by Ms Lawder. I move:

Omit paragraph (5), substitute:

“(5) the Committee is established on Monday, 6 May 2024 and shall report by Friday, 16 August 2024.”.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.32): The Greens are supportive of the amendment moved by Ms Orr. We agree with Ms Lawder that the time frame is tight. We also note that the time frame for the government to respond to the recommendations of the report is tight. Unfortunately, this squeeze in an election year is what is required.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.32): I will speak to the amendment and close debate. I fear this is quite a ridiculous reporting period. The estimates hearings finish on 6 August and the report is now due, according to Ms Orr's proposed amendment, on the 16th. This means that the committee would not even have answers to questions on notice back, potentially.

I will refer to previous Assembly estimates committees and the amount of time that was allotted. I looked at the estimates committees over the past 20 years and the number of days between the budget being handed down by the Treasurer and the reporting date. Over 20 years that average was over 50 days. Over the past 10 years it has been over 45 days. Over the past two years there were 37 days between the budget and the report.

I also refer to some comments in the estimates reports which were tabled in the Assembly. The estimates report for the 2022-23 budget said that scheduling problems arose from some ministers having limited availability. I will not read it all in detail, but I specifically note “the tight time frame between the budget and start of hearings when inviting community and industry representatives”.

Furthermore, from the 2023-24 estimates committee report, item 1.6 specifically refers to the last date of the hearings and when the report was due. This allowed the committee, according to the estimates report, only 14 business days to complete the work. It said:

At the time of the final consideration of this report, a total of 24 Questions On Notice and 10 Questions Taken On Notice remained outstanding. However, at the time the Committee were considering its recommendations there many more that were not received, meaning that the Committee lacked necessary information which could have informed its recommendations.

The Committee is concerned that if this trend of shorter timelines in which to complete estimates inquiries continues, it will negatively affect the ability of the Assembly to provide effective scrutiny on the budget process.

Recommendation No 1 of last year's estimates committee was:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government in future allow four weeks between the close of hearing dates for Estimates and the date that the Estimates Committee report is due to enable sufficient time for responses to QTONs and QONs to be taken into account.

I spoke earlier about the need for estimates committees to scrutinise spending, provide checks and balances, work in the public interest and enable organisations and businesses to have the opportunity to contribute to that scrutiny of the budget. What we have here is a proposal from Ms Orr to allow 11 days between the close of hearings and the time when the report is due. I do not comprehend how on earth the committee will produce a report in that time. You might accuse the government of trying to reduce scrutiny of the budget by providing inadequate time frames.

No-one really enjoys spending a lot of time on estimates hearings, but it is crucial. In fact, the only person I know who enjoyed estimates committees was Brendan Smyth. Some of you here will know how much Mr Smyth enjoyed estimates hearings. Whether you enjoy it or not, it is a vital part of our democratic process. The government feel that they can come in and propose an 11-day period, which includes weekends. I am not talking about 11 working days; I am talking about 11 days. I think that is quite ludicrous and quite unrealistic for those members of the committee who are trying to make a real contribution to the report, as opposed to those members who might just want to give a tick to whatever the government says, without scrutinising it in an impartial way. It is also very unfair to expect the committee secretariat staff to produce the report in such a short period of time. It is really disrespectful to them to expect them to do that.

We will not be supporting this change to the reporting date. I understand that the government have to respond to the budget as well. Perhaps the government could have brought down the budget in the first sitting week in June, rather than the last sitting week in June. There were other options to enable this, when they were looking at the sitting pattern, rather than having a scant 11 days—and, as I said, that includes weekends—to look at all of the information. I can only speculate as to the number of questions that may be taken on notice or put on notice.

The ministers who are in the hearings will say, “I will have to take that on notice,” knowing full well that the answers to those questions will not come through in time for the committee to look at them and include them in the report. This is an abuse of the power of the government. It is Labor and the Greens colluding once again to reduce scrutiny, reduce accountability and misuse their ability to direct the work of this Assembly by ignoring our democratic processes.

Budget estimates are a well-established process across a number of Westminster-style parliaments. Our Senate is the most notable example of that. But here we have a government, Labor and the Greens, riding roughshod over those processes. It is not as imperative for me in this election year, but in that period of time, even though it is such a short period of time, the Labor and Greens members of that committee will not have any time to be out campaigning in an election year, because there will be a lot of work to be done to finalise this report.

It is really inappropriate for the government to use their power in this way—the Labor and Greens members colluding to try and reduce the scrutiny of this budget. They are

trying to reduce the opportunity for members of the estimates committee to do their job properly, to do their job diligently, to do their job with the amount of effort and scrutiny that it actually deserves, rather than a rubber stamping or a ticking-off without real question, without real examination and without real scrutiny of the evidence presented in the estimates hearings. It will be done without real scrutiny of the answers to questions taken on notice or put on notice, and without real scrutiny to enable the development of a comprehensive report from the estimates committee.

As I have already mentioned, they will be putting secretariat staff under enormous pressure to try to produce that report. I feel it is so disrespectful of this government. Eleven days to produce a report is unprecedented in my time here in the Assembly. Eleven days, I think, is quite unrealistic. It is almost offensive to the process of democratic scrutiny and parliamentary oversight, which is what we are meant to be here for.

We will not be supporting this amendment. I knew that there would be adjustment to the date. I do not particularly have an issue with the start date. I did not put a start date in my motion because I knew that members opposite would want to put their stamp of control over it and put their preferred start date, rather than any date I might have nominated. But the end date to produce a report is completely unrealistic and will result in a report that is not as it should be, despite what I presume will be the very best efforts of the members of that committee.

I am hoping that they actually have a real intention to scrutinise the budget and the answers that we will receive from ministers and directorate staff. I have to assume that they will come with the best possible intentions. But I fear that this closing date means that they do not have the best possible intentions. I am deeply disappointed in the proposed date of 11 days in total, elapsed days, to produce a report, and the pressure that that will put on members of the committee and the secretariat staff. That is why we will not be supporting this amendment today.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 7

Yvette Berry
Andrew Braddock
Joy Burch
Tara Cheyne
Jo Clay
Emma Davidson
Mick Gentleman
Laura Nuttall

Suzanne Orr
Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson
Shane Rattenbury
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Rebecca Vassarotti

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

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

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

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.47): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services relating to statutory appointments in accordance with continuing resolution 5A. During the reporting period 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023, the committee considered a total of eight appointments and reappointments to the following bodies: the Architects Board and the Tree Advisory Panel. I table the following schedule of the statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Schedule of
Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2023.

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.47): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. On 20 March 2024 the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2024 was presented to the Assembly. Also on 20 March 2024 the Assembly referred the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2024 to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services for consideration of the conduct of an inquiry.

In considering the bill, the committee considered its provisions and took the view that the bill does not introduce any new, significant requirements or obligations; rather, it seeks to operationalise existing arrangements, particularly in relation to the ongoing maintenance of closed facilities in the ACT. Given its straightforward nature, the committee considers that an inquiry would be unlikely to add any new information and has resolved not to inquire into the bill.

Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance) Amendment Bill 2024

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, Minister for City Services, Minister for Government Services and Regulatory Reform and Minister for Human Rights) (10.49): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance) Amendment Bill 2024 into the Assembly today. This bill amends the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance) Act 2016, to enhance victims' experiences in seeking financial assistance through reducing red tape for victims of crime in applying for the scheme and by improving administrative efficiencies and decision-making processes for Victim Support ACT.

Since the commencement of the financial assistance scheme in 2016, more victims have applied for and received financial assistance than ever before. The government is committed to ensuring that victims are well supported, following violent crime, to access supports that are responsive to their needs and in a timely way. The Projects Assisting Victims' Experience and Recovery—PAVER—Review was commissioned by the ACT government and provides key insights to government on how this might best be achieved.

The first recommendation that the bill addresses is recommendation 4 of that review. The proposed amendment removes the requirement for a family member or intimate partner of a person who has died as a result of an offence to provide evidence of a genuine relationship with the primary victim. Requiring grieving family members to provide evidence of a genuine personal relationship not only undermines the beneficial nature of the scheme but places an unnecessary burden on related victims during a significant period of grief. Removing this requirement will mean eligibility is determined by the status of the relationship, rather than the proof of the quality and nature of that relationship.

Secondly, the bill will implement recommendation 10(e) of the PAVER Review by removing circumstances of aggravation from the act. The intention of this amendment is to streamline the provision of recognition payments, resulting in faster decision-making and significantly reducing wait times for applicants. Currently, the Victims of Crime Regulation outlines recognition payment amounts and specifies 56 recognition payment amounts for victims. These amounts are determined according to the offence category, the number of circumstances of aggravation and whether the offence caused a very serious injury that is likely to be permanent. The PAVER Review identified that these payment categories and subcategories are unnecessarily complex and a barrier to victims trying to access payments, and they substantially contribute to increased application processing times.

Since the scheme was transferred to the Victims of Crime Commissioner to administer, applications have continued to increase, with the most recent Human Rights Commission report showing that the 2022-23 period saw an increase of 86 per cent in applications from the previous year. This bill allows for the simplification and streamlining of those recognition payments, making them more accessible to victims by reducing the evidentiary burden and resulting in faster decision-making times.

Another recommendation from the PAVER Review that this bill implements is recommendation 10(f). The bill will add additional safeguards to the legislation that protects a victim's application and supporting application material held by Victim Support ACT from being subpoenaed and used in unrelated court proceedings. This protection will reassure victims that detailed personal information can be submitted as part of the application process without fear that this information could be used to the victim's detriment in unrelated court proceedings. The application and other documents will still be accessible in certain circumstances, including for the purposes of an appeal or review of a decision regarding financial assistance, or in certain circumstances where an applicant is seeking their own information.

The bill also introduces a new provision which replaces the right to apply for a recognition payment under the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance) Act 1983 with

the right to apply for a recognition payment under the 2016 act. In doing so, this bill will ensure victims of certain types of serious offences that were eligible under the repealed financial assistance act are eligible for financial assistance under this act. This amendment will ensure parity between recognition payments given for offences prior to 2016 and recognition payments for similar offences that occurred after 2016 when the act commenced. In achieving this, it ensures consistency and fairness in financial assistance provision to victims of crime and it streamlines processes so that historical victims receive that support as quickly as possible and on the same terms as current applicants.

To allow sufficient time for implementation, there will be a delayed commencement of 1 July 2025 for amendments relating to the removal of the circumstances of aggravation and applications for financial assistance for acts of violence before the commencement of this act.

The bill also addresses key issues that the Victims of Crime Commissioner has identified will improve experiences for victims of crime accessing the financial assistance scheme and ensuring the delivery of the scheme remains client-centred and trauma-informed. The bill removes the requirement for the commissioner or delegate to provide a second notice of ineligibility for financial assistance to ineligible applicants, where the applicant has not responded to the initial notice.

Finally, the bill expands eligibility for financial assistance to victims of intimate image abuse offences. It is well understood that the non-consensual sharing of intimate images can cause considerable harm to victims and the community, and it is important that victims of this type of offending can access appropriate financial support through the scheme.

This bill builds on the reform work established by the introduction of the current financial assistance scheme in 2016 by improving accessibility to that scheme, protecting sensitive applicant information, ensuring parity between applicants of historical and recent acts of violence, and providing victims with financial assistance in a timely way by streamlining payment amounts. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Heritage Amendment Bill 2024

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (10.56): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Heritage Amendment Bill 2024. This bill amends the Heritage Act 2004. It makes several policy and administrative amendments to this

legislation administered by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. The changes are part of the government's ongoing reform program to improve heritage arrangements in the ACT.

The bill improves the operations of the ACT Heritage Council in considering registration nominations to the heritage register and strengthens the council's membership by providing the minister with flexibility in appointing members with other disciplines and doubling its representation of members of the Aboriginal community.

The amendments will allow the council to reject an application to nominate a place or object to the register if it does not meet the requirements for submission; expand the grounds for dismissal of a nomination application to the heritage register; enable the reassessment of the nomination of a nominated place or object on the register if they have not yet had provisional registration decisions; expand the list of disciplines that may be considered in appointing expert members to the council to include other disciplines, skills or experience that the minister considers will benefit its functioning; and increase the Aboriginal community representatives on the council from one to two, to provide the council with access to wider skills, experience and gender diversity when considering places and objects with cultural or gender sensitivities.

As I have said, the bill amends the Heritage Act 2004 to strengthen the council's management of registration nominations. It clarifies and expands the grounds for dismissal of applications and enables reassessment where circumstances or details in applications have changed.

These amendments will enable the resolution of 41 outstanding nominations made under the repealed Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991 which were transitioned automatically to the register with the introduction of the current act. Progressing these nominations to provisional registration has been difficult due to insufficient information or changes to the nomination details over the years. Under the current act they were unable to be progressed and remained in limbo. The amendments correct this legislative anomaly, allowing these historical nominations to be appropriately assessed and resolved. This will address the historic backlog of registration nominations and enhance the register—both outcomes proposed by the government's recent heritage review.

The next amendment in the bill expands the list of disciplines in section 17 that the minister may consider in appointing expert members to the council. This list will now include "any other discipline, skills or experience the minister considers beneficial to or necessary for the functioning of the council". Other disciplines may be business or governance skills—for example, either solely or in conjunction with other existing heritage-related disciplines.

The last of the amendments relates to section 17 of the act. It increases the number of public representatives on the council by doubling the number of Aboriginal community representatives from one to two. The appointment of two Aboriginal representatives will provide the council with access to wider skills, experience and, importantly, gender diversity, providing increased options to consider places and objects with cultural sensitivities. Strengthening the role of the ACT's Aboriginal peoples in their roles as custodians of their cultural heritage is one of the government's priorities in the

statement of expectations that I provided to the newly formed council in August 2023 and a key recommendation of the government's heritage review.

In summary, this bill makes amendments that will facilitate the assessment and the decision-making of registration nominations in a way that is timely, administratively efficient, provides clarity for applicants and gives due consideration to the outcomes sought under the act. Other amendments provide the minister with increased flexibility to ensure that council membership has the most appropriate mix of disciplines, skills and experience to undertake this work.

Importantly, the amendments to increase the Aboriginal community representation will strengthen consideration of Aboriginal culture and history in the council's decision-making and provide more effective consultation with all elements of the ACT's Aboriginal community. These are commendable improvements to the ACT statute book. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2024

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.03): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2024 into the Assembly. The purpose of this bill is to make minor and non-controversial amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 2014 to improve its operations. These minor amendments are being brought forward ahead of the finalisation of the 10-year statutory review of the act. This will permit timely resolution of several operational issues with the act that are being experienced by those that regulate it, including the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

Minor amendments include clarification of offences related to entry to and feeding of animals in reserves; clearer provisions for leave reserve directions; and correcting minor technical errors in the act, amongst others. These changes are expected to improve the operability of the act and enhance enforcement and compliance.

Although the changes in this bill are considered minor, the proposed amendments fill the gaps identified by our conservation officers in the field. Our priority is to address grey areas in the current legislation that restrict our officers from exercising a function under the act. The bill also aims to reduce the ambiguity of some provisions for usability and ease of administration.

I will now outline the key aspects of the bill and how these are important in enhancing the operability of the act. The bill amends section 213 to make it an offence for a person to enter and remain in a reserve without paying an entrance fee. This amendment clarifies the intention of the provision that it is an offence both to enter and to remain in the reserve if an entry fee has not been paid.

An amendment to section 214 makes it an offence to take or allow a non-native animal to enter or remain in a reserve, with the exception of assistance animals or animals otherwise allowed in the reserve through an activities declaration. For example, horses and dogs are allowed in some reserves. The amendment also clarifies that an offence is not committed when a person is simply travelling on a road in a reserve with an animal confined within their motor vehicle.

Section 215 of the act is amended to include feeding of both native and non-native animals in reserves as an offence. This change will reduce the risks brought about by feeding wildlife, such as encouraging non-desired species and interactions, public health hazards, and the harm caused to native wild animals through consumption of inappropriate food.

The bill also amends section 256 to include the restriction of activities in reserves that may have negative social impacts. Currently, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna has powers to restrict or prohibit an activity that could have a negative impact on a reserve. The bill amends this provision to include restriction of activities that may have a negative impact on reserve users, therefore safeguarding the public's enjoyment of our native reserves. Activities that create loud noises—for example, generators and sound equipment—or produce excessive dust or offensive odour are just some of the activities that the conservator may restrict or prohibit inside a reserve.

The bill also addresses an area of the current legislation that restricts our conservation officers from exercising a function under the act. At present, the act gives power to conservation officers to issue a stop vehicle direction if they suspect that an animal or plant in a vehicle is in contravention of the act. The bill will expand this provision to include not only plants and animals but anything in the vehicle that an officer reasonably suspects is connected to an offence under the act. This may include other material that is prohibited from removal under the act, such as soil, rock and Aboriginal artefacts. This amendment will improve consistency in the Nature Conservation Act's provisions and enable our conservation officers to protect our natural assets more fully.

Lastly, section 325 is amended so that a leave reserve direction will state the name of the specific reserve and provide a maximum exclusion period of 24 hours, if no reserve closure direction is in place. This amendment safeguards a person's right to move freely in the ACT by providing a reasonable and proportionate limit on a person's freedom of movement by specifying the reserve and a maximum time period that a person can be excluded from that reserve.

I am confident that the amendments in this bill will strengthen how we protect and conserve nature in the ACT. These are small but necessary changes to enhance the enforcement of the act without putting an unreasonable cost or burden onto the public. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Crimes (Sentence Administration) Amendment Bill 2024

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

Title read by Clerk.

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) (11.10): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Amendment Bill 2024 to the Legislative Assembly. This bill makes one amendment to the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005. This amendment makes an important change that will make arrangements fairer for people serving sentences in the community under intensive corrections orders and good behaviour orders.

A key part of many such orders is the requirement to perform a specified number of hours of community service work. Engaging in meaningful tasks that benefit the community helps people serving a sentence to develop skills and a sense of responsibility. Such community-based approaches foster connection to the community, empathy, respect and a deeper understanding of the consequences of their actions. This can help to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and make our community safer.

However, there are times when it is not possible for a person to do their community service work, even when they are committed to doing so and are willing and able to complete their hours. For example, some community service work is outdoors and is cancelled when the weather is not safe or suitable. At other times, unplanned staffing shortages mean the work cannot be properly supervised or arrangements for the community service work cannot be met. In these circumstances, people have been unable to complete their community service hours as planned, through no fault or choice of their own, and this can delay how long they have to live under orders, even when they are willing and able to do the work and demonstrate their commitment to completing their sentence.

The Crimes (Sentence Administration) Amendment Bill 2024 will make the system fairer by allowing the Director-General of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate or their delegate discretion to credit people serving such sentences with community service hours in these circumstances. It will ensure that, when people are willing to serve the community as ordered by their sentence but are unable to complete planned work through no fault of their own, their willingness to do the work can be acknowledged. This change is not new or radical; it is similar to accommodations that were made during the COVID-19 pandemic when people were unable to complete community service work for COVID-related reasons. Similar arrangements were in place, acknowledging that all of us are sometimes willing but unable to meet our obligations through no fault of our own.

There are provisions included to make sure sentences, including community service hours, are not undermined by this change, such as limits on the number of hours that can be credited and the proportion of the sentence that can be credited under these circumstances. The bill also includes a requirement for the director-general or their delegate to consider whether crediting hours meets the statutory purposes of sentencing. It will not be an automatic measure and it will be appropriately overseen.

It is important that legally imposed orders remain in place and people do the work needed to complete their sentence and prepare to rejoin the community. The changes and the limits to the changes strike a balance between ensuring the integrity of sentences and making sure people are not disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control. However, the bill will address an element of the justice system that was frustrating and unfair to people who genuinely want to serve their sentence and move past the events that led to their sentencing. It is part of the ACT government's ongoing work to improve the administration of corrective services to make our justice system more fair, reasonable and just. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Debate resumed from 8 February 2024, on motion by **Mr Gentleman**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.14): I will speak very briefly today in relation to the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. The Canberra Liberals are fully supportive of making sure that our workplaces are safe places that people come home from every day. The Boland review set out an important national direction for reform in this area, and we note that the reforms brought by the minister today are in line with that national move, so we will be supporting them.

