



# Debates

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**5 February 2025**

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**Wednesday, 5 February 2025**

**MR SPEAKER** (Mr Parton) (10.01): Members:

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

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

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

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

## **Petition**

### **Ministerial response**

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

#### **Middle East—conflict—petition 34-24**

By **Mr Steel**, Treasurer, dated 31 January 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Braddock on 27 August 2024, concerning human rights and Palestine.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 27 August 2024 regarding petition E-PET-034-24 lodged by Mr Andrew Braddock MLA in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 27 August 2024 about Human Rights and Palestine.

The ACT Government acknowledges the distress in the Canberra community about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, particularly in relation to loss of innocent civilian lives and the evolving humanitarian crisis. The ACT Government appreciates the Australian Government's efforts to address these issues through diplomatic and other channels to see an end to the suffering and loss of life and livelihood.

The ACT Government notes the recent developing context in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict both internationally and domestically.

On 15 January 2025, a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas was announced and is now well underway. The ACT Government welcomes the ceasefire and will continue to provide support in practical and effective ways where possible.

As the Assembly would be aware, on 29 August 2024 the former Treasurer, Mr Barr, tabled a response from the Government to the Assembly Resolution of 7 February 2024 about ‘Human rights non-compliant companies – Divestments’.

As advised in that response, Mr Barr wrote, on 26 July 2024, to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights seeking further information regarding the reliability and enduring nature of their database, necessary before deciding whether to adopt the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) database as a part of the Government’s investment screening framework. The ACT Government awaits a response from the Commissioner.

The ACT Government is committed to a responsible investment framework and is committed to ongoing and regular reviews of the Responsible Investment Policy to ensure a cohesive, reliable and robust framework continues to be applied.

I acknowledge the other requests of the petitioners, many of which are complex and pose a range of significant legal and jurisdictional questions which would require further investigation before any action could be taken. At this stage, the ACT Government is not in a position to pursue these activities.

The ACT Government is committed to continue supporting our local multicultural community that has been affected by this conflict. The ACT Government recognises the importance of multiculturalism, and the significant value Canberra’s growing cultural and linguistic diversity contributes to the city and our community. Canberra is an accredited Advanced level Welcoming City and is a proud Refugee Welcome Zone.

The ACT Government is gravely concerned by the significant rise in antisemitism and islamophobia that has occurred across Australia since the outbreak of the conflict. The ACT Government welcomes the convening of National Cabinet to tackle the rapidly evolving situation across the country with a rise in antisemitic violence and will work collaboratively with the Australian Government and other states and territories to deliver a national response.

I thank the petitioners for raising this matter with the Assembly. I trust this response is of assistance.

### **Motion to take note of petition**

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

That the response so lodged be noted.

### **Coroner’s report into the death of Rozalia Spadafora— government response Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.03): I rise today to table Coroner Ken Archer’s report on the inquest into the death of Rozalia Spadafora and present the government response to the Coroner’s report.

Rozalia was a much-loved girl who died at Canberra Hospital on 5 July 2022, the day after her fifth birthday. I would like to start by acknowledging Rozalia's family and the devastating impact of losing Rozalia, their "beautiful, bright, bubbly spark of light". Rozalia's mother, Katrina Spadafora, father, Giuseppe Spadafora, and other family members join us in the Assembly today.

On behalf of the ACT government and Canberra Health Services, I extend our deepest condolences to the family and sincerely apologise for the shortcomings that robbed Rozalia of any chance she may have had for survival following her presentation at Canberra Hospital.

Rozalia's death was referred to the Coroner by senior clinicians at Canberra Hospital, and I recognise that this decision was informed by the advocacy of Rozalia's parents and grandparents. The inquest itself was a challenging process for all concerned, not least Rozalia's family. In finalising his report, Coroner Archer said:

I acknowledge the anger felt by the family in respect of CHS and, more generally, the ACT healthcare system. I also acknowledge their view that individual practitioners had failed to save their daughter and refused to take responsibility for failings in the standard of care they provided.

The distress of Rozalia's mother, Katrina, in particular was clear, and I will return to this at the end of my remarks.

Coroner Archer found that there were matters of public safety arising from the evidence given at the inquest. The report included four recommendations for CHS and the ACT government. The government has accepted all four recommendations.

Rozalia was brought to the Emergency Department at Canberra Hospital on the evening of 4 July 2022. The Coroner has found that Rozalia was appropriately triaged based on her symptoms and should have been seen by a doctor within 30 minutes. Instead, it was almost five hours before Rozalia was first seen by a doctor. When Rozalia was finally seen, the systems and processes in place at Canberra Hospital at the time did not support staff to provide the care Rozalia needed. As Rozalia's condition deteriorated, her diagnosis was delayed and Rozalia tragically died on 5 July 2022.

The daily pain that Rozalia's family endures following the loss of their beautiful daughter is unimaginable. Patients and their families have a right to expect the very best care from Canberra Health Services. Patients should be able to rely on the health service to treat them effectively and get them home to their loved ones in a timely way. The Coroner has found that the delays in Rozalia's care meant that any opportunity to save her was lost, and for that I am deeply sorry. Rozalia's death has had a profound impact on everyone connected with her care.

Along with the CHS executive, I am committed to improving our health system to ensure that our clinicians are supported to provide the highest standard of care. CHS acknowledges the ongoing improvement process required to ensure the shortcomings in Rozalia's care and in the communication with and support for her family are fully addressed.

CHS is in many ways a different organisation today than it was in July 2022. There have been improvements in medical and nursing staffing, systemic changes to processes, and streamlined information-sharing to effectively manage each patient requiring medical care. These changes have been made both as part of previously planned work and to specifically address the deficiencies in Rozalia's care that were identified ahead of the inquest. They have also been informed by the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Expert Panel, which I appointed in the second half of 2022 to support finalisation of the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan. The Coroner acknowledged the improvements CHS has made to the care of unwell children. The additional recommendations made by Coroner Archer will assist CHS and the ACT government to further improve patient safety.

The Coroner found that it was not possible to determine whether Rozalia would have survived if the processes in place today were in place at the time of her presentation, but the changes would have supported earlier review, diagnosis, care and escalation to a specialist paediatric intensive care unit in Sydney, which would have given Rozalia the best chance of survival.

Since the inquest was finalised in early December, CHS has implemented additional changes to address Coroner Archer's recommendations. At the time of Rozalia's presentation, the Clinical Initiatives Nurse in the Canberra Hospital ED was not rostered 24 hours a day. The Clinical Initiatives Nurse makes sure that patients in the ED waiting room are regularly assessed while they are waiting. This includes undertaking vital signs assessment and reassessing any patient who has exceeded their waiting time based on their triage category.

As a result of Coroner Archer's recommendations, CHS has introduced a policy which commits to the rostering of the Clinical Initiatives Nurse in the Canberra Hospital ED 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This came into effect in December 2024. CHS has also added a mechanism to record this in the electronic rostering system so that compliance can be measured and reported. CHS has recruited additional paediatric emergency specialists who primarily work in the paediatric ED that opened in August 2024 and has provided all team members with opportunities to undertake additional training in the care of children. Staff are now rostered to the Children's ED for extended blocks of time, which ensures they can develop and maintain more advanced skills in looking after sick children.

Workforce improvements are some of several service reforms CHS has made since July 2022. I have spoken about the Digital Health Record many times in this place because DHR implementation in November 2022 has supported CHS to provide better care. At the time of Rozalia's presentation, CHS was using about 40 electronic systems to manage the clinical care of patients and was relying on paper based forms. Now key safety mechanisms in the DHR assist teams to identify deteriorating patients and increase the visibility of information across our hospitals. Coroner Archer has recommended that CHS considers opportunities in the DHR to capture handover processes to improve comprehensive and relevant information-sharing across all public health facilities. CHS will collaborate with the ACT Health Directorate to deliver this recommendation.

Coroner Archer has also recommended that CHS and the Health Directorate work together to actively promote influenza vaccination for children aged between six months and five years of age. I can advise the Assembly that there is a program of work in place to ensure these vaccinations are readily accessible and that families are made aware that flu vaccination can make a difference for young children. For example, last year, the directorates collaborated to provide extra vaccination clinics in key locations across Canberra, and that will happen again this year. I encourage all parents to discuss vaccination with their GP and other healthcare providers.

In addition to the recommendations made by Coroner Archer, CHS will continue to work with the Health Directorate and other organisations that provide health care to children in the ACT to ensure services are safe and responsive to the needs of children and their families. The government is committed to delivering the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan to improve care and services for children, young people and their families through evidence based measures that strive to achieve the best health outcomes for Canberra's children in an inclusive and culturally safe environment. The plan covers the period 2023 to 2030, and implementation will continue to be informed by engagement with experts, clinicians, consumers and the voices of lived experience.

I close by once again acknowledging the inconsolable grief Rozalia's family experiences every day. I can only assure them that the ACT government will not forget what happened to Rozalia. Her death and the deficiencies in her care have led to significant improvements in the systems and processes at Canberra Hospital, and we are committed to ensuring that no other family experiences what Rozalia's mother, father, brother, grandparents and broader family and friends have been through.

Prior to the release of Coroner Archer's report, my hope for Rozalia's mother, Katrina, and the family was that the inquest would provide some measure of closure. Sadly, as I referred to in my opening comments, this has not been the case. I do not have the legal responsibilities or constraints of a coroner and so I can say to Katrina, through you, Mr Speaker, that I believe she did as much as any parent could be expected to do to seek health care and to advocate for Rozalia. Katrina repeatedly sought care when Rozalia was unwell and had a right to expect that the health system would respond with the best possible care. I am sorry that Canberra Hospital let her and Rozalia down so badly and I remain absolutely committed to continuous improvement in the system.

I present the following papers:

Coroners Act, pursuant to subsection 57(4)—Report of Coroner—Inquest into the death of Rozalia Spadafora—

Report, dated 6 December 2024.

Government response, dated February 2025.

Inquest into the Death of Rozalia Spadafora—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.



**Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Women, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Corrections and Gaming Reform portfolios—government priorities  
Ministerial statement**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.13): I present the following paper:

Ministerial priorities—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

It is a great honour to stand here as minister in the ACT government in the Eleventh Assembly to present my priorities across the portfolios I hold responsibility for. Ultimately, I am driven by a strong agenda to create change on the ground and addressing some of Canberra's more challenging social problems—in particular, addressing domestic, family and sexual violence, gambling harm, gender equality and, broadly speaking, community safety.

I come to this role with life experiences that do not fall into directorate categories. I recognise that life does not fall that way, which is why I feel particularly excited about the opportunities that the connections between my portfolios offer my ability to effect change. In Canberra, as one minister assigned to address aspects of these issues, I feel a strong sense of collegiality with my Labor colleagues in order to work together.

I believe we have an extremely dedicated frontline workforce in our correctional officers, and police, fire and ambulance services, who go above and beyond to serve our community daily. I will strongly support this workforce to improve their workplace conditions and training supports on offer so that frontline workers can focus on providing critical services. I also want to explicitly state how much I value our community sector partners and the work that they do. I recognise that the work never stops for those organisations; it is for 24 hours a day, with limited resources.

Much of my work over the past two decades has been in working for or advocating for people who have been harmed by gambling, domestic, family or sexual violence, and victims of crimes. It is one thing to try to help and support these people as they navigate significant trauma and often devastation of their lives; however, the harm has already occurred. Holding ministerial responsibilities presents a unique opportunity to create systemic change to prevent harm and improve the way we respond to support people when harm occurs, so that it does not exacerbate people's trauma.

In this term, I seek to tackle the enigma in Australia that appears to be gambling reform. We are perhaps at a point of transition where we have passed the precipice of horse racing being considered the sport of kings and poker machines reigning supreme. Unfortunately, now we have entered a period in Australia where the word "multi" is synonymous with sport. Until we have national action to address these issues—fully

recognising an adult's informed choice to place a bet if they want to but not having to expose the entire population to advertising—and avert the current situation of our kids growing up knowing brands of betting companies above breakfast cereals, we have a long way to go. While addressing that advertising is a federal responsibility, I will seek to pursue the measures we can in the ACT.

I am very proud of the gambling reform platform that ACT Labor took to the 2024 election. It is an ambitious and considered plan to reduce harm caused by gambling, which affects 10 per cent of our population directly and another five per cent in family and friends, which equates to tens of thousands of people who bear the brunt of this harm. During this term, I will introduce legislation that will see the ACT progressively reduce the number of gaming machines to 1,000 by 2045, commencing with the existing reduction to 3,500, which will take effect on 1 July this year. To set the ACT on this path, the government will soon establish an independent inquiry into the future of the ACT clubs industry. This inquiry is important because, as a government, we strongly support the positive contribution that community clubs make to the lives of Canberrans.

We want community clubs to remain viable and flourish without contributing to harm through counterproductive reliance on gambling revenue. Our long-term vision is for sustainable community clubs that are not reliant on gambling revenue. This is the future of our clubs in the ACT. The transition in the ACT to a significantly reduced number of machines is a long-term plank of this government's clear commitment to address harm. However, while we continue that reform, we need short- and medium-term action as well.

The government has already begun work towards introducing mandatory account based cashless gaming, with associated harm reduction measures, including gambling precommitment, breaks in play and account based gambling self-exclusion. Robust identity-verified account based gaming will mean that those who wish to set up an account will be required to set a limit on their losses. This will improve self-exclusion. Under the current model, the responsibility for policing those who are on the exclusion register falls to the staff at a club. Under our model, people will be excluded from using an existing account or opening a new gaming account. This means excluded people can still enter a venue but will not be able to use the gaming machines.

Other measures proposed, such as mandatory breaks in play, will all work to reduce gambling harm. To do this, we will seek the views of all interested stakeholders. I am proud to lead this government's delivery of this comprehensive gambling harm reform agenda, beginning with the priorities I have outlined today.

As Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, I find it unacceptable that, in the ACT, one in three women since the age of 15 have experienced physical violence and one in four women have experienced sexual violence. I hear daily from victim-survivors about the monumental challenges they face to keep themselves safe and their children alive. As minister, I will listen to the enormity of their fight to be granted the very basic human right to be safe and live free from violence. I will strive to understand their stories and address the gaps in the system that have let them down.

The ACT government is focused on preventing and addressing this serious and pervasive issue. In doing this work, we will continue to collaborate with and support

the work of community partners and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector in the ACT. Since being appointed minister, I have seen firsthand the positive impact of the dedicated and passionate frontline workers who support victim-survivors every day. I want to express my deep gratitude to this sector for their work in the ACT. This is a highly capable workforce that is highly skilled and provides high-quality services and supports to victim-survivors and their families. I am committed to continuing to support this sector in the critical work they do.

To achieve this, the government will develop a comprehensive evidence based ACT family, domestic and sexual violence strategy which will underpin ambitious reform, hold perpetrators to account and support Canberrans to feel safe in their homes and in the community. Consultation to develop this strategy will occur throughout this year. It will focus on victim-survivors and engaging the critical services that have expertise in preventing and addressing this violence.

The ACT government is also prioritising addressing and responding to coercive control, and I look forward to working with the Attorney-General to progress the work this term. This begins with building awareness and capacity across the ACT government and frontline responders to better understand, identify and respond to coercive control. It is critical to build a consistent understanding of these dynamics and ensure perpetrators are held accountable.

The ACT government is also committed to working in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to address the complex issues of family, domestic and sexual violence by implementing the recommendations of *The long yarn* report and ensuring that the strategy supports our commitments under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Critically, this supports efforts in target 13 of Closing the Gap to reduce the rates of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. The importance of investing in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is paramount to achieving this. Since 2022, the government has committed over \$4 million to five different Aboriginal community controlled organisations to provide domestic, family and sexual violence responses.

Addressing sexual violence is also of enormous importance. The *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report and the *Sexual assault (police) review report* from last year both identify the need for wide-ranging reforms to improve responses to sexual violence in the ACT. The government is committed to implementing these recommendations reforms and to adopting a coordinated whole-of-government approach to building an integrated system that is responsive, collaborative, trauma-informed and in line with best practice to support victim-survivors of sexual violence. This includes developing a new multidisciplinary centre to facilitate cross-agency and multidisciplinary responses for victim-survivors and establishing the role of sexual assault advocates to work alongside ACT police to support a more trauma-informed experience of the criminal justice system for victim-survivors, particularly in their engagement with police.

The sharing of appropriate information across agencies is another focus and, in May this year, the domestic and family violence information-sharing scheme will

commence. The scheme will provide a clear and consistent framework for agencies under the scheme to share information in order to establish, assess, prevent, reduce and manage domestic and family violence risk. Delivering an information-sharing scheme is a significant achievement for the ACT government in response to historical reports, such as the Glanfield review and the Bradyn Dillon inquiry, calling for improved information sharing between agencies. I am proud to be overseeing the commencement of this significant reform.

Finally, in relation to this portfolio, I want to say that the ACT government is committed to the affirmative consent community education and awareness campaign to complement the change in our consent laws that I introduced last term.

As Minister for Women, it is important to me that the ACT government is committed to fostering a culture that supports women and girls, including cis women, trans women, non-binary people and gender-diverse people, to be safe and participate fully. The government's vision and ongoing commitment towards gender equality is set out in the ACT Women's Plan, and we remain committed to implementing the 30 actions under the Third Action Plan, in collaboration with non-government organisations, businesses and the community. As at March 2024, all 30 actions were underway, with one already completed. I will be updating the Assembly early this year on the progress made in implementing the Third Action Plan.

The ACT is the first jurisdiction in Australia to legislate making free period products available through the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023, which commenced in December 2023. In the lead-up to the 2024 election, ACT Labor committed to making free period products available in a range of public places. To commence implementation, a pilot project in making free period products available via dispensers in a range of locations across the ACT, including libraries, courts, ACT Housing, child and family centres, and the Child Development Service. Free period products are already available and will continue to be available in public schools in the ACT. Alongside the existing sites, the new program will expand to include a pilot dispenser in ACT government schools and all ACT public health facilities and public hospitals. The ACT government will also look at making these available in sporting pavilions and other locations.

To increase opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, the government offers the ACT Women's Return to Work program, which includes grants of up to \$1,000 for eligible women who have been absent from the workforce, to support them to achieve greater financial independence, as well as community workshops which provide the information women need to apply for jobs and effectively participate in interviews.

The government also offers the Audrey Fagan suite of leadership programs, which includes the Leadership and Communication program, the Board Mentor program and the Audrey Fagan Enrichment Grants. This suite of programs is in honour of the memory of Audrey Fagan, the ACT's first female chief police officer, and aims to support community members to take that important next step, either in their careers or their personal lives, in the case of the enrichment grants.

The ACT government also has an ongoing commitment in recognising women and gender-diverse people who have made an outstanding contribution to the lives of

women and girls in the ACT through the ACT Women's Awards, which are held in March annually.

I move on to the portfolio of police. The government has a track record of working with ACT police to reduce crime and ensure Canberra remains one of the safest cities in Australia, with crime rates in the ACT being, on average, lower than they were 10 years ago. In the 2023-24 budget, the ACT government unveiled an unprecedented commitment to enhance community safety by investing over \$107 million in the recruitment of 126 ACT Policing personnel over the next five years. The government has committed to further increasing that number to 150 additional police, which represents the largest single investment ever made to ACT Policing. The substantial financial commitment enables an additional annual recruitment course for the next five years, further fortifying the ranks of ACT Policing across a range of priority areas. This includes additional police in suburban growth areas such as Molonglo and Gungahlin, and established areas such as Tuggeranong, Woden, Weston Creek, Belconnen and Central Canberra.

Alongside this recruitment drive, funding will be used to expand critical equipment, such as vehicles, body-worn cameras and other operational equipment. The government remains committed to focusing on the priority of effectively responding to domestic, family and sexual violence against women and children, and this is enhanced by the creation of a new High-Risk Domestic and Family Violence Investigation Unit in ACT Policing. This unit comprises 23 ACT police officers solely dedicated to addressing violence incidents in the ACT. ACT Policing will continue to work in partnership with the government to implement the recommendations of the *Sexual assault (police) review* and recommendations from the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report.

Another key priority of the police portfolio is the development of the digital Firearms Registry, which is an essential step towards achieving full participation in the National Firearms Register. The NFR will serve as a centralised repository for firearms information, enabling jurisdictions to share near real-time data on firearms and licence holders. The digital registry will align with national efforts and offer a modern centralised platform to track, trace, and manage firearms.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring that the ACT police are equipped with modern emergency and community services infrastructure that will service our growing community. The government has been undertaking feasibility and planning works for the new ACT Policing headquarters and City Police Station to ensure that our police force operates from modern and fit-for-purpose facilities. A key election commitment was to see a new police station in the Molonglo town centre precinct. The ACT government will conduct planning work to ensure the new station meets the needs of the Molonglo community, while integrating with policing services throughout the territory.

Negotiation of the 2026-2030 Purchase Agreement will commence in early 2025. This process will involve evaluation of the current purchase agreement, reporting and performance expectations, as well as financial arrangements.

As Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, I will be a strong supporter of equality in those services. I am pleased to report that the ACT's government's Emergency Services Agency has committed to building an emergency services workforce that reflects the diversity of our community. The agency is particularly focused on building the representation of women in frontline service delivery positions, which can serve as a critical pathway to leadership positions in the sector.

