



Debates

Weekly Hansard

Eleventh Assembly

6 February 2025

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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

The following petition has been lodged for presentation:

Hawker—Hawker Village redevelopment—petition 2-25

By Ms Barry, from 544 residents:

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly of a Direct Sale application to be lodged by Woolworths regarding a redevelopment proposal of the Hawker Village including the carpark, which is of major concern to certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to not proceed with the direct sale and save the Hawker Village Car Park and in addition, ensure that no further action is taken until an Assembly committee properly examines and considers this proposal.

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

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services.

Motion to take note of petition

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.03): I am happy to sponsor this petition for residents and the Friends of Hawker Village. This petition seeks to draw this Assembly's attention to the proposed development of the Hawker shops and concerns about the adequacy of the process of consultation undertaken by the developers.

My constituents in Hawker are responsible people who want to have a real say in the development of the community's centre. They recognise that the centre is dated and is somewhat rundown. They appreciate the opportunity to update the centre, and many in the community have some great ideas about how this can be done while maintaining the current amenities and the centre itself, but they have concerns about the scale and the potential of loss of amenities implicit in the current proposal.

They are concerned about access to amenities, and these concerns impact businesses in the area, as well as during the construction process. They are concerned that residents and business owners will not be consulted or informed about the impacts on business operations during the redevelopment. They are also concerned that public land is being transferred to a developer without adequate consultation, using a direct-sale process. The process leaves the developers to conduct consultations with the community. Clearly, developers have a vested interest in ensuring there are no objections, and many would deliberately ask vague questions such as: "Do you agree that this centre could be improved?" Clearly, most people would say yes, but this does not mean they support the proposed development. It has been reported to me by various residents of the Hawker community that a direct-sale approach is inappropriate for a development of communal facilities like shopping centres.

The petition seeks to draw the minister's attention to the fact that the current development proposal is not universally supported and asks for more work to be done to listen and address community concerns before the sale and development proceeds.

We recognise that there are challenges associated with getting public consultation right, but I would say that balancing community concerns with the interests of developers that are seeking to progress improvement would always be challenging, and there are ways we can do that properly. We on this side consider that many of these issues can be avoided with greater transparency and genuine consultation through any development stage.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.06): I endorse Ms Barry's petition and thank the residents of Hawker and the surrounding area for putting voice to legitimate concerns that are primarily, in my opinion, about the lack of government engagement with the community on this important proposal.

As members would be aware, I was speaking to the citizens around Hawker Village for all of last term, and that is continuing, and with Ms Barry as well. It is pretty clear that there are strong concerns about the lack of transparency on the direct-sale application, the lack of consultation by the government to gather the views of the community, and the failure of the government to respond with transparency and openness.

It is disappointing that Minister Steel is not here, because, as members would be aware, I pursued this matter with him last term. I really welcome the opportunity to pursue this with Ms Barry this term. The minister was asked last term, during hearings: "When will

the government make a decision on the direct-sale application?” He said it would be by the end of last year. As far as we are all concerned, that has not happened. So the “minister of failures” proves his credentials yet again, because we have obviously moved beyond the end of last year and no decision has been made.

The other thing I explored with the minister in hearings was whether the government has done consultation, to which he replied that consultation has happened, but of course, cynically, he was referring to the consultation run by Woolworths itself, asking the community whether they would like a better centre, or words to that effect. It is shameful behaviour by Minister Steel to ignore an opportunity to engage with the community, but that is just standard operating procedure for this Labor government.

It is a terrific move by Ms Barry to bring this petition forward. I thank the citizens who got behind it and got it over the important threshold of 500 signatures.

I urge the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, who have responsibility, to consider the petition and make a decision on whether to inquire into the issues raised by it. I urge members of the planning committee to launch an inquiry into this significant proposal. It is an important idea to refresh the centre—maybe keeping its distinctive accessible character but refreshing it, at the same time, with some ideas from the community and interested stakeholders. In the absence of the government doing proper consultation, this committee can basically force consultation by the government by holding an inquiry into the petition. I urge the members to take this most seriously, look into this petition and invite submissions from the community and relevant stakeholders, including, of course, the business community. The minister should take heed. This is not going away.

I again thank Ms Barry for bringing this petition forward and also thank all the petitioners who got it over the important threshold of 500 signatures. I urge the committee to launch an inquiry into this important issue.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.10): Whilst I am chair of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, I will be very clear right now: I am speaking in my capacity as a local member. I note that the petition has now been referred to my committee, so all I am going to talk about right now is some of the things I have done on this issue as a local member and what I have previously stated here, just so that we know where the story starts.

As a local member, I have been talking to the community as well. I really thank Ms Barry for bringing this petition forward today. It is really important to have the voices here. I lodged a question on notice to the government—the answer is on the register—about what the rules surrounding a direct sale to Woolies should be for a major development. I have also lodged a freedom of information request for more information. I spoke about this matter on Tuesday. That request has been denied due to reasons of cabinet-in-confidence, so I have gone to the Ombudsman to ask whether they think that information is genuinely cabinet-in-confidence or whether it is in the public interest to release the details of why this matter should be a direct sale rather than some kind of open public tender or RFQ process, which is the more usual way to run matters like this.

I previously wrote to Labor ministers about all of the issues that community members raised with me. There are different views on this matter. I would say that, on balance, most people probably want some kind of redevelopment to happen, and I wrote to the ministers and said that. There are a number of elements that my constituents are really concerned about keeping. They want to make sure they still have a post office; they want some subsidised community space so that there is something other than a shop, and they want to make sure that they have ready access to car parking. I have said in the past that underground car parking would be okay if it is well-designed. They want to make sure there is plenty of green space, that there are really good footpaths around the area and that government think carefully about the best use of this site in any redevelopment.

Those are things I have stated before. I am looking forward to seeing how this matter unfolds now.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health, Mental Health, Finance and Public Service portfolios— government priorities Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN—SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.12): I rise today to outline the ACT Labor government's priorities for the future across the health, mental health, finance, and public service portfolios. It is a privilege to continue to hold the health portfolio and to serve as Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service. The significance of these responsibilities is not lost on me, including in key areas of support for our community and our dedicated public servants, while working to ensure the sustainability of the ACT government.

However, before I get into the priorities across my current portfolios, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the officials and stakeholders in the portfolios I served in over the past two terms of the Assembly, particularly in child protection, family services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs—responsibilities I held for the full eight years. These portfolios provide an incredible insight into the lives of people whose voices are rarely heard in the mainstream of politics, and their stories will stay with me and continue to inform my work.

ACT Labor has always recognised that accessible public health care is a key enabler in ensuring all members of our community can realise their full potential and live fulfilling lives. Leading both the health and mental health portfolios means the ACT Labor government can deliver on our comprehensive plan to support the community's needs. Our vision is for a health system that is accessible, accountable and sustainable. These are the cornerstones of the policies we took to the election, and that is what we will deliver.

Last term, we concentrated on improving performance across our hospitals, and today the *Report on Government Services* confirms the improvements we made in the last term. The ACT's emergency departments have moved from some of the poorest performing at the start of the last term to some of the best. The ACT improved its

seen-on-time measure more than any other jurisdiction, moving to 62 per cent of patients seen on time, while median waiting times dropped to a low of 25 minutes.

In 2024-25, our public health services are seeing record activity. In the first six months of the financial year, Canberra Health Services saw 85,000 more patient encounters compared to the same period the year before, from 528,152 to 612,719 encounters, or a 16 per cent increase. This includes a 7.6 per cent increase in emergency department presentations and an 8.8 per cent increase in overnight hospital admissions.

This increase in demand is not unique to the ACT. Record activity is further compounded by the cost of delivering hospital care in Australia increasing year on year. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare recently released data showing that individual spending per person on hospital care increased by an average of 2.8 per cent per year between 2017-18 and 2022-23 after adjusting for inflation, so that is a real increase of 2.8 per cent per year.

After a decade of cuts to Medicare and poor investment in public health services under the previous coalition government, we are seeing the long-term impacts of the previous federal Liberal government's health policies—driving patients to the acute hospital system and making it more expensive for states and territories to deliver services.

As a responsible Labor government, we have been planning for and investing in health service growth in the ACT. The 2024-25 budget increased funding to Canberra Health Services by more than six per cent to support our public health services to respond to cost escalations and demand trends that were being seen in 2023-24. Through the mid-year review, we are delivering a further boost with an additional \$227 million to meet the additional demand we have seen in the first six months of 2024-25 and to preserve our public health services.

However, this level of growth cannot be sustained. Health accounts for one-third of the territory budget. It simply cannot grow at eight, 10 or 12 per cent a year for multiple years. To ensure our services are accessible, accountable and sustainable into the future, the government must thoroughly review how we are providing health services. Difficult decisions have been taken by a number of states, including, for example, significant reductions in elective surgery targets, removal of hiring incentives, and reductions in staffing profiles. The ACT Labor government is not proposing to emulate these drastic actions, but, to continue delivering accessible services, it is incumbent on the government that we work to ensure we are well placed to deliver on the vision Canberrans endorsed.

The government is already taking steps to bring elective surgeries back in house and taking advantage of our new suite of state-of-the-art theatres at Canberra Hospital. We are reviewing our procurement processes to drive efficiency and are reducing our reliance on agency and locum contracts. Notwithstanding the incredible challenges Australia's public health system faces, we know that Canberrans voted for our plan for health system reform.

As the only party to detail a comprehensive plan, Canberrans know they can trust Labor to invest, build and grow our public health system. This includes hiring 800 more health workers over five years from the 2024-25 budget, investing in new infrastructure,

continuing to support our workforce, and building a health system that is inclusive and culturally safe. This will not be achieved by being timid or putting off hard decisions. We will continue to review and make changes to planned care across the health service and build on our work in the last term to ensure we are developing a truly integrated public hospital network under Canberra Health Services.

Balancing planned and unplanned care, the new integrated operations centre has been supporting patients to move through our hospitals quickly, meaning more beds are available, which translates to better patient outcomes. The integrated operations centre also functions as a service planner. By reviewing the health system holistically, we can see what changes can be made in the medium to long term to improve the experience for patients.

CHS will work with consumers, carers and the health workforce to make evidence based changes that reduce what is known in the health sector as low-value care. These are services or procedures that provide no or marginal benefit to patients. Low-value care is an area of significant global research to support better outcomes for patients and optimal resource allocation across health services. Examples include knee arthroscopic debridement or the routine use of antipsychotic drugs to manage symptoms of delirium during palliative care. For anyone wanting to understand this better, the Choosing Wisely Australia website, hosted by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, is a great resource for health professionals, consumers and policy makers.

The Barr Labor government has a strong record in delivering health infrastructure investments and will continue to develop state-of-the-art facilities to support our territory-wide network. In 2024, Building 5 at the Canberra Hospital was completed. At the time it was commissioned, it represented the largest health infrastructure project undertaken since self-government.

This term, we will continue to progress with enabling and early works for the new more than \$1 billion North Canberra Hospital. We will also deliver new health centres, the south-side hydrotherapy pool, the Watson health precinct, an acute palliative care ward at Canberra Hospital and a community based imaging service in Belconnen. We will also invest in new clinics at four school sites and more nurses to provide more care for young people.

In light of the challenges we face, it is critical that we remain focused on supporting our health workforce, and we are. In the last term, the ACT government expanded the health workforce by well over the 400 healthcare workers we committed to, introduced mandated nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios, boosted the allied health workforce in acute care and invested in more supports for junior medical officers and wider workforce wellbeing.

This term we will continue to work towards our election commitment to hire 800 more health workers—nurses, midwives, doctors, allied health workers and support staff. This investment will be underpinned by our continuing strategic work on the ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032 to sustainably grow our workforce and support them to stay in the ACT in great places to work. It is because of the successful recruitment campaigns we ran last year, supported by a clear brand and message, that

CHS is now in a position to reduce the use of agency and contract staff in favour of permanent employees.

This term we will support Canberrans to stay well in the community through continued implementation of the ACT Preventive Health Plan 2020-2025, recognising that prevention is key to saving future healthcare system costs. We will also continue implementing Maternity in Focus: the ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032, the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan 2023-2030 and the Best Start for Canberra's Children: the First 1000 Days Strategy.

We know the ACT has long had comparatively low rates of bulk-billing and high out-of-pocket costs for both general practitioners and private specialists. Previous ACT government initiatives have made a difference, and this term we are committed to working alongside the Capital Health Network, doctors and practice owners to co-design an \$11 million fund to encourage more GP bulk-billing and a \$4 million Professional Development and Wellbeing Fund for primary care. We will also be working closely with clinicians, consumers, people with disability and other stakeholders as we work towards establishing an ACT voluntary assisted dying scheme from 3 November 2025.

In the mental health portfolio, I will continue the government's commitment to a whole-of-community approach to mental health and wellbeing, and to suicide prevention, and will deliver an overarching plan for mental health in the ACT. Importantly, however, my focus on mental health will not be primarily on plans, strategies and position statements; it will be on working with CHS and our non-government partners to improve service delivery and address gaps in practical ways.