I want to quickly raise one concern that stakeholders brought up with us, and that is the general direction of regulation from this government. Too frequently, we are seeing an increased regulative burden on businesses and employers. I would like to encourage the government to make sure that these reforms, as they are implemented, are not contributing to the ongoing stress and pressure that is on our construction workforces, on our businesses and on our employers in these times of definite economic uncertainty. Otherwise, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting the bill.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.16): The Greens will also be supporting this bill. I would like to extend my thanks to the minister's office for answering the questions that my office had on it. It is entirely reasonable for penalties to be indexed over time. Based on my calculations, most of the penalties have been increased to something approximating what they would have been had indexation been in place since the penalties were introduced. The way that the penalties are being indexed and updated does feel a little clunky, but I have been advised by Mr Gentleman's office that it arises due to a nationally harmonised approach not mapping well onto a penalty unit system that would otherwise be used, but that it will get the job done.

The exceptions to indexation are as would have been expected with respect to the most egregious offences involving malicious intent or serious negligence. This includes the new provisions for industrial manslaughter and corporate responsibility. We are not talking here about minor offences or honest mistakes; therefore the Greens are in a position to accept these elevated maximum penalties. The penalty that is issued in any given situation, quite rightly, remains a decision for the courts.

The Greens believe that physical and mental workplace health and safety should underline all other aspects of work. We want the ACT government to lead Australia in best practices in legislation, and implementation and enforcement of workplace laws. It does worry me that it took almost three years from having agreement by national workplace health and safety ministers to amend the laws to the reforms actually being introduced here in the Assembly, but I am happy to let the minister explain why this has taken time. The Greens would also like to see increased protection for whistleblowers, including for workers reporting unsafe work practices and environments, but I accept that that will have to be a conversation for another time.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.17): I wish to speak today in support of the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. In addition to ensuring that the penalties applied under the ACT's work health and safety laws are appropriately adjusted to contemporary values, this bill presents an important opportunity to modernise the way in which our territory addresses work health and safety breaches by bodies corporate.

This bill will strengthen the ACT's work health and safety regulator and the ability of the territory's courts to deal with corporate conduct and corporate culture in response to work health and safety breaches by bodies corporate under the work health and safety laws. In doing so, the bill reflects findings made by the Australian Law Reform Commission in its 2020 report on corporate criminal responsibility, in addition to similar findings of shortcomings made by Marie Boland in the 2018 *Review of the model work health and safety laws*.

The Australian Law Reform Commission found that successful prosecutions of corporations in Australia are difficult. All too often, corporations can be seen to be treating civil regulation and civil penalties as just the cost of doing business. It was only recently that the territory prohibited corporations from having insurance policies that covered penalty amounts that were issued because of breaches of work health and safety laws that jeopardise the health and safety of workers and members of our community. Transferring aggregation provisions that enable the consideration and attribution of conduct across the whole of corporations to the work health and safety framework will provide a clear signpost to bodies corporate operating in the territory that corporate misconduct and allowances of corporate culture that do not prioritise health and safety of people will be prosecuted. It will also provide greater certainty for regulators, investigators and prosecutors.

The work health and safety laws rightly address the corporate patterns of behaviour by established duty-based offences. The move to ensure the ability to aggregate the conduct of bodies corporate operates effectively within the work health and safety framework. It does not diminish the ACT's Criminal Code but clearly demonstrates this

government's commitment that corporate culpability for offences will be prosecuted and that there is a nationally consistent approach to addressing and preventing poor workplace safety practices. This nationally consistent approach to workplace safety offences means all workers can and should expect that their health and safety is being prioritised at work. This is what our community expects, this is what our workers expect, and this is what good employers expect.

The ACT's legislative framework for work health and safety is guided by the fundamental principle that all workplaces create a healthy and safe working environment for workers and others. Too often, workplaces are shrouded by corporate cultural layers that have not been adequately interrogated under a lens of contemporary safe work design practices. Health and safety risks must, where possible, be eliminated or minimised as far as reasonably practical, and this duty extends to corporate culture.

I thank the minister for bringing this bill to the Assembly and for his work in ensuring that workers in the ACT are safe. I support the bill.

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) (11.21), in reply: I am pleased to speak about the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. As foreshadowed in my presentation speech, the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill is largely a technical bill which advances the territory's adoption of changes made to the model work health and safety laws. Specifically, and in answer to Mr Braddock's query, the amendments to the territory's work health and safety laws align with recent changes to the nationally agreed template laws.

They propose to increase work health and safety penalty amounts, introduce an annual indexation method for the work health and safety penalty arrangements to maintain penalty levels over time, clarify that officers or persons undertaking a business are captured by category 1 offences and will be held accountable in the event that their conduct breaches work health and safety duties and results in a serious risk or injury to a worker, and transfers and strengthens measures to consider corporate criminal liability from the ACT's Criminal Code to the Work Health and Safety Act.

One of the outcomes of the 2018 independent review into the model work health and safety laws by Marie Boland was the clear finding that penalties under the work health and safety framework were out-of-date and had not kept pace with either community expectations or real-life monetary value.

The amendments in this bill will ensure that penalties reflect the seriousness of the work health and safety duties to ensure workplaces remain safe. This will see a significant increase across all work health and safety penalties of almost 40 per cent, with higher penalty increases applied to the most serious breaches: category 1 offences and industrial manslaughter. The amendments will also introduce indexation to these penalty units to ensure they maintain their real value over time.

In addition, and consistent with the national agreement by work health and safety ministers, the maximum penalty for industrial manslaughter will increase in the ACT

from \$16.5 million to the model penalty amount of \$18 million. Category 1 offences will also see a proportionate increase from \$3 million to over \$10 million. It is \$10,425,000 for bodies corporate.

The Work Health and Safety Act provides for three categories of offence for failure to comply with the health and safety duty. Category 1 offences relate to the most serious—with the exception of industrial manslaughter—cases of noncompliance, involving recklessness in exposing an individual to whom a duty of care is owed to the risk of death, serious injury or illness. The increase in penalty values has been agreed by work health and safety ministers to represent the gravity and seriousness of the offence and meet community expectations.

The model laws are in place in all jurisdictions except Victoria, and the amendments made by this bill have already been introduced by the commonwealth, New South Wales and South Australia. Adopting the model law amendments demonstrates the ACT's commitment to the nationally agreed work health and safety framework and upholds our obligations as a signatory to the Inter-Governmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety.

In addition to strengthening the offences and penalty framework in the Work Health and Safety Act, this bill also includes amendments dealing with criminal liability for bodies corporate in considering breaches of work health and safety duties, providing greater deterrence for poor safety management in workplaces. These provisions strengthen the existing Criminal Code provisions specific to WHS offences and will allow courts to consider and aggregate the conduct of bodies corporate charged with breaches of their work health and safety duties, not just those in managerial roles. This, in addition to the impact of corporate culture, plays an important role in promoting healthy and safe workplace environments.

The inserted provisions comprehensively clarify that the conduct of an employee, officer or agent of a body corporate is deemed to have been taken by the body corporate where that conduct breaches the work health and safety duties. Corporate cultures must prevent workplace safety offences, and any authorised person that knowingly or tacitly permits conduct that constitutes the physical element of a work health and safety offence will be held to account. Through this bill, the ACT government will be taking positive steps to create and promote safe and healthy working conditions in the territory.

The bill also makes minor technical changes to other legislation within my portfolio. This includes the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act. It will fix the date of commencement of portable long service leave coverage to the hairdressing, beauty, accommodation and food services industries from 1 April 2025. This date has been fixed to align with the levy contribution and reporting quarterly cycle to streamline administrative arrangements for the schemes' expansion on both impacted employers and the Long Service Leave Authority.

Amendments are also made in the bill to the Public Sector Management Act to clearly express the independence of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner to align with similar complaints investigation authorities such as the human rights and integrity commissioners. This is a minor legislative adjustment reflective of current practice.

I commend this bill to the Assembly as an important continuation of the territory's progressive platform in the protection of all workers and workplaces.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Debate resumed from 7 February 2024, on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.29): The Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 is a significant omnibus bill that aims to make amendments to the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005, the Crimes Act 1900, the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005, the Bail Act 1992, and the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill.

The bill includes an amendment to the Bail Act 1992 that will extend permitted time limits for a person in custody to be brought to the court, increasing the duration of this period from 48 hours to 96 hours. A second amendment to the Bail Act will grant powers to the courts to order bail conditions for an individual who appears before the court in response to a summons or court attendance notice. As it stands, this can only be achieved where an individual is first remanded and then requires bail, which does not present the most optimal circumstance.

The bill will also amend the Crimes Act 1900 to further clarify the definition of a serious offence in section 300. The amendment provides clarity that serious offences involve not only actual or threatened violence but also a substantial risk of harm to another person. It is anticipated that this measure will enhance community safety by ensuring that individuals who present significant harm but are presently unfit to plead, with a likelihood of fitness within 12 months, will be remanded or granted bail by the court. As such, mentally unfit individuals will have their right to freedom restricted to mitigate their risk to the wellbeing of the community.

The bill will also amend the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 to effect changes to ensure individuals historically convicted of an offence related to child sex will remain registered offenders, while also updating the schedule of registrable offences in the ACT. In essence, this broadens the range of offences that capture child sex offences and is a measure designed to protect children and ensure youth and family safety.

The bill will also amend the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005 to increase the total membership of the Sentence Administration Board from 11 to 12 members. The

Sentence Administration Broad has the powers to grant or refuse parole and consider breaches of parole and intensive corrections orders, among other powers. By increasing the number of appointed members, this will invest more labour on the board to increase its daily operational capacity. The new position will be opened strictly for the Chief Police Officer or their delegate.

I note in closing that the JACS committee resolved not to undertake an inquiry into this bill. I appreciate again the feedback from the ACT Law Society, who expressed no issues of significant concern with the bill. I note the scrutiny committee, in report 39, drew the attention of the Assembly to the potential implication of limitations on the right to liberty and security of persons under section 18 of the Human Rights Act but did not require a response from the minister.

I again thank the minister for providing his staff for a briefing, which I received on 21 February. I always appreciate the feedback from our public servants. As I said in my opening remarks, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.32): I rise to speak briefly in support of the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill, as Mr Cain said, is an omnibus bill that makes several technical amendments and changes to a range of legislation. One of the major amendments in the bill is to the Bail Act, to the current requirement to bring a person in custody before the court within 48 hours, extending the period to up to 96 hours when a person is certified to be medically unfit to be brought before the court. For this to apply, a police officer must provide the court with a certificate from a doctor stating the person is unfit to appear before the court. This must be provided within the first 48 hours. This ensures people in custody are afforded humane treatment by prioritising medical care over court appearances. The 48-hour extension allows for the person to still appear before the court promptly, which reduces the impact on their right to liberty.

Another new section inserted into the Bail Act is to deem a person to be in the custody of the court for the purpose of making an order granting the person bail or applying the provisions of the Bail Act in relation to the grant of bail. These provisions will apply where the person is not already in custody and either the person was served with a summons or court attendance notice while serving a sentence of imprisonment or the court is satisfied on fresh evidence or information that was unavailable when the person was served that a relevant risk applies in the proceedings and the court adjourns or postpones the hearing of the proceeding begun by the summons. This amendment has the aim of making bail orders for the protection and welfare of the community and promoting effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

The bill also amends the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act to update a range of offences in schedules 1 and 2 of the act. This includes savings provisions to ensure persons who are convicted of historic offences will be captured by the legislation.

Technical amendments to a range of other acts are also included, including making reference to the National Anti-Corruption Commission. This serves as a reminder to us all about the importance of integrity in the work that we do.

I would like to thank Minister Rattenbury for bringing these amendments to the Assembly. ACT Labor is very pleased to vote in support of them.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.35), in reply: The Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 makes five key amendments to ACT laws to improve the operation of our criminal and justice system. Importantly, the bill will improve the fairness of court processes and will update laws relating to the Child Sex Offenders Register to ensure the ongoing protection of our community. Direct consultation with justice stakeholders and the legal community here in the ACT identified the need for the amendments in this bill, and I will discuss each of those amendments in greater detail.

The bill makes two amendments to the Bail Act 1992 to improve court processes, as has been noted in the discussion today. Firstly, the bill empowers the court to make a bail order when a person appears in response to a summons or court attendance notice. This amendment fills a gap identified by the Supreme Court. In a recent judgement, the court noted that it did not have the ability to make a bail order in these circumstances because the person was not in custody, which ordinarily triggers the court's power to make a bail order. This amendment responds to that issue.

The amendment provides the court with the power to deem a person to be in the custody of the court for the limited purposes of then making a bail order granting bail. This power will be available in two limited circumstances: firstly, where a person is served with a summons or court attendance notice while in custody but is then released before appearing in court; and, secondly, where the court is satisfied on fresh evidence or information that a relevant bail risk applies. An example of a bail risk may be that the person is likely to try to interfere with a witness in the proceedings. This amendment aims to protect the community by allowing the court to make bail orders targeted at preventing further offending and protecting particular individuals such as victims and witnesses. The amendment will also promote the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the criminal justice system.

The bill also amends the Bail Act to extend the permitted time limit for a charged person who is medically unfit to be brought before the court. At present, a person who has been taken into custody and charged with an offence must be brought before the court as soon as practicable, and at least within 48 hours. The bill amends this permitted time frame to 96 hours in circumstances where the accused is hospitalised, and a doctor at the hospital certifies that they are medically unfit. The amendment is targeted towards situations where the accused person is physically unfit. The provisions are not intended to capture accused persons who are mentally incapable of participating in a bail hearing, as this is already sufficiently dealt with by the Bail Act.

In practice, this amendment will be used in situations where the person is unconscious, in surgery during court hours or heavily medicated. For example, the amendment would cover a situation where the accused person was a driver involved in a multi-vehicle crash and is in a critical condition for a couple of days following the incident. This amendment reduces the likelihood that a bail hearing may need to occur where an accused person is not capable of providing instructions or understanding proceedings due to their medical situation. The amendment will protect the accused's right to a fair

trial by ensuring that necessary medical treatment or care is given priority over the requirement to bring the person before the court for a bail hearing. The flexibility afforded by this amendment will help to ensure the fair and humane treatment of accused persons.

The bill also amends the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 to update the list of offences which trigger a requirement to be registered as a child sex offender. The Child Sex Offenders Register scheme protects children by preventing persons who have been convicted of relevant child sex offences from being employed in child-related employment, and by requiring ongoing reporting to police of particulars such as residential address, employment details and travel plans.

The schedules to the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act list the relevant ACT and commonwealth child sex offences which, upon conviction, trigger an obligation to be registered as a child sex offender. The bill amends these schedules to reflect changes that have been made to the substantive legislation—for example, to add the new commonwealth offence of “possess or control child exploitation material obtained or accessed using carriage service”. The bill does make changes to the operation of the scheme or to the safeguards that were built in when the scheme was developed. The bill only updates the list of offences to reflect changes in other criminal law legislation to ensure the ongoing protection of children’s safety.

The bill also increases the number of appointees to the Sentence Administration Board from 11 to 12. The additional member of the board will be a dedicated position for the Chief Police Officer or their delegate. The board is an administrative body responsible for ensuring that sentences imposed by courts are given effect. The board conducts hearings and makes important decisions, including decisions about the grant or refusal of parole. The board also considers how to deal with breaches of parole orders. By convention, a police member has generally been appointed to the board in the past. However, this amendment creates a dedicated police position to emphasise the importance of a law enforcement perspective for the board in exercising its powers. The increase in numbers of appointees will also assist the operational flexibility of the board, which has statutory time frames for its responsibilities.

Finally, the bill clarifies that, for the purpose of part 13 of the Crimes Act 1900, a serious offence must include a substantial risk of harm to another person. Part 13 of the Crimes Act sets out provisions about unfitness to plead and mental impairment. The definition of serious offence in this part affects the orders the court can make and how restrictive they are. The amended definition provides that a serious offence is an offence with a maximum penalty of more than one year of imprisonment, where the offending involved actual or threatened violence and substantial risk of harm to another person. Alternatively, a serious offence can be an offence involving an act endangering life.

This amendment addresses concerns about the scope of the definition raised by the Supreme Court in a recent decision. The bill clarifies that a serious offence must involve a substantial risk of harm to another person. This reflects the approach taken by the court in case law. The approach to the drafting of the definition in the bill will ensure that the judiciary retains flexibility in assessing whether a particular offence satisfies the definition based on the factual matrix in each case.

This bill demonstrates the government's strong and ongoing commitment to improving the criminal justice system and outcomes for the people who are involved with it. The amendments will help to ensure that our laws continue to meet the needs and expectations of the community, and that our courts and administrative bodies can operate as effectively as possibly.

I note the comments by members in the discussion today. I thank them for their analysis of the bill and for their observations of support. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Estimates 2024-2025—Select Committee Membership

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Cain): Madam Speaker has been notified in writing of the following nominations for membership of the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025: Ms Lawder, Miss Nuttall and Ms Orr.

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to:

That the Members so nominated be appointed as members of the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025.

Sitting suspended from 11.44 am to 2 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

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) (2.01): Minister Steel is away for personal reasons this week, as explained yesterday by the Chief Minister, so there are ministers here who will take questions on his portfolios. The Chief Minister is also absent from the Assembly today and tomorrow for ministerial council responsibilities. I will endeavour to respond to questions in the Chief Minister and Treasury portfolios, noting that that might make this a very quick question time! Minister Cheyne will take questions in the tourism, trade, investment and economic development portfolios, and Minister Rattenbury will take climate action questions.

Questions without notice

Legislative Assembly—Parliamentary and Governing Agreement

MS LEE: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, the 2020

Parliamentary and Governing Agreement that you signed with Labor, under the heading “Stable Government”, states:

Support the Government’s economic and fiscal strategy, as set out in the August 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, of strengthening the ACT economy to protect Canberrans’ jobs and the community as we emerge from a global economic crisis, protecting the ACT’s strong Credit Rating and ensuring sound public finances and balance sheet over the medium term.

Since the PAGA was signed, the Treasurer, your coalition partner and the Chief Minister, has failed to deliver even one surplus, lost the AAA credit rating, driven up borrowings to over \$13 billion, with an interest bill of over \$400 million, and is on track to deliver a deficit of over \$1 billion. Attorney-General, was this the “ensuring sound public finances and balance sheet” that you signed up for?

Mr Gentleman: A point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance to understand whether or not the address of this particular question is in the attorney’s portfolio.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will have another word with the Clerk, but my understanding is that Mr Rattenbury signed the PAGA as leader of the Greens, not as Attorney-General. I will talk to the Clerk and give the attorney a moment to clarify his signature to that. Ms Lee, unfortunately, I will be ruling that out of order because Mr Rattenbury signed that as the Greens leader.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, could I ask a question? My understanding, under standing orders, is that you can be asked a question on something that is before the Assembly, regardless of whether you are a minister or not. Obviously, the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement is extant for the duration of this term and sits before the Assembly as guidance for the government, as a matter in the Assembly. I understand that it has been tabled in the Assembly. Therefore why wouldn’t the minister be able to answer a question? My understanding also is that answers have been given in this place previously on matters relating to the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, so there is a precedent where members and ministers, regardless of their capacity, have actually answered questions about that document.

MADAM SPEAKER: I refer to 114:

Questions may be put to a Minister relating to public affairs with which that Minister is officially connected, to proceedings pending in the Assembly or to any matter of administration for which that Minister is responsible.

Can I seek clarification from a member who has signed the PAGA? Has that been tabled or has it found its way into the Assembly?

Mr Rattenbury: Madam Speaker, the Deputy Chief Minister and I are just conferring. I imagine it has been at some point; nonetheless it is an agreement between two parties. It is not a matter of parliamentary business.

Ms Lee: Madam Speaker, I seek your guidance. I have heard what you have just stated in response to Mr Hanson’s point. The other point that I would add to that is that Mr

Rattenbury is a member of the cabinet's expenditure review committee and clearly has responsibility in his role as a minister in making decisions based on the budget. I would say on that basis that it would be right for him to answer these questions.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think you have a point in that, so I will give you the opportunity to rephrase your question so that you can go directly to that, and not to Mr Rattenbury as the Greens leader.

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, I will not repeat the quote; I am sure Mr Rattenbury is well aware of what is written in the PAGA. Mr Rattenbury, in your capacity as a member of the ERC, was this the "ensuring sound public finances and balance sheet" that you signed up for?

MR RATTENBURY: I can assure the Assembly that the entire cabinet work extremely hard to ensure that the ACT is in a sound financial position. There are tensions there; as we have seen through the pandemic, there are times when the government needs to spend to invest in our community. There are times when the government needs to seek to make savings.