The ACT Emergency Services Agency is part of the Champions of Change Coalition, an Australian and New Zealand organisation which is globally recognised. It is an innovative policy-making body on women's rights and gender equality while driving change. While I acknowledge there is no quick fix to improving gender equality, it is clear that we are heading in the right direction, and I will continue to support the Emergency Services Agency's efforts.

It is also a priority for the Emergency Services Agency to deliver on a range of infrastructure projects. We are continually working to reduce response times for all our services and we have made, and will continue to make, investments in our ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Fire and Rescue. Construction is nearing completion for the joint emergency services station in Acton. Once open, the station will equip ACT fire responders with the facilities and infrastructure they need to carry out their vital work.

There is also planning on the future of the station in Gungahlin and for a new emergency services station in Casey. The new emergency services station in Casey will free up space at the Gungahlin JESC, which will be transitioned to a dedicated police station. The JESC has been refurbished to increase the space and amenity for ACT Policing, but it also remains home to the Ambulance Service and Fire and Rescue.

Construction of the new emergency services station in Molonglo has also commenced. This station will house the Ambulance Service and Fire and Rescue, with construction set to be complete late next year.

Finally, as Minister for Corrections, a key priority of mine is to address the factors that negatively impact the likelihood of reoffending. I aim to prevent individuals from repeat contact with the justice system by supporting rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives within ACT Corrective Services. One of the ways I plan to achieve this is through investigating transition programs for detainees to get back into the workforce.

ACT Corrective Services currently provides vocational and education and training opportunities, including nationally accredited courses which integrate real-world learning experiences, and we will seek to expand these offerings further. Our Ready to Work program already assists detainees and offenders in the community to obtain skills to better position themselves for re-entry into the workforce, set work related goals and develop a career plan.

There are also a number of formal and informal partnerships within government and community organisations that will support pathways to employment for those wishing to access employment post release. For example, we work with local businesses to

encourage the employment of detainees participating in transitional release and offenders serving their sentence in the community. This work is underway and will aim to increase work-readiness and expand on employment opportunities further.

My other priorities include reviewing how facilities and infrastructure can be updated and improved to meet the future needs of ACT Corrective Services generally, as well as the staff and detainees of the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Central to this is master planning which will include a focus on a reintegration precinct and a women's precinct, so that more tailored support to specific cohorts can be provided.

In addition, I have asked ACT Corrective Services to continue to progress and explore improvements to ICT related infrastructure, including updates to the Detainee Telephone System and CCTV. We will continue to explore the potential introduction of in-cell technology. This exploration aims to provide detainees with greater access to education, rehabilitation programs, family connections, entertainment, and other administrative functions.

Supporting the workforce is also crucial, and I am committed to continuing efforts to improve, safety, security, wellbeing, leadership and workforce capability across all ACT Corrective Services. This includes further supporting the work undertaken to date for the Blueprint for Change program, which has already delivered numerous activities to enhance the custodial operating environment. I am excited to be involved in these projects which I know will make a tangible difference in supporting our detainees' successful reintegration back into the community.

Lastly, I want to point to the government's commitment on electronic monitoring, which is an important initiative across Corrective Services and Policing to address domestic and family violence. I will work closely with the Attorney-General to prepare for the introduction of electronic monitoring in the ACT, including electronic monitoring for domestic and family violence perpetrators at the right time. ACT Corrective Services will have a particularly significant role to play in the implementation of this monitoring, and work is underway to prepare for this collaboration with ACT Policing, the Victims of Crime Commissioner and other key stakeholders.

That concludes my remarks on my ministerial priorities. I would like to thank members for their interest and attention.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Treasury, Planning and Sustainable Development, Transport and Heritage portfolios—government priorities**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.36): I am proud to rise as the territory's new Treasurer to outline my priorities. In doing so, I will also outline the government's plans for delivery and implementation in my portfolios as Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Transport and Minister for Heritage. Firstly, I would like to thank my predecessor, Andrew Barr, for

his ongoing support and mentorship and acknowledge his substantial contribution in his capacity as our city's Treasurer for more than a decade.

Canberrans spoke loud and clear at the 2024 election. Canberrans have elected a proudly practical and progressive Labor government. The broader makeup of this Assembly also makes clear that progressive values and priorities are accepted and supported by our community. As Treasurer, I am focused on delivering on our progressive and practical agenda including a sustainable financial position so that we can continue to provide the high level of government services that Canberrans enjoy. Responsible fiscal management is the foundation of ensuring we can continue to deliver these services to diversify and build our economy.

We will continue to invest in the essentials like health, education and infrastructure that meet the needs of our growing city. It is why Labor seeks government. I want to assure Canberrans that I will continue to advocate for investments in public healthcare and that as Treasurer we will not back down from making sure people get the healthcare they need when they need it.

As my colleague and Minister for Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith, outlined earlier last week, the growth in episodes and the cost of health care is a pressure we are facing at the moment. It is a pressure on the public healthcare system, and it is a pressure on the budget. It is also a priority for our Labor government to ensure all Canberrans have access to high-quality public healthcare services, and that does mean there is hard work to do in the upcoming budget this year to put it on a sustainable footing to ensure we can continue to deliver the healthcare services that Canberrans rely on.

We are focused on that as well as ensuring we have the capacity to deliver infrastructure projects that support the key priorities of our Labor government including investments in hospitals, health centres, walk-in centres, schools, housing, and public transport. As Treasurer, I will manage the budget in a responsible way so we can respond to critical and urgent needs should they arise. I will do this while making the tough decisions with my colleagues to tackle the pressures many governments face, so that we can continue to deliver the high level of services that Canberrans expect.

While this is a very real challenge, our economy more broadly goes from strength to strength. We continue to have very low unemployment and continued economic growth. This has been a consistent feature of our city. The strong backbone of the public service, both ACT and commonwealth, continues to support a growing private sector. Things have changed in Canberra since I grew up here, and all for the better. Our city is vibrant. Our regions are strong. Clearly, from the continued population growth, Canberra's suburbs are places that people want to live. Labor was the only party during the campaign talking positively about our city. Our Labor government will continue to make sure everyone knows that Canberra is a great place to live, and what we are doing to make it even better.

To support our thriving economy, we must continue to plan for a more diverse economy while also ensuring we are delivering on our role in providing the fundamentals. One of those fundamentals is the supply of housing to support our growing population. I look forward to the opportunity provided by being both Treasurer and planning



minister to continue to deliver homes that keep our city liveable for all. I will provide a more detailed overview of the economy and budget position, along with my priorities, with the tabling of the territory's budget update on Thursday and I look forward to sharing that information with the Assembly.

With our population growing to around 700,000 by 2050, there is critical need to continue reform to ensure there is a long-term pipeline of more homes. It is why housing is a priority for me as the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. We need more housing where and how people want to live, no matter if they are building, buying or renting. This term we are getting on with Labor's plan to enable 30,000 new homes, not just through government land release but, increasingly, through leased land. I am pleased that work is already underway on the next stage of planning reform, starting with major zoning changes to support more low-rise medium density housing in existing suburbs.

This next stage of reform will go beyond current planning requirements, where only a 120-metre-square unit-titled secondary dwelling is permitted. It is intended that the new reforms will allow a diverse range of housing to be built, not just dual occupancies, but a range of townhouses, duplexes, row houses and walk-up apartments in existing residential areas, including RZ1 zones. A key difference between us and the other parties at the election was that Labor committed that this work would be design-led to get it right, starting with a new missing middle design guide to inform changes to the Territory Plan, with consultation to occur with the community around the middle of the year. The government is currently developing the design guide with the support of a technical advisory group, including architects and planners, in preparing a major plan amendment. I am looking forward to progressing these reforms through the Assembly so they can be made law by the end of the year.

This year, further major zoning reforms will also be developed to allow larger-scale medium density housing in certain well-located areas close to services, shops and transport. Like in European cities, this is intended to support human-scale housing, which will promote access to public transport and renewal of shopping centres and the public spaces around them. This next stage of planning reform will support more housing in the City and Northern Gateway. Similar to the design framework already in place in the Inner North, work will also start on a new Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework to support the future light rail extension to Woden. This is about bringing land-use planning and transport planning together to ensure that existing and new residents are well connected with transport, jobs and services.

Labor said we would take a practical and progressive approach to tackling the big issues like housing, particularly for our most vulnerable, and that is why I have acted immediately this term to support people who often do not get a say in our planning system. The bill I will introduce today will declare public housing as territory priority projects. It is a practical thing we can do to support the supply of more housing for the most vulnerable people on our waiting lists. This will remove costly third-party appeals that have and will delay and block new public homes from being built in Canberra.

Consistent with the design focus of our new planning system, we want to make sure the ACT's new homes are well built for the people living in them. Canberrans should be

able to live in high-quality homes, whether they own or rent. That is why I will continue work on the implementation of a property developer licencing scheme, to make sure the people who deliver these new homes are responsible for the work they do. This work will be further strengthened by Labor's long-held commitment to bring back government building certifiers. Already I have halted the previous minister's work to recruit a team of building assurers. Work has now begun on how we can employ actual public certifiers to approve building work, with a focus on higher risk buildings.

At the same time, this year we will be developing our policy to license more trades to improve the quality of workmanship, while strengthening training opportunities and completion rates for apprentices undertaking this vital work. This goes hand-in-hand with Labor's focus on skilling the construction trades to build our pipeline of new homes, now led by Minister Pettersson. Again, we will be focusing on the trades that pose the greatest risk to building quality, like water proofers. In addition to ongoing work on updating the National Construction Code, it is a practical approach to building reform that comes from, and is expected by, the community.

As Minister for Transport, I will continue to deliver on our practical and proven plans for a modern integrated public transport network for Canberra. Our investment in our city's transport is part of our wider vision of making our city a better place to live: a city that is vibrant, connected and sustainable. Our electric bus fleet is the largest per capita in the nation, and we will continue the work to support Canberra's fleet renewal and deliver more services. Handover is underway on the largest purpose-built electric bus depot in Australia, in Woden, which I look forward to opening soon, to support our broader ambition to see the fleet transition to zero emissions by 2040 or earlier. The new public transport interchange in Woden will also be completed later this year, providing safer, modern experiences for transport for people using buses and the future light rail services.

Transport Canberra is also currently undertaking work ahead of planned network and timetable updates in term 2. This will start the implementation of Labor's election commitments in our public transport plan to improve bus services. Work will also continue this year to recruit and support more bus drivers. We have heard loud and clear from the workforce about their concerns around occupational violence. It is why we are getting on with implementing Labor's election commitments to address occupational violence and promote safety on bus services, with consultation underway with TWU representatives.

Labor built light rail stage 1, and we have shown what is possible with mass transit for Canberra. We have already started work on the next stage of light rail to Commonwealth Park. Raising London Circuit is looking great and it is almost complete. We have always said light rail is about more than just public transport; it is about building a better city that is connected for commuters, businesses and visitors.

With work underway on stage 2A, design and planning work will also continue on stage 2B this term. This work is progressing well, with design and planning for the draft environmental impact statement now entering its final stages ahead of consultation on the draft as part of the EPBC approvals process. These complex planning approvals are necessary to get the project ready for its next phase. We will work constructively with

the Australian government and make sure a continued partnership for the delivery of this once-in-a-generation infrastructure is secured. We will take an integrated land-use planning and transport-oriented development approach to improve accessibility of our transport system for more Canberrans, improve public spaces and deliver the benefits of a better-connected city.

As we look towards the future, the recognition, protection and conservation of the territory's heritage places and objects helps us understand our shared past. Our evolving recognition of the ACT's heritage helps to define a shared cultural heritage that is unique to the ACT. Work is underway to develop a new statement of heritage priorities, which recognises the work to review the Heritage Council, continued work to improve processing times and the systems required to support and protect key examples of heritage buildings as the city continues to develop.

Canberra is a great place to live, and the ACT government has a progressive, practical and proven plan to make it even better. As Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Heritage and Minister for Transport, I remain deeply committed to the delivery of sustainable services and infrastructure that Canberrans need now and well into the future, and I look forward to updating the Assembly on these priorities.

I present the following paper:

Ministerial priorities—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Disability, Carers and Community Services, Seniors and Veterans portfolios—government priorities Ministerial statement**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.48): I rise today to highlight the priority actions across my portfolios which reinforce the ACT government's commitment to an inclusive and accessible city and to protecting Canberra's natural environment.

I am delighted to have ministerial responsibility for the disability portfolio and to represent the over 80,000 Canberrans living with a disability, as well as their families, communities, carers and allies. The ACT government is committed to realising the vision of a community in which people with disability can participate in all aspects of community life without barriers. This term will see the continuation of significant reform affecting the lives of people with disability and the services that support them.

Continuing to progress responses to both the NDIS review and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability are a priority for me. I am committed to continue working with the commonwealth, state and territory governments and the community to plan foundational supports for people with a disability.

Mr Speaker, as I am sure you and most people in this place would be aware, last term I introduced the Disability Inclusion Act as a private members bill. When you take forward a private members bill, you acknowledge that you will have to hand your intentions and hopes for that bill over to someone else to implement. I did not, at the time, expect I would be handing it over to myself as the responsible minister, but I have no complaints as to how this has turned out, and realising the potential of this bill will be a key priority for me. As the saying goes, “Nothing about us without us.” I am looking forward to working with people with a disability and the broader community across the course of this term to continue to make our city the most inclusive city that it can be.

It is my privilege to take on the responsibility for carers policy, and I am grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge the more than 50,000 carers in the ACT. My own experience growing up in a family that provided foster care to many children has informed a deep commitment to valuing, recognising and supporting carers. Priorities for me include exploring the potential options for a carers recognition card, so that carers in our community have an easier time verifying their role and accessing the supports they need when they need them. Through our partnership with Carers ACT, we will also work to develop options for a purpose-built carers respite centre. The ACT government has also committed to supporting young carers by exploring the feasibility of a mentoring program that supports young carers to continue their education and find suitable employment.

During this term, we will continue to work with Carers ACT and other carer advocates and service providers to progress the vision, outcomes and priorities established under the Carers Strategy. This will include developing a second action plan to guide future progress of the strategy. These actions and initiatives are ambitious but achievable. They speak to this government’s strong commitment to build on earlier progress, such as the introduction of the ACT Carers Recognition Act in 2021. The ACT Carers Recognition Act is another bill introduced as a private member that I have the big privilege to now implement. I look forward to having an active role in ensuring that our carers are recognised, valued and heard, and get the support that they need.

I would like to take a moment to digress slightly from my ministerial priorities to acknowledge Lisa Kelly, who is the current CEO of Carers ACT but will be stepping down from her role in March after many years of service to that organisation and the wellbeing of carers across the ACT. I would like to thank Lisa for her tireless advocacy and her engagement with me in the past as I have progressed many reforms and initiatives. I wish her all the best in what she does next and thank her for her contribution to the wellbeing of carers across our community.

Turning to my portfolio responsibilities for community services, I would like to acknowledge the work undertaken by Canberra’s community-based, non-profit

organisations and the important relationship this government has in working with community sector partners to provide essential services and support that address the needs of Canberrans. Government can achieve more positive outcomes by working collaboratively with the community sector. Our commitment to refresh the *Social Compact* is made in the spirit of strengthening this essential relationship, and I look forward to seeing this work progress.

It is also timely to review the current approach to commissioning, to ensure it continues to align with its intended outcomes and supports the delivery of much-needed services for the Canberra community. As a government, we are also committed to establishing a single point of contact for community service partners in the ACT public service and to explore ways that shared access to government facilities can strengthen accessibility and reach for community sector services across our city. Together, these actions signal both the importance that the ACT government places on the role of the community sector and to working with the sector to best address the needs of Canberrans.

With respect to my portfolio responsibility for seniors, I am committed to ensuring that older Canberrans are involved, connected and valued members of our community. Work is progressing to develop the next Age-Friendly City Plan, which reflects the ACT government's shared commitment with the community to make Canberra a place where older people are empowered to lead productive and active lives. This will be achieved through enhanced social engagement and civic participation, improved access to services and transport, and supporting better health and wellbeing outcomes. Our key commitments this term include progressing recommendations from the ACT seniors card review, exploring the feasibility of a north Canberra seniors hub and continuing to work to ensure all ACT government libraries are dementia friendly.

I also hold portfolio responsibility for veterans. As minister, I am committed to improving the wellbeing of the thousands of veterans and their families living in the ACT. A key area of focus will include working with commonwealth, state and territory governments to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. This response will inform further work to support the wellbeing of the ACT veteran community. I am also committed to improving veteran wellbeing through working with RSL LifeCare to link and extend services into the ACT from the Australian government-funded veterans and families hub in Queanbeyan. I am looking forward to working with veterans and veteran representative groups to deliver holistic support for our local veteran community throughout this term.

It is an honour to take on the role of Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and walk with community to progress reform. I intend to build on this government's record of listening to community, taking action to progress reconciliation and to improve the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The ACT government remains committed to realising the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and while we can be proud that the ACT was the only jurisdiction to record a 'yes' vote in the referendum on a Voice to Parliament, we know that the reconciliation journey has a long way to go. Here in the ACT, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a democratically elected voice. It is one of only two representative models of its kind in

Australia. It will be my priority to ensure the Elected Body has the support they need to maximise the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT.

I also wish to reaffirm the ACT government's commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement. These agreements provide a key foundation to build formal partnerships and provide shared decision-making. I would like to extend my gratitude to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) for the work they do in our communities. The ACT government is continuing to work in genuine partnership with the ACCO sector and to continue to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

I will now discuss my priorities across the climate change, environment, energy and water portfolio. As Australia's city within a landscape and proud bush capital, conserving and protecting our natural environment and ecosystems is a high priority for Canberrans and the ACT government. Over this term, my key priority will be ensuring that, as our city grows, we continue to keep nature in it. We will appoint an ACT government landscape architect and establish an office to support the development of a landscape plan for the ACT. This plan will help ensure that our natural and urban environments thrive well into the future.

Work is also underway to update the urban ecological network, which is embedded in the ACT planning system and provides government and community with an aspirational vision of a connected, biodiverse network across the urban area. At the same time, a new ecological values map is being developed that will build our understanding of specific ecological values in urban and future areas to guide prioritisation for conservation actions, such as the location of new protected areas. Together, the urban ecological network and the ecological values map will highlight areas of known and potential high ecological value. This will support strategic landscape planning to conserve these important areas and deliver infrastructure and housing in areas of low impact, protecting critical habitats and ensuring our conservation activities are climate responsive. This commitment supports the consideration of urban heat and climate adaptation in urban design and landscape architecture to ensure the community continues to enjoy the broader benefits of nature in our city.

The nature conservation framework will be reviewed later this year with the aim of developing a more modern fit-for-purpose framework to deliver nature-positive outcomes. We will also review the Environment Protection Authority and Conservator of Flora and Fauna to ensure they are best positioned to deliver their regulatory responsibilities.

The ACT government has a clear plan to enhance climate resilience by supporting the use of living infrastructure and nature-based solutions such as trees, shrubs, shrub beds and wetlands. We are working towards our target of a 30 per cent tree canopy across urban Canberra and have embedded climate and urban heat measures and management of natural hazards into the planning system. As we implement mitigation actions to combat climate change, this government is committed to ensuring that our community infrastructure services and advice evolve to meet the challenges of a changing climate.

The ACT has made good progress in this area, but there is further work to do. The development of the next ACT climate change strategy will help our city and citizens to adapt to remain resilient.

In 2020, the ACT became the first jurisdiction to shift to 100 per cent renewable electricity, and we have legislated this in perpetuity. This provides a clear path forward on energy policy and emissions reduction to achieve our goal of net zero emissions by 2045 while ensuring that nobody is left behind in a just and equitable transition.

Transport and gas emissions are the largest contributors to the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions, and our Integrated Energy Plan and Zero Emissions Vehicle Strategy outline a strategic pathway to address this. Transport currently makes up about 60 per cent of the ACT's emissions, with 70 per cent of this coming from private transport. Through our Zero Emissions Vehicle Strategy, the ACT has an ambitious target of at least 80 per cent of new light vehicle sales being zero-emissions vehicles by 2030. The phase-out of internal combustion vehicles will commence from 2035, including taxis and rideshare networks being required to onboard zero-emissions vehicles from 2030. The ACT government remains committed to phasing out gas. The Integrated Energy Plan outlines our approach to phasing out fossil fuel energy by 2045, as well as easing cost-of-living pressures on Canberrans by helping Canberrans save money through their energy bills.

It is an honour and a privilege to serve as minister for the Canberra community, and I look forward to continuing to update this Assembly on the important work underway across my portfolio areas and showing the positive impacts of these initiatives.

I present the following paper:

Ministerial priorities—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Legislative Assembly—member code of conduct**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (11.01): I move:

That we, the Members of the Eleventh Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, having adopted a code of conduct for Members, reaffirm our commitment to the principles, obligations and aspirations of the code.

This motion highlights the very high standards that are observed by this parliament—a parliament that I think we are all proud of. At the start of each term, as a matter of course, we, the members of the new Assembly, reaffirm our commitment to the principles, the obligations and the aspirations of the Code of Conduct. It is quite straightforward, but it is nonetheless very important. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services relating to MyWay+.

On 4 December, the Assembly resolved to request the committee to inquire into and report on the procurement and delivery of MyWay+ and that, should the committee agree to inquire, it report back by the last sitting day of June 2025. At its meeting on 9 December 2024, the committee considered and resolved to agree to the Assembly's resolution. In adopting the inquiry, the committee amended the terms of reference to include the phrase "and any other related matters".