Bringing the mental health portfolio back together with the rest of the health portfolio will facilitate better integration and collaboration. With regard to supporting children, young people and their families, particularly those with complex circumstances, bringing the Health Directorate and Community Services Directorate together also offers the opportunity for greater coordination, joint policy and service development.

That is a good segue to the public service portfolio, which I am pleased to have taken on. The ACT public service is unique. Our staff operate hospitals, schools, public transport and other essential social and municipal services, while policymakers often undertake nation-leading work on social, economic and taxation policy. In the lead-up to the election, ACT Labor committed that a re-elected government would support high-quality public services by protecting jobs and growing the public sector workforce. This remains a firm commitment.

Following the election, the Head of Service announced that the ACT public service will undertake machinery of government changes to facilitate a closer alignment between the structure of the public service and the priorities of the government. The ACTPS 2025 Taskforce has been established to steer those changes in collaboration with the ACTPS, with Ms Caroline Edwards PSM appointed as chair. Alongside this, we must continue to ensure we are supporting our public servants to deliver for Canberrans. This year, I will begin work to review governmental programs and modernise the ACT public service, strengthen accountability and improve service delivery.

Our vision for Canberrans interacting with government is that it will be seamless and secure for all people and businesses, taking an “inclusive innovation” approach, making sure the benefits of the digital economy, including training and jobs, are accessible across the community.

Canberra is a smart city, and Canberrans expect us to be a government that makes the most of new technologies to improve service delivery. This includes public-facing technology for government services, enabling the community to easily and seamlessly interact with government, as well as using the right technology internally to optimise efficiency and effectiveness and ensure our hardworking public servants are supported by the best tools to do their jobs.

Of course, this is an area where economies of scale are not on our side, and we will need to continue to prioritise to ensure effective delivery of critical projects. Our technology priorities at the start of this term include: continuing to work on improving governance and uplifting capability in the management of projects with technology components; continuing to ensure we leverage efficiencies for the community and for the public service through our technology investments; continuing to meet and exceed our cybersecurity commitments to our community and Australia; and using data more effectively to understand underlying issues in areas such as family, domestic and sexual violence, and to better support service delivery. To achieve these outcomes, the ACT public service needs to continue attracting great people, especially in areas of workforce shortage, and to communicate and celebrate what makes the ACTPS a model employer.

As Minister for Finance, I look forward to working closely with the Treasurer. As I said earlier, ensuring that we are sustainably delivering the services Canberrans expect is critical and will be a focus as we deliver on our fiscal strategy, but I also recognise that government is here to ensure Canberrans are not left behind as a result of economic volatilities well outside their control.

Many Canberrans are doing it tough right now. Across Australia, many people are feeling the pressure of the increased cost of living. We heard this throughout the election campaign, and that is why ACT Labor committed to continuing the \$800 electricity, gas and water rebate to households with an eligible concession card. This makes the recent one-off increase permanent, providing assurance that the support will continue.

We will also continue the \$250 local trainee and apprentice payments in 2025-26 and will double that for first-year trainees and apprentices, and we will increase the Sustainable Household Scheme, injecting a further \$75 million in loan capital, giving Canberrans access to loans to assist with the cost of energy-efficiency upgrades to their homes.

This year represents a time of great opportunity for the ACT. I look forward to ensuring our frontline health and mental health services support Canberrans to access the care they need, when and where they need it, working with the public sector to deliver on government priorities, and continuing to engage with the community across my portfolios in turning the ACT Labor government’s commitments into reality for Canberrans.

I present the following paper:

Ministerial priorities—Health, Mental Health, Finance and Public Service
Portfolios—Ministerial statement, 6 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Business, Arts and the Creative Economy, Children, Youth and Families, Multicultural Affairs, Skills, Training and Industrial Relations portfolios—government priorities
Ministerial statement**

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.26): It is an honour to be able to provide a statement today outlining the priorities for my portfolios for this year and for this parliamentary term. I look forward to building on the progress made during the last term of government and continuing to deliver our progressive and practical plan for Canberra's future.

As Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, I am focused on implementing the ACT Small Business Strategy, which was released in July 2023 by my predecessor in this portfolio, Minister Cheyne. The strategy sets out the ACT government's commitment to supporting our small business community and reaffirms the value and importance of small businesses to the ACT economy. Work to deliver the strategy is well underway. Of the strategy's 50 priority actions, 20 have been either completed or are being delivered through ongoing initiatives, and work has commenced on delivering another 27 actions.

We have more businesses in the ACT than ever before, with more than 36,000 businesses operating in the ACT and nearly 97 per cent of them employing fewer than 20 people. The ACT government will continue to support businesses to start up, operate and grow through funding a number of programs, including our Canberra Business Advice and Support Service, or CBASS, which provides professional and tailored support for businesses at all stages of the business lifecycle. We will also continue to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses through the targeted Badji program run by Coolamon Advisors.

We recently opened the second round of our Social Enterprise Grants Program, aimed at supporting new enterprises to start up and helping existing enterprises to take the next step in their business journey. I look forward to seeing how the second round goes and thank The Mill House Ventures for their work supporting our local social enterprises through the program. The government will continue to support businesses at all stages, to improve the business experience when dealing with government, and to showcase and promote our great local small businesses.

The Arts and Creative Industries component of the portfolios are central to achieving our goal of Canberra being recognised as the arts capital of Australia. The ACT government's Art, Culture and Creative Policy recognises the important relationships between arts, culture and creativity domains. I look forward to continuing to meet and engage with arts organisations, artists and arts workers across the territory, and to deliver on our election commitment to increase investment in the arts sector. The creative industries are growing in Canberra, and we will also continue to invest in our burgeoning screen industry. I am also keen to explore how we can encourage more investment in our local digital games industry. Canberra already has capability in this area and is well placed to capitalise on the global growth in this industry.

This year, work will continue on upgrades to our arts facilities, including the Gorman Arts Centre and Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Work will also continue on the Kingston Arts Precinct, which will be a wonderful destination for Canberra's visual arts and culture. It will include purpose-built facilities for six leading visual arts organisations, as well as a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art space. Our program of recognising significant women in the ACT's public art collection will continue this year. Following the unveiling of *Senator Ryan Addresses the Rally*, by renowned sculptor Lis Johnson—a remarkable piece—we are now in the process of commissioning an artist to create a public artwork honouring Canberra's Stasia Dabrowski OAM, fondly known as Canberra's soup kitchen lady. We will also continue with the ACT Book of the Year Award and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts and Arts Activities grant funding, which provides important support for Canberra artists, groups and organisations to undertake arts activities across a huge range of art forms.

In Skills, Training and Industrial Relations, I am looking forward to further delivering on our priorities under the National Skills Agreement. I would like to thank Minister Steel for all the work done to enter into this agreement in the previous term of government. To guide how we will deliver against the agreement, we have recently developed a jurisdictional Skills Action Plan, which outlines the shared vision and priorities of the National Skills Agreement and the National Skills Plan. As guided by these plans, we will ensure we have the strong and skilled workforce that our growing city needs.

In partnership with the Australian government, we will continue to deliver Free TAFE to attract and support people into areas of skills need by eliminating the financial barrier to entry. There will be a particular focus on access to free training in areas of skills need for priority cohorts such as young people, jobseekers and women in non-traditional fields. We expect another 1,200 enrolments in Free TAFE this year, as well as an additional 340 places available in construction related courses, including 80 pre-apprenticeship places.

We will also progress the development of our Electric Vehicle Centre of Excellence at CIT, which will support growth in the emerging EV industry, both in light and heavy vehicles, and a range of other special policy initiatives will be developed under the National Skills Agreement this year to deliver on national priorities. This year we will also open the new CIT Woden Campus, a purpose built vocational education and training

facility, which will support excellence in education and learning outcomes, and a new CIT Yurauna will be delivered at the CIT Bruce campus to replace the current facility.

While the ACT labour market continues to be one of the strongest in the country, skills shortages remain across a range of key industries. Skilled migration plays an important role in addressing skills shortages in Canberra, and the government will continue to work with the Australian government on the implementation of the national strategy.

We know employment participation and a safe and healthy workplace are the backbone of a productive and economically prosperous society. The ACT government is an innovative leader in developing and adopting contemporary early intervention, injury management and work rehabilitation support and programs. The Work Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2026 provides a pathway to keep ACT public sector employees and workplaces safe, promote health and wellbeing, and support people to recover and return to work after an illness or injury.

I am also committed to ensuring ongoing review of public service legislation to remove barriers to workers accessing permanent employment entitlements. We will continue to keep the ACT public services in public hands and maintain and support the Union Encouragement Policy. The ACT government is also committed to a national vision for work health and safety outcomes across Australia under the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033. We will work to establish a nationally harmonised labour-hire licensing scheme, as committed to by Mick Gentleman on behalf of the ACT along with other workplace relations ministers in December 2023. I am particularly mindful of ensuring that a national scheme does not water down the robust framework established by our local licensing scheme. Another particular focus in this portfolio will be on workplace regulatory settings in relation to psychosocial hazards and psychological injury, both embedding the recent regulatory changes and ensuring they are operating as intended.

Similarly to my other portfolios, I am committed to continuing to build on the work underway in the Children, Youth and Families portfolio. My priorities will be to continue to build a sector focused on strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe, strong and connected to their family, culture and community. There is much that has been achieved and much to be done.

I recognise the work that has come before to raise the ACT's minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 years. The ACT will be the first Australian jurisdiction to raise it again, to 14, later this year. This will see us meeting international standards in human rights and recognises that anti-social behaviour in children and young adolescents requires a very different response. This is why we have invested in the implementation of the Therapeutic Support Panel which focuses on providing individualised and trauma-informed responses to young people to divert them from youth justice. I am already working closely with the chair to make sure the system supports the panel and their practitioners to do the best it can for young people and their families.

If, for a range of reasons, young people find themselves involved in youth justice, I am committed to ensuring we provide the right supports and throughcare to get the best

outcomes for young people and the wider community. The recent reviews into the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre by the Custodial Inspector and the response to the *Final Report on the Blueprint for Youth Justice* will be instructive as we continue to deliver high quality youth justice responses, by building a sector that focuses on prevention, early intervention and diversion in the first place. I share this sentiment across our child protection and child wellbeing responses.

The government is in the midst of a significant reform program to reshape the child and family sector. This is through the ambitious child, youth and family reform program guided by Next Steps for Our Kids; the establishment of the preferred provider panel that extends support from sustaining family initiatives all the way through to supporting young people as they move into early adulthood; and delivers on our election commitments to build a sector wide-child and family network and a new Child and Family Centre in Molonglo.

To support the reform program, we will also continue to modernise the Children and Young People Act. It will give us a legislative framework focused on early support and strengthening families but one that is also efficient and effective in responding when children and young people are at risk of harm. My commitment is to look to the voices of people with lived experience of the system to help understand the work that is required, including the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to continue to tackle the real problem of overrepresentation in our statutory child protection and youth justice systems.

I have been so fortunate to have spent the past eight years in this place building relationships with the multicultural community and listening to their lived experience of Canberra, and I feel very privileged to take on the Multicultural Affairs portfolio. As minister, I will work to promote an inclusive and diverse community where people from all cultures can feel at home. We are already a diverse and welcoming city, as highlighted by our accreditation as an Advanced Welcoming City. This was a commitment in our last term of government, and I am keen to ensure we maintain that status.

A big part of this commitment will deliver another fantastic National Multicultural Festival starting this weekend, which is one way we come together and celebrate all the different cultures that make up our incredible community. The 2025 festival will feature over 270 stalls and over 200 performances from community-led organisations to nationally acclaimed artists. As well as being a joyous celebration of cultural diversity, the festival brings economic benefit to the territory, attracting over 19,000 visitors to the ACT. This year we are, of course, extending beyond the traditional city precinct and further into Glebe Park. We hope that more members of the community can enjoy this iconic event safely and comfortably. We also want to make sure new Canberrans know just how welcome they are, which is why we have added new venues to our citizenship ceremonies ensuring these events remain an occasion of gravity and celebration for our newest community members.

We know that when people first arrive in Canberra, they may have faced incredible trauma and hardship. We are a proud Refugee Welcome Zone and continue to provide support for resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian entrants living in the ACT. Regardless of all this work, not everyone in Canberra is welcomed and celebrated for their diversity as much as they should be. This

is why we will deliver on our commitment through the “positive duty to eliminate discrimination” inclusion in the ACT Discrimination Act. Over time, this will ensure all businesses and organisations take reasonable and proportionate steps to make adjustments to accommodate a person’s needs. This means businesses and organisations are required to be inclusive places and will hopefully benefit from diversity. This year the ACT government will lead the way in rolling out this significant reform.

I have no doubt that throughout the year there will be more we will seek to achieve, and I am looking forward to meeting with stakeholders across my portfolios to see how we can make Canberra an even better place to live. We will continue to work together with the community to deliver the progressive agenda we put forward at the election.

I present the following paper:

Ministerial priorities—Ministerial statement, 6 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.40): I want to speak to the arts elements of the minister’s statement, and I do thank the minister for his statement. He is new to the portfolio, and I know he is enthusiastically embracing it. He is out talking to all of the stakeholders and getting across all of the problems in the arts scene, and it is really good to see. Last term the Labor government set up a pretty bold statement of ambition for the arts and that was welcome: to see Canberra as Australia’s arts capital. I think we are all really looking forward to seeing that statement of ambition being realised.