This government is very focused on recognising that we live in a rapidly growing city that needs significant infrastructure investment. We live in a city where much of our infrastructure is ageing, so there is a need for investment in those areas. With our population growth, there is significant demand on services, such as health and education. These are all of the factors that both the ERC and the cabinet is taking into account in order to produce the budgets that are tabled in this place.

MS LEE: Mr Rattenbury, are you concerned or do you believe that Mr Barr is in breach of the PAGA given his appalling record on the ACT budget?

MR RATTENBURY: As I have outlined, the cabinet is working together to deal with the many pressures that are being placed on the ACT government. We are mindful of the need to balance that desire. To ensure that we have a sustainable budget, we are making sure that we invest in the things we need to. That is a constant piece of work, and the ACT continues to have extremely positive economic performance in many regards. That is something that I think our community recognises.

MR CAIN: Mr Rattenbury, did you sell out Canberrans just to get some ministerial positions?

MR RATTENBURY: No.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, because there has been some confusion about this, with the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, there are actually press releases put out by the ACT government on their website titled "Parliamentary and Governing Agreement annual update". It refers to the Chief Minister, as in Mr Barr, in his capacity as Chief Minister. It has quotes attributable to the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Shane Rattenbury. If you have the government, on its own website, putting out statements about the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement and quoting the ministers as ministers, we should be able ask questions on it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hanson. The questions were asked and answered.

Mr Hanson: They were, but with some confusion.

Attorney-General—conduct

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, during question time yesterday, when asked about who raised concerns with you that led to you calling the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions in for a meeting, you refused to answer. You also said you would check to see whether you have any notes that you took in your meeting with the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions, held on 30 January 2024. Attorney-General, who raised those concerns that led you to call that meeting with the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions?

MR RATTENBURY: With this line of questioning, the Liberal Party are trying to step into a space where community members are intimidated away from raising concerns to the responsible ministers for fear of being named in a highly politicised way in a public environment.

Mr Cain: So who was it?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, I have come to you every day this sitting week. If I come to you again, you will be warned. Mr Rattenbury, sorry for interrupting.

MR RATTENBURY: I think it is quite important that people who have concerns are able to raise them. Then it is my job to consider the credibility of those concerns, think about the motivation for them and decide what to do with those concerns. In this case, I received concerns from a number of quarters, and that was the basis on which I felt that it was important to act—both the nature of those concerns and the places from which I received them.

MS LEE: Attorney-General, what were the quarters that you received those concerns from?

MR RATTENBURY: People who had knowledge of the circumstances.

MR CAIN: Attorney, have you checked to see whether you have any notes from your meeting with the Acting DPP and, if so, will you table them?

MR RATTENBURY: I do not have any notes from that meeting. My staff do.

Development—Thoroughbred Park

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. The ACT racing industry has indicated they want to build a \$2 billion property development on the racecourse. The original lease for the racecourse was granted under a land rent agreement and it was a concessional lease. That lease contained provisions for government to resume the site

at any time and for any reason, because the government of the time recognised that they might want the site back for community benefit. Minister, is the ACT government now intending to let the horseracing industry make an unearned windfall worth hundreds of millions of dollars when that land is developed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I feel that Ms Clay is skirting on the edge of requesting an announcement of government policy. I will, nevertheless, remind her that any decision of government will be made in accordance with the ACT's planning laws and frameworks when considering the future use of this site. She will be aware that the site has been identified in the Inner North district strategy as being an opportunity for future development that would enable the development of housing and other facilities close to light rail and close to other inner-city opportunities. As Ms Clay is aware, that work has many stages yet to go through. It is absolutely pre-emptive to ask what process the government might undertake to work with the Racing Club on this matter.

It is a matter of public record that the Canberra Racing Club has indicated that it would like to diversify its sources of revenue so that it can move away from some reliance on ACT government funding—which Ms Clay has previously explicitly moved to remove from the Racing Club—and that conversation with the Racing Club is continuing. But it would be pre-emptive and, indeed, impossible for me to make any announcement about how that might pan out.

MS CLAY: If development goes ahead, does the government have any intention to recoup the full value of the site and development from the horseracing industry so that financial and social benefits go to back to the community and not to the horseracing industry?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, there is a long way to go in this process, but I can assure Ms Clay that, from the Labor Party and the government's perspective, there would be no intention of allowing a development that did not ensure that ACT taxpayers benefited. That is why we have, for example, a lease variation scheme in place, and that is why there are costs associated for proponents to deconcessionalise a lease if they choose to do that. There are a number of strategies that the government consistently has in place to ensure that taxpayers, in fact, do get a benefit when people seek to uplift the value of the land that they hold to undertake development. Of course, one of the things that we also have when releasing land or working with people who are intending to release land for development is requirements around the development of affordable public and community housing. All those things would undoubtedly be matters for consideration, in line with the Inner North district strategy and the planning laws that were passed last year.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, would rezoning the site represent the largest-ever handout from ACT to the horseracing industry?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, it is absolutely impossible to respond in any concrete way to the Greens' speculation. We are at a very early stage of consultations with the Canberra Racing Club. They have said what they have said on the public record. That is open for the Greens or anybody else to look at. The government has substantial processes to go through before any decisions are made in relation to this matter.

Light rail—stage 2B

MR PARTON: My question is to the Acting Minister for Transport. Minister, earlier this week we learnt of major cost blowouts to the next stage of the Gold Coast tram project. According to the Queensland government, this 13-kilometre stretch of tram track could now cost as much as \$7.6 billion. The Queensland Labor transport minister has flagged the possibility that the project may not proceed. He said: “We really do have to consider the viability of projects where they have very large cost estimates versus benefit.”

Given the \$7.6 billion upper estimate for a 13-kilometre tramline that does not have to straddle Lake Burley Griffin and does not have to navigate its way through the parliamentary triangle, are you able to finally confirm today that Stage 2B of the tram to Woden will come in well over \$4 billion?

MS CHEYNE: No, I cannot confirm any figure.

MR PARTON: Minister, why is it that the Queensland government are able to openly communicate these cost estimates publicly, when all of this information is hidden by your government?

MS CHEYNE: I reject the premise of the question. Minister Steel has answered this innumerable times.

MR COCKS: Minister, how expensive does stage 2B of the tram have to get before your government starts to question the viability? Is it \$5 billion? Is it \$6 billion?

MS CHEYNE: That is a hypothetical question.

Schools—meals for students

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I was delighted to see the ACT government support free meals in our public schools. So far, what have been the results from the free meals pilot for the five schools in the trial?

MS BERRY: The pilot does not begin until term three. We have five schools that will be part of that pilot, which will be Narrabundah Early Childhood School, Gilmore Primary School, Richardson Primary School, Gold Creek School years 7 to 10 as well the Melba Copland College years 10 to 12.

MISS NUTTALL: Is it the intention of the ACT government to provide free meals in all public schools in the ACT pending the results of the trial?

MS BERRY: I thank Miss Nuttall for her interest in this pilot. It is a pilot so that we can understand how the program can be rolled out. That is why it is called a pilot. Certainly we know that nobody operates very well on an empty stomach and certainly students and young people do not learn well on an empty stomach. They do best on a full stomach. So the facts are there, and we will take that into account as we roll out our pilot.

MR BRADDOCK: Does the ACT government plan on running these services directly, or will they be relying on external vendors and P&C associations to run school canteens?

MS BERRY: It is a pilot, so that will be considered as part of the pilot. We will initially be rolling out directly from a meal delivery service and then we will investigate and consider that program as it is rolled out.

Development—CSIRO Ginninderra site

MR CAIN: My question is to the Acting Minister for Planning. Minister, has the government ever been offered the entire former Ginninderry station land by CSIRO?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think Mr Cain is referring to the Ginninderra Research Station site. Ginninderry would be the joint venture between the ACT government and Riverview. It is well on record, Mr Cain, that there have been ongoing conversations between the ACT government and the commonwealth government about the future of the former Ginninderra Research Station site. I would refer Mr Cain to all of those things that are already on the public record in relation to that matter.

MR CAIN: Minister, will the government accept an offer for the entire swathe of land if it were offered by CSIRO?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is a matter of ongoing negotiation between the ACT government and the commonwealth government, and it would be inappropriate to speculate at this point.

MR PARTON: Minister, for the benefit of this chamber, are you able to detail what stage negotiations are up to with the CSIRO to attain this land?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I understand that there are negotiations ongoing between officials in relation to this matter. I note that this is a matter that actually sits with the Chief Minister. It is a matter of public record that the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister wrote to Senator Gallagher in her role as the Minister for Finance to ask the commonwealth government that officials expedite some of these negotiations and unstick some of the issues that are currently going backwards and forwards between officials. But it would be inappropriate to provide any further level of detail than that.

Gambling—harm minimisation

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Gaming. Minister, the 2022 ACT government YourSay listening report on bet limits suggests timelines for CMS market sounding at the beginning of 2023, with a CMS deployed by mid-2024. Why was market sounding for the CMS only started four weeks ago, six months out from an election?

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, there has been extensive ongoing work and there has been some delay. Off the back of that public consultation process, the Justice and Community

Safety Directorate needed to analyse the material that was provided, and through the Ministerial Advisory Council that Minister Cheyne and I have engagement with, we established an ongoing technical working group. What became clear was that there was a high level of technical information to work through.

As Dr Paterson will know from her work on the cashless gaming inquiry, this is a broad field in which definitions are moving around and technology is evolving, and so additional time was allocated in order to enable further research by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, and of course there were cabinet processes to be gone through as well, and we are now in a position to have that market sounding get underway.

DR PATERSON: Minister, why has there been no significant poker machine harm reduction measures implemented in the three and a half years that you have been the Minister for Gaming?

MR RATTENBURY: I reject the premise of the question, Madam Speaker. There has been a reduction in poker machine numbers, and I know that is an area of particular interest to Dr Paterson that we reduce the numbers, and that work has been taking place. There has been a range of interactions with other jurisdictions, and the work has been progressing with great vigour. The Justice and Community Safety Directorate, the officials who work on these matters, have been undertaking detailed research on behalf of the government in order to work through the various policy questions that are out there.

Dr Paterson interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: You have to do the research work to identify—you have to identify the policy options before stepping forward, and that is the work that is now being done.

MS ORR: Minister, have you asked for or received any advice on whether a CMS may stymie the reduction of overall machine numbers in the territory by locking in machine costs with a provider?

MR RATTENBURY: Madam Speaker, that is one of the issues that will be addressed as part of the market sounding. The very point of going to the market sounding, having now identified the preferred policy pathways, is to approach industry and understand what their response is to that policy agenda.

Mental health facilities—security

MR COCKS: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, in the aftermath of the tragic attack on innocent students at the ANU on 18 September last year, the then chief psychiatrist provided you with a report that, while not addressing the specific incident, recommended a range of reforms in the acute mental health system. Recommendation 32 of that report was that the government develop a risk rating, in consultation with police and ambulance services, to make explicit the level of risk a person presents to others in the community. This was in

reference to when patients were permitted to leave the facility. Were risks to the community not considered and communicated to police and ambulance services before? Was that not standard practice before the incident?

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for the question. On 1 February this year the chief psychiatrist's review report was released to the public. There were 35 recommendations in that report, but you have gone to a very specific one that addresses community safety and communication.

The ACT government has announced that it will create a cross-government task force that consists of representatives of the ACT Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. That task force will consider what was in the report and undertake extensive stakeholder consultation to provide some advice on and monitor the implementation of those recommendations.

It is very important that we are able to ensure that our justice system meets the needs and ensures the safety of individuals who are receiving therapeutic care, as well as addressing broader community safety issues. All of those considerations need to be taken into account in how we implement the recommendations of that review.

MR COCKS: Minister, were you aware of whether risks to the community were being considered in these processes, and were you comfortable with releasing people from the acute mental health units without explicit risk ratings that were communicated to the police and Ambulance Service?

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for the supplementary question. Whenever we are talking about someone's application for leave as part of their therapeutic care, there are a range of considerations that need to be taken into account and communicated to the right people involved in that decision-making process. It is normal process for those things to happen. The chief psychiatrist's review and their recommendations provide us with some very helpful and useful information about how processes could be improved.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Madam Speaker. The supplementary question was in relation to the minister's awareness and understanding, ahead of the report that she is now discussing. I ask that she be directly relevant to the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: I cannot direct the minister to answer. It would be useful to come to that point, Ms Davidson.

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for that clarification. We have discussed this on a number of occasions, and my office did provide your office with a briefing around the time that all of this was occurring. We have provided you with some information about—

Ms Lee: That's not the point.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Davidson, this chamber is not privy to communication you have had with one member, so answer the question about your awareness.

MS DAVIDSON: About how those decisions are made and our awareness level of the processes involved in that?

Mr Cocks: Yes.

MS DAVIDSON: We do not look at individual decisions one by one, but we do look at processes and we do have awareness of how they should be working.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: The minister is now way off topic. The question was regarding her awareness of the risk ratings and whether she was comfortable. I ask that you direct her to be more direct.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think you have managed to run out of time. Supplementary?

MS CASTLEY: Minister, have you, since the ANU attack, fixed the problems related to communication between the mental health units and emergency services?

MS DAVIDSON: As was discussed in my answer to the very first question, what we have done is establish a task force with all of the expertise required to work out how to both implement those recommendations and oversee the implementation of those recommendations, working with stakeholders in the community as well, to ensure that we get the balance right.

Mental health facilities—security

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the Chief Psychiatrist's report, which was delivered in the shadow of the 18 September attack on ANU students, recommended that every person under the care of a mental health service has a comprehensive forensic mental health assessment, risk assessment and treatment or management plan that must be documented, and that this is updated regularly. Minister, why wasn't this mental health assessment being routinely provided before the disastrous events of 18 September last year?

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for the question. There were processes in place at the time that this incident occurred that were intended to ensure that the right people making decisions had information about the kinds of therapeutic health care and community safety risks that needed to be considered in making decisions about granting leave. I am very appreciative of the work that has gone into the Chief Psychiatrist's report that helps us to understand how those processes could be improved. I am very much looking forward to seeing the outcome of the work by the taskforce on how those recommendations can be implemented and ensuring that they are implemented well through their oversight.

MR COCKS: Minister, when considering leave requests from patients admitted through the justice system, does your system prioritise the leave privileges of those individuals over the safety of the individual and the broader community?

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for the question. The aim of leave is to provide support to someone undergoing therapeutic care. Leave is a normal part of a process in which people are preparing to return home and continue on their mental health journey. It is very important that safety, both for the person receiving care and for the broader community, is considered as part of the decision about whether to grant leave and how that will work. It is a normal part of considering how that fits into their therapeutic care that those risks would be considered.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how can the community have confidence that the system is properly considering safety, given the track record of problems on your watch?

MS DAVIDSON: I understand that the community is very much wanting to ensure that everyone stays safe at all times in the community. There are risks that need to be managed. I am very appreciative of the work that has gone into the Chief Psychiatrist's review to help us understand how processes for decision-making and communication can be improved. I am very appreciative of the submissions that were made by a number of community stakeholders with lived experience and with experience as carers and family members of people receiving therapeutic care, as well those from experts in forensic mental health care and community safety. All those considerations have gone into some important recommendations—35 recommendations—for which a taskforce has been set up to ensure that we are implementing those recommendations well. That is the level of seriousness with which we take providing good therapeutic care to people in our community, as well as ensuring community safety.

Mental health facilities—security

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the Chief Psychiatrist's report which you released as a response to the attack on students by a patient on leave from your mental health unit showed that the decision-making processes to allow a patient to seek leave involves a consensus decision by the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit and the Gawanggal Mental Health Unit leave panel. I understand that the panel includes clinical directors, nurses and educators.

However, the report does not shed any light on how, despite these measures, an individual who was admitted through the justice system, and who had previously committed a violent act on the ANU campus in 2017, was allowed to return to the same environment. Now, multiple ANU students will carry lifelong injuries and trauma.

Minister, what went wrong in your mental health system that allowed this attack to occur, when it should have been predictable?

Ms DAVIDSON: As the member would know, to discuss the circumstances of an individual's therapeutic care, particularly when there are criminal charges that are before the courts—

Mr Cocks: I have a point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was very deliberately phrased around issues in the system, rather than the precise circumstances of those events.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Ms Davidson.

Ms DAVIDSON: In terms of understanding systemic issues that might have contributed to risks in the system—not only for this particular circumstance but for wider circumstances in general for people who are receiving forensic mental health care or therapeutic mental health care and have leave provisions—this is why we had the Chief Psychiatrist’s review conducted, and it is why we have a taskforce looking at how we implement the recommendations.

MR COCKS: Minister, how often have patients with a history of significant violence and assault been approved for unsupervised leave without comprehensive safeguards?

Ms DAVIDSON: I could provide on notice how many times individuals have been approved for leave, but the appropriate safeguards part of that question makes an implication that I think is inappropriate and disrespectful to the extensive work that is done by forensic mental healthcare professionals and by the ACAT in considering leave—

Mr Cocks: I have a point of order, Madam Speaker. The minister is seeking to debate the question, at this stage. I would ask that she respond or take it on notice.

MADAM SPEAKER: She has taken part of that question on notice, and she has made comment on the appropriateness of providing information on the second part. So there is no point of order.

Ms CASTLEY: Minister, are the problems in your mental health system occurring because you insist on putting your ideology ahead of safety and recovery?

Mr Gentleman: I have a point of order, Madam Speaker—a preamble in the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you just go to the question, please? Can you repeat the question, please?

Ms CASTLEY: Minister, are the problems in your mental health system occurring because you insist on putting your ideology ahead of safety and recovery?

Ms DAVIDSON: No.

Disability—Disability Strategy and First Action Plan

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, the ACT Disability Strategy was released just this morning. It sets out the ACT government’s commitment to a community that welcomes and values all people with disability, supporting their right to full and equal participation in all aspects of community life. What focus areas are in the Disability Strategy and First Action Plan?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the question and for her ongoing commitment to disability inclusion, including through the bill that she has before the Assembly at the moment. The ACT government is committed to building a community

that welcomes and values all people with disability. This commitment has been highlighted today with the release of the ten year ACT Disability Strategy and the First Action Plan.

This is a strategy for the one-in-five Canberrans who live with disability in the ACT: that is 80,000 people. It is also a strategy for their families, carers, service providers, and allies, but it is also a strategy for all Canberrans because we know that creating a more inclusive Canberra benefits everyone. The ACT Disability Strategy consultation heard from almost 1,000 Canberrans. The principles and actions in the strategy and the First Action Plan have been developed through extensive consultation with people with disability, families, carers, community organisations and ACT government agencies.

The strategy aims to address the systemic issues, with a focus in the action plans on actions that address each of the 12 areas of wellbeing in the ACT Wellbeing Framework. People with disability told us they want to be part of, and have much to contribute to, the ACT community. To do this, they need a voice and the ability to have control over things that affect their lives; to be able to engage in meaningful paid employment; to have access to mainstream education, housing and healthcare that meets their needs; and to feel safe and secure.

MS ORR: Minister, how will implementation of the commitments in the First Action Plan proceed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The strategy will be implemented through three action plans over ten years. They focus on achieving outcomes, as I said, against each of the 12 wellbeing domains in the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

The First Action Plan has been developed as a two-year plan in recognition of the significant work that is currently occurring in disability reform. While it draws on key themes from the disability royal commission and the NDIS review, it does not form the ACT government's response, rather it is intended to build lasting foundations to support future work. For the First Action Plan our aim is to begin to address the priority issues identified in community consultation. We want to do that by supporting the community, government and businesses to drive positive change with a focus on building capacity across government and the community.

The government has allocated more than \$5.5 million over four years to address the priorities in the First Action Plan. Some of these initiatives include support for Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to deliver culturally safe and inclusive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with a disability; setting employment targets for people with a disability in the ACT public service; working with the community sector to deliver a peer support program to improve the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people with a disability; creation of new disability liaison officer roles in Housing ACT and in Access Canberra; and strengthening the ACT government's capacity to consistently provide accessible communications and information.