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.03): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services relating to the statutory appointments in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period, 1 July to 31 December 2024, the Tenth Assembly Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services and the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services considered a total of nine appointments and re-appointments to the following bodies: the Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority Governing Board; and the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board. I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during the reporting period.

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee—  
Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to  
19 October 2024 and Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing  
Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period  
1 July to 19 October 2024.

## **Social Policy—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period, 1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024, the Tenth Assembly Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion and the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety considered a total of five appointments and re-appointments to the following bodies: the board of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute; the University of Canberra Council; and the ACT Official Visitors Board.

The Standing Committee on Social Policy and the Tenth Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing did not consider any statutory appointments during the period.



I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2024 and Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2024 and Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—10th Assembly and Social Policy—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2024.

## **Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.05): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. The bill makes amendments to the Planning Act 2023 to automatically classify public housing and public health facilities as territory priority projects, similar to the existing provisions in the act that already make light rail related projects territory priority projects. Health and housing are a priority for our Labor government. That is why Labor took a strong commitment to the election to build 1,000 new public homes and invest in better healthcare services and infrastructure.

This bill is a practical measure that this Assembly can take to remove real barriers to deliver more public housing to support our most vulnerable citizens. It also enables the government to provide greater certainty to deliver key government infrastructure to support important healthcare services for the community, including the future Northside Hospital and other walk-in and health clinics.

Under the act, the Chief Minister and the Minister for Planning have the power to declare certain projects as TPPs, which was intended to provide a more efficient pathway to enable proposals to progress through the statutory planning process for a decision without third-party merits appeal through the Civil and Administrative Tribunal. However, the types of projects that are automatically considered TPPs are very limited, and projects that meet the criteria under the act, effectively, require an individual declaration to be made for each development application.

This bill proposes an amendment to recognise ACT government projects in public housing and public health facilities as TPPs. A key priority of the ACT government is to support community needs across the territory by providing diverse housing supply and delivering public health facilities. Under the new Planning Act, there is a process for the government to declare projects as TPPs. However, the act simply determines that all projects related to light rail are TPPs.

To provide certainty in the planning and construction of public housing and public health facilities, it is proposed that these specific types of developments are also automatically classified as a TPP under chapter 8 of the act. TPPs are still subject to full assessment, decision-making process and public consultation with the Canberra community through the development application process. However, because of their significant benefit to the people of the ACT, this bill makes public housing and health facility proposals exempt from third-party appeals in ACAT, which cause significant delays and planning risks to these projects.

Madam Assistant Speaker, unfortunately we all know that projects can often be delayed for months or even years when subject to ACAT appeals. Since 2019, there have been 20 appeals on housing ACT projects that were approved by the independent Territory Planning Authority and then repealed, resulting in more than 100 public homes being delayed from being built. We also know that in a majority of appeals to ACAT of approved projects, the tribunal upholds the original decision of the independent Planning Authority to approve the development or makes amendments to the approval.

We are proud in Canberra that the ACT has always had a significant level of public housing as part of our housing mix. Our continued salt and pepper approach to building new and renewed public housing in the ACT has meant that there are small pockets of co-located housing in almost all suburbs. This salt and pepper approach ensures that stock is not concentrated in one part of Canberra or needing to rely on one large development of hundreds of units.

Everywhere in Canberra is a great place to live, and the ACT's housing program provides vulnerable Canberrans with the opportunity to live in a range of different suburbs and locations across the city, including in low-rise, medium-density housing options. However, this approach also means that there are often large numbers of development applications for housing development projects that have a smaller number of homes, typically ranging from two to five to around 30 homes per project.

Under Labor's plan for 1,000 more public homes, there will be more development applications for public homes than ever. Labor acknowledged at the election that there is a need to re-look at the new territory priority projects mechanism, not only because public housing was a priority for Labor but also because of administrative issues that have been identified in declaring these types of projects as TPPs under chapter 8 of the act.

It has also become clear that an individual TPP declaration will be required for each individual public housing development application, not the public housing program as a whole or the health infrastructure program as a whole. This effectively duplicates the development application process, requiring a separate consultation period on the proposed TPP declaration, including details of the development usually considered in the DA, and requiring approval of the Legislative Assembly for that declaration. Only once the development is supported through this process does the bar on third-party appeals come into force, two months after the declaration is made. In considering using this pathway for public housing, the government understands that making an individual declaration for every public housing proposal is inefficient and that the mechanism itself would cause further delays to being able to build more public homes for Canberrans.

By automatically recognising the specific classes of projects as TPPs, this bill removes the administrative burden of declaring each individual project a TPP, including consultation on each project, which is already required as part of the development assessment process. Essentially, this bill seeks the Legislative Assembly's support to declare these projects, which have a significant benefit for the people of the ACT, as default priorities under the Planning Act rather than needing a separate declaration process for each individual TPP proposal.

Under the current Planning Act, TPP applications are assessed by the Territory Planning Authority; however, the Minister for Planning is the decision-maker for the purposes of a TPP development application based on information from the authority about whether the proposal meets the requirements of the act. I want to flag now that it is my intention, should this bill pass, to delegate my decision-making on all public housing projects to the Chief Planner under the Legislation Act 2001. This will ensure the large number of development applications anticipated in the future are assessed like any other application, though the decision by the authority would not be reviewable.

Housing ACT has a long waiting list of families who are in need of a home. It is the first step in tackling any further aspects of disadvantage people face in their lives. Canberrans waiting for housing often have no voice in the planning system to support housing proposals that will provide them with shelter, especially when these proposals are appealed by those who seek to overturn already approved housing on a range of grounds, both planning and non-planning related.

Ultimately, it is people on Canberra's public housing waiting list who are impacted by the delays and blockages directly as a result of appeals to ACAT. This is unfair. We know that ACAT appeals take time. There are examples where a significant number of homes have been delayed and the original decision simply upheld in its entirety, such as 21 public houses in Dickson in 2020.

Importantly, Canberrans will still be able to have their say on public housing proposals and to raise planning issues through the planning process. They just will not have the ability to seek a merits appeal for a development that has already been approved by the independent Planning Authority, through delegation or by me as the Minister for Planning in the case of a health facility.

In the last five years around 13 per cent of development applications appealed to ACAT related to public housing developments. This disproportionate result comes at a significant cost and resourcing for the government, including officials from the Territory Planning Authority, the ACT Government Solicitor's Office, and ACAT itself. More than 75 per cent of these appeals are ultimately resolved through mediation or with ACAT agreeing with the original decision, meaning these costly delays could and should have been avoided.

I will now discuss the amendments in more detail. The Planning Act 2023 is the foundation of the territory's long-term aspirations for the growth and development of Canberra and sets out the framework for our new outcomes-based planning system, which puts good design and people at the heart of statutory assessment.

Chapter 8 of the act establishes the powers for a territory priority project, with section 216 specifying the meaning of a TPP, including developments related to light rail or where a TPP declaration is granted. These powers commenced with the act in November 2023 as a result of significant negotiation but also compromise between parties. Since the act commenced, requests for public housing and public health facilities to be declared as TPPs have been received. Unfortunately, they have not met the criteria in the act and due to the administrative burden of seeking TPP declarations, this pathway negotiated in the current act is currently not viable for these types of development.

The bill proposes to amend section 216(c) of the act to provide that all development proposals related to public health facilities and public housing are captured under the meaning of a TPP, as currently is the case for a proposal related to light rail. This means that a development proposal related to a public health facility or public housing will not need to be declared as a TPP under section 218 of the act. This is noting the significance and benefit these proposals will have to the Canberra community.

The bill proposes to amend the act to insert a new section 217A, to include a definition of a development proposal that is related to a public health facility. This will capture development to be undertaken by or on behalf of the territory for the construction, ongoing operation and maintenance, repairs, refurbishment, replacement or relocation of a health facility, hospital or mental health facility that is or is intended to be owned or operated by the territory or a territory instrumentality. This includes residential care accommodation, supporting housing and infrastructure associated with a facility.

The bill also proposes to amend the act to insert section 217B, to include a definition of a development proposal that is related to public housing. This will capture developments to be undertaken by or on behalf of the territory for public housing. This includes the construction, ongoing operation, maintenance, repairs, replacement and refurbishment of housing on land leased, controlled or held by the housing commissioner or used by an entity contracted by the housing commissioner to provide public housing.

The proposed amendment does not capture the non-government social housing or community housing sector at this time. Private organisations can take on a variety of legal structures and joint business ventures, and any future legislation to include non-government social housing and community sector housing would need careful consideration. The government will work with the sector to consider this further in the future if the bill is supported.

The bill proposes to remove the note under section 218(1)(c) of the act, which currently reads:

*Note* Significant infrastructure or facilities includes community, social and public housing projects of any scale.

This note has contributed to the confusion about when a TPP declaration can be given. The note has been incorrectly interpreted that any community, social and public housing

meets the criteria to receive a TPP declaration, despite all the criteria in section 218 needing to be met for a TPP declaration to be given. Removing this note will provide greater clarity in the TPP declaration process and create a better and stronger pathway for the government to deliver on our priority to provide more housing and health facilities for Canberrans. The ACT government will continue to review the entire territory priority projects declaration process to ensure it is fit for purpose for significant infrastructure for the ACT beyond the health facilities and public housing to be made TPPs under this bill.

In summary, this bill makes amendments to the Planning Act to recognise public housing and public health facilities across the territory's priority projects. This is a practical thing that this Assembly can do to support the most vulnerable in our community by removing barriers to a home.

If the government delivers on their ambitious commitment to 1,000 new public homes to support thousands of people on our public housing waiting list, we must ensure that this entire program is declared a priority and delivered without delay to give more families the certainty and foundation of a home.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.20): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. The ACT government is committed to implementing a building and construction regulatory system that is fit for purpose and delivers appropriate regulatory oversight of the building and construction industry, and compliance activities that address matters of safety. Canberrans deserve a regulatory regime that fosters effective administration and compliance within the building and construction industry, ensuring safe, quality buildings, while promoting integrity and accountability throughout the industry.

To this end, the bill includes amendments aimed at implementing the strong building and construction regulatory regime that Canberrans rightly deserve. The main goal of this bill is to amend various pieces of legislation within our building and construction regulatory framework, ensuring our system is fit for purpose and proactively addresses quality and safety.

This bill will amend several components of the ACT's building and construction regulatory system, including the Building Act 2004, the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act 2004, the Gas Safety Act 2000, the Property Developers Act 2024, and the Water and Sewerage Act 2000. This bill aligns with the ACT government's commitment to build a strong building and construction regulatory regime that delivers high quality building work for Canberrans, provides the Construction Occupations Registrar with appropriate and necessary regulatory oversight tools and aligns with our expectations for the Construction Occupations Registrar around preventing and reducing building quality issues and improving community confidence in the regulator to uphold the standards and laws applicable to the ACT's building and construction industry.

To support the medical gas licensing scheme that commenced on 11 December 2024, the bill introduces provisions relating to compliance and enforcement of the work undertaken under the new licensing scheme to address safety risks with the installation, testing and maintenance of medical gas systems. This includes implementing offence provisions for gasfitters who fail to work on medical gas systems safely and competently. Incorrect installation and poor maintenance of these systems has significant risks to the health, safety and economic wellbeing of individuals, as evidenced by two serious incidents across the border in New South Wales.

The compliance framework has been thoughtfully designed to align with the ACT health regulatory system, ensuring clarity while minimising the regulatory burden on the industry. The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate has collaborated closely with Canberra Health Services and industry stakeholders as key partners to ensure the new medical gas licensing scheme, and associated compliance and enforcement powers, are workable and protect Canberrans from the incidents that occurred across the border.

Madam Assistant Speaker, the proposed minor and technical amendments to the ACT's building and construction regulatory system are designed to enhance the administrative efficiency and overall effectiveness of the ACT's building and construction regulatory system. These amendments aim to streamline processes, reduce unnecessary complexities and ensure clarity in regulatory requirements. Ultimately, these changes will strengthen regulatory oversight, support improved building practices and deliver a strong building and construction regulatory system for Canberrans.

I commend the bill to the Assembly

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

## **Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

**Ms Stephen-Smith**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.25): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. The bill is an omnibus bill which makes minor or technical amendments to laws falling within the health portfolio. These amendments would not justify the presentation of separate legislation in each case, but together will improve the administration and operation of health-related territory laws.

The bill replaces all references under health-related laws to the commonwealth's Administrative Appeals Tribunal and substitutes these references with the Administrative Review Tribunal. The need for these changes arises from commonwealth law reforms which occurred in October 2024, abolishing the Administrative Appeals Tribunal—AAT—and replacing it with the new Administrative Review Tribunal—ART. The acts and instruments amended to incorporate these updates include the Gene Technology Act 2003 and Gene Technology Regulation 2004, the Human Cloning and Embryo Research Act 2004, and the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008.

These amendments will ensure that the ART can review any decisions which could have been reviewed by the previous AAT. Replacing the outdated reference and ensuring that the new tribunal has the required jurisdiction will provide greater assurance and clarity to a person seeking to appeal a decision under these acts.

An amendment to the Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Act 2004 corrects a prior oversight which left a reference to the old ACT Administrative Appeals Tribunal in the act. The old ACT tribunal was replaced by the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal—ACAT—in 2008. This amendment corrects the outdated reference and ensures that standard provisions about applying to the ACAT for review of a decision are included. These standard provisions set out when a notice about a reviewable decision must be issued and who may apply to the ACAT for review in relation to a reviewable decision.

The bill makes a number of amendments to the Human Cloning and Embryo Research Act 2004 to ensure that the most recent ethical guidelines on the use of assisted reproductive technology in clinical practice and research are referred to in the act. The bill replaces references to the outdated 2007 version of the ethical guidelines with the most recent 2023 version of the guidelines. It also improves accessibility to these guidelines by incorporating notes in the legislation which provide a link to the relevant website where these guidelines can be accessed.

The bill also updates outdated references to a commonwealth regulation, namely, the Research Involving Human Embryos Regulations 2003, which was repealed and replaced in 2017. To future-proof the legislation, the amendments instead refer to the relevant heads of power under the commonwealth's Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002, which give power to make the regulations. These amendments will ensure that, when considering what is “proper consent” or when a human embryo is

“unsuitable for implantation” under the Human Cloning and Embryo Research Act 2004, the provisions refer to the latest industry guidelines and commonwealth law.

Finally, the bill also contains a number of technical amendments that improve the overall language and form of territory legislation and are part of an ongoing process to ensure that the territory’s statute books are up to date. These amendments include the correction of minor errors, updating language, adding or omitting notes, and removing or replacing redundant provisions.

It is important that the territory’s legislation is accurate, well maintained and cohesive. This bill enhances the readability and accessibility of ACT legislation and therefore serves as a practical measure to give effect to the principle that members of the community have a right to know the laws that affect them.

I commend the bill to the Assembly

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

**Sitting suspended from 11.30 am to 2 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Racism—antisemitism**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. As I am sure all members are aware, Australia’s Jewish community is being subjected to a national hate based campaign of harassment, intimidation, property damage and, most recently, a potential terrorist attack. Minister, on behalf of the government, will you condemn these antisemitic attacks and commit to supporting and defending the safety and welfare of Canberra’s Jewish community?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. Absolutely, the government condemns the attacks that have occurred in other jurisdictions around Australia. We have seen what has happened around Australia, and that has led to ACT Policing establishing an ongoing operation here to coordinate a response to antisemitic incidents in the ACT. Police are monitoring the situation closely and have had very close engagement with the Jewish community in the ACT. While there have been some incidents of antisemitic sentiment and graffiti, there have not been broader incidents than that. ACT Policing has increased patrols around synagogues and Jewish community facilities and is working with the community to ensure that they are feeling safe and supported.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, since the New South Wales Premier declared that a terrorist threat exists against the Jewish community, what steps have you personally taken to ensure the community’s safety?

**DR PATERSON:** I have been working very closely with ACT Policing and they have been working closely with the Jewish community and other communities in the ACT to ensure their ongoing safety.



**MS BARRY:** Minister, will you meet with the leaders of Canberra's Jewish communities to discuss their concerns and publicly commit to ensure their safety?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes; I am very committed to working with the Jewish community and am very happy to meet with them. Again, if they have very serious concerns, they should contact ACT police, and I am most definitely committed to meet with them.

### **Crime—offences committed while on bail**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Police. Minister, in recent months there has been a spate of violent, criminal offences committed by individuals who are out in the community on bail. These offences not only endanger the community but take up valuable police time, which would otherwise be spent better protecting the community from offenders. Are you concerned about the danger this poses to the community and, if so, what are you doing about it?

**DR PATERSON:** I think recidivist offending is a serious concern to everyone in the ACT. This formed a lot of the work that happened last term in the Assembly, which saw the establishment of Operation TORIC. That operation has now been committed to a more formal operating response from ACT Policing.

Obviously reducing recidivism is a key priority of the government, but ultimately the number of offences that are occurring in the ACT has decreased quite significantly in the last financial year, by 7.5 per cent. It is an ongoing issue, and we will continue to work to address recidivist offending.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, yesterday we learned that the ACT Attorney-General has terminated a review of our bail laws. Do you believe the ACT's bail laws are protecting the community?

**DR PATERSON:** I think that is a question for the Attorney-General, who has responsibility for our bail laws.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, shouldn't the government reform bail laws, given the critical understaffing and under-resourcing of police?

**DR PATERSON:** I will speak to the resourcing of ACT police. ACT Policing operates with only a marginally lower rate of operational staff than other jurisdictions, with 218 operational staff per hundred thousand of population. That is only 10 fewer operational staff than New South Wales. ACT Labor has been very committed to seeing more investment in ACT police through more police officers. The commitment was made in the budget last year for 107—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**DR PATERSON:** Mr Speaker, I cannot speak if Mr Hanson is speaking.

**MR SPEAKER:** You are raising a point of order?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, a point of order. Mr Hanson was speaking at me when I was trying to speak.

**MR SPEAKER:** All right. Mr Hanson, if you can allow Dr Paterson to answer the question.

**DR PATERSON:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The government committed \$107 million to fund an additional 126 police positions over the next five years, and ACT Labor took a commitment to the last election to see that number increase to 150. Since becoming the minister responsible for this portfolio, I have been working very hard with ACT police around seeing the works progress for a new City Police Station and city police headquarters. I am very supportive of resourcing ACT police to do the very important work that they do on the ground in our community.

### **Planning—Phillip**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning. In November 2023 the new Territory Plan removed housing from all of the Phillip service trades area. This was done without consulting directly with the owners and the traders. In July 2024, the government agreed to consult with the owners and traders of the Phillip service trades area about the zoning changes. What consultation has occurred and what was the outcome of that consultation?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question about housing in the Phillip trading area. The government understands that the purpose of zoning is to balance the different types of land uses that we have in the territory. From time to time, there are conflicts between land uses. We made a deliberate decision in the past in relation to zoning changes within the Braddon services and trades area to rezone that area to allow more mixed use development—residential and other forms of commercial development. That has resulted in some services and trades leaving that area. We want to carefully consider what the potential impact of further zoning changes would mean in areas like Phillip or, indeed, places like Mitchell.

**Ms Clay:** A point of order. I am so sorry, Minister, but it is just that we have a minute left and I am worried that you are not going to get to the point. It was actually about consultation with the Phillip traders and what consultation the government has done, having made an undertaking to do that consultation with the Phillip traders.

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister, I would ask you to be relevant to the question.

**MR STEEL:** I have even less time to answer now, Mr Speaker!

As the government considers those competing land uses, we also said before the election that we would consult with the businesses, the Phillip traders, as well as the landowners, most of whom were pushing for some sort of zoning and mixed-use change in the Phillip precinct, to look at what changes might be permissible in that area. We

know that the community relies on a lot of those services. So I want to bring the community into that discussion as well, so that they can have that say. I have asked EPSDD to establish a roundtable to have that discussion, and I am looking forward to updating the community on the exact timing of that.

**MS CLAY:** Has any consultation happened yet with the Phillip traders and the Phillip landowners?

**MR STEEL:** That will occur as part of the consultation that I want to do, bringing all of the interested and affected parties together to look at sensible zoning change. It will be nuanced. At the moment, there are not large numbers of people living in the Phillip trades areas. There is a large automotive presence. We do not want to necessarily see that automotive presence leave because those land uses are incompatible with residential dwellings. So it may be a nuanced approach where mixed-use development might be permitted in one area and not another.

That is a discussion that we need to have with the traders—who are not necessarily the owners of the buildings and the land that we are talking about rezoning—and we need to have that discussion with the landowners. But we also need to bring the community into the discussion to hear what their views are. Do they want to travel all the way to Fyshwick to access a service? The Fyshwick business community itself has tried to stop some of those services from operating there, particularly waste services. There has to be a place to deliver some of these services, which are often incompatible with some of the existing land uses surrounding them.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, what evidence will be taken into consideration by EPSDD when reviewing its decision to change the zoning in the Phillip service trades area?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I think this would require a major plan amendment. So it would not just be EPSDD considering that; it would also be myself as minister. Then, of course, there is a committee process, where the committee may intend to inquire into that and make recommendations as well. This is quite a significant change. In the context of all of the reforms that were being undertaken under the planning system review, this is one where we acknowledged that there was more work to do and more consultation that was needed with this community before we saw major mixed-use development occurring in this precinct at a loss of trades to the community.