There are some difficulties in the sector at the moment. I think the Canberra Youth Theatre’s recent, very difficult decision, when they announced that for the entirety of this year they will not be able to stage their arts programming, is really symptomatic of what unfortunately might be likely to happen to a lot of our arts organisations and our artists. Our entire arts budget for our arts organisations and all of the grants for all of our artists and our program funding is only \$12 million at the moment. It is a pretty small proportion from a \$9 billion arts budget, particularly when we look at the ambition we have stated for Canberra to be Australia’s arts capital.

I was really pleased to see there was a commitment to increase this funding this term. The Greens suggested we should double that budget, which is not a huge increase, given that we are only talking about \$12 million. Unfortunately, we could not persuade our colleagues to commit to that, but we have persuaded our colleagues to commit to increasing the budget by 25 per cent plus CPI and we have put that in our Supply and Confidence Agreement. I know a lot of the organisations are very keenly awaiting details of when that 25 per cent plus CPI might start and how that money might be allocated, whether it is by need or based on the current funding arrangement. The details will be very welcome when they come. I think “the sooner the better” is extremely important when we are seeing that some of our extremely long-established arts organisations, organisations that have been operating really well here for decades, are now unable to afford to stage arts programs in a context in which we wish to be Australia’s arts capital.

I also want to remind everyone in here—I am not sure if everybody managed to get a chance to read the report that was commissioned by the ACT government last term into the economic contribution of ACT’s creative industries. I was pretty surprised. I understand the value of art. For me, the value of art is that it is a core part of our identity. It really is part of what makes us human. It brings us together. It helps us share culture. It helps us process trauma. It is absolutely part of what it is to be a human being. I was surprised when I saw the massive economic contribution that our arts sector is making here locally. Apparently, our creative arts industries are contributing \$2.9 billion to our local ACT economy. That is not to all of Australia. That is just here in the ACT: \$2.9 billion; around 8 per cent of our local economy. So, of course, there will be quite serious implications if our artists and our arts organisations can no longer afford to practice and make these economic contributions. I would suggest that perhaps small increases to a \$12 million budget in the face of a \$2.9 billion economic contribution might be a short-term decision. We are very much looking forward to seeing enthusiastic and adequate support for the arts this term.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.43): I would like to note that the creative arts policy includes, “Create amazing art and culture—everywhere, at any time, for everyone.” I would like the Assembly to note that the Murrumbidgee electorate does not have one arts centre, and I would like to see some planning that includes an arts centre in the Woden town centre, as it is the major hub of Canberra’s south.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples—anniversary 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) (10.44): I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise all people and families with a connection to this land and the ACT region. I wish to acknowledge and respect all the continuing culture—the longest continuing culture in the world—and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

On 13 February we acknowledge the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. In this historic gesture, then Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd said:

That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment ... The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

Today, in the spirit of the National Apology, I wish to honour the resilience and strength of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their profound connection to family, Country, community, culture and language, which has endured despite enormous challenges from the intergenerational impact of colonisation and discrimination. The National Apology on behalf of the Australian government to the Stolen Generations acknowledged and expressed sorrow for the pain and trauma caused by past Australian government laws and policies that forcibly removed children from their families, communities, land and culture, and solely did this on the basis of their race.

Saying sorry was an important step in the ongoing journey of reconciliation and we acknowledge there is more to do to support healing and address injustice. The ACT government is proud of the work that we continue to drive to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. We are proud that the ACT government is committed to the self determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by working in partnership with their community, organisations and representatives.

We are proud of the work that we are doing in partnership with the Elected Body and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement. To strengthen this, the ACT government committed an additional \$1.19 million over the 2024 and 2025 periods to support the Elected Body to be a strong and independent advocate and a critical partner with the ACT government in the development of approaches that will close the gap.

Noting the history of the Stolen Generations, we are proud of the work that is underway to reform and build stronger outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who enter, or are at risk of entering, the out of home care system. The Community Services Directorate has been undertaking significant reform in the Children, Youth and Families Division. The reform is based on the principle that children are best supported and achieve greater outcomes and wellbeing if they remain with family when it is safe to do so. Children, Youth and Families have established a First Nations team whose work is positioned to provide earlier support to children and families. This is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led team that is already delivering very positive outcomes, and the ACT continues to see a decrease in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. The ACT continues to have one of the highest proportions of placement of children with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin, and this aligns with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles of recognising that kin should always be the first option for children.

We have invested in being able to do this by embedding systems to support family finding, family group conferencing, and building greater family and kin care support arrangements. This work would not be possible without our strong leaders from the community, and through the work of bodies like the Our Booris Our Way Implementation Committee, working with dedicated staff within the ACT government. Children, Youth and Families have a policy commitment to ensure, over the next few years, that up to 100 per cent of all children, young people and families are supported

by Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations. This includes transferring existing, and any new, investment funding under the Next Steps over to those organisations. These reforms will change lives for future generations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We are nearing completion of the construction of a purpose-built facility for Gudan Gulwan who, for over 30 years, has worked with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the ACT. The commitment of more than \$19 million has seen us work in partnership with Gudan Gulwan to design, and now build, a facility that will support future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and families.

The ACT government has also established the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, who continues to work in partnership with us to improve outcomes for children and young people.

In February 2023, following a motion put forward by the ACT government, the Legislative Assembly confirmed its support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We remain committed to its implementation, as we reflect on the National Apology, to make sure that the historic policies that impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, like those that underpinned the Stolen Generation, never happen again.

The three key pillars of the Statement from the Heart are Voice, Treaty and Truth. The first pillar is voice. Having a strong voice is essential to strong partnerships and shared decision-making. We are proud to have the longest standing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to government through the Elected Body. To deliver on this, the ACT government has committed to providing support and strengthening the Elected Body. We are proud to work with, listen to and lift the voices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and strengthening outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. To further support this, and within our funding commitment of \$1.19 million, an Aboriginal consultant has been engaged to work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and develop a listening report, sharing their views and aspirations with the Elected Body. Following the provision of the listening report, the ACT government will work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to strengthen the Elected Body model so that it can continue to represent their rights and interests into the future.

The second pillar is treaty. The ACT government is committed to progressing discussions about treaty here in the ACT, recognising the complexity of what this would look like for traditional custodians through the mechanism of native title and the needs of the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The third pillar is truth. The ACT government has committed to progressing a process of truth telling in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, noting that this is needed to enable reconciliation and active, ongoing healing. In the spirit of the National Apology and our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, we are working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations, and this must be underpinned by changing the way that we work across the ACT government.

We are signatories to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and in accordance with our commitments, we are developing a transformation strategy to embed key elements that strengthen how we work with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In line with Priority Reform 3 of the National Agreement, our ability to identify and eliminate institutional racism, discrimination and unconscious bias; to embed and practice meaningful cultural safety; and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and embrace truth telling, will be critical to how we work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to support them to achieve stronger life outcomes for today's generations and those into the future.

As agreed by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap, we are progressing this work as a priority to strengthen how, together, we achieve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

As the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, I am committed to making a difference; to build upon the work of my predecessors to continue towards healing the wounds of the past as we walk together to build a brighter future; and to continue to build a community that celebrates and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their culture.

I present the following paper:

National Apology Anniversary—Ministerial statement, 6 February 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 258—amendment

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.53): I move:

That standing order 258 be omitted and substituted as follows:

“258. If a committee desires the attendance of a Member as a witness, the Chair of the committee shall, in writing, request that Member to attend. Should the Member refuse to attend or to give evidence, the committee shall report the matter to the Assembly. The Assembly may order a Member to attend a committee and to give evidence to the committee.”.

The motion I am moving today to change the standing orders is more of a symbolic change than a substantive one. Some context might be useful for the newer members, who are about to experience their first annual reports hearings. Past practice has been that the committee schedule has been largely determined by government—both the desires of government committee members, and the schedules and availability of ministers.

This has meant that some members, on some occasions, have not been able to secure enough time to fully investigate certain matters of public interest through the annual reports and estimates process. There is a process whereby ministers can be recalled for an additional hearing, but, in practice, that has also been subject to the whims of government, which has ultimately limited the transparency and accountability, and that is the whole reason we have annual reports and estimates hearings.

But the government does not have the majority in the Assembly now, and so it cannot dictate terms to committees anymore. The purpose of this motion is to reaffirm the new state of play and make it crystal clear that the Assembly expects ministers to attend hearings, including spillover hearings. This means that a minister's desire not to attend, or any scheduling conflicts, are now less important than their full participation in these hearings. If they choose not to participate, the Assembly will have the power—and, I believe, a strongly felt desire—to compel that participation. My hope and expectation is that we will not need to use the power. I think the very act of agreeing to this motion will send a clear signal to every minister that we are willing to compel their participation, and that they will do so without needing to be compelled.

Before I conclude, I want to make a more general point. I think we are just starting to appreciate that the Assembly now has power over the executive, after so many years of the executive dominating the Assembly. This is going to open doors that have been closed for some time, and I think it will be pretty uncomfortable for the government. Government members are not in control anymore. The time when they were assured that every bill would be agreed; the time when they knew every vote would go their way; the time when they could win every fight, has passed. So maybe it is time that government members get on board with more transparency and more accountability, because it is going to happen with or without them. It is what the community wants, it is what they expect, and it is what I am determined to deliver.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.56): I thank Ms Castley for moving the motion. I have an understanding about what it is actually about. In the spirit of believing that this motion is well intentioned, and with the proximity of annual report hearings, the government will support this motion today. However, at least personally, it is not without a degree of pretty significant reticence, which I will go on to explain.

The proper process to follow here is for a standing order suggestion to go through the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure for consideration, and for it to then prepare a report with recommendations for the Assembly. This allows for the problem that the suggested change is trying to solve to be aired, to be understood. It was not until I heard Ms Castley's speech just then that I became fully aware of what she intends with this change and the problem, as she sees it, that she is trying to solve.

Because this motion has not followed the usual process, and the way it has been crafted is unusual, I believe—subject to the Clerk’s advice—it is going to create an incoherence in a section of the standing orders, which is probably of interest to you, Mr Speaker. The consequences of what has been drafted have not been examined or scrutinised. As much as it is intended to be symbolic, I think this could have some different consequences.

I have not been a minister for all of my time in this place and I do not necessarily know about my colleagues’ engagements, but my understanding is that all ministers do engage with the committee process in good faith and that we do our very best to accommodate hearings, sometimes at pretty short notice, and to prepare for them and to be as helpful as possible. Ministers have appreciated the flexibility in previous Assemblies, and I hope that, despite this motion, this flexibility can still occur to an extent—again, I appreciate the intention—because we do have other responsibilities.

We have other national meetings that we need to attend, where our absence is not only conspicuous, but potentially problematic. For example, in November I attended the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, where attorneys-general there that day signed our national agreement on the legal assistance sector. In the way that Ms Castley has just described things, if I had had a clash there would, perhaps, not have been any room for negotiation for me to have attended on any of the other days when I and the committee might have been available.

That is my concern with the remarks. I am also concerned that in taking the existing standing order—this motion is targeted at ministers—it will mean that all members have been captured by this amendment, not just ministers. That is not unusual, given what is in standing order 258. Committees, of course, can invite members to attend with regard to questions of privilege, consideration of bills sponsored by private members and other matters; but if this is about sending a symbol to the executive that they do not have the run of the Legislative Assembly, then—if we think of the doctrine of the separation of powers; the executive never does—I am not sure that how this has been crafted is going to achieve what Ms Castley has been looking for without capturing everyone and the powers that it potentially affords.

It is also worth looking closely at how the existing standing order reads. We are going to go into the “standing orders according to Tara”, so I could be wrong, but I will try my best to explain. Standing order 258 reads:

If a committee desires the attendance of a Member as a witness, the Chair of the committee shall, in writing, request that Member to attend; should the Member refuse to come, or to give evidence or information as a witness to the committee, the committee shall advise the Assembly, and not again request the Member to attend the committee.

Now, drawing from the excellent *Companion to the Standing Orders*, second edition, it is clear that standing order 258 is not intended to be read alone but in conjunction with standing orders 256 and 257. The companion confirms that committees do not have the power to reach decisions on matters relating to the refusal of members or witnesses to appear and answer questions. These matters must be reported to the Assembly, which

then decides on a course of action. When an MLA appears before an Assembly committee, they do so as a witness and not as a member, and are subject to the same obligations as any other witness.

Standing order 256 reads:

If a witness fails or refuses to attend or give evidence, the Assembly, on being so advised, shall deal with the matter.

Standing order 257 reads:

When the attendance of a Member is ordered by the Assembly for examination by the Assembly, that Member shall be summoned by the Speaker to attend in the Member's place.

The point I am making is that the existing standing orders already provide the exact mechanism that I believe this change is hoping to achieve; that is, that the committee refers the issue to the Assembly, and then it is up to the Assembly people in this place—and as Ms Castley rightly noted, the executive does not have the majority on its own—to decide what to do.