Madam Speaker, these priorities in the First Action Plan were consulted through with the Disability Reference Group, and reflect very clearly what we heard through the

community consultations from April to August 2022, reflected in the listening report that was released in late 2022. A lot of work has been done to bring all of these together, and I particularly want to thank the thousand people who participated in the consultations and all of those who put the strategy together.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what other work is the ACT government doing to improve outcomes for people with disability?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson also for his question and recognise that one of the actions in the First Action Plan is the development of an ACT neurodiversity strategy, which Mr Pettersson called for in a motion in this place in September last year.

More broadly, the ACT Disability Strategy and First Action Plan is part of a suite of interconnected strategies, including the ACT Inclusive Education Strategy 2024-2034 and the ACT Disability Health Strategy 2024-2033, both of which were released in December last year, and the ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019-2029. Taken together these strategies aim for the ACT to be a more accessible and inclusive society where people with disability can fully participate in all aspects of community life. This means in the last six months the ACT government has committed more than \$19 million to disability programs, services and supports across the three strategies; the Disability Strategy, the Disability Health Strategy and the Inclusive Education Strategy.

My colleague, the Deputy Chief Minister, launched the Inclusive Education Strategy and First Action Plan in December, which will invest \$9.9 million in ensuring all children and young people, regardless of their circumstances, have access to high quality education on the same basis as their peers. Also in December, as I said, I launched the ACT Disability Health Strategy and the First Action Plan to provide a platform for change to enable people with disability to attain the highest possible quality of healthcare, free from discrimination and on equal terms with all people in the ACT. During the 2023-24 budget review, the ACT government committed initial funding of \$4.1 million towards the implementation of the First Action Plan for the Disability Health Strategy.

Madam Speaker, the ACT government is committed to ensuring we embed a social model of disability in the ACT, recognising that it is society that creates barriers to inclusion, not people with disability themselves.

Gungahlin—Joint Emergency Services Centre

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, I have been contacted by concerned ex-personnel from the Gungahlin JESC who are worried about exposure to the diesel and other toxic particulates over the time that they worked at the JESC. Minister, have you had medical advice that can be relayed to the people who are concerned about their exposure? What is the nature of that advice?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Milligan for his question and his interest in the safety of our first responders at the Gungahlin station. We released a report just the other day in relation to those contaminants at the JESC in which experts have said that there is no risk to anybody who has previously worked at the JESC. There were minimum amounts

of both lead particulate and diesel particulate which were in an area that was not accessed by staff. Staff will be returning to the JESC, as I mentioned, early in May or towards the end of May.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, who has responsibility for the wellbeing of the staff who are concerned about this matter? Where can they go to get tested without incurring further costs?

MR GENTLEMAN: My advice is that nobody has been exposed to those particulates. So we do not see any reason for them to get tested. Of course, the person responsible would be me as the minister. I took the advice of those experts who were looking at the particulates in the area. As I mentioned, that advice has been released in a report. It is safe to return to the building.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you release to the community any medical—not just expert advice but medical advice—that you have received to allay any further concerns?

MR GENTLEMAN: There is no medical advice. The advice was from experts in contamination—hazmat experts—and that document has been released already.

Housing—rental affordability

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, there has been some discussion of rents in the ACT, with claims that rents are falling. Media reports are mixed about whether rents are rising or falling. What is the latest rental data, and have rents fallen in any quarter in the ACT in this term of government?

MADAM SPEAKER: I am just conferring, and I am just needing to understand what has that got to do with the Attorney-General. Just a moment.

MR RATTENBURY: In your assistance, Madam Speaker, I have responsibility for the Residential Tenancies Act in my portfolio.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: That will be it.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: The opposition playing the man, as always. To answer Mr Braddock's question, there is obviously a range of datasets, but what I can confirm is that if one looks at the ABS data, which looks at all the rents paid in Canberra within their consumer price index measure, we have not seen rents go down in any quarter in the ACT since 2020. From June 2020, the CPI index numbers for rents in Canberra have gone up every quarter since then from a baseline in June 2020 at 109 through to a figure now at 122.9, so that has been the increase. There was a slight dip from March 2020 to June 2020 from 109.3 to 109.1, but in every quarter since then, the ABS rental index has increased, so in terms of Mr Braddock's question, the answer is no, there has not been a quarter in which rents have fallen in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK: Attorney-General, in the ACT has increasing renters' rights decreased the supply of rental properties?

MR RATTENBURY: No. According to the ABS, we have seen a growth in rental properties continually for over a decade in the ACT now, and new loans to investors for ACT residential property have increased dramatically since 2020, and borrowings by investors for ACT is still well above the pre-2020 levels.

We often hear it in this place where people—particularly the opposition—have opposed a range of measures that are about seeking to ensure that tenants live in fair and reasonable conditions, and mindful of the need to also respect the fact that investors have put a lot of their own money into these things, and it is an important asset for them. But the horror stories we hear where people say, “If you bring these changes in, investors will flee the market,” is simply not borne out by the data that is available in a public forum.

MS CLAY: Attorney, are rents rising and by how much?

MR RATTENBURY: As I indicated in my first answer, yes, they have been. The Australian Bureau of Statistics rental CPI index has increased continually since June 2020, and according to that index, rents in Canberra have gone up by more than 12.6 per cent since September 2020, so that is an indication that it is a point of pressure.

Of course, members will have seen the material out at press today. We did see the new data from Domain. Now, what we have seen in that is some variation where the new weekly asking rents for houses has dropped by 0.7 per cent between March 2023 and March 2024, but the asking rents for units have gone up in the same period by 3.6 per cent. That data from Domain does not capture changes in rent in leases that are being renewed by existing tenants. This is only new properties going on the market, and so certainly in the unit space there we are seeing a particular pressure.

Gordon—playing fields

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, in 2022 the pavilion at the Gordon playing fields was subject to an arson attack, causing significant damage to the structure, with a subsequent arson attack in 2023 causing further damage. In response to the 2022 fire, the ACT government provided temporary facilities in the form of converted shipping containers. Minister, in response to a question asked by the former Greens member for Brindabella, in October, you stated:

... the government is still working through insurance issues with regard to the two incidents of vandalism on those structures.

Minister, it is now April 2024, new football seasons are commencing and still nothing has happened with the damaged pavilion. It now stands abandoned, as a monument to the government's neglect of the south side of Canberra. Minister, why is it taking so long to provide a time frame for the works required at the Gordon playing fields and what is the government intending to do with the Gordon playing fields pavilion?

MS BERRY: I answer this question for all members for Brindabella who have asked me for advice on this. I know it is something that has been of particular interest to you, Madam Speaker, as well. This has taken some time. The December 2022 fire and the subsequent fire in July 2023 meant that there were interruptions and we had to seek further advice from insurance to ensure that we were able to claim for the repairs of the facility, following the fire. That impacted our ability to put a procurement out for a contract to repair the facility.

One-third of the Gordon pavilion has been impacted and will need to be rebuilt. A tender for that will need to go out. In the meantime, as Mr Parton has said, tenders have been put out for the site. Sport and Recreation have been working with all users of that sportsground. There will be some disruption, in that the Tuggeranong Knights will be moved to Gordon 2, which is in fact at Conder. That has a canteen and toilets available during the day. It will also have additional facilities for the Knights to use for this season while the work to repair the Gordon facility occurs.

MR PARTON: Minister, will you be able to tell us when that situation regarding the pavilion at the Gordon playing fields will finally be fully rectified?

MS BERRY: I cannot at the moment, but I can commit to informing all members for Brindabella—and the Assembly, if everyone else is interested—of the time frames once I am aware of them and once the tender contract is returned.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why does your government continue to ignore and neglect the south side of Canberra?

MS BERRY: I completely reject the premise of that question. The government has gone all out, particularly with conversations about that circumstance at the Gordon pavilion.

Mr Parton: Have you seen the pavilion?

MS BERRY: I have seen photos of the pavilion and I have been at that sportsground and the Conder sportsground a number of times. I know the impact that the destruction of that pavilion has had and will have on the community. We have ensured that there are plenty of other facilities available and have worked closely with all of the sportsground users to make sure that that is satisfactory and meets their needs.

I cannot control what insurance does or the advice or time frame that is given to government. I am sure that, if we just went ahead and ignored what the insurance company said with regard to the ability of the ACT government to recoup some of the losses that it might have when facilities of that type are destroyed by vandalism, we would be hauled over the coals.

I understand that it is frustrating that it has taken so long and those two fires did impact it. I will be keeping a close eye on its repair and upkeep over the next couple of months, especially during the winter sport season, to ensure that sportsground users are satisfied with the response that we have been able to provide. I know that everybody would prefer that this facility was not burned down, but it was. We will work towards its repair and make sure that all of the sportsground users have what they need to play winter sport.

Mr Parton: Before the tram gets to Tuggeranong or after?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton!

Vaping products—nicotine

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Population Health. Minister, how are you working alongside ministers in other jurisdictions to make it harder for young people to access vaping and tobacco products?

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for the question. The ACT Greens support an evidence based harm-reduction approach to drug policy and a collaborative approach. We do not want a situation where, if you are caught in Canberra with an MDMA pill in your pocket, we take a health focused approach to what you are using, but, heaven forbid that you are caught with a little mango flavoured nicotine juice. We support harm reduction because we know that this approach is grounded in human rights—

Mr Cocks: Madam Speaker, on a point of order—

MADAM SPEAKER: Just a moment. I do apologise. I was conferring with the Clerk on something else.

Mr Cocks: A question has been asked of the minister in her capacity as a government minister. I seek your guidance. She is currently speaking from a Greens' policy perspective. I would like your advice as to whether she should be speaking to the government's position.

MADAM SPEAKER: I would say that is in order. You need to focus on your responsibilities as a minister. I am sorry I was distracted. Ms Davidson.

MS DAVIDSON: Applying an approach other than harm reduction to vaping would be contradictory to this government's demonstrated position on responding to the harms of drugs but would also be at odds with the evidence associated with supporting both smoking and vaping cessation. In line with what we have already done in the ACT, the ACT has supported the establishment of a fixed-site drug-checking service, which is currently—

Mr Pettersson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance: the question was about young people's access to vaping and tobacco products. I would ask the minister to be relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: To that point, Ms Davidson, in the time you have left.

MS DAVIDSON: I am terribly sorry. I was refocusing on the request to talk about the government position.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am sure you can do both.

MS DAVIDSON: I can. I can multitask. The progress of current legislative change means that, on 21 March, when the commonwealth Minister for Health introduced a bill to prohibit the— *(Time expired.)*

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, does the ACT government support the vaping reforms being introduced by the commonwealth government?

MS DAVIDSON: As I was saying, on 21 March, the commonwealth Minister for Health introduced a bill that prohibits the manufacture, supply and commercial possession of disposable single-use and non-therapeutic e-cigarettes. Subject to parliamentary approval, that could come into effect as early as 1 July this year. At the moment, section 36 of the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008 makes it an offence to possess schedule 4 medicines, including nicotine vapes, without appropriate authority. This is about protecting the public from the potential harms of dangerous substances. If convicted, the offence carries a maximum penalty of 200 penalty units, or \$32,000, or two years imprisonment, or both.

What we want to do is have a consistent policy approach around substance use, irrespective of the substance. That is very important in a harm reduction environment and it is what we have been doing in the ACT government for the last few years. I thank you for the part that you have played in ensuring that we are staying on that harm reduction track.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS DAVIDSON: And thank you for your contribution, Mr Hanson. This is why I will be working with harm minimisation experts to find a way to not criminalise people who find themselves in the difficult situation of not being able to legally access a substance that they are dependent on and, instead, take a health focused approach to supporting better and safer outcomes for our community. The two things are not inconsistent. We can ensure that we are taking a harm reduction approach.

DR PATERSON: Minister, which stakeholders have you met with to shape these policy positions?

MS DAVIDSON: Thank you for the question. I do believe diary disclosure is in the process of happening again, so you will be able to check the names and dates of the meetings that we have had. I thank the community sector organisations that provide advocacy around the harm reduction approach that we need to take for the time that they have taken to do that. That includes ATODA, CAHMA and a number of others.

Dr Paterson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: the question went to the stakeholders that the minister has met with. That was not answered.

MADAM SPEAKER: You have time left to be more expansive on your answer, Ms Davidson.

MS DAVIDSON: I could take on notice to provide you with a list of the names of every organisation and the date on which I met them, but you will see it all through the diary disclosure process that is happening anyway, which might actually provide you with that detail quicker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Are you taking it on notice, Ms Davidson?

MS DAVIDSON: I think that, actually, the quickest way for you to get the detail is to just check the results of the diary disclosure.

MADAM SPEAKER: That will be available within the next 30 days, Ms Davidson.

MS DAVIDSON: If that is not published within the next 30 days, yes, I will take it on notice.

MADAM SPEAKER: So you are taking it on notice. Thank you, Ms Davidson.

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, all further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answer to question without notice

Gungahlin—Joint Emergency Services Centre

MR GENTLEMAN: In relation to the question from Mr Milligan regarding the JESC, I advise that not only were the experts involved in the investigation as tabled in the report, but also we had union officials involved, and of course WorkSafe ACT, throughout the investigation.

Attorney-General—order to table documents

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.02), by leave: I move:

That, with reference to standing order 213A(a), this Assembly calls on the Attorney-General to table in the Assembly the notes of the meeting between the Attorney-General and the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions on 30 January 2024 by close of business today.

We have asked a number of questions in a number of different ways. Yesterday, Mr Rattenbury, in relation to this issue of his meeting with the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions, said he was not sure if he had notes; then we heard later that he did not have any notes but one of his staff did.

We can dance around this all we like. We can approach it in a number of different ways. We can use a number of different standing orders. But can we just cut to the chase and have Mr Rattenbury fess up and release these notes of the meeting? The more he squirms around this, the greater the fuss will appear to be about why he will not be more up-front about his answer.

I know he is going to come up with all sorts of reasons, procedural and otherwise, about not releasing those papers; but, really, it will just be better, quicker, easier and in everyone's best interest if he comes out with those papers. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (3.03):

Under standing order 213, I am quite comfortable with releasing the document. I do note that the standing order gives 14 days. I am mindful that those notes refer to other parties. Under normal FOI procedures—if I were to use that as, perhaps, a corollary for this process—where a third party is referred to in notes or in documents being sought, there is a requirement to undertake that consultation. I think it is appropriate in these circumstances, given that those notes refer to other parties, that it will take a couple of days.

I have 14 days under the standing order. I think it is appropriate that I undertake those steps at least to advise the other parties that these notes are going to be released. I am comfortable with releasing them. They demonstrate the point I have made, which is that I had a policy-level conversation with the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the notes will go to that. But I think it is appropriate, as is required under the FOI Act, that I take the days available under standing order 213A to undertake those steps. Certainly, from the Greens' point of view, we are happy to support this motion today.

Ms Berry: As I read standing order 213A, it does suggest that there is some time before the papers need to be provided once they have been asked for, and I think it is appropriate to seek advice from third parties on that.

Ms Lee: On a procedural matter, Madam Speaker, I seek your guidance. We have heard what the Attorney-General has said, and we understand how the Labor Party will vote. Ms Lawder's motion specifically states, "by close of business today". I am wondering if it is prudent for Mr Rattenbury to actually formally move an amendment to that motion.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you; I think there is merit in that suggestion. Mr Rattenbury, you have spoken but would you seek leave to speak again?

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (3.06): I seek leave to speak again.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: Ms Lee raises a fair point. I overlooked it in my willingness to agree to the motion. I move the following amendment to the motion:

Omit "by close of business today".

MADAM SPEAKER: And with a time frame? Are you suggesting 14 days?

MR RATTENBURY: The time frame is covered by the standing order, so I feel it can be left.

MADAM SPEAKER: We delete "close of business today" and refer to standing order 213A?

MR RATTENBURY: The motion references the standing order, so I feel that it picks up the issue. The amendment is that those five words be deleted.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.07): I will conclude and address the amendment. I am pleasantly surprised. I thought this was going to be one of those long, drawn-out things,

where we use a whole lot of different tools at our disposal, so I would like to thank members for their willingness to put this to bed and avoid that long, drawn-out process. Thank you to members for supporting this today.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Madam Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 29(3)—2024 Strategic Review of the ACT Auditor-General, dated 8 April 2024, prepared by Mike Blake AM.

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2023—Canberra Institute of Technology, dated 3 April 2024.

Gaming Machine Act, pursuant to section 179A—Gaming Machine Tax Rebate Review, dated January 2024.

Inspector of Correctional Services Act—Review of a critical incident by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services—An Alleged Sexual Assault of a Detained Person at the Alexander Maconochie Centre—Government response, dated April 2024.

Health—nurse-led walk-in centres

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (3.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT's first public nurse-led Walk-in Centre opened on 18 May 2010, providing nurses in the ACT the opportunity to work to the top of their scope of practice and have become highly valued in the Canberra community;
- (b) the Walk-in Centre network has been progressively expanded to five locations covering all of Canberra's major regional centres to provide free, accessible and high quality health care to Canberrans for a range of minor injuries and illnesses without an appointment;
- (c) quarterly performance reports show that between October 2021 and September 2022 those five clinics saw and treated more than 77,000 Canberrans and those from the surrounding NSW region – this has reduced the load of emergency departments and potentially costly GP visits;
- (d) Walk-in Centres save Canberrans time and money by providing free services and a range of prescriptions, and particularly provide parents with convenient out-of-hours assessments of unwell children;

- (e) Walk-in Centres have been designed to serve a complementary role with the ACT's other health services and the Labor Government has continued to invest in expanding Walk-in Centre capabilities and recognise the value of nurse-led models of care;
 - (f) ACT Labor committed to building a new health centre in North Gungahlin to provide walk-in and appointment-based services that will further complement the Walk-in Centres; and
 - (g) ACT Labor committed to a new more than \$1 billion northside hospital that will support Canberrans on the northside to access essential public hospital services into the future;
- (2) also notes that there has been longstanding opposition to the Walk-in Centre model and nurse-led models of care from a range of interest groups, political parties and other stakeholders, most notably during the 2020 election campaign when the then-Liberal Health Spokesperson labelled them "a total flop"; and
- (3) calls on all parties to:
- (a) publicly affirm support in the Chamber for the current nurse-led Walk-in Centre model, the retention of existing locations, the Urgent Care Clinic partnership with the Commonwealth Government and rule out a politically-motivated "review" of the Walk-in Centre model; and
 - (b) support nurse-led health care provision that allows nurses to work to the top of their scope of practice and complements health services in the ACT to ensure Canberrans can access high-quality, public healthcare into the future, including considering innovative nurse-led models of care in the new health centre and Northside Hospital.

I rise today to introduce my motion that is focused on the ACT government's nurse-led walk-in centres by recognising their significant contribution to our healthcare system and calling on each party in this chamber to publicly affirm their support for the ACT's nurse-led walk-in centre model.

This motion is a bit of a change to the issues and passions I usually focus my work on, and it may come as a surprise to some members, but I am a strong advocate for Canberra's nurse-led walk-in centres. There have been many times over the years when I have actively chosen to go to a walk-in centre to seek medical treatment, rather than booking in at a later time to see my doctor or visiting the emergency room. They are a great addition to our health services, and I want to make sure we protect them, improve them and ensure more Canberrans can easily access them when in need.

Our walk-in centres are run by nurses and provide free health care for non-life threatening injuries and illnesses to anyone who is over one year of age. They are part of the national network of Medicare urgent care clinics, with centres open seven days a week, including Christmas and New Year's Day, between 7.30 am and 10 pm. You do not need to make an appointment; you can just rock up and go on in. Across the ACT, there are walk-in centres located in Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Dickson, Weston Creek and Gungahlin.

Walk-in centres can provide you with a health assessment and treatment for a wide range of health needs, including medical certificates and care of minor injuries such as

cuts, abrasions, bruises, burns, common colds and influenza, skin conditions and many more. The centres are staffed by advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners. If your health needs are more than what they can provide, they will direct or support you to get the right care.

Madam Speaker, it is important to highlight that these centres care for anyone over the age of one. You do not need a Medicare card, and all services and treatments received are free. As an added bonus, people can see an estimate of wait times at any of the walk-in centres through the ACT government's website. This is an extremely beneficial feature, as anyone who is in a position to easily access more than one walk-in centre may choose to visit a centre that is slightly further away if they are able to be treated sooner.

Our walk-in centres play an important part in Canberra's healthcare services by helping to remove people from our emergency rooms who may have medical needs that can be treated by our highly skilled nurses. These centres are not here to replace the vital work of the doctors and nurses in our emergency rooms but, rather, to treat people with medical needs that are not life threatening and can be treated quickly, without them needing to book in to see their doctor.