## **ACT Gambling and Racing Commission**

**MR CAIN:** My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister, I refer to reports that the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission has imposed a fine of \$1.2 million on the Hellenic Club following the tragic suicide of a patron in 2020. I also refer to reports that the minister was not made aware of the fine by the commission and only learnt about it through the media. Minister, why were you not told about this fine?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. The reason why I was not told about the fine or the determination of the findings is that under the Gambling and Racing Control Act it contains very strict secrecy provisions. Importantly, section 35(2) makes it an offence for any person who has been a gaming officer—who are the people

who investigate these issues—to disclose any information obtained under or in relation to the administration of gambling law.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, aren't you, really, just throwing your regulator under the bus?

**DR PATERSON:** No. I am demonstrating that the regulator is upholding the laws of the ACT.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, what else aren't you being told about?

**DR PATERSON:** I don't know!

### **Transport Canberra—MyWay+**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, the ACT government has stated that MyWay+ readers will not be installed on some older buses that are scheduled to be withdrawn from service in the near future. Minister, when will all buses that do not have a MyWay+ reader installed be removed from service and hence we will have 100 per cent coverage across the fleet?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. We have a small number of buses that are due to be retired over the year, with the continued supply of replacement buses through our contract with VDI Australia to deliver Yutong buses. In looking at the figures, in terms of the cost of having to install the hardware and the cost of continuing to maintain those buses, we have made the decision that those buses would not be fitted out with the MyWay+ ticketing system. As a result of that, people who are accessing those buses do not have to pay for public transport, so they get a free ride if they happen to find that they are travelling on one of those buses.

Work is underway to finalise the fit-out of the buses that were due to have the hardware fitted and that are not due to be retired. We are very close to having 100 per cent of those buses fitted out, but there will still be those ones that are due to be retired that will not have the hardware, and a deliberate decision was made before the ticketing system came into force in November that that would be the case.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, will those buses which will not have a MyWay+ reader installed be removed from service?

**MR STEEL:** I think I answered that question: this year. They are planned to be retired this year, as part of the renewal of the fleet, with the contract for 90 Yutong E12 buses replacing those buses, and they will have the new MyWay+ hardware fitted in them. We expect more people to be able to use the MyWay+ system as a result.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, how will the government in the meantime manage the network, in light of the data gaps arising from buses where passengers are not tapping on and off?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. Yes, during this transition period to the new MyWay+ system, there has been a change in the data provided, so we will be using a range of different metrics to look at patronage. Firstly, we will be using door

counts, particularly on light rail vehicles, which provide an accurate indicator of the number of people using light rail. Of course, we will be looking at how we can make assumptions about the patronage based on the number of buses that are not fitted out in the system, which will change from time to time, because those buses will not be retired all at once. As soon as we get a replacement bus in, those older buses without the MyWay+ equipment will be removed from service. We can take that into account in the assumptions that we make about the patronage modelling. As more and more people tap on and off with public transport, we will get clearer patronage figures.

We have not started to enforce the penalty fares for not tapping off at this point in time, but we will do that later in the year, as people become more confident with using the MyWay+ system. That will give us far greater data around how people are moving around Transport Canberra's network.

### **Emergency Services—storm events**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for City Services and Minister for Government Services. Minister, how has Access Canberra and City Services supported the government's response to the damage caused by recent storm events in the territory?

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you. I thank Ms Tough for the question. Alongside the ACT Emergency Services agency and the ACT State Emergency Service, both Access Canberra and our City Services crews have played significant roles in addressing the damage experienced across the community.

To relieve pressure on the SES, Access Canberra responded to 428 calls for assistance from the Canberra community related to storm events across January. Stemming from the event on 15 January alone, City Services identified a total of 495 cases resulting from the storm and subsequent strong winds. Gungahlin and Belconnen yet again experienced the brunt of the damage, with Nicholls and Ngunnawal being the worst impacted.

City Services crews have worked hard to triage and to respond to requests based on their need and priority. Of the 495 cases, over 70 per cent have already been completed, while the remaining cases are being progressed. This is testament to the dedication and hard work of our frontline City Services crews.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, can you provide further details of where these agencies have gone above and beyond to help Canberrans.

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary question. Our terrific staff at Access Canberra and City Services have worked incredibly hard to support our community. As I mentioned, to support the SES in the storm recovery efforts, the Access Canberra contact centre was stood up across five days in January, including 11, 12, 15, 16 and 17 January. Not only was Access Canberra operating significantly longer hours, but they also continued to fulfil the standard operations. This includes having the busiest day ever for our Access Canberra service centres on 6 January.

I know that on the day many of our service centres worked later so that they were able to see everybody who was waiting. I really thank the community for their patience.

I have heard anecdotally that there were many people who came along, were advised of what the wait time was, and were able to get their QR code and get a coffee—exactly what that was established for—and many were simply patient enough to wait there, and I heard that they treated staff with respect. By all accounts, we heard some terrific things that day, but our biggest thanks need to go to the service centre staff, who work incredibly hard.

City Services crews have not only worked late hours during the storm events, but have also worked overtime to address damage and subsequent impacts across the territory. Roads ACT received direct after-hours response calls for flooded roads and debris. Their role, as part of storm response and responses to other emergencies, is a considerable one, and I really want to underline the efforts of those individuals, and their work as a team, because they are vital to making the spaces we move through safe.

Another team which continues to respond to the effects of a storm long after the immediate impact is the urban treescapes team, and I hope I get a chance to talk about that in the next supp!

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, what resources are available to assist the community in the clean-up efforts?

**MS CHEYNE:** One of the major resources is the urban treescapes team. This team has worked overtime to conduct tree inspections until we get on top of the mammoth clean-up effort and throughout some very hot days that we have experienced. We are indebted to them.

Naturally, with storm events comes green waste. City Services has placed temporary green-waste skip bins in Amaroo, Ngunnawal and Nicholls for the community to use. These bins have been available for close to three weeks, now, supporting the most affected communities with the ongoing clean-up and recovery, with skip bins at Nicholls and Ngunnawal requiring emptying weekly.

TCCS is monitoring the ongoing clean-up and recovery, including consideration of how long these facilities will be required in those areas. Of course, there are some things that Canberrans should not take into their own hands. Trees causing damage to power lines should be reported to Evoenergy, and downed trees on public land should always be reported through Fix My Street.

I also want to take this opportunity to remind members and the broader community to please slow down and respect the safety of our teams when driving past—especially our clean-up crews who are working on foot. Supporting our crews in this way means they are able to work efficiently, and, most importantly, safely, in getting the job done.

### **Sports and recreation—international events**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Many Canberrans have expressed frustration over our city's exclusion from hosting 2027 Rugby World Cup matches, particularly given the Brumbies are the most successful rugby team in the country. This is not only a missed opportunity for local fans, businesses and our tourism

industry but is also a blow to Canberra's reputation as a premier sporting destination. In light of the territory's budget constraints and the potential embarrassment this disappointing outcome poses for our city as the capital of the host nation, could the Chief Minister please inform the Assembly whether he approached his federal Labor colleagues about a potential joint bid with the commonwealth to secure Rugby World Cup games in Canberra, as the nation's capital, or whether he will do so in the future for similar events?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Emerson for the question. The commonwealth is involved in any sporting event held in the Institute of Sport precinct and at GIO Stadium, because ultimately it owns that venue. We simply lease it from the Commonwealth. In relation to this particular tournament, I understand the Commonwealth played some role in supporting Rugby Australia. Most of the negotiations around particular venues, stadia and host cities were effectively undertaken as competitive bids between the states and territories, complicated somewhat by the Victorian government's initial decision, in protest at Rugby Australia's decision to remove the Rebels from Super Rugby, to withdraw from the bidding process, then, at the 11th hour, they decided to come back in. They, perhaps together with the New South Wales government, were the reason we were outbid.

**MR EMERSON:** Will the Chief Minister please detail the ACT government's level of engagement with the Australian government's national sports strategy, Sport Horizon, with respect to its focus on the "green and gold decade" providing Australia with "an unparalleled opportunity for international engagement through sport"?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Emerson for the supplementary. Undoubtedly, the territory, as the host of the Australian Institute of Sport, will play a role in that national approach as we look to future events being held in Canberra. That includes the Brumbies hosting the British & Irish Lions at GIO Stadium in a few months.

Rugby Australia, before the International Rugby Board made its announcement around World Cup hosting cities, wrote to us indicating a range of other international rugby content involving Australian teams playing international fixtures that would be available, again, though, in a competitive bidding process. Noting that we were successful in relation to the Brumbies and the British & Irish Lions and that the offer we put forward was accepted by Rugby Australia and was broadly similar to the offer we put forward to the World Cup Rugby folk, I think we can look forward to being successful with future bids at a national level.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Can the Chief Minister explain how we will capitalise on the inevitable tourism we will see in Australia during the Rugby World Cup in 2027, including how we might entice tourists to add the national capital to their trip while they are here?

**MR BARR:** There will be a number of lead-up events to the tournament. The timing of pool matches, for example, directly clashes with Floriade, when we are already at a point of peak tourism in the territory. There are generally no hotel rooms available over that October long weekend in the school holidays and over the peak part of the Floriade festival. We will have our major event on during most of the Rugby World Cup.

**Waste—recycling**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. I was pleased to hear that in 2028 we will at last get a new recycling facility out at Hume to replace the facility that burnt down in 2022. This means that when Canberrans put recycling in their yellow-topped bin at home, it will get recycled out at Hume like it used to. Will the new facility recover and recycle soft plastics?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. We are all very excited that we are able to get the build and the operation of this new facility underway. Ms Clay would know that soft plastics is an issue that we are tackling at a national level. Currently, it is material that would not be accepted by the new facility. However, the work at a national level to address issues around soft plastics has included developing national criteria to achieve collection and recycling at scale and packaging reform to design out hard to recycle packaging. Soft plastics recycling trials across Australia have been necessarily limited. There have been a handful of councils that are trialling some soft plastics recycling, but it is very, very small and not at a scale that would suit the ACT at this time. The good news, though, is that the contract has flexibility to incorporate new innovations, improvements in technology and to adapt to changing recycling priorities and materials. A value-for-money assessment could be undertaken in due course to consider whether it would be appropriate for that facility to receive soft plastics.

**MS CLAY:** Will the new facility recover and recycle all of the standard packaging that comes from a supermarket, including bamboo containers, small pieces of paper, coffee cups, plastics and mixed material?

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you, Ms Clay. The answer is “I think so,” but let me check for you. There will be advanced sorting technology, particularly sophisticated data collection, management and analysis systems. The advanced sorting technology will be equipped with automatic recognition: using screens to separate paper; laser optical identification with air jets to separate plastics; and powerful magnets to extract metals. This will help us better separate, identify, sort and segregate recycling to higher purity levels and reduce contaminants for better quality end-market products. In terms of the other types that Ms Clay mentioned, I will take that on notice to come back, for completeness.

**MR BRADDOCK:** How much will the ACT government have paid in contract fees to ship our recycling interstate from when the old facility burnt down in 2022 to 2028 when the new facility opens?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I do have that information, or at least that information to date. I will check that I have the most up-to-date figures as well as figures into the forecast modelling in taking that question on notice and coming back to Mr Braddock.

**Planning—approvals**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, the Planning Act 2023 introduced the new outcomes based



planning framework. How many applications have been made to ACAT for public housing developments since the new framework was introduced?

**MR STEEL:** I am happy to take that on notice and provide Ms Carrick with some detail. But what we do know is that the data over the last five years, back to 2019, shows that there have been 20 appeals of public housing developments that were already approved by the planning authority. That represents over 100 public homes that have been appealed and, as a result, have been either delayed or blocked from being built. That has a significant impact on families and on people who are on our Housing ACT waiting list.

As a result, I have introduced a bill into the Assembly, which I hope to get the support of the Assembly for, to remove this significant barrier for more public housing being built in the territory under our new Planning Act and our new outcomes based planning system, which includes not only continued assessment by the independent planning authority and opportunity for community input through that as part of the consultation process but also an outcomes based approach that includes new mechanisms like design guides to make sure that what is proposed is required to respond to those to make sure that those homes are well designed for the people that are living in them.

**MS CARRICK:** The minister referred to evidence from the old planning framework.

What evidence do you have under the new outcomes based planning framework to justify the decision to remove third-party appeal rights in the Planning Act 2023 for new public housing developments?

**MR STEEL:** I do not draw a distinction between the two acts in terms of the third-party appeals. I am happy to provide the information about the specific appeals that have been made, but it is relatively still early days of the new Planning Act. Third-party appeals exist under both acts currently. Whilst the call-in powers were removed under the new Planning Act, there is a new process called Territory Priority Projects—a mechanism that was meant to and intended to enable the streamlined approach to be able to deliver priority projects that have a significant benefit for the community and the people of the ACT more quickly and without the uncertainty and planning risk of a third party appeal.

What we have seen in practice since the new Planning Act began is that that mechanism does not operate as intended, especially for public housing, because there are a large number of individual development applications that are required for public housing. Because of our salt-and-pepper approach that we take, which we are very proud of here in the ACT, there are large numbers of development applications for smaller numbers of dwellings.

Each one of those would require a declaration under chapter 8 of the Planning Act as a TPP, which would require an additional process, in addition to the DA assessment, and would consider some of the same details about the developments that would be required in a DA, which would delay the timeline for the bar on third-party appeals for two months, but only after the Assembly has actually approved the individual TPP declaration—after the Chief Minister and minister have. We do not think that it is going to operate efficiently for the purposes of delivering what is going to be a very extensive

program for new public housing—1,000 homes over the next five years to support the most vulnerable in our community.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, from 2019 to 2024, how many ACAT appeals were lodged on all DAs?

**MR STEEL:** You could probably do some of the maths yourself. I am happy to provide the exact raw number, but 13 per cent of all development applications that were appealed to ACAT were public housing projects. It is a considerable number, and I think it is out of line with the number of public housing applications made compared to the number of private development applications that are made overall. That is a concern and it shows that public housing is being held up in the appeals process.

That is why we have put forward a practical bill to make sure that we can deliver this housing for people who need it and are on the waiting list. I hope the Assembly has the opportunity to consider that now that the bill has been introduced to the Assembly.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR STEEL:** We have been called on to do this by a range of different community groups, because it is a real barrier to getting more homes built. We have a significant plan to deliver more homes in the future, and we do not want those held up as a result of third-party appeals for projects that have already been approved.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—staff**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, following the Integrity Commissioner's Operation Falcon report into the falsification of observation records at AMC, what action have you as minister taken to ensure correction officers undertake medical observations in accordance with the instructions set out by qualified medical practitioners?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. The Operation Falcon report, delivered by the Integrity Commission a couple of weeks ago on 17 January, investigated actions of two corrections officers at the AMC. Findings revealed that a corrections officer had failed to complete hourly observations for a detainee on four entries in the detainee observation form. The investigation also identified misconduct by a senior executive in not formally reporting this officer's actions.

A lot of work has been done since this occurred. This was a number of years ago, in 2020. Last year, a new detainee observations operating procedure was implemented. That was notified on the ACT Legislation Register in October of last year, so that has been fully implemented. I have received numerous briefings on this issue, and I am assured that the new observation procedures are working well.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, what management or employment action with respect to those ACT corrections officers was undertaken by the directorate?

**DR PATERSON:** One officer no longer works for ACT Corrective Services, and one officer is on leave.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, what steps have you taken as minister to ensure that the culture of AMC is focused on meeting the detainees' medical needs?

**DR PATERSON:** AMC has a significant program of work in changing the culture of correctional officers and how they record observations within AMC. But there has also been a whole lot of further work, as a broader issue around the culture of AMC that was recognised years ago, that saw the Blueprint for Change report and program established. That was established in 2022, with the objective of improving the safety and wellbeing of correctional officers. Basically, there was an evaluation of the Blueprint for Change findings, which has seen significant reform happen within ACT Corrective Services and out at AMC. I am really excited about working with Corrective Services to continue this important work.

### **ACT Policing—major events**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, over summer we have seen a number of major events held across Canberra, including New Year's Eve, Summernats and the Australia Day celebrations. Can you update the Assembly on the success of these major events?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. Yes, there have been some very exciting events happening over the summer, and Canberrans have been letting their hair down, celebrating the new year and associated events. On New Year's Eve, 40,000 to 50,000 people attended celebrations by Lake Burley Griffin. Only four people were taken into protective custody; and, pleasingly, no-one was detected driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Over the Summernats weekend, ACT Policing ran a high visibility operation at the festival. Compared with last year, there was also a reduction in the number of arrests at the festival. I commend the impeccable behaviour of Canberrans during this time and look forward to another successful event next year.

There was also the Braddon Fringe Festival, which was expanded from one night last year to three nights this year. Again, it was a fantastic success. It saw an increase in the numbers of police on the streets; but, ultimately, patrons enjoyed themselves and it was a very successful event, with minimal issues.

The Multicultural Festival will be held this weekend. Again, it is another festival where ACT Policing will be involved in ensuring that Canberrans can celebrate this great event.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how does ACT Policing work to ensure that these events are safe for all Canberrans to attend?

**DR PATERSON:** During the summer period, ACT Policing has run the Safe Summer campaign, which I was pleased to speak about in the last sitting, and launched with the Chief Police Officer on 6 December last year. The Safe Summer campaign has been developed so that ACT Policing can actively educate and engage with the Canberra community around dedicated enforcement throughout the summer period.

The campaign will run until the end of February and will focus on reducing alcohol-related violence, promoting safe behaviours and road safety. This program runs every year and to date has been really effective at promoting how Canberrans can keep safe while celebrating during the holiday period.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, an outlaw bikie gang also hosted a national event in Canberra recently. What are you doing to support ACT police regarding bikies?

**DR PATERSON:** An outlaw motorcycle group did come into the ACT on the weekend. ACT Policing ran a very successful operation with New South Wales police.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Alexander Maconochie Centre—staff**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. I refer to recent media reports that the Assistant Commissioner of Custodial Operations was caught on a video throwing a female detainee with such force that she physically rolled into her cell—a sickening video, I might add. Could the minister please inform the chamber whether it is ever appropriate for an official to throw a female detainee.

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. I appreciate that that vision was quite shocking and confronting for the Canberra community to see. That was an incident that took place in 2015. I am advised that that incident was fully reported at the time by the officer involved. It was fully investigated, and the matter is closed. That was a long time ago, but since then—over the last couple of years—there has been implementation of a use of force oversight committee. Unfortunately, our corrective officers do have to use force within AMC at times. It is an unfortunate part of their job. Ensuring that officers are highly trained and supported in those roles, and ensuring that we have appropriate oversight through this committee, is a priority.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, do you support officials who engage in this conduct? Should they keep their jobs or even be promoted?

**DR PATERSON:** This was not misconduct. I believe that if misconduct had occurred then it should be reported and investigated.

**Mr Cocks:** I have a point of order on relevance. The question was not about misconduct but, rather, “this type of conduct”.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think the minister is attempting to answer the question, and I am happy to let her continue. Are you finished, Minister?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, do you believe that the throwing of female detainees is consistent with the government’s stated commitment to human rights.

**DR PATERSON:** The AMC operates within a human rights framework, as do all other ACT government services. As I said, unfortunately ACT correctional officers are at times required to use force, and when they do they are required to report it. Then that report is investigated. After that incident in 2015, all the appropriate reporting took place by the officer involved. It was investigated and the matter is closed.

Since then, the use of force oversight committee has been established over the last couple of years. Every incident and use of force in ACT government places of detention is monitored by this group. There is also the Inspector of Correctional Services. There is a whole range of oversight institutions that can look at incidents that happen, so I am confident that we are doing everything to ensure that staff are fully trained and supported to conduct their jobs.

### **Justice and Community Safety Directorate—grants**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. I note that the Canberra Labor Club, an associated entity of ACT Labor, received a grant of \$202,820 from the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, as reported in the 2023-24 AEC Transparency Register. I also note the Labor Club received \$165,000 from the same directorate in 2022-23. The club's turnover in those two years was \$105 million each year. Minister, is it appropriate for a Labor government to make grants to the Labor Club, which in turn makes donations to the Labor Party?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. I will take on notice which fund that is. I assume it is the sustainability club fund. Those funds were granted under a Greens minister in the previous government. The Labor Party has not received donations from the Labor Club in over a decade.

**Mr Cocks:** A point of order on relevance. The question was not about the structure but, rather, the appropriateness of the relationship that results in a Labor government making grants to the Labor Club, which makes donations to the Labor Party.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Berry?

**Ms Berry:** On the point of order, I think the minister was answering the question quite succinctly and was explaining where the grant came from under a previous government.

**Mr Hanson:** On the point of order, the question was about the Labor government, which this group proclaims they were last term. Regardless of who the minister is, the question was that it was a Labor government giving money to the Labor Club to keep its pokies going, and then there was the donation that directly goes to the Labor Party.

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, I am wondering whether, in the 50 seconds remaining, we can allow the minister to attempt to answer the question.

**DR PATERSON:** I already answered the question.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, as a former advocate for gaming reform, do you believe the other receipts declared by the Labor Club would be better directed to organisations which specialise in gambling harm minimisation?

**Mr Pettersson:** Point of order: the question is asking for an expression of an opinion. It is clearly out of order, “Do you believe it is appropriate?”