The way that the standing orders are currently crafted leaves it open to the Assembly to decide its course of action, and that is appropriate. I appreciate that the wording in this motion today does say that the Assembly may order a member to attend. That is not inconsistent, but it is duplicative, and it does mean that how 256 and 257 are read together is problematic.

If this matter had gone through the Standing Committee of Administration and Procedure—of which you, Mr Speaker, are the chair—or if, as we were seeking to do, we had instead come to an agreement with all parties here to refer it to that committee, this would have been understood, or at least the “world according to Tara” could have been appropriately challenged. But the result, I believe, is an amendment that creates an incoherency in the standing orders, and that is a problematic precedent for any of us—whether we are new members or we have been here close to 20 years—to set.

I really regret the way that this has come about. I hope in the future that suggestions of this kind can at least go through you, Mr Speaker, as chair of the appropriate committee, for examination and then report back to the Assembly for it to decide, or at least that members come talk to us and tell us what they are trying to do. The government is supporting the motion because we do not disagree with the intention, but this has been a dangerous precedent. I am nervous. I am nervous for what it means for this term to come. Ultimately, though, I believe the motion is well intentioned, and that is why we will be supporting it today.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.05): The Greens will be supporting this small change to the standing orders, as we agree in this particular instance that getting it done quickly is reasonable. I am aware that it replicates a power available to the Senate, which can order a senator to appear as a witness and give evidence to a Senate committee after they have otherwise refused to do so.

Odgers' Australian Senate Practice points out, "In practice, these procedures are not used; senators often voluntarily offer their views and information to committees." It then goes on to describe an exception case where the order has been used in 2016, where the cabinet secretary, Senator Sinodinos, refused to appear before a committee.

These events allow the observation that this rule functions on a basis on which a minister's refusal to comply with a request and then an order, can result in a question of privilege. If this process is never used, it means we are doing well. Nonetheless, it is worth being there as a recourse option in the event of a hostile minister and to disincentivise hostility. No one is above the law—not members, not ministers—and all of us are accountable to the Assembly.

I note ACT Labor's concerns that this amendment should go through to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure for review. Our view is that the proposed changes to the standing orders are sufficiently clear-cut to pass now. I would also observe that, with annual reports coming up, we trust ministers to attend hearings in good faith, but having this power in place will no doubt give committee members that extra peace of mind. I suspect that many of us have a bunch of other ideas that would be great to discuss. I would like to encourage members to bring them to a more fulsome review of the standing orders that will be run by the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure.

These reviews will also let us test more novel and effective approaches, and I am happy for us to collaborate on all sorts of ideas, especially those relating to government accountability.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.07): Parliamentary committees regularly call on ministers to give evidence. This is essential for any parliamentary committee in any modern democracy, in order to scrutinise government policy and provide the community with information about what is happening and why. I am disappointed that today's amendment is necessary; but it clearly is, and I thank Ms Castley for bringing it.

Last term, our standing orders provided that a committee could request a minister to attend as a witness. There are powers in the standing orders, but there is no clear consequence for when a minister refuses to appear or give evidence. In practice, committees would ask once or twice, or in some circumstances multiple times, and usually the minister would appear. But if they did not, there was no clear pathway forward. An inquiry might close without the evidence it needed, and there would be no consequence for the minister who refused to appear.

I know this is how the standing order played out because it happened in one of my communities. The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity requested Labor's Chief Minister and Minister for Climate Action to appear to give evidence at a public hearing into climate change and a just transition, and the minister refused. In a climate crisis, when Canberrans are facing extreme cost of living pressures, how we make a just transition to a safe climate is an important issue. I trust that we all understand the climate crisis—I am not going to talk about that—but I want to expand a little on what the term "just transition" means.

How do we take action to reduce our emissions and adapt to the changes already locked in in a way that is fair for all of our people? How do we do this so that no matter how much you earn, you have access to a home that is cool enough to live in, regardless of whether or not you own that home?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order on relevance. How is this at all relevant to this motion?

Mr Rattenbury: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, Ms Clay is outlining why a minister may need to be called, and the significance of the issues that are being questioned.

Ms Cheyne: No, she is not. She is talking about climate change.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Cheyne, there is no point of order. Ms Clay, continue.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. How do we make sure you have access to affordable low emissions transport, not just expensive EVs? How do we ensure you have access to food you can afford to eat despite the fact that climate change makes food production more expensive? That is what just transition to a climate means, and that is what that inquiry was looking at.

We heard evidence from the Greens Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, and that was very useful. We did not hear evidence from Labor's Minister for Climate Action. On 27 August 2024, the committee made a statement to the Assembly explaining that the committee had contacted Labor's Minister for Climate Action three times to request him to give evidence and attend. Twice he declined outright, noting that he had nothing further to add to the written submission, that he could take questions on notice, and that he had a busy schedule.

This completely misses the point of a public parliamentary hearing. A public hearing allows members to ask questions. It allows members to ask follow-ups. It ensures that it is clear that the minister has either answered or has refused to answer publicly; everyone can see what the minister says. It allows members from other parties to hear the answers as they are given and to weigh in with their own questions and questions that have been put to them by their constituents.

It is an essential element of accountability and community representation, and it is entirely different from receiving a written statement from a minister, prepared by the directorate that may or may not address the questions asked, and that provides no opportunity to follow up and press the point. This is why most proceedings in parliaments, in courts, and in other investigations, are not done purely on the papers. They involve question-and-answer hearings, and hearings are usually public unless there is a very good reason to make them otherwise.

The first two requests to appear were refused outright. The third request was declined in a more roundabout way, but it still failed to result in an appearance from the minister. Our committees and secretariats are really accommodating, and they will continue to be really accommodating. We always offer a range of times to suit a busy person's schedule; we offer multiple times; we offer hearings outside the regular hearing schedule

to accommodate ministers. But it is completely unacceptable to say repeatedly, “No, I cannot come to the hearing. I have nothing to say, and I am very busy.”

The standing order we are operating under now—the one that was in place then—states:

If a committee desires the attendance of a Member as a witness, the Chair of the committee shall, in writing, request that Member to attend; should the Member refuse to come, or to give evidence or information as a witness to the committee, the committee shall advise the Assembly, and not again request the Member to attend the committee.

So that standing order requires the committee to ask in writing once. Our committee asked in writing three times. It did not result in an appearance from the minister. We finished that inquiry into climate change and a just transition without ever once hearing from Labor’s Minister for Climate Action. The only consequence in the standing order that we were advised at the time to follow was to tell the Assembly, which we did in the statement to the Assembly. And the Assembly took no further action. Of course I understand that, because there was no clear pathway for the Assembly to take. The standing order did not say what should happen next, and that is what this change does.

We cannot simply allow ministers to refuse to appear and dodge questions from members and from the community about government policy and about how a minister is performing their duty. For completeness, I will note that Labor’s chair dissented from the committee decision to make that statement to the Assembly and tell them that Labor’s Chief Minister and Minister for Climate Action refused to appear. I, of course, will not impute motives to anyone in that matter. On a general point, however, I will note that parliaments are given oversight regarding individual members and ministers to ensure that decisions are made in a principled way and are not informed by politics, and that if decisions are made in a purely political way, it is clear to the public because it is all on record.

On a personal note, I am deeply uncomfortable that Labor’s former minister with responsibility for climate action refused to give evidence to a parliamentary committee inquiring into climate action. I trust we will have much greater accountability and cooperation from Labor’s new climate minister, and that she will take this role seriously in a climate crisis.

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) (11.13): I rise to contest strongly the presentation of events by Ms Clay, with regard to the ECCB standing committee of the last term. I view it as an absolute witch-hunt that went on inside the committee, and it is continuing in this term.

Luckily, on 27 August in the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to standing order 246A, I made a statement on behalf of that committee detailing the facts of the matter. I am going to read some of that statement again to set the facts straight. I will note that the last correspondence from the minister was that the minister’s office indicated that he would consider another possible date. That is not a refusal. I will go through my statement.

In accordance with the usual practice of committee secretariats, contact with the office of the Minister for Climate Action—

That was not the appropriate minister to give evidence to this committee and this inquiry, and was not the minister presenting the government's response—

was made on 5 March 2024 to check his availability to attend the public hearing ... the minister's office responded on his behalf, noting that the minister had nothing to add to the written submission to the inquiry and declined to attend the hearing.

That was because the relevant minister, Minister Rattenbury at the time, was attending the hearing. The statement continued:

Noting the provisions of standing order 258, which require that 'if a committee desires the attendance of a member as a witness, the chair of the committee shall, in writing, request that member to attend', on 18 March 2024 I wrote as chair formally inviting the minister to attend the hearing on 30 April. On 22 April, the minister's office responded that he was unable to attend due to his schedule, but could take questions on notice in relation to the inquiry.

I wrote to the minister on behalf of the committee on 21 May 2024 requesting he provide a suitable time for a hearing on one of six specified days. The minister's office responded ... asking the committee to propose a time and date for the hearing.

On 11 June 2024, the committee agreed to hold a public hearing on 2 July 2024, and to invite the Minister for Climate Action to attend this hearing ...

Mr Cocks: It was a timeframe matter.

DR PATERSON: It is written here in *Hansard*, Mr Cocks.

On 11 June 2024, the committee agreed to hold a public hearing on 2 July 2024, and to invite the Minister for Climate Action to attend the hearing, noting that he had not directly refused to give evidence for the inquiry. A copy of this letter was sent to my office on 11 June ...

Unfortunately, I did not see his letter until a week-and-a-half later. The statement goes on:

The letter was sent to the minister on 26 June. The minister's office responded to this letter on 1 July 2024, that due to the late notice—which I, as chair, take full responsibility for—the minister was unable to attend the hearing on 2 July.

That day, 2 July, was the next day. The minister's office indicated that he would consider another possible time. This is not a refusal in any way; it is an absolute witch-hunt by Ms Clay from the previous committee meeting. It has blown into this Assembly, and it is absolutely petty rubbish.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.17): I wish to speak briefly in support of this motion. To me, this reads as an accountability measure. I am conscious that I am new to this place and, clearly, I am still getting used to the standing orders. But what I have heard from

people who elected me to be here, and who elected another independent, is that they wanted to see the government held to account. I think that when people say that, really what they mean is that they want to see people in power hold themselves to account.

I am reassured—by what I have seen of the collaborative nature of the behaviour in this Assembly and within the committees—that, should this standing order be used, the Assembly would reach a good decision and resolve the matter respectfully and in good faith. I would also note that, should we as members of this Assembly choose to make ourselves accountable at every opportunity, I suspect this standing order as amended will be made irrelevant.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.18): As the only member of the committee that has been referred to, and yet to not speak so far—as occurred once or twice during the life of that committee in the last Assembly—I guess I will have to step in and give my perspective on where things landed.

The interesting place that we land in occasionally in this place is in a battle of semantics, and I feel that that is exactly where we are now. That is why it is genuinely important for us to get this sorted out. I note that no-one has named the minister who was asked to attend, so I will just call him “he who shall not be named”. When the committee attempted to get “he who shall not be named” to attend—

Ms Cheyne: I wish to raise a point of order. Mr Assistant Speaker, there is a standing order, which I do not have to hand, that members need to address people by their title or their preferred name.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibbings): I think it is preferable.

MR COCKS: Very well. With respect to the relevant minister—I cannot recall precisely under which title he was to attend—the committee found it incredibly difficult. You can hear, from the dates that the former chair of the committee has just outlined, that it was over an extraordinarily long time that we attempted to get the minister to attend the hearing. Whether an extended period of not being able to find a suitable time in the diary is a refusal or not, I am not sure, but it came to the point of the committee becoming so frustrated by a minister that we had to resort to saying, “We will have a hearing on this day; will you attend? Minister, attend this hearing.” And we were told, “No, can’t do it. That day doesn’t work for me.”

That is the reason we need this change, because, as Ms Clay has outlined, the advice to the committee at that point was very clear. I understand that this does not align with Minister Cheyne’s interpretation of the standing orders, but the advice the committee received—and we clarified it multiple times in meetings—was that there was no more that we could do: that the committee chair could make a statement and that was the end of it. We had no power at all to compel a minister to attend.

It is also very important to understand that this amendment to the standing orders does simply align the ACT with the Senate. It makes it clear. On my reading, it makes it consistent with the other standing orders that Minister Cheyne has outlined, and therefore I think it is inordinately sensible that we simply pass this.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.22): I was not going to speak to this, but I just thought that I must. If popcorn were available in the chamber and if it could be consumed, I think I would have got a big bucket, because it has been fascinating to watch. There have been some great points made by both sides of this debate. It is fascinating that everyone has indicated that they are supporting it anyway, but here we are!

Some good points have been made by Ms Cheyne in that, yes, it is quite possible that if this change is made, it will create a little bit of ambiguity in the standing orders; but you could go through this document—as I do, late at night!—and find quite a number of areas where there is some ambiguity. I do not think that the fear that Ms Cheyne has put forward in her speech is going to be realised in any great way.