Last year, I was out walking my friend's dog, and I tripped over him and badly hurt my ankle. I knew it was not broken, but it was incredibly painful, and I was not able to walk on it properly. My GP, who I note is absolutely wonderful, could have provided treatment except that I tripped after hours, and the next day was a public holiday, so it would have been over 24 hours before I could have even made an appointment with my GP, and I needed treatment a little bit faster than that.

Instead of going to the nearest hospital and waiting in the emergency room, I checked the wait times of the walk-in centres and visited the Dickson centre to seek medical treatment for my ankle. I decided this was the best course of action, as my medical needs were not life threatening, and I knew I could easily be treated by a nurse. While at the walk-in centre, which I hobbled into rather than walked into, the nurse treated my ankle and gave me the necessary pain relief and treatment to tend to my ankle.

I was nothing but impressed with the care and treatment I received from the nurses. They were friendly, helpful and quick to help alleviate the pain and discomfort I was in. In short, I had no regrets with deciding to seek medical care from one of our walk-in centres, rather than at the hospital. I was conscious that I did not want to make others in the emergency room wait for longer for their own medical needs, and especially if their medical needs were more crucial than mine.

I am not alone in having a positive experience at our nurse-led walk-in centres. Many Canberrans actively choose to have their medical needs attended to by nurses at these walk-in centres. At the times that I have had to visit one of the centres, I have seen families and all different kinds of people within our community seeking treatment there. Having a walk-in centre close by is extremely beneficial for young families. As everyone knows, kids do not stop, and sometimes their high energy and excitement for life results in them injuring themselves. I think it is important for the community to have access to instant medical care for urgent and non-urgent medical needs.

Part of my motion today calls on each party to publicly affirm their support for the current nurse-led walk-in centre model, to retain existing locations and continue the urgent care clinic partnership with the commonwealth government and to rule out a politically motivated review of the walk-in centre model.

I am introducing this motion today to ensure that each party here in the chamber does their duty to the Canberra community to ensure we support and continue to improve

our walk-in centres. I have briefly touched on my own positive experience at the centres, and I am sure other members across the chamber can recount a positive experience, too, whether for themselves, their kids or a loved one. These centres play an important part in our healthcare system, and I want to ensure we work together to grow and improve the services they offer. A politically motivated review into our nurse-led walk-in centre, I fear, could be quite damaging and not beneficial for the community. Our walk-in centres are popular, and they work well by helping to get people with less urgent medical needs out of our emergency rooms, which helps to reduce the overall wait times within our emergency rooms.

Based on comments in the past from former and current members of the opposition, it can be said that they do not support walk-in centres or the role they have in our health system. I have found some comments that I have heard in this place over the years that I have been here very concerning, for the centres and for our hardworking nurses at these centres. Today I am seeking reassurance for walk-in centres from every member in the chamber by calling on all parties to publicly affirm their support of the current nurse-led walk-in centre model. The final “calls on” in my motion asks all parties to support nurse-led healthcare provisions that allow our nurses to work to the top of their scope of practice, as their contribution complements the co-existing health services within the ACT. I have briefly touched on the benefits that these walk-in centres have for the community and their assistance with freeing up people from our emergency waiting rooms.

The ACT government prioritises and is continuing to improve our high-quality public healthcare services, now and into the future. I will allow my ministerial colleagues to provide further information on future improvements that this government is making to healthcare services across the ACT. The existence of our nurse-led walk-in centres complements the pre-existing healthcare services such as our public hospitals, including the expansion to Canberra Hospital, and other privately owned general practices around the territory.

I firmly believe that nurse-led walk-in centres provide a great service to the community and complement our existing health infrastructure. In saying this, I acknowledge that healthcare service is something the ACT government should continue to invest in, and will continue to invest in and improve, as our population continues to grow.

I have seen how much my electorate of Yerrabi has grown and how the ACT government has been putting in place the necessary infrastructure to meet the demand. Our Gungahlin walk-in centre is very popular and well respected within the community. Many families appreciate the support and health services that the walk-in centres

provide. I look forward to seeing the improvements for the Gungahlin region that the north side hospital upgrade will provide, as well as other future improvements to the health services in the Gungahlin region.

In the meantime, we need to ensure we continue to support our nurse-led walk-in centre model and prioritise the urgent care clinic partnership with the commonwealth government. We know that nurse-led walk-in centres provide necessary health care to the community. I would encourage all members of this place to be supportive of considering innovative nurse-led models of care in the new health centre and north side hospital.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.17): I move the following amendment:

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

- (c) since 2020 Labor has crab-walked away from its commitment to the nurse-led walk-in centre model in favour of health centres which integrate with General Practitioners;
 - (d) with only one health centre completed and one new site selected, there is no prospect of Labor delivering on its promise of 5 new health centres by mid-decade;
 - (e) given its woeful record on infrastructure delivery, Labor also has no prospect of delivering its promised \$1 billion plus northside hospital on time or on budget;
 - (f) the health needs of Canberrans and, in particular, those living on the northside and in Gungahlin will therefore continue to be neglected by the Barr-Rattenbury government;
 - (g) there has been no published data for nurse-led walk-in centres for 18 months due to the ongoing debacle with Digital Health Record data reporting and quarterly performance reports; and
 - (h) in 2011 the Labor government engaged the ANU to conduct a review of its walk-in centre and in 2023 it announced a strategic review of community health assets across the ACT; and
- (2) calls on the Barr-Rattenbury government to admit and to apologise to Canberrans for their failure in primary health care.”.

It is an axiom of Australian politics that governments should govern, and oppositions should oppose, where it is right to do so. When a motion like this one comes along, it signals a government which is bereft of ideas, and trying to attack its opposition rather than come up with solutions. The public intuitively gets this, and marks down governments which indulge in this sort of exercise. The Minister for Health used to use former MLA Johnathan Davis to run this sort of motion. Now, the government has to rely on one of its own to run interference.

The other thing these sorts of motion do is invite scrutiny of the government’s own record—in this case, its own record on nurse-led walk-in centres. Labor’s record is not a good one. In fact, this government is walking away from nurse-led walk-in centres. It is crab-walking away from them. It knows it, and I know it. This motion is not just a

pathetic attempt to wedge the opposition, working on the premise that attack is the best form of defence; it is also an attempt from Labor to distract from this embarrassment, as it crab-walks away from nurse-led walk-in centres.

In 2020, ACT Labor's health policy position statement promised:

Five new nurse-led walk in centres would be built ... in south Tuggeranong, west Belconnen, in the inner south, the Molonglo region and north Gungahlin ... would be rolled out progressively from 2021-22 into the middle of the decade.

Labor promised another centre in Molonglo co-located with the National Health Co-op in Coombs to "test a model of integration with general practice". Labor's policy gave the impression that these new health centres would be nurse-led, saying:

The centres will be rolled out progressively between 2021-22 and the middle of the decade. While the Canberra Liberals will never support Walk-in Centres, ACT Labor will continue to invest and grow nurse led care in the community because it's the best way for Canberrans to easily and conveniently receive the care they need.

So far, Madam Speaker, only the Molonglo facility has been completed. It is not walk-in, but by appointment only, and the ACT government does not refer to it as nurse led. This is despite the Molonglo facility being staffed by nurses and midwives and having a focus on maternity and family care.

As my predecessor as shadow health minister, Giulia Jones, said, Labor's election commitment was "deceptive". The *Riotact* captured this deception in a 2021 story headlined, "Confusion in Coombs: it's not a nurse-led walk-in centre, but a walk-in centre led by nurses". As a result of this deception some nurses still think there are six nurse-led walk-in centres in Canberra, not five. Unlike the government and this motion, which admits five locations for nurse-led walk-in centres, a media release from October last year stated:

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) welcomes the announcement that the six ACT nurse-led walk-in centres will provide expanded services as they join the Medicare Urgent Care Clinics program.

Six of them! Continuing its crab-walking in March 2023, Canberra Health Services issued a proposal to implement an urgent care clinic by placing a GP into an existing CHS walk-in centre. According to the AMA, this one doctor would "be hidden away in a back office". It is another example of this government's sneaky attempts to undermine nurse-led walk-in centres. Labor is again crab-walking away from nurse-led walk-in centres.

Why is the government doing this? In her August 2023 infrastructure update, the health minister recommitted the ACT government, by saying:

The Government will roll out four new Health Centres to deliver community-based services in South Tuggeranong, North Gungahlin, the Inner South and West Belconnen. These Health Centres will provide integrated multi-disciplinary care with a focus on preventive care and advice, early intervention, and the management of chronic illness.

The minister said:

Importantly, these services will work closely with primary care—including General Practitioners—to deliver truly integrated care. This is where health reform is headed ...

As an aside, at the 2020 election Labor promised these centres would be rolled out progressively between 2021-22 and the middle of the decade. Well, here we are in 2024, we know that the new south Tuggeranong health centre will be built in Conder, but sites for the new health centres in the inner south, west Belconnen and north Gungahlin are yet to be confirmed. No doubt Labor will promise them again during this election. Heaven knows when they will be actually delivered.

Turning to some of the other aspects of Ms Orr’s misconceived motion, clause (c) notes:

- (c) quarterly performance reports show that between October 2021 and September 2022 those five clinics saw and treated more than 77,000 Canberrans and those from the surrounding NSW region ...

Why does she stop at September 2022, I wonder? Well, I am going to tell you.

Mr Parton: Why do you reckon?

MS CASTLEY: Do you want to know, Mr Parton?

Mr Parton: Yes, I do.

MS CASTLEY: It is because there were no quarterly performance reports for ACT public health services for December 2022 or March 2023. The reason for this is the debacle with the digital health records data reporting. As for the June 2023 quarterly performance report, there is only one dataset for emergency department presentations, and it is only three pages; usually, there are 37. These figures were highly qualified, so there must be doubt as to their reliability. What an embarrassment for this government.

Needless to say, there is no technical or supplementary information. The quarterly performance reports for September and December 2023 are a cobbled together exercise—again, just nine pages of ED data, including a technical report. What a disgrace! It is an embarrassment. The health minister was warned that this would happen, but I digress. Suffice to say, we have not had any published data for nurse-led walk-in centres for 18 months.

As for clauses (e) and (f) of Ms Orr’s motion, as circulated, they are barely intelligible. Three times she uses possessives instead of plurals, and she repeatedly talks about “complimenting” walk-in centres. I am happy to compliment walk-in centres. The nurses are amazing. They do a fantastic job. I have always said that, and so have my predecessors. I am not sure that is what Ms Orr means, though. Leaving the howlers aside, this is Labor again creating the impression that nurses could have a lead role in what it actually prefers now simply to call “health centres”.

Coming to clause (g) of Ms Orr’s motion, about ACT Labor’s commitment to a new \$1 billion north side hospital, you have to laugh. Going by the 12 years that it is taking to deliver the Canberra Hospital expansion, and the way the tram is going, I would not count on Labor delivering a new north side hospital before 2050.

Coming to part 2 of Ms Orr’s motion, I note Ms Orr is having a go at my predecessor’s predecessor as shadow health minister, claiming:

... during the 2020 election campaign when the then-Liberal Health Spokesperson labelled them “a total flop” ...

By “them”, Ms Orr means the walk-in centre model and nurse-led models of care; but, as far as I can see, Mrs Dunne called Labor’s policy “a total flop”. She was not referring to nurse-led walk-in centres, as imputed by Ms Orr in her motion. I quote from the *Riotact* in September 2020:

The Liberals came out swinging at Labor’s pledge to build five new walk-in health centres at South Tuggeranong, West Belconnen, the Inner South, Molonglo and North Gungahlin. The centres will start to be built from 2021-22 and continue until the middle of the decade. The Liberals called the announcement “a total flop”...

Given only one of these five health centres have actually been delivered, I think it could be said that Mrs Dunne was not far off the mark. Coming to the “calls on”, clause (a) calls on all parties to—and I quote:

- (c) publicly affirm support in the Chamber for the current nurse-led Walk-in Centre model, the retention of existing locations, the Urgent Care Clinic partnership with the Commonwealth Government and rule out a politically-motivated “review” of the Walk-in Centre model ...

I think I have amply demonstrated what this government really thinks about the current nurse-led walk-in centre model, the model that Labor is crab-walking away from. I could repeat what the health minister has said about the new health centres working with general practices to deliver truly integrated care and that “this is where health reform is headed”.

As to ruling out a review of the walk-in centre model, I note that Labor itself has conducted such a review. In 2011, the then Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute evaluated the first year of operation of the sole nurse-led walk-in centre, which was then located at the Canberra Hospital campus. I quote from page 20 of that evaluation:

ACT Health engaged the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) at the Australian National University (ANU) to conduct an independent evaluation of the first twelve months of operation of the walk-in centre.

I do not think I need to point out the hypocrisy of Ms Orr’s motion on this point. But there is more. In the 2023 budget, the government committed to “a strategic review of community health assets across the ACT to develop a long-term plan for the upgrade,

renewal and construction of these facilities”. Several community health centres are located next to walk-in centres, so even though the meaning of “community health assets” is not entirely clear, it is hard to see at least some walk-in centres not being caught up in this review.

This brings me to the part of Ms Orr’s motion calling on all parties to commit to the “retention of existing locations” of current nurse-led walk-in centres. Can the government even make that commitment? Finally, Ms Orr wants all parties to—and I quote:

- (a) support nurse-led health care provision that allows nurses to work to the top of their scope of practice and compliments health services in the ACT to ensure Canberrans can access high-quality, public healthcare into the future, including considering innovative nurse-led models of care in the new health centre and Northside Hospital.

Presumably, by the “new health centre” she means the north Gungahlin health centre, which is one of the centres which is not yet built and may not be built any time soon under this government. I can tell you that your own health minister is not going there; or, to paraphrase her, that is not where health reform is headed.

Ms Orr’s motion is as ill-conceived as it is disingenuous. Labor is crab-walking away from nurse-led walk-in centres. Its rollout of the five new health centres—one in over three years—is not even a stroll out. This motion’s “calls on” are hypocritical and, in terms of infrastructure delivery under this Labor-Greens government, entirely hypothetical.

The Canberra Liberals cannot support it. At the same time I support the ACT’s five nurse-led walk-in centres, which are staffed by highly skilled health professionals—wonderful nurses that do amazing work.

Mr Parton: Hear, hear!

MS CASTLEY: Absolutely; they should be celebrated. I commend the amendment that I have moved to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Disability and Minister for Health) (3.31): It was interesting to hear Ms Castley right at the end indicate that the Canberra Liberals are in fact supporting maintaining the model of nurse-led care at five walk-in centres across Canberra, and it will be very good to see that they take that position to the election—something they have never done before. I think it is reasonable for Ms Orr in an election year to move a motion that calls on parties to declare their positions. Canberrans have a right to know what each party believes in and what each party will do in the lead-up to an election.

What Ms Castley has largely done, notwithstanding her last-minute support for walk-in centres, has been to demonstrate a complete lack of understanding of the difference in models of care between urgent care and preventive and coordinated care for people with chronic conditions, which Labor very clearly stated in 2020 would be the focus of the new health centres.

That is why the new health centres will have a different model of care from that of the walk-in centres. In fact, the new health centres were announced as building not only on our network of five nurse-led walk-in centres, but also our community health centres, which already provide care in many locations across the community. We saw a need to expand the locations in which Canberra Health Services provide care to south Tuggeranong, west Belconnen, the inner south, Molonglo and north Gungahlin. Of course, the Molonglo clinic is already open, providing particularly maternal and child health and women's, youth and children services, reflecting the high need for that demographic in the Molonglo region.

We will not be supporting Ms Castley's amendment. It is bizarre. It is bizarre to claim that Labor is walking away from its commitment to the nurse-led walk-in centre model. Ms Castley drew on a proposal that was part of a consultation on the implementation of the urgent care clinic network in Canberra, that was proposed to have a GP to support the scope of decision-making for the expanded urgent care model for the walk-in centres. But, in the end, as Ms Castley should be very well aware, we agreed with the commonwealth that we would in fact maintain the fully nurse-led model for the walk-in centres as part of the urgent care centre network. We doubled down on nurse-led care in the walk-in centres, and that is very clear in the Chief Minister's media release in October 2023.

In fact, we ran an entire campaign at the end of last year, across Labor members, on even better walk-in centres. That commitment has seen a commitment to increasing the number of nurses and allied health professionals; three new nurse practitioners and three new advanced practice nurses; an advanced scope physiotherapist for the Weston Creek Walk-in Centre to treat patients with musculoskeletal injuries—the physiotherapist will also provide virtual assessments and support for the nursing staff at other walk-in centres; and a radiographer and sonographer at the Weston Creek medical imaging service, to expand the service to provide after-hours imaging.

Under this initiative, funding will also provide more equipment for the nurse-led walk-in centres to treat a wider range of conditions. This includes slit lamps and tonometers for eye examinations and removal of foreign objects in the eyes; handheld ultrasound machines for the examination of lacerations and other wound types; and vascular dopplers for investigating blood flow. This is all about enabling our fabulous advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners to work to an even fuller scope of practice. The scope of services is planned to further expand to include treatment for: shoulder injuries; male urinary tract infections; injuries for people who are pregnant; and screening for sexually transmitted infections. This builds on other expansions that we have already delivered in this term of government.

Ms Orr talked about the fact that our nurse-led walk-in centres can treat children down to one year of age. Of course, that change was made in September 2022, driven by our nurses in the walk-in centres. They expanded their scope of practice from down to two-year-olds, to now being able to treat children aged between one and two years. In the past nine months they have seen more than 2,200 presentations of children in this age group. The result is that more parents able to access free, high-quality care for their children.

In May 2023, we opened the Weston Creek imaging service, the community-based imaging service co-located with the Weston Creek Walk-in Centre, which has provided about 5,100 services so far. That means people with limb injuries can go to a walk-in

centre, they can get a referral for an X-ray, they can go to the community-based medical imaging centre, then they can go back to the walk-in centre, and have their limb injury treated, without ever having to present to a hospital. That is very important care, saving Canberrans money and time with our highly skilled teams. We remain committed to more nurses and more services closer to home at our walk-in centres.

Data from 2021-22 shows that our walk-in centres are efficient and have been diverting presentations from our emergency department. More than 80 per cent of presentations were treated by a nurse. About 10 to 12 per cent needed to be redirected to a general practitioner because, of course, there are scope of practice limitations, but we do work in partnership with general practitioners. Only five to seven per cent needed to be directed to an emergency department. This has resulted, since 2013-14, in a reduction in the proportion of primary care type presentations to our emergency departments. So there is no doubt that walk-in centres have been successful, and that is why we have continued, and will continue, to invest in nurse-led care.

Just this week we introduced amendments to enable nurse practitioners and authorised midwives to prescribe medications for abortion. We are strengthening our workforce models through our workforce strategy and nurse practitioner task force and investing in more advanced practice positions. We are working with the federal Labor government to strengthen Medicare and unlock skills in primary care to enhance the scope of practice of health professionals.

In the past year, more than 121 nurses applied for advanced practice nurse positions in our walk-in centres. We know that offering these types of positions is rare in Australia, and it is a great opportunity for staff as well as for providing great care for patients.

Ms Castley said we have gone back to Mrs Dunne's position, where Mrs Dunne likened the treatment from our nurses at walk-in centres to simply being related to matters that, once upon a time, were dealt with by mum with a packet of bandaids and a bottle of betadine. How dismissive that is of the incredibly highly skilled staff.

Ms Castley herself has said, when talking about emergency centre data, and I made the point to Ross Solly on ABC Radio Canberra, that that emergency department data in the ACT does not capture those presentations at our walk-in centres. We have more presentations per annum at our walk-in centres now than we do at North Canberra Hospital, but none of that is captured in our emergency department data because they are not emergency departments.

Ms Castley was very dismissive of that statement in her subsequent interview with Ross Solly, but the interesting thing about it is that we have seen our emergency department performance improve, partly because we have now imported this model of nurse practitioners, trained in walk-in centres, into Canberra Hospital's emergency department, because they are able to treat those presentations in the emergency department, just as they do in the walk-in centre. That is further evidence that walk-in centres are treating many of the same conditions and taking pressure off our emergency departments.