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Castley, could I get you to either repeat or rephrase the question, because I am not sure whether Mr Pettersson’s point of order is relevant. If you can have another crack—either repeat or rephrase—

**MS CASTLEY:** I can repeat it. Minister, as a former advocate of gaming reform, can you enlighten the Assembly—

**Mr Pettersson:** You’re changing it! So you are not repeating it?

**MS CASTLEY:** I can repeat it, if you would like me to. Is it going to be allowed if I repeat it?

**MR SPEAKER:** I cannot recall the specific wording of the question.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, as a former advocate of gaming reform, do you believe the other receipts declared by the Labor Club would be better directed to organisations which specialise in gaming harm minimisation?

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, the question does ask for an opinion, so I am going to rule it out of order.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, why did these grants go to the Labor Club when there are far more deserving community organisations with very urgent needs?

**DR PATERSON:** As I said in answer to the first question, I will take on notice which grants they were, but I suspect they were sustainable club sector grants, which are directly for clubs. They can apply to seek these grants. There is a tier 1 level for large clubs and there is a tier 2 level for smaller grants.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**DR PATERSON:** You can look up on the JACS website who those grants are awarded to. I will come back to the Assembly with clarification on the exact fund.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—staff**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. I also refer to reports that the Assistant Commissioner of Custodial Operations was caught on video throwing a female detainee. Minister, who leaked the video?

**DR PATERSON:** You will have to ask the *Canberra Times*.

**Mr Hanson:** There he is!

**MR SPEAKER:** No, I am not going to call Mr Lindell!

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, do you have confidence that sensitive, operational information on the security of the jail will not also be leaked?

**DR PATERSON:** No, I do not, which is why the matter has been referred to relevant authorities to investigate how that footage was leaked.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, do Corrective Services staff have confidence in their executive leadership?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, I believe so, and this is why there has been significant work over the past decade and reform in ACT Corrective Services to see culture reform in the AMC. I think the recent evaluation that came out, evaluating the Blueprint for Change, found that these measures had been implemented to the highest standard. There is significant work going on to the tune of about—

**Mr Hanson:** Point of order, Mr Speaker, in her response the minister said, “I believe so.” She offered an opinion. I wonder if she could—

**MR SPEAKER:** No. No, Mr Hanson, there is no point of order. There is no point of order.

**Mr Pettersson:** On the point of order, on the original question, the question did ask for an expression of opinion. I was not going to call it until Mr Hanson raised it—

**MR SPEAKER:** I am not sure that it did.

**Mr Hanson:** It did not. It asked if they have confidence. It did not ask what is the Minister’s opinion? Now she did not answer the question. She offered an opinion. I am saying that if you are going to hold us to the point—If they are going to—

*Members interjecting—*

**Mr Barr:** It is the standing orders. A question cannot ask for an opinion. It has been that way for 35 years, Mr Hanson!

**Mr Hanson:** We asked a direct question. Therefore, if she is offering an opinion, that is not answering the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, if you could take your seat.

**DR PATERSON:** The only extra point I would like to make is that to implement the culture change, activities within AMC have been budgeted to the extent of \$30 million over the past two years. It is a significant priority for the government to see Corrective Services officers supported and working in a workplace that is professional and supports our detainees.

### **ACT Policing—Molonglo Valley**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for Police. Labor’s 2024 election commitments included the establishment of a police station in the Molonglo Valley.

However, this commitment, made just a few months ago, following a lot of advocacy from the Canberra Liberals over many years, is now described by the minister on Facebook as, “a longer term plan. Minister, this is critical infrastructure for addressing the escalating crime rate in the Molonglo Valley, which already exceeds the ACT average. Why has this commitment been deferred and what is the specific timeframe for delivery?”

**DR PATERSON:** Delivering a police station in the Molonglo Valley is a priority for the ACT government. It will form part of the town centre development. That development will need to progress, and then we will progress with the police station. There is a whole lot of work in terms of the planning and feasibility studies and what type of facility ACT police want. That planning work has already begun and will progress throughout this term as the development of the town centre progresses.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, can you rule out a 10- to 15-year timeframe for this project, which I have heard in a number of reports from the community?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, I can rule that out. The police station and the town centre will begin before 10 to 15 years.

**MR HANSON:** When will the Molonglo police station be open for business?

**DR PATERSON:** Once work starts on the town centre, work will then begin on the construction of a Molonglo police station. This is a priority for the ACT government. We recognise that this is a new town centre and developing community.

### **ACT Policing—Winchester Police Centre**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the minister for policing. Winchester police station recently sustained significant water damage after heavy rain in January. Footage was captured of water pouring from the ceiling onto officers’ desks and electronic devices. The AFPA President, Alex Caruana, said, “The incident reflects years of neglect and inadequate funding for police accommodation by the ACT government, endangering the lives of our members.” Minister, don’t ACT police deserve a safe work environment that does not endanger the lives of our officers?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, ACT police definitely deserve a safe workplace. In relation to the leak at Winchester through the roof, that was due to a blocked drain. That work was rectified; plumbers were called. It was a blocked drainpipe. The damage was isolated in one corner of the building. No injuries were reported, and affected staff were moved to other areas of the Winchester station.

What I do think is that it highlights the urgency of the work to deliver on in terms of a new city police station and headquarters. That is something I am strongly committed to and spoke about in my ministerial priority statement this morning. Work is well progressed on that and will continue to progress, and I will continue to work with ACT Policing to see that they are delivered facilities that are fit for purpose.

**MS MORRIS:** Police officers in the ACT serve with the knowledge that they may have to put their lives on the line to protect members of the community. What steps are



being taken by the government to ensure that repair works at Winchester police station are prioritised?

**DR PATERSON:** As I said, it was a blocked drainpipe. That was cleared, repair works were implemented, and it is all fixed.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, will you commit to tabling a repair and maintenance plan for the ACT Policing station to provide officers and the community with real transparency and accountability?

**DR PATERSON:** The repairs have been completed. There is nothing to report.

**Mr Barr:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice**

#### **Waste—recycling**

**MS CHEYNE:** In response to Ms Clay's and Mr Braddock's questions, as to whether the new recycling facility will recycle and recover all standard supermarket packaging, the answer is that, no, it will not. While materials collected through recycling collection will be processed through the sorting technology that I described, the facility will be focused on high-quality resource recovery, with a focus on rigid plastics, glass, aluminium and steel.

The final cost of the interim service—that is, transferring the recycling that we produce in the ACT to Sydney, as it is at the moment—will be subject to resolution of the insurance payments. Currently, it costs approximately \$10 million per year in additional costs.

#### **City and government services—road and cycleway maintenance**

**MS CHEYNE:** Regarding Mr Milligan's question yesterday about the Monaro Highway and glass, Roads ACT is responsible for sweeping between Mugga Lane and the construction zone, and the contractor is responsible for sweeping in the construction zone, all the way to Lanyon Drive. Both of those were swept in mid-December. If Mr Milligan would like to let me know exactly where those issues are occurring, we can make the request of the responsible area.

### **Leave of absence**

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

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

### **Papers**

**Ms Cheyne,** pursuant to standing order 211, presented the following papers:

Legal Aid Act—

Legal Aid (Commission President) Appointment 2024—Disallowable Instrument DI2024-277—Revised explanatory statement.

Legal Aid (Commissioner—Financial Management) Appointment 2024—Disallowable Instrument DI2024-278—Revised explanatory statement.

## Housing affordability

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.00): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT was ranked second last in CommSec's *State of the States* economic report for the December quarter, falling from second place in 2022;
- (b) the ACT now ranks second-last in key construction and housing metrics, including:
  - (i) construction work completed;
  - (ii) new owner-occupier housing finance commitments; and
  - (iii) new home building starts;
- (c) new dwelling starts in the ACT are down nearly 50 percent compared to the decade average, with the time between approval and completion of new houses doubling over the past decade; and
- (d) construction work fell by 10 percent in the ACT during the past year;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the ACT's economic performance and credit rating have a direct impact on the Government's interest bill;
- (b) the ACT's credit rating was last downgraded only 16 months ago due to the ACT's poor budget position and forecast deficits;
- (c) the ACT's budget position is expected to run a cash operating deficit for the fourth consecutive year, with financial management weakening due to prolonged fiscal recovery and high debt levels;
- (d) recent reporting indicates the Government will seek approval for hundreds of millions more in deficit spending; and
- (e) the ACT's economic outlook has shifted from stable to negative, with the credit rating expected to fall within the next two years if:
  - (i) the capital account deficit remains above 10 percent of total revenue; or
  - (ii) cash operating balances continue to be in deficit; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) urgently develop a plan to improve financial responsibility, and stabilise the ACT's credit rating;

- (b) take immediate action to improve the ACT's performance in housing and construction, including:
  - (i) establishing an independent review panel, comprised of industry and community experts, to assess the current regulatory and administrative framework for building and construction, and to recommend reforms that streamline processes and accelerate construction timelines without compromising quality; and
  - (ii) introduce fiscal and regulatory reforms that incentivise private investment in the housing sector and create a more conducive environment for new housing projects;
- (c) report on progress by the end of the last sitting week in April; and
- (d) publish the fiscal plan by 8 May 2025.

Back in 1992, in the USA, a Democrat adviser to Bill Clinton coined the phrase: "It's the economy, stupid." For decades, that quip served as a reminder for all sides of politics to pay attention to the state of the economy, because the state of the economy matters; it has real-world impacts. But here in Canberra it feels like Labor forgot about the economy quite some time ago. I get it. It is economics. It seems like boring stuff—debt levels, credit ratings, interest bills, dwelling starts, inflation, contraction, concentration, diversification, taxes, duties and levies. They all look the same to some people. It seems boring, but it is important. It has a real-world impact.

You cannot fake it in economics, and you can only spin your way out of trouble for so long. Eventually, reality comes back to bite you, because a poor economic outlook is not just academically boring stuff; it affects everyone in our community, and things are not looking so great for our economy.

The CommSec *State of the States* report ranked the ACT as the second-best Australian economy barely more than two years ago. Now we are ranked second worst. We are going in the wrong direction. Just 16 months ago, Canberra was blindsided by the loss of our AAA credit rating. After years of triumphalism from the Chief Minister and former Treasurer, after years of ignoring Canberra Liberals' warnings—as far as I can tell, just because he did not like the people who were warning him—the real world bit and we lost that credit rating.

As a direct result of that failure, the ACT has to pay higher interest. Credit providers consider the ACT riskier than it used to be, so they charge us more; and, if it happens again, it will get worse. That interest bill is an empty expense. Every dollar spent on interest is a dollar that the government cannot spend on the services and the infrastructure that Canberrans need. It is another dollar that cannot go towards providing a safer or more prosperous Canberra and another dollar that cannot go towards lifting up those doing it toughest in Canberra. It is another dollar that the government will try to extract from Canberrans.

The amount of money being lost to interest is getting worse and worse here in the ACT. It will reach \$855 million by 2027-28, according to the last budget, well on its way to a billion dollars, and it may well be worse when the Treasurer gets around to lodging his budget update. And it will certainly get worse if the government fails to act responsibly and we see another credit rating downgrade.

The CommSec *State of the States* report provides some pretty dire and damning reading. And CommSec is very clear. This quarter's fall is clearly linked to failures in construction, home building and home finance; second-last in the areas of construction completed, new owner-occupier housing finance commitments, and new home build starts in the December quarter of 2024.

In the past year, construction work in the ACT was down by 10.8 per cent. Dwelling starts in the ACT fell over the year by 39.9 per cent. The Housing Industry Association shows that building approvals for houses have hit a new low, with 2024 recording the lowest number for a 12-month period—680—since records were first published in 1970. Overall, the ACT had 2,180 dwellings approved in 2024, which is the lowest number of approvals since September 2007.

On every front, it is clear: Labor are failing on housing—a subject that this government, this Treasurer and, indeed, federal Labor claim is their priority. Well, the proof, as they say, is in the pudding.

The current state of the housing industry is the entirely predictable result of the policies of Australia's oldest government. And, of course, housing is not the only area of the economy where Labor is failing. The budget position was already strained. The ACT's budget was already running in deficit. The government was already relying on accounting fudges to make the position look better than it really was. The government is now seeking approval for hundreds of millions of dollars more in deficit spending.

Our economy faces persistent threats. Contrary to the Treasurer's positive comments this morning about a diverse economy, things are headed in entirely the other direction on that front, as a direct result of federal Labor's actions. The government will be forced to refinance debt at higher interest rates because of the former Treasurer's shift to using interest-only finance. There needs to be a plan to restore the financial responsibility which has been absent for so long—a path back to reality which acknowledges the real-world impacts of bad financial decisions and provides an explicit path to fiscal sustainability—and details on how the government intends to secure our credit rating. It is important because we need to stop the government throwing more money that Canberrans have paid into the cost of a credit rating downgrade and interest rate hikes.

The government must take this seriously. We need to fix the underlying conditions that have contributed to the most recent collapse in economic performance. Our construction and building industry is genuinely struggling through the weight of regulation, complexity and bureaucracy, at the same time as it has been hit by a massive increase in costs. The problems are being exacerbated by the government, not helped, and it is adding to the cost of construction, putting it further out of the reach of ordinary families.

We need the government to genuinely listen to the people who are trying to tell them why our housing industry is struggling and why it is reaching a tipping point. The government, for once, needs to hear a message that it does not like from the people who are actually on the ground.

I have had conversations with all members of the crossbench on this motion, and there are things that we agree on and things that we do not. The only people who have

declined to engage productively are Labor. Despite scheduling this motion to make sure there was plenty of time for Labor to consider it, come up with a position and engage, despite reaching out to invite discussions, I have not heard anything back.

I can take some guesses as to how the new Treasurer might respond. I imagine the Treasurer might criticise this motion because he considers the budget and the budget update that he announced after this motion was listed to be the very plan we are asking for. We knew that the Treasurer would be presenting a budget update at some point, but no budget that the Chief Minister delivered in his time as Treasurer set out how to pay back debt.

I expect, for example, that the Treasurer might decide to attack the Canberra Liberals as conservatives. He might decide to say that we are obsessed with debt and deficit. At least, that is the way his predecessor tended to play it. It is spin that this Treasurer has used before, and he would be right, to an extent. I am deeply concerned about the impact that debt and long-term deficit spending have on our economy and on our community, and the impact of throwing money away on interest payments.

The Treasurer might decide to attack me because I do not have any savings to offer him to save his budget, and he is right. I do not have access to the information that he has. I do not have the power to ask public servants to identify waste or options for savings. He might decide to argue, as he did this morning, that Canberrans voted for an ACT Labor government. After all, we on this side of the chamber fell short by a couple of hundred preferences of winning an equal number of seats to Labor. He might decide to attack the Canberra Liberals' election commitments as being expensive. I will not shy away from it. We went to the election on the back of strong assurances from Labor on the health of the economy and the sustainability of the budget position.

Before the election, we thought that the economy was going to be in one position; it is not in that position now. It has gone the wrong way. So we brought forward an ambitious agenda for Canberra. We, like so many other Canberrans, have been blindsided by just how dire things actually are, with a near quarter-billion-dollar blowout in health services alone.

I do not know that the Treasurer will use these arguments to try and spin his way out of trouble, and I really hope that he chooses to debate matters of substance instead of resorting to talking points and petty politicking. We will see. But the fact remains that this is a critically important matter, and the direction of the ACT economy will affect the lives of Canberrans every day.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.10): In anticipation, the government will be supporting Ms Clay's amendments, which I anticipate she will be moving later in the debate.

I want to be crystal clear with the Assembly and the community: the so-called independent review that Mr Cocks's motion proposed is nothing but a blatant attempt from the Canberra Liberals to wind back important protections for homebuyers, subcontractors and workers in the construction industry. It is a poor attempt to rehash a

debate that has already been settled in this place about property developer licensing—something that our government supports to protect homebuyers from dodgy developers.

Beyond that, it further proves that the Canberra Liberals are devoid of any policymaking capacity of their own—other than, of course, to bulldoze Kowen Forrest, to supposedly provide no housing for the next five years. So maybe it is a good idea to have someone else make the policy for them, but this should not be at the public's expense. It is galling hypocrisy from Mr Cocks to criticise the government for making essential investments in health care and infrastructure while seeking funding for someone else to do his job for him. Rather than present their own plan to the Assembly to identify which homebuyer protections they would wind back, to identify the ways that they would like to make construction sites more dangerous for workers and to identify the tax cuts that they would like to give to developers, they want to hide behind an independent review panel.

Mr Cocks's motion calls for fiscal reforms that incentivise private investment. Again we see hypocrisy. One of the best ways to support first home ownership is through stamp duty reduction. It is efficient and it does not distort the market. It is not a wild inflationary scheme like the federal Liberals proposal to force young people to deplete their superannuation for housing. We will continue to build on our history of reducing stamp duty to incentivise home ownership.

We already know the Liberals want you to pay more stamp duty. They like inefficient and unfair taxation. We know that the Liberals want to make sure developers are able to make massive windfall gains by removing the community contribution made when a lease is varied to the benefit of a property owner. They want Woolies, Coles, the big banks and multinationals to pay less tax in Canberra by lowering the rate of payroll tax that they pay.

In response to Mr Cocks's motion as a whole, as Treasurer and as Minister for Planning, my focus is clear: we will build more homes, we will ensure fiscal responsibility and we will continue to manage a thriving economy. As I outlined this morning in my statement of priorities, responsible fiscal management is the foundation of ensuring that we can continue to deliver these services to Canberrans and diversify and build our economy. We will continue to invest in the essentials like health, education and infrastructure—all that is needed—to meet the needs of our growing city. We will continue to make investments in public health care and, as Treasurer, I will not back down from making sure that people get the health care they need, when they need it. There has been pressure there which has been well known and articulated by the government, and we will have further to say about that as we move through the budget process.

Our government is focused on that as well as ensuring that we have the capacity to deliver infrastructure projects that support the key priorities of our Labor government in critical areas like new hospitals, health centres, walk-in centres, schools, housing and public transport. These are all investments that have a significant benefit for generations to come and are worthwhile investments. As Treasurer, I will manage the budget in a responsible way so that we can respond to critical and urgent needs as they arise. I will do this while making the tough decisions with my colleagues to tackle the pressures

that many governments have right around the country at the moment, so that we can continue to deliver the high level of services that Canberrans expect.

While this is a very real challenge, our economy more broadly goes from strength to strength. We continue to have very low unemployment, a very tight labour market and continued economic growth. This has been a consistent feature in our city—something that Mr Cocks simply will not recognise, which, of course, continues a pattern that we saw in the election, where Labor was the only party that was prepared to talk up our city, the strong economic growth and the businesses and economy that we have here in Canberra. The strong backbone of the public service, in both the ACT and the commonwealth, continues to support our growing private sector.

Of course, one of the fundamentals to the economy and part of the range of foci that this motion has is in relation to housing to support our growing population. I look forward to the opportunity provided, being the Treasurer, the planning minister and the transport minister, of bringing all of those portfolios together to continue to deliver the homes that are required to make sure that our city is liveable for all. Again, as I outlined this morning, we need more housing where and how people want to live, no matter whether they are buying, building or renting. Labor is committed to building 1,000 new public homes. That means that the construction of new homes in the territory, across the whole construction market, will not be reliant only on private supply. Construction of public homes will provide a pipeline of supply when private developers are highly affected both by supply site constraints—like the various significant cost escalations that we have seen in relation to building materials and labour—and by changes to demand for private housing.

This term, we are getting on with Labor's plan to enable 30,000 new homes over the next five years, not just through government land release. As we have been clear, this should also come from leased land. I am pleased that work is very much underway on the next stage of planning reform. The regulatory reforms that we are taking and have already begun include major zoning changes to support more low-rise medium-density housing in existing suburbs.

A key difference between us and the other parties at the election was that Labor committed that this work would be design-led—starting with a new missing-middle design guide to inform changes to the Territory Plan. We did not commit to weakened design and weakened protections for homebuyers, as the Canberra Liberals would have us do. We set up this process to make sure that there was a community contact and that there was good design whilst we also accept new housing in the existing suburbs that we live in. I am looking forward to progressing those reforms through the Assembly so that they can be made law by the end of the year, following consultation with the community around the middle of this year.

This year, further major zoning reforms will also be developed to allow larger scale medium-density housing in certain well-located areas, close to services, shops and transport. I want to acknowledge that the Liberals campaigned against that at the election. It was very active campaigning. While they talk about regulatory reforms to address economic issues in the housing and construction sector and to be able to supply homes, they were actively campaigning against those regulatory reforms at the election.

We will get on with that work. We recognise that there has been weakening demand in the housing sector. There has been a range of reasons for that. We know that interest rate increases and consistently high interest rates have affected homebuyers. We also know that there has been significant escalation in construction costs which has affected the supply of new homes. Construction firms have also been suffering from being able to finance their new projects because of interest rates. These macro-economic settings have had an impact and flowed through to the commencement statistics. So, to be clear: the cost of construction materials and, particularly, the tight labour market are some of the main drivers that we are seeing affect the commencement statistics, not just here in the ACT but also nationally.

When Mr Cocks tries to conflate the budget position with some of the broader construction market conditions, he needs to understand that there are macro-economic factors that affect those issues. He also needs to stop cherry-picking from the statistics. We know that inflation is coming down, and that will, of course, provide some opportunity for the RBA to potentially open the door for interest rate cuts in the future, which is pleasing to see, and the macro-economic improvements will help support private investment in homes. As a genuine economic observer, Mr Cocks would be aware that this can take time to flow through to the official statistics.