I have heard the suggestions from Ms Clay and the amazing to and fro about what went on in that committee, but I think that the point that the opposition leader made in her speech right at the start is the most relevant—that the biggest thing that the passing of this motion will achieve is to send a very clear signal that if committees would like ministers to appear, then that is what they would like and that is what should be delivered. Ms Cheyne’s response to it was that there are important matters that ministers have to attend to. I am absolutely certain that that will also be taken into account, but this just sends a signal that this is a place of transparency; this is a place where government decisions must be scrutinised, and they will.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.24), in reply: In closing, I would like to thank all members for their contributions today, and I am thrilled, as Mr Parton has just said, that we have greater transparency. That is the goal of annual reports and estimates hearings, and, indeed, it is the reason that this motion is before us.

There are a couple of points that I would like to make. Ms Cheyne talked about the “standing orders according to Tara”. Well, the “standing orders according to Leanne” are that, yes, these other two standing orders are there. There is that action that the Assembly could direct, compel, summon; however, when you read the last point in standing order 258—we have heard it but I am going to read it again—it says:

If a committee desires the attendance of a Member as a witness, the Chair of the committee shall, in writing, request that Member to attend—

We have heard that this has happened.

Should the Member refuse to come, or to give evidence or information as a witness to the committee, the committee shall advise the Assembly, and not again request the Member to attend the committee.

That seems like a bit of a “get out of jail free” card if a minister chooses to use it. Those are the standing orders according to Leanne, so I am thrilled that we have stronger language here, and that we have the ability, now, for the Assembly to order a member to attend a committee and give evidence to the committee. That is all we want.

I know that, many times, I have had more questions and needed more time, and I have been told that the questions were new, or they were not new, or they should just go on notice, “No, you are not going to get the minister back.” I was not asking for a session

until midnight; I was just asking for an additional session on a given moment. I found that very frustrating. What we are trying to sort out here is to give us all the ability to get all the questions out to the ministers when we have got the opportunity. That is what we want.

As Ms Cheyne said, she regrets the way that this has come about today; well, I deeply regret not being able to get the full time with the ministers in the portfolios that matter to me and my constituents. So thank you for the support today, and I am really thrilled that we have been able to come to an agreement and get this one across the line.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

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) (11.27): Together with Ms Cheyne, I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to be presenting this bill today, which will enhance children's rights to protection—the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025. The Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 establishes and governs the administration of the child sex offender register. The act requires offenders who have been convicted of particular sexual offences against children to be registered and to comply with certain obligations under the act, including reporting obligations and a prohibition on engaging in child-related employment. This is designed to increase the protection of children and decrease the offender's risk of reoffending.

This bill amends section 124 of the act, which prescribes the definition of “child-related employment”. Child-related employment includes employment, training or volunteer work that involves contact with a child in a prescribed list of employment areas—for example, at educational or religious institutions, clubs and associations, and wards of hospitals where children are ordinarily patients.

The bill makes a narrow amendment to include the provision of child-related legal services through Legal Aid into this category of child-related employment. Legal Aid ACT's vital services to our community include child-centred services, such as representing children in legal matters; running the Youth Law Centre, a dedicated legal advice service for people aged 12 to 25 years; and providing independent children's lawyers in family law matters. Legal Aid ACT also provides representation services in other areas where children may be witnesses or the subject of proceedings, such as in child protection matters.

This amendment goes beyond direct employment with Legal Aid ACT and ensures that employment in child-related services funded by grants of legal aid but provided by private solicitors is also prohibited. The amendment is consistent with the policy intention of the existing definition of child-related employment and will ensure that the scheme continues to operate effectively.

This bill is not a significant bill, but it does limit some rights under the Human Rights Act 2004. The bill limits the right to work, as it increases the types of employment that may not be undertaken by a registered offender. It also limits the right to privacy and the right to liberty and security of person. These rights are limited because the act makes it an offence for a registrable offender to apply for or engage in child-related employment, and it is an offence for a person who is charged with child sex offences to not disclose those charges to an employer or potential employer. As these offences are punishable by imprisonment or fines, it potentially limits the right to liberty. The requirement to inform an employer of charges limits the right to privacy. All limitations on these rights are narrow and justified, as the purpose of the bill is to increase the safety of children in the ACT.

The bill promotes the right to the protection of the family and child. This right recognises the need for children to be protected because they are inherently vulnerable. This bill increases that protection and gives effect to the requirement within that right to give primary consideration to the best interests of the child. The reduction of risk to children, the promotion of this right and the reduced risk of reoffending for registered offenders justifies the imposition of this further restriction on them.

It is intended that this amendment is the first stage of a broader focus to include child-related legal services more generally within the list of child-related employment areas, in recognition of the regular contact that those undertaking this professional service can have with children. That work will also consider other professions that should be included in this list. However, it is intended that any such amendments are progressed at a later stage to allow for broader consultation in the policy development and drafting stage. Thank you very much.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.32): I am pleased to co-sponsor the introduction of Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025 today. As it stands, the act establishes a child sex offender register scheme for the ACT. There are similar schemes in all other jurisdictions in Australia. Offenders who have been convicted of certain child sex offences are referred to as “registrable offenders” and are required to comply with certain obligations under the act.

The overarching purpose of the scheme is to protect the ongoing safety of children and reduce the likelihood of reoffending by registrable offenders. To help achieve this purpose, the act creates offences where a registrable offender fails to comply with their obligations. A key facet of the act is a prohibition on registrable offenders engaging in or applying to engage in child-related employment.

An individual who is engaged in or applying to engage in child-related employment is also required to disclose any pending charges for a registrable offence to an employer

or prospective employer. Child-related employment includes employment, training or volunteer work that involves contact with a child in a prescribed list of employment areas that are likely to involve contact with a child—for example, at daycare centres, educational or religious institutions, clubs, associations and overnight camps. The contact may be physical, oral or involve any form of written communication, including electronic communication.

This prohibition on child-related employment is intended to reduce the opportunities available to a registrable offender to reoffend. This is because where a registrable offender has contact with a child, the risk to the safety of the child is increased, as is the risk of reoffending. This bill today introduces one discrete amendment to the act to expand the prohibition on child-related employment for registrable offenders. The bill makes a narrowly scoped, discrete amendment to the definition of child-related employment in section 124 to add the provision of legal services related to a child provided by Legal Aid ACT, whether through its officers or its funded private practitioners.

This amendment is to reduce any ambiguity, or perception of ambiguity, as to whether a role at Legal Aid ACT involving contact with a child is child-related employment for the purposes of the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act. Children often come into contact with legal service providers, and in particular, Legal Aid ACT, through a variety of different means. This may include when being represented in a legal matter, when seeking legal advice, or as a witness in a proceeding.

Ordinarily, the provision of legal services in these situations will necessitate direct contact with a child, such as to take instructions or question them as a witness. This amendment will ensure that registrable offenders under the act are prohibited from being employed in the provision of child-related legal services by Legal Aid ACT and that it will be a criminal offence if a registrable offender applies for or engages in employment in the provision of child-related legal services with Legal Aid ACT.

While the bill may limit the right to privacy, the right to security and the right to work, I am satisfied that these limitations are reasonable and justifiable. The amendment has been drafted to ensure that these limitations are proportionate to the purpose of promoting the right to protection of family and children.

I respect that there will be a question of why this amendment is not broader, such as to include child-related legal services more generally. It is my intention that this amendment is the first stage of a broader focus on those, the broader focus necessarily requiring broader consultation and policy development to be undertaken. In this instance, this bill is about responding to a discrete issue and a clear recommendation from the CEO of Legal Aid ACT, and we have done so swiftly in support of that.

The bill has a delayed commencement of three months to ensure that any individuals who may be impacted are made aware of this change and the narrow expansion of the criminal offences under the act. In essence, this bill is about removing ambiguity. It is about greater clarity, and that greater clarity is about ensuring the ongoing effectiveness of the child sex offender register scheme and protecting those in our community who are most vulnerable.

I thank the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and my colleague Minister Paterson for their engagement and quick work and support of this bill, and particularly the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, which has been under a lot of demands, I would say, from the numerous bits of legislation that we are looking to progress. This has been a very important one, personally, for me, as the new Attorney-General, to remove this ambiguity. I am pleased to commend the bill to the Assembly today.

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

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.38): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. The bill makes amendments to nine pieces of legislation to improve their operation. This is an omnibus bill that makes minor and technical amendments to laws falling primarily within my portfolio as the Attorney-General. It also makes amendments to two pieces of legislation within Minister Paterson's portfolio, as the Minister for Gaming Reform.

In short, the bill will enhance the quality of the ACT's statute book by increasing the readability and accessibility of our legislation. This will make it easier for members of the community to read, understand and apply ACT legislation. An explanation of each of these minor and technical amendments can be found in the explanatory statement. In summary, the amendments: update cross-references within legislation to ensure that ACT legislation referring to legislative instruments in other jurisdictions remains current and coherent; update notes to ensure they remain as accurate and helpful to the community as possible; remove redundant or obsolete definitions; and make minor updates to language to enhance consistency throughout the ACT statute book and to align with the renaming of important federal institutions.

Although these amendments are minor and technical, they are important. Individually, they are insufficient to justify the presentation of separate legislation, but, taken together, they make important progress in improving the overall quality of the ACT's legislation, and this greatly enhances accessibility for all Canberrans and, indeed, interstate users of ACT legislation. This is because legislation, like standing orders, can be challenging to read and understand, and this can present significant barriers to individuals accessing legal information. Legislation that is out of date or incoherent—for example, that includes outdated cross-references—can exacerbate these issues.

This has important flow-on consequences for access to justice, as it can make it harder for individuals to comprehend and comply with their legal obligations.

These amendments continue to signal to the ACT community the government's commitment to the maintenance of a modern and accessible ACT statute book, and I am pleased to be bringing forward these amendments today. Again, I thank all of the staff in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate who have worked on this bill and particularly the PCO, which I understand has done the bulk of it in identifying where amendments needed to be made. They are a first-rate operation, and we are very glad to be supported by them across the statute book—as has been a bit of a theme for this sitting week—it is due to their hard work. I very sincerely thank them and, in doing so, I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 11.42 am to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Health—Coroner's report into the death of Rozalia Spadafora

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, yesterday you apologised to the family of Rozalia Spadafora for failures within the health system which ultimately led to her death, but you have not withdrawn your remark from an estimates hearing on 23 August 2022, when I asked about Rozalia and you said:

People die in hospitals; it is part of delivering a hospital service ...

Will you now, publicly, finally apologise for that remark?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not really thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, but it is a predictable one. It is true to say that, when you are delivering health services, sadly and unfortunately, people die. That is in fact part of delivering health services. What we seek to do within the health system is ensure that it does not happen when it should not, and that health care is provided to ensure that people's lives are saved wherever that is possible.

In the case of Rozalia Spadafora, that did not occur. I was very clear yesterday and I was very clear at the time that Rozalia died that we would do everything we could to understand what happened. Canberra Health Services engaged collaboratively with the coronial process in order for that to occur. Canberra Health Services also undertook significant internal work, and I established an expert panel into child and adolescent clinical services to ensure that every lesson was learnt from this terrible tragedy that occurred within Canberra Hospital. It was an absolute tragedy. I did apologise to the family of Rozalia Spadafora for the failures that occurred within Canberra Hospital, and I again extend my deepest condolences to them.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why is ACT Health forcing the Spadafora family to prove their grief, which you said yesterday was inconsolable grief, in order to access compensation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, if there are matters before legal processes, the matters are sub judice. I am not in a position to talk about them in this place. There are standard processes that occur in relation to such matters. It is the ACT's commitment to be a model litigant in these kinds of matters. I do not even want to use the word litigant. These are matters that have a legal process. That legal process needs to be undertaken. In all of these types of cases where there is a claim against the territory—and, again, it is hard to talk about this. It is not a public process.

Ms Castley seems to have just made public a process that has not been a public process. I do not know on whose authority she has done that. But, to the extent that there is a process, that is part of the standard process in these matters. Obviously, the Coroner only handed down the report on 6 December, and we worked very quickly to respond to that report. We responded to it in the first available sitting week. We tabled the report, responded to it and accepted all the recommendations in the first available sitting week, and that was yesterday. I was very keen to ensure that we did that, to close off as quickly as possible the part of the process for which I am responsible.

MR HANSON: Minister, given the principle of ministerial accountability, shouldn't you take full responsibility for the failures in your portfolio that caused this tragedy and stand down?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have taken significant responsibility in relation to this matter. As I indicated, I established the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Expert Panel to ensure that we finalised the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan as quickly as possible—work that was already underway in July 2022. I have consistently worked with experts and with Canberra Health Services to ensure that improvements have been made in the care of unwell children, and we have made investments through every budget process to improve the care that we provide to children and young people in the ACT.

What I can say to the people of Canberra is that I think about Rozalia at least once a week—every week in doing this job. So, if anybody here thinks that anyone in this place would be more committed to making changes to improve the care of children in this city, I dare them to name someone, because I am absolutely committed to continuing this process of improvement.