In relation to our new health centres, of course, we have invested, in the 2023-24 budget, \$16.5 million in the new health centres, including design for the new health centres in

the inner south and north Gungahlin. We will have more to say about the location soon. Of course, we are investing in the construction of the new health centre in Conder. But they are different, and we have not made a commitment at this point about whether each of those will include a walk-in centre; they may, but they have a different focus.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.41): We will not be agreeing to Ms Castley's amendment. We will be agreeing to Ms Orr's motion and I thank her for bringing that motion today. I would like to talk a little bit about why some people find nurse-led walk-in centres so helpful.

For some people it is about access outside usual business hours and on weekends and public holidays when that minor injury happens, or you realise you might have a medical issue and it is outside your GP's normal working hours. It is really helpful to know that there is somewhere that you can go, that there is no need for an appointment and that there is no out-of-pocket cost.

A 2018 survey by ACT Women's Health Matters identified that affordability is an issue for many women and they mentioned the walk-in centres as a good option for those one-off issues. It also builds trust. That 2018 survey said:

Women talked about a preference for accessing health services through places they are already familiar with, such as community health centres and walk in centres. These are services women trust to provide them with advice, referrals, and health care for specific issues.

Empathy and trust are critically important to many people in our community. It is something that the nurses at our walk-in centres are really good at. Talking to a nurse is something that is effective in making health care accessible to people in our community who might feel unsure of whether they will be listened to, believed and respected when they ask for medical help. I have heard from teenagers who talk about organising, in their words, "Family excursion to the walk-in centre, who's in?" when their friends are talking about what sounds like a sexual or reproductive healthcare need.

I have heard from parents who appreciate being able to ask for advice from someone in person about whether their child needs urgent care or can wait to see a GP in a few days; from older people who have a minor injury and want to make sure it gets the right first-aid treatment to prevent an avoidable hospital admission due to infection; from people in casual work who cannot afford to lose a day's pay, but know they need to see someone about a minor healthcare issue before it gets so bad that they end up at the emergency department; and from people who have a sports injury on a Saturday and need to know if it is something that needs an X-ray or an ice pack. Even for me, it is about getting the gravel cleaned out of my elbow after stacking it on my skates! I have Harry and my local community pharmacy in Hughes to thank for making me see anyone at all and not just whacking a bigger bandaid on it. Sometimes you really do need to talk to a trained, skilled healthcare professional, and that is what we have at our nurse-led walk-in centres.

When you cannot afford or cannot get access to your regular doctor, you do not have a regular doctor or you are not sure if this even needs a doctor, a walk-in centre is there

for you—not as a replacement for an ongoing relationship with a regular primary health provider like a GP, but as a complement to that relationship and as a way back into building those trusted relationships with primary care providers in general, rather than for a specific service, for people who have not had a regular provider.

It is really good to know that physio will also be easier to access through walk-in centres in future, particularly for those Saturday sports injuries that do happen, and that other health service providers will also be available through urgent care clinics in future.

I would like to affirm that the ACT Greens do support our nurse-led walk-in centres.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.44): I stand to speak in support of Ms Castley’s amendment to Ms Orr’s motion. I would like to remind the Assembly of the Deputy Chief Minister’s comments during an interview with ABC Radio on 5 April. Ms Berry said, “We do not make promises we cannot deliver on.” What a preposterous way to describe the ACT Labor-Greens government’s track record on delivery of promises: “We do not make promises we cannot deliver on.”

As Ms Castley’s amendment points out, only one health centre has been completed and only one new site selected. Is that conforming to what Ms Berry has promised on behalf of this government? The prospect of ACT Labor delivering on their promise of five new healthcare centres by the mid-2020s is non-existent. Does anyone actually believe that the new north side hospital will cost \$1 billion as promised?

ACT Labor does not deliver on promises it makes and the ACT Greens are complicit. The Barr-Rattenbury government have a lot of questions to answer when it comes to the state of the ACT health system, and this, amongst many other things, is why the Canberra Liberals will hold a royal commission into our health system if elected in October. The Canberra Liberals will hold a royal commission into ACT Health because they want to listen to our health professionals and they want a proper inquiry into what has been so wrong with our health system and its ministerial mismanagement over so many years.

The Canberra Liberals, as Ms Castley said, support our nurses and our healthcare workers wholeheartedly, and we want to listen to them. Nurses are the backbone of our health system and, when they struggle, the whole system struggles. The Canberra Liberals will always support our nurses and their delivery of health care to Canberrans. It is ACT Labor and the ACT Greens who need to be up-front with our city’s nurses and apologise to them, and to all Canberrans, for their continued failures in primary health care.

I commend Ms Castley for moving this amendment, which better reflects the current state of play; and I commend Ms Castley for her ongoing efforts in advocating for health professionals, especially our nurses, in her role as shadow health minister. An Elizabeth Lee led Canberra Liberals government will listen to nurses; we will listen to our health professionals; and we will ensure they are equipped to deliver the important health care that all Canberrans deserve. I support Ms Castley’s amendment.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (3.48): In paragraph (3)(a) Ms Orr calls on ruling out a politically motivated review of the walk-in centre model. I say the only politically motivated one talking about this motion is the author of this motion. We are here to be

a voice for the people, a voice of reason in a sea of complacency. I want to talk about the great negligence exhibited by the current administration, this government, particularly within our healthcare system.

For far too long, the Labor Party and the Greens party have turned a blind eye to the urgent need for a change in our health system. The great negligence exhibited by this government display their arrogance and their pride, which have blinded them to the concerns of the very people they were elected to serve. It is another inaction, a sort of utter stupidity, to ignore the pressing issues plaguing these vital centres.

We cannot continue to celebrate mediocrity while patients suffer. We must confront the uncomfortable truth and take decisive action, and this is where a review is handy. Our constituents, our neighbours and our friends are relying on us to make meaningful change, and that meaningful change will only come when a review happens.

I have listened to the voices of those who rely on these walk-in centres and their grievances are both valid and urgent. It is unacceptable that public parking spaces do not accommodate the needs of those seeking medical attention. The lack of privacy at the reception desk undermines the dignity of patients. The revelation that sick leave certificates are not universally recognised as medical certificates is nothing short of appalling.

When my daughter had a minor operation, her post-operative care required daily changes of her dressing. We were referred to the walk-in centre by the hospital. We went into the walk-in centre, and guess what they asked? They did not ask for her Medicare card or her name; they asked if she had brought her own dressing—if we had brought our own dressing to a medical centre. “Excuse me,” I said to them. They said, “Sometimes we are out of dressings, so hopefully you have some.” Really? Is the government cutting back its health funding by so much that now we need to supply our own dressings at a medical clinic? Literally, he could have just said, “We are out of medical dressings; please use bandaids to dress up your post-operative wound because we have a budget cut.” It was embarrassing. He was embarrassed to be in that position.

I challenge the government, as they turn their back on a much-needed review, to acknowledge these issues and take immediate steps to rectify them. Every moment of inaction from this government on this issue brings them closer to closing the walk-in centres because they are not sustainable as they are. That is why it is not a politically motivated review; it is a people-motivated review.

Those politically motivated words only come from the mouths of those who created them but do not want to admit the flaws of their walk-in centres. It is childish, foolish and irresponsible. The government need to step up because every moment of inaction from them on this issue brings them closer to a crisis in the walk-in centres and possibly closing them down, because at the moment it is absolutely not sustainable.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (3.52): I would like to thank all members for their sometimes interesting contributions to the debate today. What was interesting throughout the whole debate, particularly from those opposite, was a range of different views. It has left me a little bit confused as to what the Liberal Party actually thinks of walk-in centres. I note some members were quite happy to praise nurses but stopped short of saying that they supported walk-in centres. I must say that I do not quite follow. If you

respect nurses and you respect the work they do, why is it so hard to say, “We support the work that they do in this model”? With Mrs Kikkert’s comments, I am still trying to work through those words.

Putting aside the comments and the debate, and looking at Ms Castley’s motion, I think this is a classic example of deflection. I put forward quite a simple proposition. It is easy to follow. If you have no problem with supporting the model of nurse-led walk-in centres, you would not have an issue with signing up to it. Instead we have no firm view from the Liberals as to where they stand on this, and we just have a long list of things that are a deflection. It is just to draw attention away from the substantive issue without addressing it.

I will not be supporting the amendment today. I would rather stick with looking at the substantive issue that I raised in my motion.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 14

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

Yvette Berry
Andrew Braddock
Joy Burch
Tara Cheyne
Jo Clay
Emma Davidson
Mick Gentleman
Laura Nuttall

Suzanne Orr
Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson
Shane Rattenbury
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Rebecca Vassarotti

Amendment negatived.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport Canberra—fares

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT is in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, with many Canberrans struggling under high interest rates and inflationary pressures;
- (b) the weekly cost for an adult MyWay cardholder to commute on public transport five days a week is \$32.20;
- (c) Canberra’s buses are some of the least used in the nation; and
- (d) the average weekly cost of parking in Civic is well over \$100; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to cap weekly fares for adult MyWay cardholders to \$25 to provide cost-of-living relief to Canberrans.

This is a pretty simple motion. This is a motion to flush out which political parties or, indeed, which MLAs actually give a toss about the cost-of-living crisis and which parties genuinely want to increase public transport patronage—because, clearly, that is not occurring at the moment. The motion is designed to show who actually wants to move the dial with regard to public transport usage and, additionally, which members in this chamber have heard the many voices from the public regarding the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

I am not sure whether you noticed, Madam Speaker, but last week the Canberra Liberals released our much-awaited public transport policy. I have a copy here for you, if you want to take one home. I just happen to have it in the chamber with me. Hasn't it been received well, Madam Speaker? Michael Moore said, in *CityNews*:

The launch of the Canberra Liberals transport policy directly targets the Labor-Greens greatest area of electoral weakness.

But they have many. He continued:

The policy is extensive and provides a serious alternative to the government's costly light rail to Woden.

He described it as “an Exocet missile” in the electoral battle towards October—getting a little bit carried away, is Michael.

What about Ryan Hemsley, from PTCBR? What did he have to say? He said:

This is a bold and commendable plan that addresses many of our association's recent suggestions for improving Canberra's bus network. Critically, it gets the basics right. What the Canberra Liberals have presented is a comprehensive public transport package that, if implemented, would have a genuinely positive impact on the public transport user experience.

Extraordinary, from PTCBR. And what about our good friend Ian Bushnell, in the *Riotact*? What did Bushie have to say? He started by saying:

The ACT Government ignores the Canberra Liberals' public transport policy at its peril. It could be a game-changer.

He also said that “what they are offering is a much-improved bus service with a couple of dedicated busways with priority features and a much lower price tag” than the tram.

An equitable, fair system is a major plank of our transport policy, and we bring that component to the chamber today in the form of this motion. We are simply calling upon the government to endorse and take carriage of one of our ideas—because, at the end of the day, we do not really care who delivers these things. It is of no consequence to us who delivers it, as long as they get it done. We are just here to bring about positive change. We, the Canberra Liberals, believe that a cheaper fare system that is equitable for all Canberrans is required and that, most importantly, this needs to be something that drives significantly increased patronage on buses and trams.

I would remind members that, despite the enormous amounts of money that this government has spent on public transport in the last decade, we have barely moved the dial with regard to per capita usage of public transport, which is an area in which we used to pretty much lead the nation. The Canberra Liberals are committed to encouraging more people currently using private motor vehicles for their regular travel needs to use public transport instead. That is what we want to see, and we want to see more frequent use of public transport by existing customers—not just for trips to and from work; we want to grow the weekend and the evening travel.

To do this, we would like to provide discounts for regular use through capped weekly fares. It makes sense. It is pretty simple: we will cap weekly public transport fares and, once you hit that cap, every journey you take thereafter would be free. That is what we are talking about. Let's cap the maximum weekly fare to \$25. Of course, we are talking about adult fares—the current single one-way adult fare at \$3.55. The weekly cap could save a commuter between \$5.50 and \$19.70, and as much as \$1,000 annually. Of course, that figure could also go up depending on how many times that particular commuter made the decision to utilise the free public transport on the weekends or once we got past that cap. So the savings could be greater.

The weekly cap would also encourage people to change from driving their car and save on car parking, and—something which I know excites Ms Clay to the point where she cannot stand still—it would encourage more people out of their cars. That is what it is all about. I look forward to hearing about transport emissions, because we think it is important.

The change to ticketing will encourage the use of public transport off peak and on the weekends because weekend usage would essentially become free for weekday commuters. It would also help with cost-of-living pressures and encourage Canberrans to use public transport as they weigh up the cost of parking with a fixed weekly transport fare.

We think it is a great policy position. We love it. But we are more than happy for the government to steal it and run it out themselves. You can torpedo part of our policy because, once you guys are already doing it, you have beaten us to the punch. We are offering you that opportunity today, and we would certainly be fully supportive if you take it up. I really have nothing more to say, Madam Speaker, so I commend my motion to the chamber.

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) (4.04): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT is in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, with many Canberrans struggling under high interest rates and inflationary pressures;
- (b) the weekly cost for an adult MyWay cardholder to commute on public transport five days a week is \$32.20;

- (c) all seniors over the age of 70 and children under the age of five receive free public transport;
 - (d) concession MyWay cardholders receive free fares when travelling off-peak; and
 - (e) the ACT Government has kept fares deliberately low over many years with fares remaining the same since 5 January 2019;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) unlike most other major cities, the MyWay ticketing system carries a standard adult fare of \$3.22 at peak and \$2.55 off-peak regardless how far you travel in the ACT;
 - (b) since the start of 2023 public transport fares have increased in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide; and
 - (c) weekly household public transport costs in Canberra are the third lowest in the country, nearly \$30 less than Brisbane and \$20 less than Melbourne and Sydney; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) consider further options to support more people onto public transport in the ACT;
 - (b) consider the strategic and time-limited use of free public transport where there is network capacity to accommodate a potential increase in passengers and this is most likely to drive behaviour change; and
 - (c) continue to advertise how public transport is an affordable way to commute around Canberra.”.

I am pleased to speak today about how our government has been deliberately keeping public transport fares low to support more Canberrans to get onto public transport. But I do need to reflect immediately on something that we have seen throughout the motion debates this week—that is, the paltering way that the Canberra Liberals have approached information. Paltering is concerning, and it is a reflection that they do not think that the community is paying attention, that the community cares what they say or that the community will just blindly believe them.

I refer to selectively quoting statements without putting the entire context out there, and deliberately paraphrasing without sharing the elements of comment or opinion that have been put out there. In particular, Mr Hemsley’s article is titled “The good, the bad and the weird”. So it is not all sunshine and roses. I appreciate that Mr Hemsley has done very detailed research on Mr Parton’s and the Canberra Liberals’ transport policy, and he has cast what I would suggest is a fair lens over it. But making it out to be something that it is not by paraphrasing or by selectively quoting really does seem to be from the Canberra Liberals’ playbook. It is all they have, and that is disturbing, to say the least.

Public transport is a critical service for the community, and it is one that I am proud to use. We recognise the pressure that the rising cost of living, driven by high inflation and interest rate rises, is placing on Canberrans. It is why the ACT government has deliberately not increased public transport fares since January 2019, more than five years ago, and it is why we offer free or reduced cost of transport services to vulnerable users, so they are not restricted by these pressures. The cost of an adult MyWay trip is

\$3.22 during the weekday peaks and \$2.55 during off-peak times and weekends. Concession MyWay fares are at least half this cost again, and cheaper still for children to get to school.

Whereas public transport fares have been increasing in other metropolitan cities, including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, the ACT government has not increased fares. Our most recent budget reaffirmed that the ACT government will not apply indexation and increase public transport fares. Unlike other Australian jurisdictions, these flat fares are also part of the ACT government's commitment to minimising the tyranny of distance-based fares for those who are travelling longer distances.

Mr Parton would be placed to know that, if he were to catch the bus from his local shops in Tuggeranong to the Legislative Assembly, he would be paying less than he otherwise would for the same distance in other capital cities. Research of current public transport fares across Australia indicates weekly household public transport costs in Canberra are the third lowest, representing nearly \$30 less than Brisbane and \$20 less than Melbourne and Sydney. To further relieve household pressures, the ACT government offers free public transport to all seniors over the age of 70 and children under the age of five, as well as eligible students through the student transport program, and concession holders, who receive free fares when travelling off peak and on weekends.

We are committed to supporting all commuters to access the public transport network, including supporting commuters with mobility issues or other forms of social disadvantage, through upgrading our infrastructure and through the provision of bespoke services. Some of these services include the free flexible bus service. This helps vulnerable Canberrans, such as the aged or people who have mobility difficulty, to get from their home to local community service locations such as hospitals, shopping centres and medical centres. We have special needs transport available for eligible students who travel to and from home to the closest appropriate disability education setting located in an ACT public school.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Transport Program provides a bus for use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to connect with their communities and culture in the ACT and the surrounding region. The regional community bus service operates for ACT residents who find it hard to use other forms of transport, and it runs from Monday to Friday and has flexible routes.

The ACT government routinely promotes and advertises public transport options, particularly in community hubs where transport needs are concentrated. We are regularly reminding non-users of the affordability of public transport compared to parking and other costs to drive to and from work or other places.

Patronage data indicates that there is an upward trajectory of public transport uptake in Canberra, both pre-COVID and returned, to those levels in late 2023 and into 2024. It indicates that the community is responding to the strategic vision for public transport to balance coverage with high-frequency corridors that enable turn-up-and-go frequencies to more parts of Canberra. I am fortunate to live in a turn-up-and-go centre. I would say that, whether it is the R2, R3 or R4, travelling to work from Belconnen town centre, especially at peak times, is always popular. But I have also been pleasantly surprised to see just how well patronised the bus is on the weekend.

We are positioning Canberra's public transport network as a credible alternative to the car for both work and other purposes—leisure, appointments and errands for Canberrans. Indeed, if it is a sitting day, I almost always take the bus. That is because it is reliable; the timing is reliable. If it is more than 25 minutes, I am shocked; whereas, travelling from my house in Belconnen town centre, the best I have ever done is 13 minutes, within the speed limit. But there have been some days where it has been an hour simply because there have been multiple accidents. Buses being able to have that right of way and that flexibility through the city makes it much easier and gives me much more confidence about a sitting day that has a dedicated start time.

Transport Canberra patronage data indicates that, on average, 380,583 trips were recorded per week in the last full financial year before COVID, in 2018-19, and that, for the current financial year to March 2024, the average is 370,000 weekly trips. So the suggestion that Canberra's buses are some of the least used is not accurate when considered in this context.

Buses maintain roughly 80 per cent of Canberra's total public transport patronage alongside light rail, working together to move Canberrans around our city. While some routes may be patronised more than others, the ACT government balances its planning intent to achieve patronage growth with its policy responsibility to provide a sufficient level of transport coverage to all parts of Canberra, even those with less demand for travel.

The ACT public transport future is bright. It is promising and it is exciting. To manage growth and meet strategic objectives, our transport network is realising the moves to support a shift towards public transport by offering both coverage services and high-frequency corridors to more parts of Canberra. Strategic data-informed and balanced investment means that the ACT government will continue to provide a service that is continually progressing towards world class and maintaining the offerings to ensure affordable and accessible public transport services are available to all ACT residents and visitors.

We recognise growth in weekend and local service frequency is critical to supporting travel choice and attracting new users to public transport across the week. That is why we have updated the Saturday bus timetable, providing an additional 331 services and extending the span of hourly frequencies to later in the day. I do recognise that we have a way to go with Sunday. That is firmly on the government's agenda, and particularly for Minister Steel. Our commitment to supporting the public transport needs of the ACT remain strong. It is reflective in all we have invested in to date and all we will continue to invest in, in the future.

While we all know there is an election this year, I do look forward to the important debates throughout the year on public transport—although, as we have heard from Mr Parton, this motion was a terrific vehicle for him to plug his policy, which he even brought down here. But the facts shared in the amendment to the motion explain exactly what the costs are—that the costs are low and have not changed since 2019. The thing is that the bigger step that our government can and will be taking to attract people to public transport is building light rail, including light rail to Woden.

Mr Parton: And Belconnen?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, and to Belconnen. The proof is in the pudding with stage 1. When we gave Canberrans light rail, they embraced it and the use of public transport increased. Investing in a mass-transit system, keeping fares low and growing our transport network are all key parts of our planned public transport. I know that Minister Steel is looking forward to announcing the details of our election commitments later this year.

Mr Parton's motion asks us to commit to a proposal that has impacts on our public transport network which would need careful consideration through a budget process. We are committed to keeping public transport affordable, exploring ways to encourage people onto public transport and identifying how we can support them to rethink the way that they get around our city.