If the Canberra Liberals want to be genuine in their calls for regulatory reform that encourages housing investment, they will support our housing measures—they actively campaigned against some of those at the election, but some I have introduced in the Assembly today, and it is a very good example of the sort of regulatory reform we are taking to deliver more housing, which I think Mr Cocks did not quite expect we would bring into this place today; they would support our proposed legislation to enable more investment in housing; they would be genuine in their support for fiscal measures that support investment; and they will need to eventually get on board with tax reform so that we can support more demand, particularly from first homebuyers, giving them the opportunity to buy a new home. Also, if the Canberra Liberals want to be genuine about backing private investment in the ACT, they should acknowledge the strengths of the ACT economy, rather than cherry-picking data that suits their incoherent narratives. I think that this motion could not be a greater example of an incoherent narrative that we have seen in this place.

I will spend my time as Treasurer backing the ACT economy. It has solid fundamentals. We will not be talking down our city. There are challenges ahead, and we acknowledge that. We note that there are amendments proposed by Ms Clay that have been circulated in the spirit of providing the Assembly with a clear update on the range of policies our government has and is seeking to implement. Labor will not oppose those amendments. The government will continue to provide updates on the fiscal position, policy and outcomes of the territory, including a credit rating, through budget processes which will be handed down in June. I commend Ms Clay's amendments to the Assembly and reject this cherry-picking exercise from the opposition.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.22): I rise to speak to Mr Cocks's motion. I intend to move the amendments that have been circulated in my name. I want to move them individually, one at a time, so that members can debate and vote on the individual amendments. I move amendment No 1 that has been circulated in my name:



Omit paragraph (2)(d), substitute:

“(d) recent reporting indicates the Government will seek approval for hundreds of millions more in unplanned spending; and”.

Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Cocks for bringing this motion forward and for being so transparent in negotiating with us. I also thank Minister Steel’s office for being transparent in negotiations. I think this is how the new parliament should work. We have lots of different parties and lots of people with different views, and we should be engaging across the floor on every issue and seeing what is the best outcome that we can come up with.

The Greens are concerned about the Labor government’s management of the budget. Labor often speak about fiscal responsibility, but we are concerned about their unwillingness to invest sufficiently in public housing, the climate and the environment. These were core reasons why the Greens were unable to accept shared government with Labor this term. Better investment earlier would have saved us money now and would have given us better services and a healthier environment. There is a truism that the cheapest time to invest in infrastructure that you really need is yesterday, and Canberra is paying dearly for delays, both in economic terms and in terms of losing out on those services.

The ACT Greens believe that careful financial management includes learning from past mistakes and implementing changes quickly. This can help our money go further, achieving better outcomes for the community. ACT Labor need to convince our community that they are across the issues and that they are able to come up with solutions that will assure the ACT’s credit rating and improve the rate of housing approvals and supply.

Mr Cocks raised *State of the States* reporting, and this does show a decline in construction work in the ACT. I am sure this decline in approvals is on the radar of the minister for planning. He has already spoken about it. But we need to get more data, and we need to understand what has been happening over the longer term. That will allow a broader, better-informed discussion about the supply of housing in the ACT, particularly the missing middle—public, and genuinely affordable homes. It is pleasing to see an increase in infrastructure investment, where the ACT leads the nation, and that should bode well for future employment growth.

Some of the indicators in *State of the States* are not particularly concerning for the Greens and many others in our community. We need a sustainable, thriving, circular economy that provides people with what they need to live a good life. But we do not simply need any economic activity and endless growth—for instance, endless increases in new car sales or endless increases in house prices. These things are not making everybody’s lives better. Endless increases are good for the billionaires, but they are making many people’s lives much worse.

Endless increases are also damaging our environment, and they should not be our measure of success. That is precisely why the ACT has wellbeing indicators, so that we can think about what we need and what actually improves all of our lives and our environment, rather than counting endless growth that only benefits billionaires as the only indicator of success.

We know Canberra is a progressive city that cares about this. Here in the ACT, we lead the nation in EV sales. That is a car sales figure that I am really proud of. Interestingly, despite our nation-leading growth in EV sales, data just released by the Electric Vehicle Council shows that sales of Teslas here in the ACT are plummeting. We cannot be sure of the exact reason, but I think we can safely say that the recent actions of Tesla's billionaire CEO might have something to do with it.

Canberra leads the nation in EV sales because of deliberate policies that the Greens instigated while in government. But we should not be seeking to lead the nation in all car sales. I would personally read that to mean that we have failed on public and active transport, that people have no other means of travelling and that they have had to buy a new or second-hand car and pay vast amounts in petrol—things that, increasingly, many of us cannot afford—because they have no other choice.

Similarly, I do not want to see the ACT lead the nation on house price increases. Let us spare a thought for those poor people in WA who are contending with 24.6 per cent year on year increases in house prices. Do you imagine that is making their lives better? Is that a good indicator of economic success?

The interest rate at which government borrows is not falling as fast as we all hoped it would, but, when it starts to come down, that will be the time when we will want to see government speed up their investment, particularly in public housing, light rail and other transport infrastructure.

A Dutton-led government would be a huge threat to the ACT economy. In recent days, he has claimed there are 36,000 unnecessary jobs in Canberra. That is a lot of job cuts. A Dutton-led, Temu Trump-style federal government would clearly make Australia better for billionaires, and would clearly make everyone else worse off. It would also create a chilling effect on the ACT economy.

In terms of reading how well we are doing and how well our economy is going from the *State of the States*, it is complicated. We share economic concerns that a lot of our community are raising. We do not think that a two-month review of the system and the planning and construction sector is the right approach at this point in time.

In terms of the specific amendment, amendment No 1, I have put forward a small but significant change. Mr Cocks's original motion talks about millions more in deficit spending. I have suggested that is millions more in unplanned spending. For us in the Greens, there is a big difference here. Deficit spending is sometimes something that you should do because you need to invest in the things that you are buying. Most Australians are pretty familiar with this as a concept. If you need a home to live in, it is a good idea for you to borrow money and live in that home. This is a really familiar idea. Some deficit spending is okay, if you are buying really useful infrastructure, it is something you need and it is going to increase in value in future. That is the kind of spending that is really useful.

We are seeing quite a lot of unplanned spending. Some of that is on things that are an absolute waste. Some of it is on things that maybe we need but we are shocked that government has not seen this coming and taken steps earlier to give us the services we

need, so that we do not need to have that unplanned spending. Unplanned spending in large amounts is certainly something that concerns the Greens, and that is why I have put up amendment No 1.

**MR MILLIGAN** (Yerrabi) (3.28): I would like to start by thanking Mr Cocks for bringing this important motion to the Assembly today. I am sure that we all agree here that we all want a strong economy for Canberra. We want a strong economy for government, and it is good for Canberrans as well. A strong economy also supports families by providing better job opportunities, higher wages, affordable goods and services, access to credit and financial stability. These factors help families to improve their living conditions, plan for the future and enjoy a higher quality of life.

A strong economy provides a stable footing for the government to provide the essential services that Canberrans expect. I refer to services such as an effective health system—clearly, we do not have that here—a quality education, and supports for those living with a disability. There is a need to equip the frontline services here in the ACT and other basic public services.

When the government provides these services, it creates a place that people want to visit, and where people want to live, a place where they want to start a career or advance their career, and a place where they want to raise a family and/or start a business. Canberra should be that place. When the government provides a strong economy, this provides the private sector with the conditions needed to succeed, such as higher demand for goods and services, access to financing, a skilled workforce and opportunities to expand.

A successful private sector can see more business startups. It can be innovative. That then creates jobs and leads to individual wealth and further opportunities for investment. It creates security and raises the standard of living. But, to do all of this, we need a strong economy. The Canberra Business Chamber recently stated:

Over recent decades Canberra has developed from a city focused on supporting the public sector to one with a far more diverse economic base.

Canberra's private sector is made up of over 36,000 private small businesses that include but are not limited to a strong retail market, tourism, hospitality and accommodation, tertiary institutions and training, financial services, fitness, sporting organisations, and the arts and creative industries, to name just a few.

Canberra is visited by over five million people a year. We have over 1,700 retail shops. There are over 1,100 cafes and restaurants that Canberrans can choose from. There are over 47 non-government private schools. There are at least 60 different sporting organisations. There were over 19,000 international students enrolled in the ACT in our tertiary institutions in 2024. There is currently, as we heard yesterday during question time, a Netflix blockbuster being filmed here in the ACT with a Hollywood superstar, and we previously hosted the filming of Liam Neeson's *Blacklight* in 2021, which, for the six days while they were here, brought in \$2 million to our economy.

Canberra has great potential, if it is given the opportunity. Instead, Mr Assistant Speaker, you may have seen an article in the *Canberra Times* today with the title

“Future bleak for businesses”. In the article, the Chief Executive of the Canberra Business Chamber, Greg Harford, said:

Times are really challenging out there, and I think a lot of people don’t quite understand how tightly many businesses operate ...

Another business owner said that the current climate is simply “not sustainable”. A third business owner said that it was harder to do business here in the ACT compared to other jurisdictions.

One example is the current workers compensation scheme in the ACT. It is far more costly than equivalent schemes in other jurisdictions. This is a key pain point for businesses, driven by the uncapped nature of potential liability here and the lack of time limits for lodging claims. Business owners who operate in both the ACT and New South Wales have reported that their ACT workers compensation insurance costs 47 per cent more than in New South Wales.

Today we are looking at one business sector that is really struggling due to government inaction. This motion addresses the decline in the building and construction industry, which has not been given the opportunity to operate effectively. As Mr Cocks’s motion notes, the ACT now ranks second-last in key construction and housing metrics. New dwelling starts in the ACT are down by nearly 50 per cent compared to the decade average. Construction work fell by 10 per cent in the ACT in the last year.

We attribute this decline to the failures of the ACT government. It has failed to deliver effective government policy, and it has failed to deliver a strong economy. In 2023, the ACT was stripped of its AAA credit rating, which went down to AA+, because of its poor budget management, and just yesterday the ACT government was told that its approach to fiscal discipline appeared to be increasingly loose. That is not what one wants to hear about the ones in charge of the purse strings, is it?

Anyone who runs their household finances knows the importance of managing a good budget and the importance of avoiding a poor credit rating. A poor credit rating can create a range of obstacles for individuals, from high costs of loans to limiting housing options and even difficulties finding employment. It is no different for the government. The government’s poor financial management has created obstacles to providing the essential services that Canberrans expect. In the end, Canberrans are once again paying the price.

Again, I want to thank Mr Cocks for bringing this important motion to the chamber today. Clearly, in the “call-ons”, he has developed some solutions that he thinks, going forward, will help the building and construction industry and work towards improving our economy here in the ACT. It is about developing a plan to reduce government debt, establishing an independent panel review, and introducing fiscal and regulatory reforms. This is a great step going forward in order to improve the ACT’s financial credibility and to get the ACT back on track.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.36): With respect to this amendment, this is a very important point. This is a change of one word in the motion, but it is a significant word. To lose the term “deficit” from this motion is to ignore the reality of the budget situation. Whether it is planned or unplanned, the fact remains that this spending is

funded by deficit. Every dollar that this government spends in addition to what it has available is funded by debt. That means more interest, and that means less money being available in the future. At some point in the future, someone has to pay that money back. Someone has to. It might not be this Treasurer. It might not be the next Treasurer. At some point, reality bites, the storm hits, and we must pay it back.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I am not sure if you have ever met someone with really serious debt problems—someone who, for one reason or other, sees no way out, and who has become utterly dependent on debt. For some reason, they have become entrenched in the destructive cycle of borrowing to pay back. That is where we are right now with this government, and that is why the word “deficit” matters.

We cannot ignore the fact that every extra dollar that this Treasurer seeks to spend fiscally sends the ACT backwards, and someone has to pay it back, whether it is this Treasurer, his children or our children. At some point, it must be paid back. That is why this word matters so much, and that is why we cannot agree to this amendment.

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (3.38): Without a strong economy, we cannot build a strong Canberra. A strong economy is the lifeblood of our communities. It gives everyday workers, families and local businesses a chance to get ahead and prosper. It builds confidence that they will rightly be rewarded for their well-pressed efforts. A strong economy with low inflation and unemployment enables human flourishing. It means that, at all levels of society, after workers, families and businesses have taken care of life’s demands, they can be inspired to innovate and grow, because a strong economy gives them the stability and the security to do just that.

When a government cannot deliver a strong economy, it is always the people who suffer first. Time and time again, at both the federal and the territory level, we are shown that Labor cannot manage money. We can always rely on them for one thing, and that is to weaken the economy through higher taxes and inflationary spending.

Australians are suffering the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation. They have experienced the biggest fall in disposable household income of any developed country in the past two years. Federal Labor has thrown fuel on the inflationary fire, overseeing \$347 billion in additional spending in just three years. That amounts to \$33,000 of additional spending for every Australian household. Does anyone feel like they have had \$33,000 worth of value added to their lives since federal Labor came to power? Certainly, Mr Assistant Speaker, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone in my electorate who would say they were better off now than they were three years ago. That is because Canberra is not immune to federal Labor’s poor economic management, nor the devastating effects that it is having on inflation.

Our troubles are only made worse because, at a territory level, we are subject to the whims of a high-taxing, high-spending Labor government that leaves a trail of rorts and waste in its wake. The ACT government has cost Canberra our AAA credit rating, which has a direct impact on our interest bill. The ACT fell from second place to second last in CommSec’s *State of the States* economic report for the December quarter in 2022. If the ACT does not shift course and set us on the road to recovery, our economic outlook is at risk of officially slipping into negative, and our credit rating being further downgraded in just two years.

I thank my colleague Mr Cocks for bringing forward this very important motion today. Mr Cocks understands that, if our economic conditions continue to unravel as they are, more and more workers, families and local businesses will cop the brunt of it. Mr Cocks understands that, if we do not urgently jump on the road to recovery, develop a plan to stabilise the ACT's credit rating and improve financial responsibility, the queues outside Canberra's food pantries will only get longer, defaults on mortgage payments will only become more common, and local business closures will only become more frequent. The writing is on the wall. It is well past time that this government took responsibility, heeded the warning signs and set Canberra on the road to recovery.

I congratulate Minister Steel on his appointment as Treasurer for the ACT. I can appreciate that his new responsibility is no small undertaking. He does indeed have a big job ahead of him, and the opposition wish to work collaboratively with him as he restores the territory's financial outlook. I invite the Treasurer to come to Tuggeranong and hear just some of the stories of struggle and hardship that many people in my electorate are experiencing. Sadly, many Tuggeranong residents cannot afford life under Labor. Every day, there is a battle to get food on the table, to keep up with the household payments, and to pay for doctor visits and the kids' extracurricular activities. They are working hard. Some of them are sacrificing time with their family to juggle two jobs, just to cover the basics. Others who need that little bit of extra help from food pantries and community services are grappling with a range of very complex emotions about their life circumstances—shame, disappointment, embarrassment and even fear.

One of the biggest cost-of-living pressures is housing, whether it is mortgage or rental repayments, or sky-rocketing energy bills, rates, taxes and levies. Everyone agrees that to have a roof over their head is their biggest security. Typically, they will cut all of their expenses from their lives to prioritise housing and secure their home. That is just one reason why improving our housing and construction sector and reducing the financial burden of housing and home ownership are integral to stabilising the economy.

A strong economy does not just happen. It demands sound strategic policy and competent execution. This motion endeavours to achieve just that, and I commend it to the Assembly.

Question put:

That **Ms Clay's** amendment No 1 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 13

Noes 10

Yvette Berry	Michael Pettersson
Andrew Braddock	Shane Rattenbury
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Laura Nuttall	Caitlin Tough
Suzanne Orr	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Marisa Paterson	

Chiaka Barry	James Milligan
Peter Cain	Deborah Morris
Fiona Carrick	Mark Parton
Leanne Castley	
Ed Cocks	
Thomas Emerson	
Jeremy Hanson	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Ms Clay's** amendment No 1 agreed to.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.48): I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name:

Omit paragraph (3)(b), substitute:

“(b) by the last sitting week in May 2025 table a report which details:

- (i) the fiscal and regulatory reforms being taken by the ACT Government that incentivise the delivery of public, community and affordable housing;
- (ii) the fiscal and regulatory reforms being undertaken by the New South Wales and Victorian Governments that incentivise the delivery of public, community and affordable housing;
- (iii) for the period from 2015 to 2024 and broken down into categories specifying whether it is a single residential dwelling, dual occupancy, townhouse, terrace house, apartments 3 storeys and under, apartments 4 storeys and over and which of these add new housing stock as opposed to knockdown rebuilds, how many:
  - (A) Development Applications (DAs) were lodged;
  - (B) DAs were approved; and
  - (C) dwellings were completed;
- (iv) how many full-time equivalents (FTEs) are working in areas which are responsible for processing DAs;
- (v) any information the ACT Government can provide about how many FTEs in similar areas within New South Wales and Victoria that process DAs at the state and local level; and
- (vi) the feedback that the ACT Government has received through the Environment Planning Forum and elsewhere from organisations such as building and construction companies, architects and others working in construction, about the operation of the new planning system and how ACT Government is responding to this feedback;”.

The Greens agree that there is a problem in relation to construction and building here. It is not just here in the ACT. Other states, territories and countries are experiencing the issue of housing costs, supply issues, and problems with construction and rising costs. So are we.

The ACT data last year, however, was pretty startling. We Greens cannot support a hasty two-month review of regulatory settings following five years of intense reform. We do not think that is the right decision to make at this time. What we need to do now is better implement what we have, not create further reform. Endless review and endless reform are not going to stabilise our housing market, but we do need to better understand the recent data that the ABS has released on building approvals in 2024. These are the figures that most concern me. The ABS figures on building approvals say 2024 had half the approvals that 2023 had. The *ACT Land and Property Report* figures that are issued every six months similarly show a pretty big decline in the reports they

have released so far in both completions and approvals. This is a problem. We need to understand it. We need to address it.

We have already made a lot of reforms in this area. A lot of this work happened last term and the planning minister has outlined a lot of this reform. There was a five-year planning review from 2019, leading to the introduction of a new Planning Act. We got new district strategies that recognised for the first time that the districts have different characters that need to be considered in the planning and development of each district. We have a whole new Territory Plan. To make sure that the system is delivering better outcomes, there are already a number of reviews built into the Planning Act for all of these pieces of work. An evaluation framework was also developed, which outlines the approach to assessing how that planning system is performing.

We also made changes to the construction and development industry. Greens minister Rebecca Vassarotti introduced property developer licensing, which was passed in the Assembly in 2024. That is a key system of community protection to regulate property developers and to help stop the problem of shonky developers phoenixing-out and leaving Canberrans out of pocket and with no home or apartment to live in.

There was a lot of consultation on all of these measures, and we ran parliamentary committee inquiries. We considered good outcomes, we considered community protection, and we considered better standards in a changing climate. There are already reviews built in for each of these elements. They are factored into the legislation. The review periods are typically three to five years, and that is the normal time frame to circle back and see whether a reform that you have made is working. We do not typically do that within a year because it is too early to tell.

We have a lot of reform, and we have the evaluation frameworks built in. We in the Greens do not think right now is the right time to set up a new system to review the whole lot. And two months is not a long time to stand up a new panel, to ask them to look at the entire regulatory system and to meaningfully review it. We do, however, need better information on the current situation in our local industry and all of the local and national factors affecting it. We need to understand why planning approvals have fallen, and we need to develop an appropriate response to that.

That is why I have circulated amendment No 2 in my name. Mr Cocks has correctly highlighted the problem, but I do not think his solution is the right one now. So here is what my amendment does instead. My amendment will get the information published quickly. It will get the information from official sources and from the local industry. It uses the existing industry consultation method of the Environment and Planning Forum more effectively, and it ensures that the government is listening to and releasing the results of that industry consultation. It means that no-one should be taken by surprise about where our local construction is up to.

My amendment also gets comparative data from New South Wales and Victoria, and we are very much hoping that the Labor governments in those states will help out the Labor government in this one. That will help let us know if there is something particular happening here in the ACT or if we are just part of an overall pattern.



My amendment looks at the resourcing we have in our development application processing teams, and it will publish the key information setting out whether our DA teams are resourced properly and are running efficiently. That is a report that can be completed in a pretty short time frame, and government can use that data to provide the Assembly with advice on what has caused the drop in approvals and advise on a way forward. Government could choose to implement results in the next budget as well, and it will be published, for transparency.

I took a bit of time to do a little industry consultation, and I have put together some of the information that I think the community and the industry would find useful. Some of the data that we are after is for 2015 to 2024. We want to look at a good, long period of time and see it year by year so that we can see proper, long-term patterns, and we actually want to know how many DAs are being lodged and approved and how many dwellings are completed. What we need to know that is not currently clear to anybody is not just how many DAs it is, but how many are for single, freestanding homes. How many are for large apartment buildings? How many are for low-rise apartments, townhouses? How many of these are knockdown-rebuilds? And how many of these are adding new housing stock and taking us forward? I think all of that data together will actually provide us with a lot of clarity about what is going on at the moment.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.54): We will not be opposing this amendment. The intent of the measures in the motion was to get the ACT government to genuinely listen to many of the stakeholders who feel that their voices have not been heard, throughout all of the processes that Ms Clay referred to.