Elective surgery—waiting times

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to elective surgery waitlist data as published by CHS. I note that, between 11 October 2024 and 31 January 2025, the percentage of Canberrans that are overdue for elective surgery has gone from 21 per cent to 28 per cent for Category 1 patients; 45 per cent to 50 per cent for Category 2 patients; and 22 per cent to 24 per cent for Category 3 patients. Can you please explain why the wait times and number of overdue elective surgeries continue to blow out, despite all your claims of delivering a better health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Ms Castley is well aware, there was some significant disruptions to elective surgery in the 2022-23 financial year, including a fire at Calvary Public Hospital's theatre complex, which took out the entire theatre complex for some weeks and five theatres for 10 months. That resulted in a significant reduction in the

capacity to deliver elective surgeries in that year. We have continued to increase the elective surgeries that are delivered by Canberra Health Services and through our private partners and we are continuing to do that this year. This year we have set a very high target for elective surgeries and we are on track to deliver on that target.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why do you only have the most recent fortnightly waitlist data on the website, and not any previous reports? Is it because you do not want the public to be able to track the results over time?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will have another look at the website and see if previous data is available. We regularly publish formalised and cleansed data through the Health directorate. So that is data that meets the national standard. The data that Ms Castley is referring to that is point in time is Canberra Health Services operational data. It is published on the basis of a request from both consumers and general practitioners to understand what is going on at a point in time. That is the exact purpose of that data—we publish operational data at a point in time. Operational data changes over time and is published to provide an indication to consumers and general practitioners of what is going on at that point in time. That is the entire purpose of the CHS operational data.

If you want to look backwards at what has been occurring: the data that is published on the ACT health data dashboard is now available; there are quarterly performance reports going back; there are Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports going back; MyHospitals on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website is live; and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare cleansed data set is available. So that is how you look backwards. This CHS data that Ms Castley is talking about is specifically and deliberately point in time, because that is what consumers and other clinicians were asking for.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you take responsibility if you do not meet elective surgery targets and rule out coming in here with yet more excuses?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have consistently taken responsibility for my portfolio in the five and a half years I have had it.

Justice—mandatory minimum sentencing

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, last night we saw federal Labor, with its Criminal Code Amendment (Hate Crimes) Bill, abandon its official platform of opposing mandatory minimum sentencing. Attorney, what assurance can you provide to Canberrans who are worried this shift in the federal sphere might lead to mandatory minimum sentences being introduced in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I regret that I did not follow what occurred in the federal parliament last night. So, to provide the best answer I can, I will take that on notice and seek to come back as soon as possible.

MR RATTENBURY: Attorney, what is the ACT government position on mandatory minimum sentences and how can Canberrans be comforted that this will not reverse on a dime like we saw overnight with your federal counterparts?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, would legislation like the hate crimes bill be consistent with the ACT Human Rights Act?

MS CHEYNE: I think that is asking for an expression of opinion—and I am not a lawyer.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Attorney, I am not sure that he is asking for an opinion. But, given that you have taken the first two on notice, would you like to take that question on notice as well?

MS CHEYNE: Sure.

Taxation—registration fees

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, the ACT has some of the most expensive licence and vehicle registration fees in the country. For example, a vehicle that would cost \$649 to register in New South Wales costs more than \$1,300 in the ACT. It is the same for all sorts of licences and fees, contributing to Canberra's high cost of living and encouraging many Canberrans, in fact, to register their cars, trailers and caravans elsewhere. Minister, why are ACT government fees and charges so much higher than the rest of the country?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I reject the commentary that our fees and charges are so much higher than the rest of the country. I think Mr Cocks was selective in the fees and charges that he referenced. I am happy to take those ones on notice and to come back with a detailed explanation about what informs that fee. I would note that there are other fees and charges where we have been incredibly progressive, where we have, in fact, removed the fee, such as for hawker licenses—

Mr Hanson: It costs less to have heroin, that's for sure!

MS CHEYNE: It is not always about drugs, Mr Hanson. We have removed the fees for hawker licenses, and we are flexible in the offering of other things. I would note and point to the election commitment regarding the registration fees for caravans and trailers and refer Mr Cocks to that.

MR COCKS: Why does the government choose to penalise people who have low incomes and who cannot afford to register their vehicle interstate or to achieve your rebates on electric vehicles?

MS CHEYNE: We do not. We are not penalising any particular person. In fact, through multiple enquiries in this place, and through the government's consideration, we adopt many different policies and strategies to support people who are vulnerable, including through the payment of infringement notices, for example, where there is great flexibility in entering a payment plan, in addition to getting financial advice provided through Care Financial. So, in fact, Mr Speaker, I would say that the government does

all it can to be supportive of people who are vulnerable in our community, but these things, or some of the things at least, that Mr Cox has referred to do come at a cost, and they are a privilege to use or to have, and the government does have a cost in terms of the processing of them. We are looking at ways of improving our own efficiencies all the time, and certainly when it comes to Access Canberra's service centres, they are incredibly efficient, and I thank them for their service.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, will you adjust the registration fees to align with New South Wales?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, that is technically out of order as well, because that is asking me to announce government policy; however, I would note that we already have ongoing support for households when it comes to cost of living. Motor vehicle registration concessions in the ACT can be up to a 100 per cent discount on motor vehicle registration fees. We expect the estimated take-up in this financial year alone to be 66,750 registrations. If that is not supporting the community, I am not sure what is. Of course, we also have public transport concessions, driver licence concessions, the Taxi Subsidy Scheme and numerous other concessions available to the community.

City and government services—trees

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Given the high level of local taxes, Canberrans expect a reasonable level of service from this government, but they are continually let down. Two years ago, a resident of Kaleen lodged an issue about a dangerous tree on public land, behind their back fence. It took 12 months for the government to note that it was dangerous and should be removed. Twelve months after that, the tree fell, damaging the property. Thankfully, no-one was injured. Minister, if a dangerous tree is marked for removal, how soon can a resident reasonably expect it to be removed?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I believe this information is publicly available, regarding what someone can expect. Tree removal and the time frames for that are based on the risk that our arborists assess at the time. I am not saying that the risk profile of a tree cannot change; of course, it can, depending on the circumstances—storm activity and other things. In terms of removing trees, it is undertaken through that risk assessment, and they prioritise and schedule work accordingly.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what are you doing to improve this level of service to ensure residents feel safe in their own homes?

MS CHEYNE: For starters, I trust our teams. I trust our arborists; I trust our City Services crews. They do a remarkable job. I have seen them in action. I have even climbed a tree with them, and that was hard work. They do an incredible job in cleaning up.

I acknowledge that, just after speaking about the storm season yesterday, we had another storm. Again, our crews have been out overnight, supporting the clean-up effort. All of these things necessarily create issues in terms of the scheduling of trees that have been identified for removal, when we are responding to issues of greatest

need—where there are safety issues, where there are trees down on roads or on powerlines, for example.

In terms of further support for our crews, after meeting with them last year on several occasions, they made it clear to me just how much the articulated loader was helping them to get into some hard-to-reach areas, particularly when soil was very damp. As a result, with the support of the ACT government, they have acquired another loader. I have seen plenty of pictures of it, hard at work. Indeed, there was a naming competition for it last year.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, does the government accept responsibility to cover the cost of any damage caused by your failure to act?

MS CHEYNE: I would not describe it as a failure to act. Regarding insurance, I cannot comment on this particular case, and I will not comment on individual cases.

Lake Tuggeranong—water quality

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the minister for water.

Minister, yesterday Lake Tuggeranong was closed to all water activities due to the discovery of sewage and oil contamination. This is unfortunately not the first time in the last few months that Lake Tuggeranong has been closed for similar reasons. I did have constituents reach out to me who were concerned that, contrary to listings on the government website, they were unable to find signage along the lake between the skatepark and the library.

Minister, what measures, both physical and digital, were taken to alert people to the lake's closures yesterday?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. So you are correct. Under Section 22 of the Lakes Act 1976, there was a decision to close all areas of Lake Tuggeranong yesterday, based on advice from – or Tuesday, based on advice from Health Protection Services. This is due to the presence of sewage as well as the presence of oil, which does appear to have come through a pipe that had been damaged and has now been repaired. Regardless, those contaminants are still there, but it should not be an ongoing issue due to this being a particularly damaged area.

In terms of the signage that was available, I do need to probably take that on notice to learn exactly where signage was established. But I do know that the crews across EPA, Health Protection Services and others were working to remove contaminants from across the lake network and to provide as much advice as possible. Of course, nothing is as good as seeing a sign when you are in the location, but members would be aware that there were a very large amount of communications issued right across social media and government channels, and through the media as well. So our advice remains the same: please do not enter the water for any reason, primary or secondary contact.

MISS NUTTALL: Is there any more information you can share on the source of the contamination and when you expect it to be addressed?

MS CHEYNE: Potentially. I will take it on notice, Mr Speaker; I just cannot see it in my notes. I should be able to come back at the end of question time to clarify.

Effectively, the test results of sampling of the water will inform the steps that need to be taken for Lake Tuggeranong to be reopened. But, for the moment, it remains closed. And I will see what further advice I can get you by the end of question time.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, has there been any follow-up to the previous incident of contamination back in January, including possible fines or prosecution?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice, Mr Speaker.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. It has now been 10 weeks since the launch of MyWay+ and the system continues to be plagued by problems. Could you please update the chamber about when the system will be fully functional?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The system is functional. It is providing what was intended as part of our contract over 10 years with NEC Australia to provide contactless payments—payments through credit and debit cards—which around half of the people using our public transport system have been taking up really successfully and seamlessly across the system. People have also been taking up the travel card option that was traditionally provided under the old MyWay system and are also using the new account functionality that exists to be able to tie different payment methods to one account.

We have been working through planned updates for the system, including current testing that is going on of group functionality, to enable parents in particular to support their children's accounts. We are looking forward to rolling that out later this month so that we can support more functionality on the system compared to what was ever available under MyWay.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, can you confirm whether the QR codes will ever be fully functional and wholly reliable?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The QR codes are only one payment option available to Canberrans using our public transport system. Since the launch, we have worked closely with NEC to improve the functionality of the QR codes, in particular reducing the size of the QR codes to make them easier to scan on the MyWay+ validators, and we have been working to provide communications to Canberrans using public transport on how to use the QR code functionality. That is not just on the MyWay+ app but also through the paper tickets that people can buy from the TVMs that are being installed at the moment. People will be able to top up their MyWay+ cards as well on those machines. That is one way to pay. It does take slightly longer than the contactless payment options, like the credit and debit card and travel card options, which we are now providing Canberrans through MyWay+. We have been encouraging Canberrans to use the method of payment that is simplest for them to use.

We have not yet, during this transition period—as I mentioned in question time earlier in the week—switched on the penalty fares for not tapping off, because we want to give Canberrans the opportunity to try out the different payment methods that are available. We will continue to monitor the use of those. By far, the greatest methods being utilised are the debit and credit card options, the travel card options that are available, and indeed using a credit or debit card on a smartphone device—a contactless payment—which is, of course, an option that was not available under the old MyWay system.

MS BARRY: Minister, is it still your position that it was appropriate to launch on 27 November and that adequate testing was undertaken?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I made clear that we made the decision to go live in November based on advice that had been provided—that there was a high level of confidence in the system and the testing that had been done prior. Obviously, issues arose immediately following implementation in November. Many of those issues have been addressed. The system is functioning and Canberrans are tapping on and off public transport using their credit and debit cards, which was the major feature of this system that we wanted to introduce to Canberra. It has been embraced by many people who are having a seamless experience using public transport.

Other updates are being made and we are certainly interested in hearing feedback about improvements to the user experience of the MyWay+ app, the MyWay+ portal and the broader system. We will continue to make those improvements over time to make sure that this system is even better.

Disability—government support

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, how is the ACT government working with the commonwealth to support people with disabilities?

MS ORR: I thank the member for their question. The ACT government has been working with our counterparts in every state and territory and with the commonwealth on our co-governance responsibilities for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and on the early work required to build new foundational support services, the improved service system navigation for people with disability generally and targeted responses for early intervention.

Recently the commonwealth released the Australian Disability Strategy update and the first National Autism Strategy. The community consultation that informed these set a clear articulation of the work the commonwealth will be undertaking and provides the ACT government with the opportunity to align our own priorities to ensure reform at all levels of government is aligned. I deeply appreciate the engagement and advocacy that disabled peoples' organisations, advocacy groups and the disability support services sector; mainstream health, education and community services providers; and all officials working on this; have contributed to progressing the reforms in this agenda. We know the community wants to see a service system within and outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme that is responsive to, and meets, their needs. That is the message the ACT government will continue to make as we progress through these reforms.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what does the release of the National Autism Strategy mean for Canberrans?

MS ORR: The recent release of the National Autism Strategy represents a new and important step in national policy that acknowledges autistic peoples needs have not always been well accounted for in service access and design, and that our understanding of autism and neurodiversity has a way to go. The implementation of the strategy and the learnings and supports from the actions will be of benefit to all Australians, including Canberrans. As members in this place may be aware, the ACT government has a commitment to develop an ACT neurodiversity strategy. The release of the National Autism Strategy provides a valuable example of tested ways to approach co-design and policy priorities, which will aid the early thinking on this piece of policy reform.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what additional work for the disability community will the ACT government be undertaking this term?