I would note that the motion—and I do not think Mr Parton really discussed this—talks about parking costs and that these are having an impact as well. I would note that I do not hear anyone complaining about public transport fares, actually, while we do hear that parking can be expensive for people and it can be prohibitive. We introduced EasyPark not too long ago. EasyPark is a terrific application because it allows you, on your phone, to select where you have parked and you can put in the time that you expect to be there. But if, for example, you find that you are back at your vehicle and ready to go before that time is up, you simply hit stop and you are only charged for the time that you are there. As a result, the average parking spend per session amount has decreased in real terms. It has decreased from \$5.95 in 2021-22 to \$3.93 in 2023-24. This highlights the benefit to the community of EasyPark—only paying for the time that they use.

We will continue to be flexible in innovative opportunities that make public transport more attractive. It is cheaper and, in some cases, it is faster. It is more effective and you are able to do things like read or do work. I know Mr Braddock has talked about this in the past, as well as his travels on light rail to the city.

With that, I will conclude. I thank Mr Parton for the opportunity to speak about this today and for the opportunity to provide some facts about what we are experiencing and what makes a difference; that is, making sure that we have the infrastructure, the reliability, the frequency and the flexibility in our ticketing system that makes it convenient and easy for people to take public transport. That is exactly what Minister Steel is focused on. That is exactly what the ACT government is focused on. I commend the amendment to the chamber.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.18): I stand to speak in support of Mr Parton's motion, and I commend him for bringing this to the Assembly's attention. Firstly, I want to recognise the tremendous work that Mr Parton has done in cooperation with Elizabeth Lee and her team, and in his role as shadow transport minister in this term. Mr Parton has connected with transport stakeholders at every level—and some of the most surprising and unexpected support has appeared—and demonstrated an amazing capacity to engage people in the ongoing transport debate in our city. I think I speak on behalf of all Canberra Liberals and many Canberrans in saying that Mr Parton will make a fantastic transport minister if given the opportunity by voters in October this year.

This motion reflects one of the key pillars of the Liberals' people-focused public transport plan for the ACT. Canberrans currently pay up to an average of \$32.50 each week to commute to and from work on public transport. The weekly cost of parking in Civic is well over \$100 a week, and that is before you factor in vehicle running costs. The ACT is in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, with many Canberrans struggling under high interest rates and inflationary pressures. ACT Labor and Greens have no plan to ease cost-of-living pressures for Canberrans, but the Canberra Liberals do.

The Canberra Liberals have a plan to deliver an equitable fare system to encourage greater use of public transport and provide real cost-of-living relief to Canberrans. Under Labor and the Greens, the percentage of Canberrans using public transport to go to work has sunk to one of the lowest in the country—shame! A fair cap encourages people to change from driving their car and save on car parking. A fair cap also encourages use of public transport off peak and on the weekends. This is a sound and reasonable initiative to provide real cost-of-living relief to Canberrans. This is a sound and reasonable initiative to promote greater use of public transport by Canberrans. This is a sound and reasonable initiative to focus public transport policy back on the people.

An Elizabeth Lee led Canberra Liberals government is just that—people focused—and our transport policy platform is proof of that. I know many of my constituents in Ginninderra would welcome a \$25 weekly cap on bus fares with open arms. I encourage all members to support Mr Parton's motion as it was moved. I want to thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion forward and advocating for people-focused public transport policies for our city.

In closing, I obviously cannot support Ms Cheyne's amendment. I want to touch briefly on Ms Cheyne's "calls on". Firstly, she calls on the ACT government to "consider further options to support more people onto public transport in the ACT". It has already been done for them. Just have a look at the Canberra Liberals' transport policy—tick that box. Maybe that is really what that motion is saying. I do not know, Madam Speaker. I think they are saying, "Yes, we're going to look into this"—and won't it be interesting to see how much they use of this Canberra Liberals' policy leading up to the ACT election?

Secondly, she calls on the government to consider "strategic and time-limited use of free public transport". What about a weekly cap? That is actually quite simple. Why not come up with a motion to say, "Well, Mr Parton wants to cap it at \$25 a week but we're going to make it easier for Canberrans and come up with a lower number"? Why not do that? That would actually be an interesting amendment. Instead, we have something that says, "We are going to keep considering things." For how long does this government need to consider how to make public transport better in the ACT? How long do they need? I reckon they have had long enough, and I think Canberrans realise that the government have had long enough to make this and many other parts of government in the ACT much better than they are.

Thirdly—and I cannot believe this one—the amendment calls on the government to "continue to advertise". I will have to stop there—continue to advertise. I feel like a Labor adviser at the moment.

Ms Lee: Is it the one of 106?

MR CAIN: Sorry; 12 and 106 are not the same. They are just not the same. They might be spun that way. We have heard the minister try to do that over the last couple of days. Maybe they should just stop advertising. Maybe they should just drop that one. There could be an amendment to drop the thing that says “to advertise”. Just stop there, please. You have done a pretty awful job so far. If you cannot add up, you had better not advertise that you cannot add up. That is really simple, I think. Please, take it seriously. Come up with something that is really going to help Canberrans embrace public transport and be able to afford it. I think the Canberra Liberals have actually done exactly that.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.24): I rise to speak in support of the amendment circulated by Minister Cheyne and to speak about Mr Parton’s original motion. I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this motion. There were two reasons behind it. They were the two reasons that I saw when I read it, and Mr Parton mentioned both. It is the sort of motion you do if you either want to encourage more people to catch the bus or you want to provide cost-of-living relief for those who already catch the bus. These are really good goals but, unfortunately, I do not think the motion will achieve either of those effectively. So the Greens have decided to support the amendment circulated instead.

We have spoken before about bus fares and whether they are having an impact on whether people are catching the bus. The most detailed debate we had on that was when the Assembly committed to a free trial period in April 2022. The research done by my office on this motion has returned the same results as it did back then. Fees and fares are not the major determinate in whether people catch the bus. More Canberrans would catch the bus if we provided a better bus service. Most Canberrans do not choose not to catch the bus because it is too expensive; they choose not to catch the bus because it is infrequent, unreliable or it does not go where they need to go.

The measure is also unlikely to encourage more people onto the bus. Mr Parton’s motion notes the weekly cost of a bus commute is \$32.20 and the weekly cost of parking in Civic is over \$100. That is just for parking. If you add in petrol and all of the other costs of car ownership, of course, the cost of driving is much, much higher than that \$100 a week. So Canberra commuters could already be saving \$68 a week just on parking if they caught the bus. But they are not catching the bus. Why would they start catching the bus if we offered them another \$7 a week in discounts? I think most Canberrans do not catch the bus because our buses do not provide the service that most Canberrans need.

Canberra needs more buses and needs better buses. We currently have a poor service outside of peak hours and peak routes. Sometimes it barely exists at all, like our Sunday service that is once every two hours, if it shows up! If it does not show up, maybe it is once or twice a day when there are problems. Our peak hour service is much better used but it is still under-serviced. We have got really full buses during those Rapid peaks. Some of them are over-full, and some of them have been over-full for years. The Rapid service from Belconnen to the city is often full by the time it leaves our town centre. We need more services at peak hours and we need a more useful service the rest of the time for the rest of the suburbs. That is how we will encourage more people to catch the bus and that is how we will reduce driving.

Most of the evidence shows that fares and free public transport do not have a big impact on ridership. What impacts ridership is quality—is this service any good? I am also not

convinced on the cost-of-living relief offered in this motion. It is not well-targeted. We already have a lot of concessional fares and free fares for people who need them in our bus system and in our public transport system, and that is really targeted in there already. It is great to have concessional fares and free fares for those who need them. I am always interested in hearing where we need to extend those. The cost-of-living crisis is really a good time to talk about this again, but today's proposal is not well-targeted. Today's proposal would primarily give a hand-out to nine-to-five commuters. Our nine-to-five commuters in this town are not the people who are struggling the most at the moment. We would do much better if we used the money in this initiative to provide more targeted relief to those who are really, really struggling.

I am a Green; I like to look at evidence. I like to look at the best evidence I can find, and I quite like the idea of free public transport, provided we have first made sure that we have really good public transport. So I would like to see good evidence about what free fares would do in the ACT. The amendments we have had circulated actually point towards a free bus trial. It is a free bus trial that this Assembly committed to run back in 2022, and we would like to see that free bus trial happen. We think that is the best way to get good ACT-based evidence about what impact that has on bus usership. It would be the best way to determine what effect waiving fares has on ridership. Let us be clear, if anything in the price realm is likely to change behaviour, it is going to be free buses not slightly discounted buses. Ideally, we would run that trial when we are running enough bus services so that we can genuinely see if more people catch the bus when it is free at a time when there is more room for people to catch the bus if they want to.

The Greens are looking at a lot of ways to bring cost-of-living relief for Canberrans, and we have got pretty different ideas from the Canberra Liberals. We are not running with a \$7 a week fare rebate for nine-to-five commuters, for the same reason we would not give \$100 car vouchers to wealthy Canberrans. We just do not think that is well targeted and we do not think it is a good use of taxpayer funds. We support the Rent Relief Fund; we support free fares for those who need them; and we support energy relief for pensioners and concession cardholders. All of these are really targeted cost-of-living relief measures that go to the people who need it most.

We tried earlier in the week to provide more rent relief for renters, but we were voted down. We will try again with other well-targeted measures that are going to the people who need them the most. Any cost of living relief needs to be allocated based on need. I am surprised the Canberra Liberals keep rolling out universal handouts when they are also talking a lot about debt and deficit. We Greens really want to provide relief too, but we want to make sure that it goes to those who need it when we are talking about taxpayer money.

For Canberra's public transport users—and for those who want to be Canberra's public transport users—we would like you to have the best service and we would like financial support provided to those who need it. That is what we are aiming for. So we will support the amended motion that considers a free trial at a strategic time. I look forward to bringing forward more measures that will give Canberra the bus service that we need.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.30): I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, and I support his call to call on the government to cap weekly adult fares to \$25 a week. This, of course, comes from the Canberra Liberals'

transport policy, which will deliver a faster, easier, greener and more affordable transport system in the ACT at a fraction of the cost of the Labor-Greens transport plan.

By reducing the weekly cap we will encourage more people to catch public transport for their weekly commute, as well as encourage more people to catch public transport on the weekend. By capping adult fares at \$25 a week, we will save a weekly commuter around \$20 a week. Over a year, this will mean a saving of more than \$1,000. That is more than \$1,000 that a Canberra Liberals government will keep in the pockets of Canberrans during this cost-of-living crisis. This policy will save our nurses, teachers, public servants, tradies and small business owners who catch public transport each day over \$1,000 a year.

These are the Canberrans who are concerned about the rates bills that have increased significantly since this government announced its tax reform. These are the Canberrans who are concerned about being able to afford to access a GP practice because their local doctor has told them that they are increasing fees because of this government's payroll tax on GPs. These are the small business owners who cannot even get in touch with this government to raise their concerns, let alone have their concerns addressed. These are the small business owners who are being hit with thousands of dollars in rates, taxes, fees and charges because this is a government that does not respect, does not value and does not care about business. The Canberra Liberals are listening. This is one of the many ways that we will make sure that Canberrans receive some cost-of-living reprieve from a government that sees no issue with wasting millions of hard-earned Canberra taxpayer dollars on dodgy procurements and abandoned projects whilst delivering nothing.

We want to see more people use public transport, something that this Labor-Greens government has failed to do over the past decade despite spending billions and with an intention to spend more billions. In 2011 the government had a target to get nine per cent of the population using public transport. In 2016 that target was 10.5 per cent, and by 2026 the target is 16 per cent. So 13 years after announcing these targets it will not surprise all members in this chamber that this government has not been the government of delivery and has failed to meet its own targets. What a surprise! Public transport usage remains at less than seven per cent. This has not happened overnight and this was not an accident. It has happened over time because Labor and the Greens have wasted hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on not delivering on the core government services that Canberrans need and deserve. It has happened over time because Labor and the Greens have mismanaged the budget and not prioritised the needs of the Canberra community. It has happened over time because Labor and the Greens are so utterly out of touch with the challenges that are facing so many Canberrans that they stopped listening to the community a long time ago.

That is why a Canberra Liberals government is committed to a public transport system that will reduce travel times, improve connections and—as Mr Parton has said today and will continue to say—reduce the cost so that more Canberrans can access it. The Canberra Liberals' people-focused public transport policy will make that happen.

This measure, of course, comes on the back of our commitment to delivering real and tangible measures to reduce the cost-of-living pressures for many Canberrans. In January this year we announced a \$65 million cost-of-living relief package, where

Canberra families will be able to access financial support to help with the cost of back-to-school and extracurricular activities. We will provide welcome relief for rego and electricity bills, which have gone up, up and up—and we will deliver free public transport to those who need it most, our students, seniors and concession cardholders. But we also want to make public transport accessible and easy to use for all Canberrans. One way we are going to do this is by introducing a \$25 weekly cap on fares.

Mr Parton brings this motion today because, whilst Labor and the Greens always talk the talk when it comes to cost-of-living relief, as they talk the talk when it comes to better access to public transport, they have utterly failed to walk the walk. And today, when given yet another opportunity to demonstrate to the community that they mean what they say, I think we have already seen from the contributions made that they will once again fail Canberrans. The Canberra Liberals are committed to ensuring that we deliver a genuine people-focused public transport plan that will get Canberrans where they want to go and when they want to get there. That is something that is a far cry from what this Labor-Greens government has made of our public transport system.

Before I close, I just want to briefly address some of the contributions that have been made by Ms Cheyne and Ms Clay. Ms Cheyne started off her speech by giving a lecture to the Canberra Liberals about apparently using selective quotes. My assumption from that, of course, is that, from now on, any time a member of the Labor Party or the Greens uses any quote, it is going to be the whole thing. Whether it is a book or whether it is an article, it is going to be the whole quote—because the Canberra Liberals have been accused of selectively quoting. So that is my assumption and that is what their standard is going to be held up to. It is deluded to the extreme that this is from a minister who yesterday strenuously defended the “One of 106” signs that are splashed over every bus that is in the rotation—which, by the way, I remind members is 12. That is rich. That is deluded to the extreme. It is like they have been there for so long that they have literally lost their grip on reality. So thank you so much for the lecture, Ms Cheyne, but you can keep that to yourself.

Ms Clay justified why she was not supporting the motion that has been brought by Mr Parton. She said that, if it was going to try and get more people on public transport or to provide cost-of-living relief for those who already catch public transport, Mr Parton’s motion that calls on those actions will not get there. Yet, she is quite happy to support the amendment brought by Ms Cheyne. I note, Mr Assistant Speaker, that you yourself went through the calls-on in great detail. But let us have a look at what the calls-on is: “consider further options” and “consider the strategic and time-limited use” and “continue to advertise”. These are the exact same weasel words that Labor and the Greens use when they make motions, when they bring themselves from the back benches or where they make amendments, because it means that they are not going to do a thing. The fact that Ms Clay has decided, “You know what; I will swallow it once more,” goes to show that the Greens cannot be trusted. Yes, it is an election year; and, yes, they are doing the fake divorce, as we see every election. But when it comes down to where it actually counts, the Greens cannot be trusted. That is abundantly clear today.

I thank, once again, Mr Parton for bringing this motion and also for the hard work that he and his office have done in providing the Canberra community with a genuine and real people-focused public transport plan that will get Canberrans where they want to go when they want to get there, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.39): What a great practical, sensible motion Mr Parton has brought today—and what a response from the government. Let me start with the end of what Ms Cheyne had to say. She said that, in some cases—some cases—public transport under this government can deliver faster and more effective transport. I am so glad that the public transport serves the minister well. I am really glad that it does—because it has got to be working somewhere, right?

It certainly is not in a whole lot of other places. It is certainly not for the people in Weston Creek who have seen their buses replaced with far slower options that take up to 45 minutes to make it to the city. It is certainly not working for those people. It is certainly not working to get more people taking public transport. Clearly, this government has failed on its objectives. It is very clear from the numbers. We have heard it today—seven per cent. They could not even hit the nine per cent that they were aiming for years ago. So I am glad that something is working somewhere for this minister, because it is certainly not for many other people.

It is clear to me that this minister has no awareness of the everyday experience of what people are trying to contend with as they make their way to work through the daily congestion from Woden, from Weston Creek and from the Molonglo Valley, where they have to contend with troubles on John Gorton Drive and Streeton Drive. This government has failed to deliver on its promises. It has not delivered a public transport service that works for real people. It is not good enough to just say, “We only want it for those people who cannot afford any other option.” We are saying it is time to deliver a service that works for everyone. It is time for faster, cheaper, more convenient public transport that reduces congestion. It is time to deliver a bus service that actually works. It is very clear to me that if you want better buses, if you want a public transport service that gets you where you want to go faster, cheaper and more conveniently, it is time to get on board with the Canberra Liberals’ plan for people-focused public transport, because it is time to give something new a shot.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.42): I am extremely disappointed that all parties in this place could not agree on this motion. The amendment is as weak as I thought it would be, but that is what I thought we would get. But, as weak as it is, respectfully—if I can say it respectfully—I think the Greens are weaker for supporting the amendment and not supporting the original motion.

I sense that there was a part of Ms Clay that wanted to back this motion, but she fell short of it. I am disappointed that Ms Clay suggested that only the people with concession cards are doing it tough in this cost-of-living crisis. It is a very typical Greens view that anyone who is working full-time is probably a capitalist and they should not be receiving any assistance and that, if they are doing it tough, it is their fault for choosing to be in the system and do it the way that they are doing it. Which Canberrans do you reckon are the ones who are feeling the heat from interest rate rises? Would it be the unemployed? Who would it be? Would it be the pensioners? When we watch those interest rates go up, would it be the concession cardholders? There is a squeeze on all cohorts in our city, not just the people who are receiving welfare. Ms Clay believes that the only people who are struggling to pay their bills are those on pensions or are concession cardholders of any description. I think Ms Clay needs to get out more.

In the calls-on 3(b), Ms Cheyne has gone with “consider strategic and time-limited use of free public transport where there is network capacity to accommodate a potential increase in passengers”. I am assuming that what she is actually leading to is that this so-called “consideration of strategic and time-limited use of free public transport” has nothing whatsoever to do with cost-of-living relief or any mechanism that is actually designed to get more people on buses. When the government finally transitions the ticket-readers on the buses and the tram stations to long awaited MyWay Plus system, it is actually physically impossible for them to collect fares for a period of time. That would be a time-limited use of free public transport. I am not sure that that is all that strategic, because it is impossible to collect fares while there are two systems in place. You cannot have two systems operating at once. So there was always going to be a period of time during which fares could not be collected. God help us if the government comes out and says that this is a cost-of-living measure—but I am sure they will. I am absolutely sure that they will. I think it is as disingenuous as the “one of 106” zero-emissions bus signs running around on the 12 Yutong buses.

To have an amendment striking out a weekly fare cap and replacing it with an already operationally required period of free transport is quite simply pathetic. So why wouldn't we all support it? Why wouldn't we all support this motion? It cannot possibly be because of cost. Let's be honest about spending within the transport portfolio. We know that this government is going to fork out \$4 billion, \$5 billion or even \$6 billion to get the tram from Commonwealth Park to Woden. So it cannot be about cost—because cost never ever comes into it.

Ms Cheyne had the audacity to suggest that we are creative with the use of information and that we leave bits out. She suggested that somehow we left out bits of Mr Hemsley's critique about transport policy, which is a bit like Transport Canberra leaving out the words “ordered” and “potentially to be delivered sometime in the next decade” to their signage of the number of buses. I would also draw Ms Cheyne's attention to *The Canberra Times* poll today on whether the one of 106 electric bus signage is misleading. As unparliamentary as it may be, the poll is currently running at 75/25—75 per cent to 25 per cent in favour of the government is misleading us with that signage.

Ms Castley: Interesting.

MR PARTON: It is interesting, isn't? We have spoken a lot about transport this week, and of course we spoke about it yesterday in this chamber. How much traction have the videos on that issue had? As per our discussion in the chamber yesterday, I have had 40,000 views in less than 24 hours. So I would suggest we will eclipse 100,000, and, when they see that signage, so many people will think about the creative use of the truth. As much as I am a fan of Mr Hemsley, there are time limits to these speeches and I am not able to read the whole thing. Although it is interesting that, when I was going through looking for quotes, there were the obvious ones that we arrived at, but the whole is pretty positive. I was reading through it again and thinking, “Gee; I owe this man a beer”—no bribery in an election year! But the whole thing is pretty positive. It is really not too bad. Obviously there are some things that Mr Hemsley and I disagree with.