The industry—people who are in the industry every day, working to deliver houses and apartments, working to make sure people can actually buy a house in the ACT—are contending with clear problems in regulatory complexity, and in terms of administrative inefficiency and bureaucracy. That seems to be the reality of their everyday experience. They are fighting against conflicting regulations that suggest one intent in one regulation and another intent in another regulation. They are trying to navigate extraordinary restrictions on being able simply to deliver homes for Canberrans.

I accept that the wording of that proposal could be interpreted as a two-month review, as Ms Clay has pointed out, and I am willing to accept the amendment that she has put forward. However, I think it is genuinely important that the government get better at listening. It is not just this area; in every area that people speak to me about, they feel that this government turn a blind eye. They have stopped listening. They are not interested in what the people on the ground have to say. It is just a case of regulation after regulation, administrative burden on top of administrative burden, and it just cannot go on. Every time that happens, it adds to the cost.

Please listen to our industry. You cannot deliver housing to Canberrans without the private sector. It cannot be done. We need people—builders, architects, planners and subcontractors. They are telling us that the system we have is not working. The new system that has been introduced in planning is not yet working. We are seeing time lines blow out on DAs under the old system to over 200 days as a median. It is not working. Please listen. Otherwise, I think that the additions that Ms Clay has provided are good. I would again like to thank her for the productive way she has engaged with us. I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised. Let us see where we get to from here.

**Ms Clay's** amendment No 2 agreed to.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.57): I move amendment No 3 that has been circulated in my name:

Insert new paragraph after paragraph (3)(b):

“(c) introduce fiscal and regulatory reforms that incentivise private investment in the housing sector and create a more conducive environment for new housing projects;”.

This amendment simply reinserts the second part of Mr Cocks's original motion, paragraph (3)(b)(i). I have taken the lightest hand that I can. This is part of our new approach in the Greens. We are trying very hard to negotiate with everybody here and only make amendments when we think it is really important. This one got cut out of the list, so I have popped it back in the list. That is Mr Cocks's original paragraph, and my amendment pops it back in.

**Ms Clay's** amendment No 3 agreed to.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.58): In closing, I would like to thank everyone who has engaged productively on this matter—in particular, the Greens. I have to say that I was genuinely pleasantly surprised with the degree of positive and constructive engagement that we have had in reaching a position today. I am genuinely pleased that we will get a plan, I hope, from the government to actually restore some financial and fiscal responsibility. That is absolutely critical.

Of course, Mr Steel's speech needs to be dealt with to some extent, because Mr Steel has proven to Canberrans that ACT's new Treasurer is just as committed to spin and petty politicking as he always has been. He could not resist the urge to dive in and engage in a less than productive way. He could not resist the urge to go after the petty political points, the partisan political points, and suggest a range of things that were effectively straw-man arguments.

This Treasurer loves to build up a whole range of assertions about what the Canberra Liberals want, but he will not deal with the reality of what we are trying to achieve. Mr Steel has accused us of cherry-picking data. He wanted to point to inflation data as an example of what we did not mention. Of course, on plenty of occasions this week, the government decided to suggest that we should leave federal matters for the federal government and, for ACT matters, we can deal with them here.

On that federal matter of inflation, it is very important to understand that, when you scratch the surface of the data that Mr Steel is referring to, things start to come a bit unravelled for the Labor Party. What you have—and it is noted in the data—is a very clear instance of hidden inflation. It is not all rosy. It is not simply landing in the middle of the Reserve Bank's target band. Labor subsidies are hiding the inflation that is really occurring.

One of those is energy rebates. Energy rebates have hidden the fact that, in reality, prices are going up. Increases in commonwealth rental assistance hide the real picture

when it comes to rents. Global oil prices have dropped. That is a fortunate circumstance, although I think that, in future releases, we will see that trend reversed, based on the prices we are paying at the pump now.

Of course, there are public transport subsidies, like the ACT's free transport on Fridays and Queensland's 50c fares. They are hiding the real picture when it comes to inflation. They are not achieving more people taking public transport; they are simply hiding the real economic situation on the ground. If Mr Steel is so committed to spin that he cannot deal with the reality of the situation on the ground, if he is so committed to partisanship that he will not acknowledge where there are problems, he will run into severe problems when reality hits.

I am grateful that the Assembly will be passing this motion, but I hope that Mr Steel takes his job seriously.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Housing supply

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.03): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) Canberra's population is on track to reach 500,000 by 2027 and 784,000 by 2060;
- (b) ACT Treasury forecasts dwelling investment will strengthen from 2025-2026 as interest rates decrease, population grows and real wages increase demand;
- (c) we are in a housing crisis with Canberra dwelling values 36 percent higher than March quarter 2020, and the median price third highest after Sydney and Brisbane;
- (d) putting homes near jobs, shops, community infrastructure, parks and public transport reduces the cost of transport and cost of living;
- (e) Canberra needs more homes, housing choices, affordable homes and climate-friendly homes, and we also need to protect our green spaces and the local character of our communities; and
- (f) current RZ1 planning controls do not encourage missing middle townhouses, row houses, terrace houses and low-rise apartments;

(2) further notes:

- (a) in 2019, ACT Labor began a planning review that did not answer community questions about missing middle and RZ1 reform;
- (b) in March 2023, the ACT Greens proposed a parliamentary inquiry into missing middle and RZ1 reform but this motion did not pass;
- (c) in November 2023, ACT Labor launched the new planning system, designed to deliver better community outcomes and 100,000 homes by 2050, but the primary RZ1 missing middle reform has only led to 33 development applications lodged in the first year;

- (d) since August 2024, ACT Labor has been consulting with planning, design and building professions on a Missing Middle Design Guide (MMDG);
  - (e) in June 2024, ACT Labor procured Purdon Planning to report into the commercial, planning and lease barriers to missing middle development, and SGS Economics and Planning to report on the best locations for missing middle homes; and
  - (f) ACT Labor has not said whether it will publish these reports, run public consultation, or when it will act on the results;
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to make a Legislative Assembly statement by 4 March 2025 outlining the:
- (a) MMDG, and when it expects to finalise discussions with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and Pool of Practitioners (POP), how many TAG and POP meetings were held, and what issues were raised;
  - (b) Purdon Planning report and what planning, leasing and financial factors it identified to affect uptake, and what planning and non-planning changes and levers will affect supply and diversity; and
  - (c) SGS Economics and Planning report and what criteria it used to identify the best locations for missing middle and medium density homes; requirements to provide adequate public and private open and green spaces; and what analysis is undertaken of the local character of neighbourhoods; and
- (4) further calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) table in the Assembly by 24 June 2025 the:
    - (i) Urbis and Stewart report;
    - (ii) Purdon Planning report; and
    - (iii) SGS Economics and Planning report;
  - (b) release the final MMDG and Territory Plan amendments by the end of 2025; and
  - (c) table all reports and run public consultation on the MMDG prior to lodging any Major Plan variation.

Like the rest of the country, Canberra is in a housing crisis. We are struggling with homelessness. At the end of last year, the ACT had a total of 3,002 people on the public housing waitlist, and 1,291 of those are on our priority and high-needs waitlist. Priority waitlist Canberrans have to wait at least 187 days before they have a home—half a year. They are in the highest category of need. Housing is absolutely essential for them, and we cannot give them a home for six months. Those newly on the waitlist wait for 1,104 days, which is over three years of homelessness.

We do not know how many people are homeless and not on these lists. Anecdotally, a lot of people are couch-surfing, camping or sleeping in their cars. That conforms with recent media reports that homelessness is surging as housing is increasingly unaffordable. That is why the Greens took the most ambitious government housing plan to the last election. We were the only party with a detailed plan and a commitment that would clear the public housing waitlist.

Renting in Canberra is also tough. The ACT Greens stopped rent bidding, but Canberra rents still grew by 2.3 per cent over the last 12 months to December 2024. Rents are still increasing, and buying a house in Canberra is also tough. Canberra homes cost 36 per cent more than in the March 2020 quarter, and our median home price is the third highest after Sydney and Brisbane. With high average incomes and a rapidly growing population, pressure has been increasing on housing supply in the ACT, especially for households that are on lower incomes.

Housing stress is not felt by a small group of Canberrans; it is now common. There are very few homes that are affordable to rent or buy for essential workers, and a frightening proportion of Canberrans spend more than 30 per cent of their income on renting and housing, which puts them in housing stress.

We are not just in a housing crisis; we are also experiencing a climate and extinction crisis, and these are interlinked. Our city continues to expand into environmentally-sensitive areas that are further removed from the city centre, forcing people to use cars to get to work, shops, sport, doctors and community facilities and to take their kids to school. We have limited public transport and, the further we sprawl, the harder it will be to do public transport well. Big distances also do not encourage people to walk or ride to any of the places they need to go.

We are losing environmentally sensitive flora and fauna. Australia has not protected our environment at the national level. Yesterday's piece in the *Guardian* about the failure of our nature-positive and protection laws showed that Australia has cleared nearly eight million hectares of land—an area larger than Tasmania—this century. We are losing entire habitats and entire species, and, instead of protecting the areas that are left, we are trading them off as environmental offsets.

Bluetts Block is a really good example of one area that we need to protect. There are a lot of people concerned about Bluetts Block and the entire western edge. There are a lot of areas within our footprint, too, like the Ainslie Volcanics. The Greens have been campaigning for protection there for a long time.

Environmental destruction is, of course, linked to the climate crisis. That is why both the IPCC's sixth report and last year's *State of the environment* report said that we needed to stop urban sprawl. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment set out clearly the link between continued urban expansion and climate and environmental impacts. That is why the first recommendation in the commissioner's report was:

Legislate an urban growth boundary to contain urban expansion and achieve a compact, liveable and efficiently designed Canberra.

The good news is that there are solutions to all of these complex problems. Clearly, we need to build much more public housing and we need a lot more missing-middle homes. Here, we are probably all familiar with missing-middle homes now, but I will outline what I mean by that term for anyone who is listening. Missing-middle homes are the ones that we have less of in Canberra—the gap between large homes on big blocks and big apartment towers. They are townhouses, terrace houses and low-rise three-storey

apartments with big, shared green spaces that people see in other cities and love, and we do not have enough of them in Canberra. We need to see the delivery of more missing-middle solutions.

The Greens have a clear plan to address all of these issues. We took a progressive housing and planning policy to the last election. We want to set city limits. We want to stop urban sprawl and protect our environment. We want to re-create RZ1 to RZ2 and provide opportunities for greater densities within our existing suburban areas, especially the inner areas with large blocks that are close to shops, public transport, work, active travel, green spaces and community infrastructure. We want to build much more public, community and affordable housing.

We want local community input to guide how these areas are developed, especially when our blocks are consolidated. That allows for greater densities. That is particularly good in areas near shops, group centres and transport. We want to take into account broader community needs so that better outcomes are achieved, as opposed to being driven by proponents seeking to maximise revenue and as opposed to developer-led development. Our policies focus on the role of housing as a home, not housing as an asset to generate wealth.

In the week that we released our housing and planning policy, a third party reviewed similar reforms and concluded that those reforms would lead to 100,000 more homes in the ACT. Those are more new homes than any other plan presented at the election, and that is a plan that we could put together whilst protecting our environment and giving people access to more climate-friendly lifestyles. I am comforted to know that this approach would work and that there is a solution. Third-party commentators have said that this would work, but I am concerned that we have not yet seen delivery of this solution in the ACT.

I am pleased to say that we have common ground with Labor, the Liberals and the Independents on many of these issues. I think everyone has accepted that we are in a housing crisis and that we are not yet getting enough public housing built. Labor's Minister for Homes and New Suburbs gave a statement yesterday about this. She said Labor would increase Canberra's public housing, and I was really pleased to hear that; but, when I looked at the actual targets, they were underwhelming. We currently have around 200,000 homes in the ACT and, of those 200,000, 11,801 are public housing properties.

By 2030, we should have around 230,000 homes. ACT Labor say they will increase ACT public housing to 13,200 by 2030. Those are more homes than we have now, but it is not enough to keep pace with population growth and overall housing growth, let alone keep pace with our actual needs. To me, it looks an awful lot like Labor's figures take us backwards from where we are now.

Right now, about 5.9 per cent of our housing stock is public housing. On my numbers, by 2030, on the Labor plan, only 5.7 per cent of our housing stock will be public housing. I would love to be corrected—I really would—because we need more public housing; so, if I have those numbers wrong, please let me know, and I will be very happy.

Labor and the Greens do share a vision for a compact city. We ran a lot of reform work in this area last term, but unfortunately the five-year planning review, led by Labor, gave us the primary missing-middle housing reform of dual occupancies. We know that reform has only delivered 33 approvals in its first year of operation. It was not the reform that we needed.

ACT Labor did not answer the community questions about where we would see the missing-middle homes during the planning review. People wanted to know where these low-rise apartments, townhouses and terrace houses would go. I was at community forums when people asked these questions. They were not answered.

ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals voted down my motion in 2023 to run public consultation on missing-middle zoning reform. We were concerned that these questions were unanswered. We wanted an inquiry so that they could be answered. It is a shame because that would have been two years earlier than where we are now.

I am pleased to say that the planning minister is now doing the work that we need on missing-middle development. It is fantastic to see. I wish it had been done last term. We have not yet seen a commitment to release a timetable or a public release of that work. Given what happened last term, we Greens are really worried about that. Will the community see delivery this term, will they have genuine consultation, and will they see the documents in an open and transparent manner?

If, despite all of those delays and despite that lack of transparency, we see really great outcomes built on the ground here in the ACT, we might be okay with it. I am not convinced that we are seeing those great outcomes at the moment, and I think the debate on the last motion probably clears that up. I personally think it is too early to say that we have long-term trends going one way or another, but we certainly saw problems last year and we have not seen the pace of change in the reform that we need.

According to ABS data over recent years, the ACT pretty consistently sees 4,500 to 5,000 new dwellings approved each year. In 2024, the ABS data said that dropped to 2,180. Again, the *ACT Land and Property Report*, issued every six months, has indicated that approvals and completions dropped in 2024.

Those are the reasons why I have presented this motion today. The Labor government tell us they have been working on missing-middle and zoning reforms since 2019, and they have, but they have yet to deliver this work. They have two reports that are nearly complete. The Purdon Planning report will set out the commercial, planning and lease barriers to missing-middle development. It will tell us why we are not getting the missing-middle development that we need right now. Is it a lack of finance? Is it leasing problems? Is it zoning problems? Is it a lack of supplies? What is the problem? We need this information.

The SGS Economics and Planning report will set out the best locations for missing-middle homes. It will tell us where we should put these homes. It will answer the key questions that the community keep asking, and have been asking during the previous five years: where will these homes go? We would like these reports to be published. People want to know the details and they want to see progress.

ACT Labor has finally nearly finished its missing-middle design guide. That is great to hear. If it is done well, it will help industry to build more diverse dwellings like townhouses and terrace houses and, hopefully, it will help industry to do this with good design and good-quality homes that people want to live in. People want to see the details. They want to see this design guide, they want to be consulted on it and they want to know that it is going to help.

It would have been great if all of this work had happened during the planning review, when we had a lot of public consultation, but we are here now, so we hope to speed up the clock and make sure that this work happens. We would like a commitment that the work will be completed in a timely way while we are in a housing crisis, and we would like all of these reports to be published and consulted on so that people can see where we are up to.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.14): My comments in response to Ms Clay's motion will be brief. This morning I detailed the government's plan to deliver on the missing middle and the time frames for consultation. The government is currently developing the missing-middle design guide with the support of a technical advisory group, including architects and planners. At the same time we are also preparing a related major plan amendment.

I expect these reforms will be brought to the Assembly so that they can be made law by the end of the year. As I have already outlined in the Assembly, there will be community consultation on the draft missing-middle design guide around the middle of the year, ahead of bringing the major plan amendment to the Assembly.

To achieve these reforms, cabinet needs to make a series of considered decisions. Labor takes the system of government that we have seriously. We run a cabinet government. The cabinet needs to have full and frank discussions and reach decisions that are backed by cabinet solidarity. Afterwards, the decisions of government, and any information that supports them, can then be presented to the community and subject to scrutiny.

The confidentiality that applies to cabinet documents before they are considered is important, because it supports frank discussion and careful deliberation. The reports identified in this motion, two of which are not yet complete, were being prepared to inform cabinet's consideration of the missing-middle reforms. The Urbis and Stewart report is part of the broader development by the government of the draft missing-middle design guide, which is currently being informed by the technical advisory group and a pool of practitioners. The SGS report, which will give information about precincts and spaces for missing middle housing, is also not yet complete. The Purdon Planning report is being analysed by my directorate now to support future cabinet consideration of the missing-middle design guide. This has not yet occurred.

The government accepts this motion, subject to recognising that each of these reports will need to be considered by cabinet and a decision taken before any public release. The time frame that I announced for reform and consultation broadly fits with the time



frames in this motion. There will be community consultation from midyear on the draft missing-middle design guide, and I will bring forward changes to the Territory Plan to the Assembly, which a committee will have the opportunity to inquire into, hopefully before it is finalised before the end of the year. However, the release of any specific documents in June will be subject to the progress of cabinet consideration at that time.

In debates about process, it is important to keep sight of our goal. Our Labor government's goal is to enable 30,000 new homes—to build, buy or rent. The new reforms will allow a diverse range of housing to be built, not just dual occupancies but a range of townhouses, duplexes, row houses and walk-up apartments in existing residential areas, including RZ1 zones.

Labor's vision for this work is for it to be design-led so that the community consultation gives Canberrans a tangible picture of what successful medium-density reform looks like. This was the key difference between us and the other parties at the election. Labor was the only party that committed to undertake and prepare a detailed draft missing-middle design guide to consult with the community. The Greens did not commit to it. The Liberals did not commit to it. And I am not aware of any other party that committed to undertaking this design work. It is important that it is done right and that we can go out for consultation.

It is in stark contrast with the proposals from other parties, like the Greens, who suggested that we should just switch RZ1 zones to RZ2 in a major plan amendment without that detailed design guidance occurring. Zoning changes will only be proposed once we have a good understanding of the design outcomes that will be delivered, and government needs to properly consider this in the cabinet.

Delivering on the missing middle is only one part of Labor's broader vision for housing. As I outlined this morning, changes to zoning around our local shops and group centres will also promote access to public transport and renewal of shopping centres and the public spaces around them. Through combining land-use planning and transport planning, the government will also be ensuring long-term access to jobs, transport and amenity for existing and new residents. We will do that through transport-oriented development, which is another set of zoning reforms that we will be undertaking.

Labor's focus during this term, as it has been, will be on achieving practical outcomes. Earlier today, I proposed a concrete, practical measure to support the delivery of more public housing. In the last term, I took the hard decision to call in the approval of more than 3,000 new homes in the Molonglo Valley.

There will be opportunities for consultation with the community and for future scrutiny in this chamber of our government's housing proposals. I have outlined some of that time line today, and the government will not be opposing this motion, because the government already has a plan to consult and the time frame for delivering that consultation.

I will engage directly with Ms Clay in the lead-up to June about the specific documents listed in this motion and consider their executive privilege status at that time, and once they have been considered by cabinet.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.20): I rise to speak on Ms Clay's motion on behalf of the Canberra Liberals, and I want to thank her for bringing this important motion to the Assembly's attention. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion.

I will offer one critique; that is, it is my understanding that the 2023 proposed parliamentary inquiry into the missing middle and RZ1 reform, which Ms Clay referred to, was not supported because there was a committee process already happening that covered planning reform in general. That is my understanding, as opposed to the Liberals in that case opposing the inquiry itself. The committee was already looking at planning, planning reform and the bill.

As the motion points out, Canberra's population will grow significantly over the course of the century. We are on track to achieving a population of half a million people in this term of the Assembly, and to having three-quarters of a million by 2060. It is exciting to see how our city will develop into a futureproofed global capital city.

As Canberra grows, how we plan for and prepare to accommodate this growth must be examined. How do we meet the housing and sustainability needs of a growing Canberra, and how do we meet these needs at present? The work that has been conducted on the possibility of introducing missing-middle housing options will contribute to these questions.

As the motion says, Canberra is in the middle of a housing crisis—a crisis of both affordability and supply, and a crisis, in my opinion, that the government has contributed to. Young people are struggling to get a foot in Canberra's housing market. Families are struggling to get a foot in Canberra's housing market as well. It is not unusual to interact with couples, both with incomes, struggling to come up with a way to have their own home.

This has been a direct result of ACT Labor's land release policies. They have deliberately choked the supply of land releases to keep rates up, land tax up and property prices up, as evidenced by the public ballots for land releases in new suburb developments such as Jacka, Whitlam and Ginninderry. Land ballots for vacant blocks released in these developments continue to accumulate thousands of applications.

This demonstrates that there is a significant shortage of housing supply in the ACT, especially as our city grows, yet there are also many unrealised opportunities for brownfield and greenfield developments in the ACT. Significant swathes of RZ2 land remain underutilised relative to its potential land use as per planning regulations. The costs of construction, as well as the way that the LVC—the lease variation charge—is administered stymie development.

I remind the Assembly that the Canberra Liberals called for a full review of the LVC and its impact upon "respectful infill", as I called it during the campaign, and I will continue to call it that as our planning priority for missing-middle approaches—"respectful infill".