MS ORR: I thank the member for her question. The ACT government is committed to working with the community through the “nothing about us without us” principle to continue making our city the most inclusive it can be. In addition to developing the ACT neurodiversity strategy, we will continue to progress our own ACT Disability Strategy, and in addition to that, key policy work will also be working across government to realise the ambitions and the potential of the Disability Inclusion Act, and improve everyday accessibility for Canberrans with disability.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. The 10 weeks since the launch of MyWay+ have been plagued by problems, with drivers and passengers often forced to give up on payments. How much fare revenue will be lost because of this fiasco?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Obviously there was a period where we did not have any fares collected ahead of the launch, between the time that we switched off the old MyWay system and started to put in place the final hardware validators on the buses, and that was factored into the budget. Of course, we are still within the financial year, and we will be looking at what the outcome is for public transport revenue overall closer towards the end of the financial year and as part of the budget process.

But we are seeing really strong use of the MyWay+ system, with people getting on board and using the seamless contactless payment options that are available that simply were not available before. We have seen the benefit of that at major events, where people who have not typically used public transport in the past have not had to find a way to get a MyWay travel card; they have simply been able to tap on and off with their debit card to access public transport to get to and from those events—which is great to see. Obviously, this is a benefit for visitors to the ACT as well who may not have had a MyWay card in the past. So there will be significant benefits from this.

At the moment, as I explained earlier in the week, there is a small number of buses that still have not had the hardware installed. Those final installations are occurring. So there will be a—

Mr Cocks: Point of order on relevance. The question was about the quantum of funds that have been lost rather than the reasons for.

MR SPEAKER: Minister—

MR STEEL: I have answered the question.

MR COCKS: Minister, how much extra has it cost to sort out the problems with MyWay+ since its launch in terms of ACT government expenditure, including the cost to the public service?

MR STEEL: That is within appropriation, in terms of the cost of the public servant resources attached to the project. Of course, we have a 10-year contract with NEC Australia over the roll out of the system and ongoing operations and maintenance of the system. That is part of the \$64 million contract that we have with them. We have been working really closely with them on making updates, both planned and unplanned, to MyWay+ to improve the benefits of the system for Canberrans, and we are continuing to provide updates to the community about that on a weekly or twice weekly basis. We will also be providing a very detailed submission through to the committee inquiry that is underway into MyWay+ which will provide a range of information that we can make available to the committee for it to consider the roll-out.

But we have a system that is functional. It is providing the contactless payments options that we promised the people of Canberra. There are improvements that we can make to the system for user experience, and we are open to listening to that feedback and making updates with NEC Australia to improve the user experience.

MS MORRIS: Minister, what is the total cost, in terms of all ACT government expenditure, of the ACT's efforts to get an updated ticketing system since the need for a new system was identified nearly a decade ago?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am happy to take that question on notice. But, when we employ people to do this work, it is within the existing appropriation, in most circumstances. There may be some agency costs for project management, but we have the outcome of a 10-year contract with NEC Australia for \$64 million to deliver this project. If what the member is suggesting is that we should have gone ahead and procured a system that was not value for money in a previous procurement, we disagree.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Cocks: Point of order: the minister has gone on to debate the question.

MR SPEAKER: I would agree. But, Minister, I get the sense that you have finished answering the question.

MR STEEL: I have.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—incarceration rates

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. In response to a question about Indigenous incarceration rates that was taken on notice in the last sitting period, the minister indicated that the government had committed to setting a target to reduce the rate of Indigenous incarceration in the ACT to achieve parity with the non-Indigenous population by 2031.

The Productivity Commission's latest *Report on government services*, released this week, shows our Indigenous incarceration gap increased in the last year, remaining the highest in Australia. Further, while the non-Indigenous repeat offending rate dropped slightly, at 58.5 per cent in the ACT, which is great, the Indigenous reoffending rate increased, with the ACT now taking New South Wales's place as the jurisdiction with the highest Indigenous reoffending rate in the country. Is the minister aware of these alarming figures, and what would she say to members of our First Nations community who might be concerned that a policy of setting a target for 2031 will not be enough to address our shameful Indigenous incarceration gap?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. The government has a range of targets through a range of agreements with different timeframes, and certainly I am kept updated against those targets as we progress. There is nothing easy, quick or simple about the reform in this area and making sure that we are starting to respond to and right injustices of the past.

The member has quoted a number of statistics. I will take the detail on notice, and I will get some advice, given that we do have a number of commitments there and a lot of work underway, as to how best to go through the detail of what the member has asked. But I would make the observation that as we work through these reforms, it is not necessarily going to be straightforward. It is not necessarily going to be easy, and we are not necessarily going to be on a continuum of progress. There will be times when we might go back, but we are also going to go forward. That is why we set these targets out so that we can work towards going through what are very complex reforms and changes. What I will say is that we do remain committed to realising the change that we need to make to start to work towards righting the injustices of the past that have led us here.

MR EMERSON: Will the minister commit to reducing the Indigenous incarceration gap in this term of government?

MS ORR: The government has made a number of commitments, and we remain committed to seeing those through.

MR RATTENBURY: What steps do you propose to take to deliver on that commitment?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question. As the former Attorney-General would know, there was the commissioning of the review into over representation of First Nations

people in the ACT justice system, which is concluding its second phase of analysis. We will be receiving the report for that very soon, and that report will feed into the steps that the ACT government will be taking to reduce the rates of incarceration and the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT justice system at all levels of the ACT justice system.

In addition to that, Minister Paterson and I will be working closely together with Minister Orr about options, practical initiatives that we can undertake, that support detainees on their release and that support detainees who might be on bail, or who might be on remand, and may need some extra support—so that we can reduce those recidivism rates. We do take that data very seriously and look forward to updating the Assembly when we have more to say.

Lake Ginninderra—water management

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, water is currently making its way from Lake Ginninderra towards Ginninderra Falls, for the purposes of filming a Netflix series, *Apex*, starring Charlize Theron. What volume of water was released by the ACT government on each instance last Friday, 31 January and this Tuesday, 4 February, and on what basis was each volume approved?

MS ORR: I believe I have already covered quite a bit about the approval process in answer to previous questioning on this. The actual amounts were based on what capacity could be released, and minimising any impacts that might come from that, which is the central question to be considered under the act.

MS CLAY: How often does the ACT government release water from public waterways through private property for the purpose of for-profit enterprises?

MS ORR: I reject the premise of Ms Clay's question. We had a request to release water. That is what we looked at. The decision was based on whether we were in a position to release the water.

I make the observation that the last question I was asked around this was: will you override everything and unilaterally release water for this particular reason? Now I am getting a question from the other side. We can start to see here the two sides of the argument, and what I had to grapple with in looking at this question. What was put to me was that we had a request; we had the ability to consider that request, and I had to consider that request under a certain legislative regulatory framework, which is what I did. As I pointed out during the previous line of questioning on this, the request as to who it came from, which movie stars were involved, whether we liked the movie, whether we had a subscription to the subscription service—all of that was not actually part of the request and the consideration.

Ms Clay: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Could we stop the clock there? What is your point of order, Ms Clay?

Ms Clay: It is on relevance. The question was: how often have you—and the answer might be, “I will take that on notice.” It was about how often; it was not about the premise or the basis. It was about how often.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, I sort of agree with Ms Clay that, in the first instance, you have rejected the premise of the question, but then you have gone on to answer it. If it is possible for you to answer the question—

MS ORR: Certainly. While I can appreciate Ms Clay’s point of order that the question was about how often it was opened, it was for a specific purpose. That is certainly what I have gone back to in my point. If the question is: how often is the valve opened? I would have to take that on notice and come back to you. It is opened for a range of reasons many times and across different areas. I would have to find out.

MISS NUTTALL: What are the impacts of each water release on Lake Ginninderra and the ACT’s natural environment, including on aquatic life and water quality?

MS ORR: Decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis. The impacts, as Miss Nuttall has phrased it, or the impacts of doing a release, will change, depending on the circumstances at the time. But they will go to things that you have to consider—the lake area, the surrounding lake area, the aquatic life, the downstream flows and how that will affect the water system. All of these were considered in the advice that was put to me in making the decision.

Sport and recreation—Amaroo Tennis Centre

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Labor first promised the Amaroo Tennis Centre ahead of the 2020 election, with a three-year completion timeframe. It later extended this to September 2024, but the development application was only approved in July 2024. Given the expected, 18-month construction timeframe, the centre is now expected to be completed in late 2025 or early 2026.

Minister, why does it take the ACT government five or six years to build something this simple?

MS BERRY: Well, actually building things like this just is not that simple. It is quite a major infrastructure project. And so there are a number of due diligence activities that need to occur before the project can go ahead. There are certain timeframes in place for that work to occur. There is work involving getting expressions of interest, getting the funding through the budget process and then making sure that the project can be delivered in a timely and safe manner.

We have also been engaging very closely with Tennis ACT, who have been very supportive of this project, understandably, frustrated because, of course, everybody would want this to have happened six years ago. But they understand that there are processes in place for major infrastructure projects like this one.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, can you guarantee that the centre will open and in use in early 2026?

MS BERRY: Well that is definitely the plan.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, can you provide the Assembly with an updated forecast of the total project cost?

MS BERRY: Look probably not at this time. But as soon as that figure is available then I will be able to do that.

Vocational education and training—apprenticeships

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, data released by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training shows that the ACT is the worst-performing jurisdiction in the country for commencements, completions and those in training. We are the only jurisdiction to have had a drop in these categories between 2020 and 2024, with commencements down 7.5 per cent, completions down 13 per cent and those in training down more than 25 per cent. Minister, why has the ACT gone backwards while the rest of the country is moving forwards?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. The answer to that question is broad and varied. The ACT is, of course, experiencing a very tight labour market, which has made entering the workforce in general more appealing than ever before. The ACT government recognises the challenges in this space, which is why the ACT government has committed to introducing two apprentice payments of \$250 and the federal Labor government has committed to a similar scheme, but much larger, of \$10,000.

MR HANSON: Minister, what do you say to the local industries that depend on a pipeline of new apprentices and trained staff?

MR PETTERSSON: What I would say to them, very loudly and clearly, is: “We want to work alongside you to deliver the skills and training mix that will deliver the workforce that you need.” The ACT is a fast-growing economy, and to deliver those skills requires investment in the training and skills that are required, which is why the ACT government is proud to invest in a new CIT campus in Woden and rejuvenated facilities in Bruce.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, can you guarantee that apprentice numbers will increase this year?

MR PETTERSSON: The ACT government takes very seriously our commitment to support the skills needs of our economy. The fluctuations in numbers are, of course, hard to predict but largely respond to the economic climate. The ACT is experiencing a very tight labour market which has made the ACT a jurisdiction in which getting people into training is more challenging than in others. We do acknowledge those challenges, which is why we have a range of programs in place to respond to that.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on relevance: the question was very clear on whether the minister can guarantee numbers will improve. It is a simple yes or no answer. He did not really get to the point.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I am not sure that I can direct the minister in the specific way to answer. I think he did address the core of the question. I am sorry that his answer did not appease you, but I think it was answered generally.

Mr Hanson: Fair enough.

Hospitals—performance

MS TOUGH: My question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, the Productivity Commission's *Report on government services* to be released today will provide more information about the improvements seen in the ACT's public health system's performance. Can you update members on the improvements across our hospitals and emergency departments?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the question. She is right, the latest *Report on government services* will indeed highlight important improvements we have been making in health, confirming the ACT-level data that has been released over recent months through annual reports, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare MyHospitals data, and most recently the ACT health services data dashboard, which went live yesterday. All of these sources show we are treating people faster in our emergency departments, and through our hospital-wide improvements, including the integrated operations centre, supporting more efficient patient flow.

In 2023-24, the number of patients seen on time in the ACT's emergency departments grew by 11 percentage points to 62 per cent. Category 3 and 4 seen on time have improved considerably by 10 and 14 percentage points respectively. Length of stay of four hours or less in our emergency department has increased to 56.2 per cent. When compared to peer hospitals, the ACT's hospitals are leading Australia on this performance measure. On length of stay of four hours or less for presentations ending in admission, the ACT is leading all jurisdictions. In 2022-23 the ACT also had the lowest rate of separations for potentially preventable hospitalisations, with a rate of just under 21 per 1,000 population compared to a national rate of around 25.

Elective surgery, of course, continues to be a key focus. In 2023-24, there were more than 18,400 additions to the public waiting list and we achieved a waitlist turnover of 95.9 per cent, a five percentage point increase on 2022-23. We will continue to focus on improving the performance of our ACT health system and supporting Canberrans to continue to enjoy the best health status amongst all jurisdictions.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how are ACT government investments ensuring these improvements are sustained across our vital public health services?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. In the 2024-25 budget the ACT Labor government reached funding investment of \$2.6 billion into the health portfolio an increase of more than \$700 million compared to the 2019-20 budget.

Our 2024-25 budget investments included expanded delivery of emergency and elective surgery, expansion of the Canberra Hospital campus, more paediatric and neo-natal services, additional beds at the University of Canberra Hospital, improvements to patient flow, and more services for older Canberrans.