Ms Cheyne was critical and dismissive yesterday of my use of social media. But I would say in response that, unlike a government minister, I cannot utilise the multi-million-

dollar taxpayer funded propaganda channels that this government has set up to distribute its various election messages disguised as important government information. I do not have the ability to use taxpayer money to spread my messages; so I do it in whatever way I can—and it seems to be working all right. We will not be supporting this motion.

Ms Cheyne: You are not supporting your own motion? You said it.

MR PARTON: You got me. You got me. It took you all week, but you got me. We will not be supporting this amendment. I think I have said enough. I think we are all ready to go home.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 7

Yvette Berry
Andrew Braddock
Joy Burch
Tara Cheyne
Jo Clay
Emma Davidson
Mick Gentleman
Laura Nuttall

Suzanne Orr
Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson
Shane Rattenbury
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Rebecca Vassarotti

Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
Elizabeth Lee
James Milligan
Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 211A, I propose the question:

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Correction to the record

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Disability and Minister for Health) (4.54): On 14 January 2024, I received correspondence from a cardiologist about information I provided to the Assembly in

March 2023 regarding their engagement with Canberra Health Services. On receipt of this correspondence, I asked CHS to investigate the concerns raised and I subsequently responded to the specialist.

In my comments in March 2023, I stated that the specialist had been “offered a lucrative position in a private cardiology group in another jurisdiction and they chose to take that appointment”. The advice from CHS is that my statement in the Assembly reflected their understanding of this situation at that time and until the correspondence was received. However, I accept that the specialist has now advised that they signed a contract with the other employer after their resignation from CHS. In addition, I and CHS recognise that using the term “lucrative” to describe the position was subjective and may have been read or heard as pejorative.

The specialist has advised that my description of their decision was not accurate and that this has caused distress to them and their family. In light of this, I withdraw this statement and clarify that no imputation was intended to be read into it. I apologise to the person concerned for the use of this language and the hurt that this has caused, and I thank them for their service to CHS at what was a challenging time.

Environment—Ginninderry conservation corridor

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.56): I rise to speak briefly about the ongoing issues surrounding the legality of the Ginninderry Conservation Corridor. It appears that the Ginninderry joint venture, which is a public-private partnership involving the Suburban Land Agency, remains non-compliant with the federal act, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. The government appears to be doing anything it can to avoid responsibility for failing to appropriately secure the land within that corridor—all of it, that is—as required under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The fact that this issue remains unresolved for quite a long time serves as an indictment on the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development for failing to ensure that our suburban development is compliant with federal law; it serves as an indictment on the Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management for failing to take care that the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is actually being adhered to; and it serves as an indictment on the Chief Minister for failing to take responsibility for this calamitous and illegal continuing situation. They need to get this sorted out.

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (4.57): The Assembly’s Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity is currently conducting an inquiry into Ms Clay’s Environment Protection (Fossil Fuel Company Advertising) Amendment Bill 2024. The committee has posted submissions to its inquiry on its website, and I rise this afternoon to clarify the status of one of those submissions.

There is a submission from the Chief Minister in his capacity as the Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development. The committee has listed this as being an ACT government submission. In fact, it is not an ACT government submission. During the

cabinet process, I, Minister Davidson and Minister Vassarotti opposed the views contained in the submission. The result was that cabinet agreed that this was provided as a submission from the Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development.

My office wrote to the committee on 26 March, drawing the committee's attention to this information. The committee noted the advice by return email. The submission continues to be labelled an ACT government submission on the website. I invite the committee to reflect on whether they might amend the record to ensure the information they convey to the public is accurate.

As for the bill itself, when it comes to the debate in this place, members who oppose banning fossil-fuel advertising will need to explain why they think it is okay for fossil-fuel companies, the biggest drivers of climate change, to be allowed to continue to buy social licence.

Transport, Canberra and City Services—acknowledgement

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) (4.59): Yesterday, we passed two very important pieces of legislation, and it was absolutely remiss of me not to thank the public servants who had put in quite a lot of effort to make them happen. The first was the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2024, which, while quite technical, is an incredibly important piece of work. The board was very keen to see its passage for the certainty that its passage provided. I really thank TCCS and the teams within TCCS who made it possible for us to get that through quite quickly.

Secondly, the Better Regulation Taskforce has worked exceptionally hard and, despite the protestations from those opposite, exceptionally quickly in this term—and especially in the past 18 months—to not only hear about the challenges but also respond in very practical ways. I am very grateful that we got support across the floor for them yesterday, but I think that speaks to the nature of the reforms, their very hard work and just how much the reforms will help. I really do thank them for all those efforts and I apologise that I did not thank them, as I normally would, at the conclusion of the debate.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Employment—four-day work week

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (5.01): I rise today to speak on the four-day work week. I encourage members in this chamber, as well as the ACT community, to consider a trial of the four-day work week. The four-day work week comes with no loss of income nor conditions; that is, reducing the number of hours worked in the week, not simply compressing the same number of hours in fewer days.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you might be interested to know that the world's largest trial of the four-day work week was conducted in the United Kingdom, where organisations implemented a four-day work week for their employees. The outcomes of this trial were overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting increased levels of physical and mental health, an improved work-life balance and higher levels of productivity.

The report stated that 96 per cent of employees said that their personal lives had benefited and 86 per cent of employees felt that they had performed better at work. One year after this trial in the UK, 89 per cent of companies have continued to utilise the four-day work week. Earlier this year, other results that have been revealed after the trial include a much lower turnover rate among workers, increased efficiency and happier employees. In a follow-up survey for managers and CEOs, 100 per cent of them reported that the four-day work week had either a positive or a very positive impact on their organisation. It is clear that these sustained results have shown not only the short-term impacts but also the real and long-lasting effects which benefit not only the employees but also the organisations they work for.

Other trials are being conducted around the world, including in Germany, which at the start of 2024 has 45 companies trialling the four-day work week for six months. In a recent survey, 73 per cent of workers were in favour of reducing the work week to four days whilst still receiving the same wage. Similar to the UK, Germany has adopted the 100-80-100 model, whereby the four-day work week involves employees receiving 100 per cent of their normal pay, with 80 per cent of the work hours and 100 per cent of the productivity. The results one month into the trial have indicated employees are already stating that their satisfaction and happiness have increased, they are increasingly motivated and they have improved life satisfaction. I am confident that Germany will continue to have similar outcomes to the UK trial.

Here in Australia, Medibank Australia has found similar results, where workers reported enhanced sleep, better productivity and an improved quality of life. In fact, 96 per cent of employees who have been on the four-day work week trial wanted the four-day work week to continue. Medibank's head of HR noted recently that there was a noticeable reduction in stress levels across the employees, which was attributed to their increased autonomy, fewer meetings and a greater work-life balance. Additionally, the Medibank study found that the number of sick days that were taken by workers decreased by two-thirds. Evidently, the employees who were working a four-day work week have improved wellbeing both inside and outside of employment.

It is clear that these promising results from trials around the world and here in Australia underscore the potential for the four-day work week to revolutionise the way we approach work in the ACT. It is also important to recognise that there have been significant societal shifts since the pandemic, with workers and employers reconsidering the importance of workplace flexibility.

The country that introduced the four-day work week in 1940, the United States, has seen Bernie Sanders recently propose legislation to reduce the work week from 40 hours to 32 hours, without any reduction in pay. Senator Sanders emphasised that shifts longer than eight hours and any work weeks that go beyond 32 hours of work

should be eligible for overtime pay. The senator encouraged the United States to adopt a four-day work week so that productivity and the wellbeing of employees and employers rise—something that has been noticed around the world.

The traditional five-day work week no longer aligns with the needs and expectations of modern employees. By providing employees with an extra day off each week, we can significantly improve their work-life balance and their quality of life. Embracing a four-day work week reflects the shift towards prioritising the wellbeing of employees while addressing excessive working hours, stress and burnout caused by overworking.

As the Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality has recommended, I am also in support of the report's recommendations to establish a trial of the four-day work week here in the ACT public service. This recommendation is in lockstep with the federal parliament, whose Senate Select Committee on Work and Care recommended that a trial of the four-day work week take place within the ACT government. Considering that we have support from the Australian federal government to trial the four-day work week here, looking at the ACT public service, I once again encourage members in this chamber, as well as the ACT community, to support exploring the possibility of a four-day work week here in the ACT.

Ukraine—armed conflict

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.06): On 24 February this year, Friends of Ukraine Canberra-Queanbeyan organised a vigil to mark the second anniversary of Russia's illegal attempt to invade Ukraine. I welcome members of the community who join us in the public gallery today and I thank them for inviting me to speak at the vigil.

While this conflict is far from the ACT in a physical sense, I wish to take this opportunity to reflect on the consequences of Russia's aggression, because it is imperative that the courage and unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian people continues to be globally supported, even more strongly than it has been until now. The human toll alone is heartbreaking. While the estimates vary, it is clear that hundreds of thousands have lost their lives and have been injured, from innocent Ukrainian civilians to soldiers killed in combat; children, parents, brothers, sisters—all loved ones. The tragedy of lost human life is squarely as a consequence of the decision by Russia to attack Ukraine.

Beyond the direct loss of human life in Ukraine, there are, of course, other impacts. There is the prospect of famine in the global south, given Ukraine's role as a breadbasket for the world. The environmental damage caused by events like the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in the middle of last year and the potential destruction of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is enormous. More than 12,000 square kilometres of Ukraine's nature reserves have now become a war zone. Estimating the total environmental damage inflicted by war is not possible until the war ends, and we have no idea when that will be. According to preliminary data, it will take Ukraine at least 15 years to recover. On top of repairing and rebuilding ruined buildings, residential and commercial infrastructure, schools, hospitals and priceless cultural heritage, repairing environmental damage will be an immense task.

Meanwhile, the dysfunction, vacillation and, in some cases, active sabotage in the United States Congress with regard to continuing support for Ukraine is sending

dangerous signals to dictators, despots and autocrats around the globe. If Ukraine does not prevail in this war, millions more people will face a more dangerous future. An article I read on the war at the time of the anniversary was titled, “Not losing is not enough: it’s time for Europe to finally get serious about a Ukrainian victory”. The author’s central point was that all of Europe is at war. He went on to say:

If we don’t face up to the urgency of enabling Ukraine to consolidate its defensive positions, regroup and ultimately win the war that it’s fighting on behalf of all of us, then a few years down the road we will face an even more direct attack from an emboldened, revanchist Russia.

That is a clear, powerful and succinct reminder that we cannot simply sit on the sidelines and speak of solidarity with Ukraine, admiring the courage and tenacity, but must also actively support Ukraine with all the means that they need. I am by no means the first person to say this, but it does bear repeating: democracy is not a spectator sport. People in countries who believe in democracy and value freedom must stand staunchly with Ukraine and must actively support them.

One resident of Ukraine, whose words I came across in the run-up to the anniversary, said:

I don’t know a single person that is not trying to help with the war effort. Of course, not everyone is a soldier, but everyone I know is either donating to the military, helping to raise money, involved with different charities, helping the army with logistics and supplies, crowdsourcing drones for the armed forces, and whatever else you can imagine.

The people of Ukraine are showing us all how it can be done and why it needs to be done. Australia as a nation and we as individuals must maintain and strengthen our commitment to Ukraine, because Russia is not going to back down. Experts warn that nations in the Baltic and Eastern Europe will be in President Putin’s sights next if Ukraine does fall.

To the members of the Canberra, Queanbeyan and district communities who have been keeping vigil outside the Embassy of the Russian Federation every Saturday and often during the week as well, keeping vigil continuously since February 2022, your solidarity with those struggling in Ukraine is a source of inspiration.

The second anniversary of this war invites us to commemorate the efforts of the brave people of Ukraine, shine a light on the ongoing injustice driven by Russia, and stand together in demanding more support for Ukraine. We call for strength for Ukraine and, ultimately, peace for Ukraine.

Ginninderra—community events

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.11): I want to speak briefly about a few local events that I have been able to participate in in the past few weeks—local being in the electorate of Ginninderra. Last Saturday, it was a delight to join the community of St Monica’s Catholic Primary School in Evatt. In fact, it is just down the road from our home. Their fete was on Saturday. It looked like, “Will this happen or not?” As we know, Saturday

morning was very, very wet and steady in its rain. I was able to pop down, after some other commitments, to the fete in the afternoon. I found that they had done a remarkable job. They housed all of the usual school fete stalls and creative activities within the school site itself or undercover outside.

I am sure that we all appreciate our wonderful schools and the fetes they put on. We had the wonderful range of plant sales, crafts, local crafts, hair braiding, books—so many things that the community offers to others to support their school. We even had Shah Bros Lemonade selling their lemonade, who came from deep down south in Kambah—your territory, Mr Deputy Speaker. It was a delight to help in a very small manner by spinning the raffle wheel; I am happy to say I was put to work just a little bit. It was a delight to join the community on that Saturday afternoon for an hour or so.

Then, of course, late last month we had the Belconnen Community Men’s Shed, right next to Page shops, celebrate their 10th year of operation. I want to commend the Men’s Shed movement. It is really encouraging to read their rationale for why they do this sort of thing. I do want to read from their statement of purpose:

Our Shed was established to help prevent men from suffering the isolation, loss of purpose and wellbeing that is often associated with men leaving the workforce either for health reasons or retirement.

It is well known that men do not talk as much as they should about their problems, so the shed, with its tools and men working together, creates that environment and that opportunity.

I particularly want to commend the Men’s Shed next to Page shops because they have also reached out in a mentoring manner to take in young men who need some guidance. You can put the pieces together: these young men, who need guidance, are brought into the company of older, experienced men and given some hands-on work to do to contribute to different parts of our community. They offer the opportunity of sage counsel from experienced people.

I will mention, as well, the petition I have running on behalf of a business in west Belconnen at Kippax. They came to me and said, “Our workers are getting slugged because they have got no long-term parking near to where they work,” which is along that very popular strip of businesses just down from the Kippax Group Centre. They are getting pinged with parking fines, and there is inadequate long-term parking. I encourage any members to go to my socials, or to go to the Assembly website if you do not want to go to my socials. Go to the Assembly website for this e-petition that calls for more long-term parking in west Belconnen at the Kippax Group Centre. This is something that has been brought to me by the local business community, and I am certainly happy to encourage it.

I guess many of us will be getting into the mode of doorknocking at local shops. I am sure that we are going to see lots of candidates out and about. I am happy to say that I am continuing my practice of doorknocking in the suburbs of Ginninderra—obviously nearly all of Belconnen is in that electorate—and setting up mobile offices at the shopping centres and, certainly, putting myself out as the local member for the community, as I should be doing.

Women—women’s rights in Iran

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.15): In September we will be coming up to the second anniversary of the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who was beaten and arrested in Tehran for improperly wearing her headscarf. She later died in the custody of the morality police. We all watched the wave of protests that swept across Iran in the wake of her death. The bravery of such resistance is incomparable for the rest of us in this chamber. The anguish of the people could be heard in the chants, such as “I swear by Mahsa’s blood Iran will be free,” and the internationally recognised slogan, “jin, jiyān, azadi,” meaning, “woman, life, freedom.”

Tens of thousands of people in Iran have risked their lives to take part in the uprising. Within 74 days of Amini’s death, over 448 people had been killed by security forces and at least 18,000 arrested. This situation, although occurring on the other side of the world, has repercussions right here in Canberra. According to the latest census, of the 34,000 Iranian-born people in Australia, 545 of those individuals call the ACT home. In the past two years, members of the Australian Iranian community have experienced increased threats, intimidation tactics and unbridled surveillance after attending solidarity protests that call for democracy in Iran. Those who speak out against the regime are overtly threatened and their family members in Iran are questioned.

In his 2022 annual threat assessment, Director-General of Security of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, Mike Burgess, stated:

Foreign governments will often monitor and intimidate members of diaspora communities who are critics of the foreign government or express views at odds with the regime’s policies.

Iranian Australians should be able to stand up for their rights without fear of retribution. Their demands should not be controversial: the right to freedom of speech, the right to live with dignity and the right to defend these without fear of retribution. We in this chamber and as Canberrans must always protect the fundamental rights of any community in the ACT to peacefully protest. To deny one person this right is to suppress it for all of us.

I, in my office, have heard from Iranian Australian constituents who do not feel safe to speak freely on their university campuses here in Australia because there are many regime loyalists that are intermingled throughout the academic spaces; yet pro-democracy dissidents continue to protest and advocate for the rights of their people. In solidarity with this courageous community, we too must show our solidarity by openly expressing our moral support, advocating for human rights in Iran and ensuring the freedom of Iranian Canberrans to express themselves. As activist Nazanin Boniadi put it, “We are not saying go in and save the Iranian people. We are saying stop saving the Iranian regime.”

Gambling—harm minimisation

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.18): The past few weeks have seen a heightened debate on gambling harm in the ACT: in part because of the confronting story of

Mr Kasurinen's death as a result of the harm he was experiencing from gambling, and in part because of a media release that went out the day after Mr Kasurinen's story came to the public's attention. The media release and subsequent commentary announced that the market sounding process had begun for a central monitoring system, and there was a decided shift in the minister's previous stance on bet and load limits to a new focus on loss limits. For those not accustomed with these measures, they are very different things. Loss limits are new to the table.

The last official public documentation produced by the ACT government in respect of the delivery of bet limits was in September 2022 in the government YourSay listening report—two years ago. Since then, there has been a serious lack of answers and transparency in this process. Time lines for a delivery of a CMS were clearly articulated in these reports, but, again, nothing has happened; and as we heard in question time, there is still no reasonable answer as to why the market sounding has only just begun. The lack of transparency leads me down the path of a range of theories—that the minister may not be genuine about delivering a CMS.

I put it to the Assembly that perhaps the minister did not have the backbone to go to the clubs two years ago to say that they were going to have to pay for a CMS. Or did the minister realise that bet limits were a relatively ineffective harm minimisation policy to justify the \$70 million expenditure on a CMS? Or does Minister Rattenbury only care about reducing gambling harm around election times? The bottom line is that he has sat on his hands and done nothing for the past two years. And what we are witnessing now is how easy it is for a minister whose performance is under scrutiny to politicise gambling harm reform, making the lack of delivery everyone else's fault and not his own.

Minister Rattenbury and the ACT Greens have gone on a campaign to try to discredit me and my voice in this debate. I will not be silenced in a public policy debate, and I will continue to challenge the minister on this policy and his performance. Much of the rhetoric coming from the ACT Greens and Minister Rattenbury is pitched at how powerful and influential the gambling industry is. But what if the true story, the real story, was down to an incompetent minister who has not delivered on his portfolio this term.

Minister Rattenbury, there have been no tangible poker machine harm reduction measures implemented this term. Minister Rattenbury, there is a complete lack of transparency and accountability from the Gambling and Racing Commission, and they present an, honestly, truly dismal performance in regulating the clubs and protecting the community from harm. Minister Rattenbury, self-exclusion has been shamefully left to fail. Minister Rattenbury, you have barely touched on addressing online gambling harm. Minister Rattenbury, clubs in the ACT are in the exact same predicament, in terms of their planning and divestment activities, and are highly frustrated. Minister Rattenbury, how will you justify to the Canberra community that the extent of reform you have implemented this term is to establish a ministerial council to advise you?

Gambling—harm minimisation

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.22): I rise today, as the Greens spokesperson for the prevention of domestic and family violence, to talk about the importance of taking a harm reduction approach to gambling addiction in the ACT: to provide people who

are really struggling with gambling addiction with the ability to effectively self-exclude from venues, where they do not want to be tempted to go over their limits; and to provide those people with the ability to have bet load and loss limits that can be set daily, monthly, yearly—similar to what has been very effectively used in Tasmania and in other jurisdictions. This is a very helpful thing.

I want to thank Minister Rattenbury for the years of work and consultation with harm reduction experts and stakeholders in the community in working out how we can approach this issue. To have a centralised monitoring system for gambling machines in the ACT will be very helpful in reducing the harm that is caused by gambling. I thank Minister Rattenbury for the ongoing work that he puts into this piece of policy.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.23 pm until Tuesday, 14 May 2024 at 10 am.