Approximately 73 per cent of all blocks in Canberra are currently zoned RZ1, which allows only for a single detached home. A significant proportion of these RZ1 blocks

are 800 square metres or larger. It is the major prevalence of RZ1 land where the idea of the missing middle could come in, and why it is important that we have this debate and see these studies that the government is undertaking. We need to know what the options are.

As any Canberra-based planning nerd who follows the exhilarating world of planning discourse in the ACT would know, the idea of missing-middle housing has been a prominent one over the last few years. Missing middle is the idea of allowing more affordable medium-density homes in areas predominantly featuring low-density homes. This is primarily due to the advocacy of the Missing Middle Canberra coalition, self-described, which includes Greater Canberra, Master Builders ACT, Community Housing Industry Association ACT, Public Transport Canberra, ACT Council of Social Service and many more who want to see supply increased and affordability more attainable.

The steps taken by the planning minister to instigate the missing-middle design guides and reports into the various issues facing potential missing-middle developments are a positive sign—unfortunately, very slowly, and not as transparently as they ought to be.

Ms Clay's motion is fair and reasonable in its "calls on" to have the planning minister make a ministerial statement in the next sitting period on these reports. That is very appropriate. Canberrans deserve an update on these reports in a timely manner. It is also fair and reasonable in requesting the tabling and release of these reports and amendments this year.

We simply cannot afford further delays to such important and potentially significant investigations. It is vital that we have greater transparency and integrity for these investigations so that Canberrans can know what the possibilities are.

Planning is a portfolio that affects all Canberrans, whether they realise it or not, which is why the release of timely and transparent updates is needed. The community deserves to know what is going on. Fundamentally, that is why the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion. We believe in transparency, integrity, accountability and executive responsibility. The essence of this motion speaks to each of these core values.

We are also broadly supportive of the desired outcome of finding ways to respectfully fill in our current footprint and, as members would be aware, to not ignore the potential for some expansion of the current footprint. We wholeheartedly agree with the notion that putting homes near jobs, shops, community amenities and public transport options is best practice. We believe in undertaking responsible urban renewal in conjunction with appropriate and extensive community consultation.

As members would know, we took to the last election a balanced and future-focused policy platform to planning, housing and land release. I believe we had the right balance between respectful infill and extending our footprint into areas like Kowen. Obviously, we have a new party room and new leadership, so all of those policies will be re-examined. We certainly have some good things to think about and perhaps to build on, and we look forward to seeing more of what the government is looking at, to inform us as well.

Our policies, such as expanded RZ1 dual occupancies and identifying mixed-use development opportunities in retail and commercial precincts, are ones that we will be re-examining, to see whether we can find, through the government reports and the government's transparency, ways to reflect on those and improve them. These policies were designed to maximise land use in existing urban areas, while preserving the unique character of our suburbs and ensuring that our residents' needs are at the forefront of our decisions.

It should be clear to all Canberrans that the Canberra Liberals want to promote greater standards of living and place Canberrans in close proximity to employment, retail and transport via respectful urban infill. The investigative studies that are underway may identify some missing-middle housing options as a viable way to achieve our desired outcome, other than what is already being contemplated. It may also highlight where the missing middle is not the most appropriate approach. But the only way we will know and be better informed is by seeing these reports. This Assembly, as well as all Canberrans, should have transparent updates and access to these reports and the design guides to enable due consideration.

In closing, I want to reiterate the thing that drives my own approach to planning in broad terms; that is, the vision of a bush capital, a vision that sees a city that Australians are proud to call their capital city, and that Canberrans are even prouder to live in. A capital vision is something that must be at the heart of all planning considerations—the vision of a bush capital that sets a fantastic example of how to do planning well, with the community at the heart of its planning approach.

As I said, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting the “calls on” in this motion, and I commend Ms Clay's motion to the Assembly.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (4.30): I rise to speak in support of this motion, and I thank Ms Clay for bringing it forward. When I talk with young Canberrans, they often speak, tragically, of dreading the future. Many young people cannot see any scenario where secure housing will become available to them. They feel the system is set up for them to fail. Even basic share housing for young people, particularly if located somewhere near where they study or work, is becoming unaffordable. But they are not only beaten down by a housing market that is clearly not designed for them; they also despair at runaway habitat clearing and native species extinction, and the stubborn reluctance of many people in power to course-correct.

On the 2024 WWF threatened species scorecard, the ACT was one of only two jurisdictions in Australia to see a decrease in multiple indicators, suffering the largest decrease on both the recovery plan and protection indicators. Over 65 local species are facing extinction. This is the consequence of relentless urban sprawl and of the conceptualisation of land as valuable only to the extent we can build on it.

Last year, at an election forum attended by some of my now colleagues, we heard from a Dickson College student who lived in an outer suburb with poor public transport connectivity about his frustration at the constant urban sprawl we are permitting here in Canberra. He just could not understand the government's willingness to keep building out, paving over bushland and constructing new suburbs further and further

away from the central services and employment hubs. This did not strike him, as a 17-year-old, as a sensible long-term approach.

He is not alone; 81 per cent of young Australians believe politicians think too short term. Can we prove them wrong and take a longer term view of Canberra's development? I think we can. We are sophisticated enough to preserve and restore the ecological diversity of our beautiful bush capital while building sufficient housing to offer a secure, affordable, well-connected home to everyone who needs one, as well as accelerating our city's move away from car dependency and towards becoming a city that is easy to get around by public transport, by bike or by foot. This should be the aim of missing-middle housing reform, which we have heard a lot about in this place, but still with relatively little meaningful action to date.

It is time for the government to commit to supporting the sensible, sustainable, affordable, livable, climate-ready, high-quality densification needed to address the ongoing housing crisis, while taking meaningful steps to become a world leader and establishing a culture of responsible stewardship over our natural environment, infused with First Nations knowledge about caring for country. I implore the government to show courage in pursuing these dual aims.

Canberra should not be the country's least walkable major city, with the lowest public transport of all capital cities in Australia and some of the nation's most expensive housing. We need to make it easier to build more duplexes, townhouses and terraces, while keeping our suburbs green and leafy, and enhancing the urban tree canopy to avoid heat islands. We need to invest in fewer road duplications and more public and active transport improvements. We need to view our open landscapes not just as empty land that presents development potential but as natural habitats that present opportunities to invest in supporting the ecological diversity of our local environment.

We should listen to young people about what they need from our city and what they want for our city. That is how we create a Canberra fit for current and future generations. Again, I thank Ms Clay for her motion, and I look forward to seeing further action in this area.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (4.34): I rise to speak in support of Ms Clay's motion. This motion puts us closer to realising a vision of a livable Canberra that is better for the climate, our health and our communities. At a time when Canberra's population is growing rapidly, there is an opportunity here to promise a more convenient and affordable lifestyle for the residents of this city.

By focusing on building homes located near shops, workplaces, schools, green spaces and public transport options, people will not have to rely on their private vehicles for every single trip. We know that this is a great thing that people want. Take the low-rise apartments in Kingston. You have shops, close proximity to workplaces, and great transport and housing, all in walking distance of each other. But most of Canberra's suburbs do not look like this. Instead, we have sprawling suburbs far away from workplaces, schools, social spaces and services, where, unfortunately, Canberrans have no realistic option other than to drive instead of walk, ride or hop on public transport to get to places, meaning large areas have to be allocated to car parking spaces. That means

less space for parks, playgrounds, cafes and other things that we know our community really love and enjoy.

Having more medium-density housing built where people already live and spend their time will reduce congestion on our roads and offer the added health benefits and reduced emissions that come with the switch to active and public transport. Planting these closely knit suburbs with lots of trees, well-maintained paths and green spaces will mean a more livable, beautiful and social community. Instead of spending all of our time in our own private backyards, children can play together in community green spaces. We will get to know our neighbours when out walking the dog and maybe even connect through a Sunday morning frisbee session or a neighbourhood Christmas party.

We are made to believe that we can either have a beautiful bush capital or more housing. The ACT Greens believe we can have both. This motion wants to make this vision a reality for more Canberrans sooner than we are currently seeing with the government's present planning policies. That is why I am pleased to support this motion today, because it seeks to move this forward and make it a reality for more of our residents sooner.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (4.36): I support Ms Clay's motion to receive the reports that are being undertaken; however, if we are to set an urban boundary and densification will be within the footprint, and if we are to use public transport and walk and cycle to our local amenity, we need to make sure we have local amenity. We need to make sure that our town centres are not just dormitories and that they are not just used to transit through to get to some other district. To do this, we need to look at the 2018 ACT Planning Strategy to ensure we understand the role of our town centres, group centres and local shops in our urban hierarchy, and I suggest that we review that plan to make sure we understand what we are doing.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.37), in reply: In closing, I am pleased to see that this motion is going to pass, and I thank every member for their contribution today. I think we have an awful lot of common ground, which is what we often find when we come in here. I am pleased to see that we will have midyear consultation on the missing-middle design guide, and it looks like we will have the release of the reports ahead of that consultation. I do understand that the minister undertook that he would engage directly if there were any reason that any elements of those reports could not be released, and I know that he will look at those reports with a view to releasing as much as possible, and will only redact things if it is overwhelmingly in the public interest to redact them.

I will check Mr Cain's point about what we said at the time on that inquiry. Thank you, Mr Cain. I will have a look at the transcript. I thank my colleagues Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick for their contributions. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Papers**

### **Motion to take note of papers**

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

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

## **Statements by members**

### **Nepalese Association of Agriculture, Forestry and Environment**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.39): A couple of weeks ago, I had the immense privilege of joining the Nepalese Association of Agriculture, Forestry and Environment for a guided walk around the Sanctuary in Tidbinbilla. I would like to thank them for their generous hospitality and boundless knowledge of environment. I am grateful to Dr Ram, Dr Yakindra and the rest of the team for a warm welcome.

In conversations as we sat over lunch, I learnt so much from everyone about shifts happening in the climate change research space, sustainable agriculture and food waste initiatives, and water quality surveys in the ACT. The association has built an excellent community of practice that, as members of this place, it would do well for us to tap into. I was also thoroughly impressed by an excellent performance—impromptu, in fact—by two of the youngest members of the association of their rendition of Taylor Swift and a wonderful Nepalese dance.

Thank you to Ngunnawal Elder Bradley Bell for a warm welcome to country and to Braydon and his wonderful family for taking us around country and sharing Ngunnawal knowledge and practices with us. We learnt about bush soap, which smelled amazing, and a plant, Mulleun's eggs—Mulleun being the beautiful wedge-tailed eagle on Ngunnawal country. We also had the incredible luck of sighting a beautifully healthy, red-bellied black snake lounging in the sun. That was really fun. I would be very eager to spend more time with the wonderful folks at the association and encourage other members to do the same.

### **Australia Day 2025—honours**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (4.41): I rise to be so bold as to doff this Assembly's collective cap in respect and congratulations for the magnificent work and service to the Tuggeranong community of Ms Susan Saunders and Mr John Saxon, who were both justly recognised in the 2025 Australia Day Honours List.

Ms Saunders was awarded the Public Service Medal. I was a public servant for many years—and may well be again—but, despite my best efforts in a number of roles, I have no idea of the diligence and competence it must take to earn the Public Service Medal. Ms Saunders, however, has been recognised for her skill and leadership through the development and implementation of the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Act 2012.

Mr Saxon received the Medal of the Order of Australia for his work to expand humanity's scientific understanding of deep-space tracking and exploration. The electorate of Brindabella is the ACT's hub for shallow and deep-space exploration, and has been since the Orroral Valley Tracking Station was opened in 1961. So Mr Saxon being recognised in this way has particularly apt orbital resonance. I should note, however, that, because there are, give or take, 200 billion trillion—or 206 sextillion—

stars in the universe, I presume that, notwithstanding this award, Mr Saxon's work is not yet quite complete.

On behalf of the Brindabella community, I thank Mr Saxon and Ms Saunders for their hard work and leadership. They join a long and inspirational list of Brindabella achievement.

### **Lunar New Year events**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.42): I rise to wish everyone a happy and prosperous Lunar New Year, the Year of the Snake. My first outing for such a celebration was last Tuesday, joining the celebrations at the Sakyamuni Buddhist Centre in Lyneham. I note as well that I was in the company of Mr Braddock and Miss Nuttall, and I was also able to pass on apologies from Ms Lee and Ms Barry, who were hoping to join us but circumstances prevailed to prevent that. It was disappointing that there was no Labor representative.

We welcomed the Year of Snake at the temple with joy, tradition and a strong sense of community. The Lunar New Year is more than just a date on the calendar; it is a time for particularly our Asian community to reflect, renew and consider their fresh beginnings—hence “new”. I want to thank the Abbot of the Van Hanh Monastery, Reverend Thich Quang Ba, for his kind invitation and for hosting us for a snack before the celebrations commenced. The formal part commenced at 8.30, which included a pretty spectacular lighting of fireworks that ascended to the top of this quite amazing building in Lyneham.

Well done to that community, mostly the Vietnamese Buddhist community. I look forward, obviously, to joining Ms Barry in particular at many of these sorts of events and celebrations.

*Discussion concluded.*

### **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### **Brindabella electorate—public art—community mural**

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (4.44): At the start of this year, a local Lanyon woman by the name of Tracy Hall decided to help our local community by turning a much-graffitied fence on Woodcock Drive, across from a busy intersection with Jim Pike Avenue, into a beautiful work of art. She saw a need in our community, encouraged by the local Facebook group, and decided to do something about it. Tracy set up a GoFundMe page, designed a mural and advertised at the local shops, the wonderful Little Luxton cafe and online. In no time at all, Tracy had enough money and the approvals to paint the first three offending fences.



Over the last couple of weeks, with community support and a small donation from the ACT government, Tracy has turned an ugly, graffitied fence into a beautiful work of art reflecting our local area, with bluebells, a kookaburra, the sunset over the Brindabellas and a tree trunk so perfectly fitted under the existing tree on the other side of the fence. Tracy has since gained approval for the final two fences from the property owners of the houses on either side of the current mural and is currently planning to expand the murals onto those two fences in the hope of creating an absolutely beautiful picture on Woodcock Drive in Gordon.

Tracy assures me that once the weather cools down she will be back out there, which sounds reasonable to me because, having visited Tracy a couple of times while she was out there painting, it was hot! I do not know how she did not melt, and when the windy days came through and she was trying to spray that spray paint, it was just spraying back at her. It is definitely reasonable for her to wait for it to cool down a bit before she gets back out there.

Tracy's work has brought a smile to the faces of so many locals. Every day she has been out there painting, people have stopped to help her, encourage her, donate, or just tell her that she has put a smile on their face. There have even been letterbox drops saying how wonderful the work is, and the Canberra Notice Board Group went off in such a beautiful way when someone shared the picture.

As a Lanyon resident who drives along Woodcock Drive more times than I can count, I hope this fence mural is just the start of something amazing for Lanyon and Tuggeranong, and the beautification of our area. Thank you, Tracy. Thank you to all the local kids from Gordon and Lanyon more broadly who helped out. And if you do stop by the mural, you can see where some of the local kids have drawn their own little bits on there, to always remember their part in this. Thank you to the members of our community who supported Tracy or just smiled and said a kind word while passing by. I know this mural brightens my day every time I go past, and I hope it does for everyone else in the community.

### **National Multicultural Festival 2025**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (4.47): I want to take a moment to reflect on all of the vibrant activities that have been happening in our capital and comment on the activity that we will be experiencing this weekend; that is, the National Multicultural Festival. We celebrated Australia Day last week and welcomed the Lunar New Year, which is the Year of the Wood Snake. These events showcase the rich diversity that makes Canberra truly special. But the celebration does not stop there. This weekend we will welcome and celebrate the spirit of multiculturalism at the National Multicultural Festival.

As a dedicated member of the multicultural community, and as someone who has attended this event for over 10 years and who has volunteered, I would say: you do not want to miss it. It is an event that promises to be engaging and vibrant, so, please, I would love to see you all there. Obviously, this event is a powerful reminder of the diverse culture and heritage that we share in our community. I am particularly excited to sample all of the cuisines from across the world, from the Pacifica cuisine to the

Asian cuisine, and then to the very intense flavours of the Middle East. It is a fantastic opportunity to taste the flavours of the globe, and the community, and to experience the rich traditions that make us unique.

I am excited to be joining the mini-parade for the Nepalese community and the African community. Unfortunately, I will not be participating or wearing any of the costumes, but I am hoping, again, that I will see you all there celebrating us as a multicultural community. The festival also serves to remind us and the rest of the country that Canberra is a city that celebrates diversity and openness. It shows that our city is not only a place of culture and cultural exchange, but also a thriving hub for businesses, innovation and collaboration. This festival is a classic note that Canberra is open for business and ready to embrace people from all walks of life.

The National Multicultural Festival would not be possible without the hard work of the volunteer organisations who dedicate their time and energy in making this festival a reality. I think there are upwards of 80 per cent or so of people working at the Multicultural Festival who are volunteers, so that is really commendable to the volunteering community. Their commitment obviously fosters a welcoming and inclusive community and does not go unnoticed. We owe them a deep gratitude, and we appreciate and thank them for their work.

I would like to acknowledge the amazing work of my colleague Peter Cain, who has shared his thoughts on the significance of this cultural event in this sitting week. His ongoing efforts to promote multiculturalism and strengthen our community are truly inspiring, and I thank him for his work. Obviously, there are big shoes to fill, but I am looking forward to working with him and collaborating with him.

As I wrap up, I would love us not to forget the message that multicultural celebrations bring, at a time when the world seems divided. Events like this festival remind us how much we can achieve when we come together to embrace our differences. I encourage everyone to take part in this celebration and to take the time to reflect on our diversity and what makes Canberra such a beautiful place in which to live. I look forward to the many celebrations and events as we continue to support ourselves and our community. I trust that, when we reconvene, we will do so with renewed energy and a shared commitment to community growth.

### **University of Canberra—Market Day**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.51): I would like to take this opportunity to speak very briefly about the UC Market Day, which I had the pleasure of attending on Wednesday of last week. I was joined by my lovely colleague Jo Clay MLA, and had a great time speaking with politically engaged young people on a range of issues that they wanted us to know about.

Folk asked us a ton of really good questions on our stance on a range of topics, local and federal. Members will not be surprised that cost of living and housing were both very common themes, as was integrity in politics. As ACT Greens spokesperson for education, it was great to talk to people about all elements of education, as teaching

students in particular wanted to know what we were doing for them. It was an honour to get to meet the people who will bring passion and energy to our schools, our hospitals and, of course, our universities, over the next few years.

A lot of people who think of Canberra higher education only think of the ANU, but the incredibly busy and bustling campus at the UC on market day shows that UC students are deeply invested in being part of their university community. I would, in particular, like to mention the multiple queer groups and the UC Refugee Action Club as some of the many groups that do a wonderful job ensuring that all students at the university feel welcome and that they belong in this community. Seeing the range of clubs and groups that exist to support students in so many different pursuits and through so many experiences is wonderful.

I was glad to see Vice Chancellor Bill Shorten there, as finally the university will be moving away from the series of interim vice chancellors that has prevented the university staff from having much stability over the previous year. I was also heartened to see members of the community asking Vice Chancellor Shorten some tough, sincere questions about his policies and intentions for the university. I think he has a long, hard job ahead of him to get the university governance back on track, and I think fronting up and being challenged by the broader university community is an important step to rebuild the trust that has been chipped away over previous years.

I am genuinely excited for the future of UC. Seeing such a thriving, happy community event makes it even clearer how much potential there is. With a permanent vice chancellor returning to the university, it is the perfect time to clear the air and celebrate what UC can be. I want to be able to return to a market day even more vibrant than the one that we had this year, at an institution that students, staff and community members feel safe and supported by. This is the UC where I see the future of Canberra.

### **Legal affairs—commencement of legal year**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.53): I rise in my capacity as shadow attorney-general to reflect on the recent commencement of the 2025 legal year, which was launched at the Supreme Court last week, on Tuesday, 28 January. I was fortunate to attend the ceremonial sitting to mark this commencement, in the company of the new Attorney-General and the presidents of the Bar Association and the Law Society, before the full bench of the Supreme Court, and obviously in the company of many of Canberra's lawyers and barristers.

The commencement of the legal year is a time for legal professionals and all those who work in the ACT courts and tribunals to reflect on and renew their dedication to justice, integrity and the rule of law. We cannot overestimate the important role that judges and barristers, solicitors, associates, attendants and administrators within our justice system and our legal system play in our society. Of course, as we are aware, the judiciary represent the third branch of our Westminster form of government.

It was a pleasure to attend the event and mark the commencement, with the Chief Justice presiding, and with presentations from the three that I have named previously—the new

Attorney-General, the President of the Bar Association and the President of the Law Society. I want to thank the courts and tribunal for organising this ceremony and for inviting me, in my capacity as shadow attorney-general.

Thank you as well to the Law Society and Bar Association for their promotion and of continuing advocacy for Canberra's legal professionals to make sure they receive the support they deserve, and to ensure they are conducting themselves in an appropriate, professional manner. I wish our territory's legal professionals all the best for this legal new year. I will continue to liaise with them, get briefings from them on relevant topics and legislation, and engage with them to show my support for a justice system and a legal system with integrity, setting high standards for our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 4.56 pm.**