This built on the investments we have made over successive budgets in expanding our emergency departments, intensive care units, medical and surgical beds, sub-acute and community services, paediatric services, and of course, the infrastructure our health services need for the future. Opening the Critical Services Building in August 2024 was, of course, a vital step in future-proofing the Canberra Hospital campus and we have been expanding services going into this state-of-the-art building to ensure we can maintain the improvements and innovations we have put in place.

To respond to increased demand, we are now investing a further \$227 million in our public services because, unlike those opposite, ACT Labor understands that we need to preserve public health care and embed the improvements we have been making in our hospital system performance. Funding this initiative will support Canberra Health Services to continue providing high-quality services to our growing population, including the additional frontline health workers we have recruited to meet this increased activity across our health services. ACT Labor will always back public health services and will continue investing in an accessible, accountable and sustainable public health system for the Canberra community.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, can you provide further information about the ACT government's commitments in this term that will further support improvements in performance and continued high-quality care for Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary question. ACT Labor, of course, did take a comprehensive plan to the election, unlike any other party or independent in this place, and that is exactly what we will deliver. We will recruit 800 health workers—more nurses, doctors and support staff—and we will ensure Canberra Health Services continues to be a great place to work by building our wellbeing supports and research and training opportunities for our staff.

We will deliver further public health service reforms including in planned care and improved access to specialist outpatient services. In the mental health portfolio we will deliver a mental health services plan by the end of 2026 and focus our efforts on practical improvements to the system. We will work with general practitioners to provide opportunities for trainee and junior doctor placements in general practice; lift bulk-billing, especially for children; and support the general practice workforce with their wellbeing and professional development.

We are committed to delivering on our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement as well. Further improvements to our health services will include establishing a Birthing on Country model and improving wraparound antenatal and postnatal supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families.

We will continue to deliver on key strategies reflecting our priorities for health service delivery over this decade, including the delivery of the more than \$1 billion Northside

Hospital, the ACT Health Services Plan and the critical Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan, to name just a few elements of our comprehensive policy platform.

Planning—Phillip

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. There is confusion about the future of the Philip trades precinct because the Woden District Strategy says that the Phillip trades precinct will be protected in land use planning; however, the zoning in the Woden District Policy provides for housing developments of up to six storeys in this area. As Braddon has been redeveloped, many services have been forced to leave the area as high-value residential developments were approved. The Phillip trades precinct is an important part of the Woden Town Centre and services a large catchment across Canberra's south. While the current laws allow for residential development, how will you ensure that the service trades are protected from the impact of residential development in the Phillip trades precinct?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. As I noted in some detail in question time yesterday, we intend to have a conversation with the community, with traders and with landowners in the Phillip services and trades area about what the future zoning requirements should be in that area. So it's a future-looking discussion.

The district strategies for each district in the ACT were not set in stone through the planning system review. They were developed and introduced as a document that was proposed to be a living document, where it would be amended from time to time based on the needs of the community and, indeed, based on consultation with the community. That is what I am intending to do with the roundtable with the Phillip area and the broader Woden Valley community, to make sure that we have the balance right when it comes to what might be permitted in that area and the various competing land uses in that particular precinct.

Ms Carrick: Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Ms Carrick, you have a point of order?

Ms Carrick: A point of order on relevance. The question was about the zoning allowing for housing now. If DAs go in now, how do you protect the trades? It is not about the future; it is about now.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister is going to finish his answer.

MR STEEL: I am happy to add that what we have seen is that residential development specifically within the Phillip trades area is generally not permitted. So there will not be applications under the new system that I expect that would come forward that would be approved. There were some allowances under the old Territory Plan that might have permitted some development applications to come forward, and they have been assessed under the old system. Indeed, some of them have been rejected.

MS CARRICK: Will the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework include holistic land use planning for housing, jobs, services, public spaces and community facilities across the whole Woden Town Centre, including the Phillip trades precinct?

MR STEEL: The scope of that project is being developed and I am open to that—and I have had that discussion with Ms Carrick about what the potential scope might be in terms of the footprint of the project. But, yes, it is intended to be a broad land use plan, particularly associated with some of the transport planning that we want to bring together on stage 2 of light rail and potential future extensions as well. That may include the Philip trades area as well. But the first point of discussion on that will be directly with the Phillip trading community and the broader Woden community as part of a roundtable. That discussion may then feed into the southern gateway planning work if there is a desire for change in that area.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what will the government do to ensure that the Philip trades precinct better meets the needs of community, such as by encouraging the return of lost services such as hardware and garden supply retailers? What will it do other than the roundtable?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly we will get an understanding about what sorts of services the community wants to access through that process and indeed potentially through a broader planning process with the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. We cannot dictate which businesses establish themselves with particular services within an area. But the broad land use planning may permit a range of different uses within a land use zone.

The discussion will be more about whether the existing zoning is what people desire; whether people want a different type of zoning and planning controls being available in that area to permit other land uses and mixed-use development; the compatibility of those land uses; and whether there are particular areas that people think should be changed and others that should stay the same. I do not have a particular view on whether there should be change or, indeed, whether it should remain the same. I am open to that discussing taking place. There may be a variety of different views, but I am keen to have that roundtable with the community to find out what their views are.

Libraries ACT—resourcing

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, I refer to correspondence between us concerning the opening hours of ACT libraries over summer, which are significantly reduced compared to previous years due to, as you advised me, issues of workforce availability and staff burnout.

Minister, why are our libraries suffering such significant staff shortages and staff burnout issues so as to force reduced operating hours over the summer for one of Canberra's significant public services?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question, and I would like to particularly recognise the staff at our libraries. I have visited each and every one of our libraries in the ACT, and their commitment to their work is admirable. To the substance of Mr Braddock's question, summer hours for Libraries ACT are due to several reasons. It is about increasing staffing capacity at branches throughout the summer and giving our Libraries ACT staff time to undertake administrative and planning tasks when libraries are closed. It also provided for increased leave opportunities for Libraries ACT staff. When reviewing the opening hours over the summer period against other ACT

government services, particularly over what is usually referred to as the “shutdown period”, Libraries ACT was not consistent with the service offering from across government, so we sought to keep that more consistent.

We also wanted to improve service reliability by helping keep unplanned branch closures to a minimum. We certainly notice, generally, that December and January are quieter times for our libraries. There is a general decline in loans, returns and visitors to libraries, so the closure days were chosen in accordance with the low-demand days. There were a number of requests for leave that we wanted to make sure that we were able to fulfil, but there have also been a considerable number of unplanned absences which has— (*Time expired.*)

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why does it look like the bilingual story time program has been cut from the library’s programs, and has this any relationship to the staff shortages in libraries?

MS CHEYNE: I will come back if I am incorrect, but generally over this period we have had reduced programming. Bilingual story time, in fact, is going to be tomorrow night for adults at the National Multicultural Festival and then for children on Saturday. I certainly would expect that it has not been ramped up to the usual extent over the January and early February period, but I am not aware if there have been any changes to the scheduling of it overall.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, how soon can the bilingual story time program be reinstated consistently in libraries in support of our linguistically diverse communities?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—grants

DR PATERSON: I wanted to respond to yesterday’s question about the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund that Ms Morris asked me about. It was the DSSF. It holds money paid by clubs on the levy on the number of gaming authorisations held. It is a levy that is paid entirely by industry. Payments out of this fund occur in accordance with ministerial guidelines made under the Gaming Machine Act and must satisfy purposes set out in the act.

Applications for payments from this fund are assessed by the DSSF advisory board, an independent board established by the act. The minister then authorises the payments on recommendations from the independent board.

Sport and recreation—Amaroo Tennis Centre

MS BERRY: I wanted to provide detail on the funding that has gone towards the Gungahlin tennis centre. At this point in time, for members’ information, it is \$13.834 million. The construction tender will be released this month.

Lake Tuggeranong—water quality

MS CHEYNE: I come back to Miss Nuttall's questions about Lake Tuggeranong. Regarding the aspect of the question about signs—that I will keep on notice. But regarding everything else, it was not the same source of contamination as in 2024. Regarding what has occurred this week, ACT government field teams identified the source by working backwards from the gross pollutant trap, enabling the contamination spill to be traced to a kerbside sump.

Local businesses in Tuggeranong engaged incredibly cooperatively to confirm the sources, and a crossed trade-waste line was removed and rectified on Wednesday morning, and that will continue to be monitored. But the issue is considered to be resolved. It would be premature to talk about regulatory action at this point, but I would note that the matter has been referred to the plumbing inspectorate.

Work that has been undertaken includes the installation of floating bunds to minimise further entry of oil into the lake. And contractors attended earlier this week to suck contaminants out of the gross pollutant trap to make room for releases. EPA officers and TCCS staff have worked to monitor and support clean-up work. The lake is closed until further notice, pending water quality sample testing. The results of those tests, as I said before, will determine the next course of action, including timing for the lake's reopening.

Mr Rattenbury, I believe, asked me about the contamination incident in January. He might have been referring to the one in September, and, if so, the entity responsible for the event in September 2024 has been billed for the government costs.

Justice—mandatory minimum sentencing

MS CHEYNE: Regarding mandatory minimum criminal sentences, ACT government policy is to not seek to use mandatory minimum criminal sentences in our legislation, and there is no change to ACT government policy. Courts take into account and seek to balance many factors relevant to the sentencing process, and mandatory sentencing would interfere with that.

Regarding Mr Braddock's question, commonwealth bills and acts are not subject to the ACT Human Rights Act. However, in general terms, mandatory sentences do, of course, engage a number of human rights in terms of imposing significant limitations on those.

Papers

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Reports—2023-2024—

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority—Corrigendum, dated February 2025.

Director of Public Prosecutions—Corrigendum, dated February 2025.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Corrigendum, dated February 2025.

Public Trustee and Guardian—Corrigendum, dated February 2025.

Coroners Act—

Pursuant to subsection 57(4)—Report of Coroner—Inquest into the death of Luke Anthony Rich—Government response, dated February 2025, together with a statement.

Pursuant to subsection 102(8)—ACT Coroner’s Court—Annual report—2023/2024, dated 24 December 2024.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 30E—Half-yearly performance reports—December 2024, for the following:

ACT Health Directorate, dated 6 February 2025.

ACT Local Hospital Network, dated 6 February 2025.

Canberra Health Services, dated 6 February 2025.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, dated February 2025.

Community Service Directorate, dated February 2025.

Education Directorate, dated 6 February 2025.

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development, dated February 2025.

Housing ACT, dated February 2025.

Infrastructure Canberra, dated 6 February 2025.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate, dated February 2025.

Transport Canberra and City Services, dated February 2025.

Transport Canberra Operations, dated February 2025.

Phillip Swimming Pool & Ice-Skating Centre—Development—Assembly resolution of 3 December 2024—Government response, dated February 2025.

Health—government reporting obligations

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of transparency in government that allows the people of the ACT to scrutinise government decisions and policies;
- (b) for the public to have trust in their system of government, it requires the Government to regularly publish reports, statistics and other material that demonstrates decisions taken are in the public interest and that resources are being used efficiently; and
- (c) for the ACT public to have confidence in the provision of health services, it requires the regular publishing of reports highlighting the performance of the hospital and health systems;

- (2) further notes that the ACT Health Directorate has failed to publish the *ACT Public Health Services Quarterly Performance Report* since 15 May 2024; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) require the Minister for Health to make a statement to the Assembly explaining why she has failed to meet her reporting obligations;
 - (b) table the missing reports by the end of this week;
 - (c) commit to publishing future reports in a timely way;
 - (d) stop making excuses and hiding the truth about the state of the health system; and
 - (e) call a Royal Commission into the ACT health system and finally deliver better outcomes for Canberrans, and for our overworked frontline health workers.

I am not moving today's motion because I want to but because I have to. I should not be moving it, and the Assembly should not have to consider it, because it should be redundant. It should be unnecessary. But here we are, calling on the health minister to publish reports and data which she is already obligated to publish. If she ignores this motion, if she refuses to publish, we will have to raise the matter in the next sitting week and order her to do so. What a waste of everybody's time.

The message that we all heard this week is that our health system is a mess. It seems that they have managed to overspend their budget by 20 per cent in the first half of the financial year and need an urgent bailout. It also seems that the government is moving to cut services, such as low-value care—and, of course, I know what low-value care is, Minister—but at the end of that low-value care is a Canberran who will now miss out, and I can guarantee that it will not be the minister who fronts up, faces that person and explains why they are no longer getting the care they deserve.

She is considering cuts to elective surgery, too. The dire state of the health system has come as a surprise to some, and I can understand why. The picture that is painted by the minister is a rosy one, full of new investments and improved capabilities, happy staff and high levels of care. Madam Assistant Speaker, if you only heard what the minister has been saying, you might take her at her word. You would not know about the challenges, because the data to contradict her has not been available.

As the motion notes, the government stopped publishing performance reports for public health services in May last year. I suspect the minister will argue that this motion is unnecessary, that the government has a dashboard and everything is fine. It is the sort of spin that you would expect. And there is a dashboard which contains some of the same data, but the dashboard has the same timeliness problems. Actually, quite a bit is eight months old, despite the dashboard supposedly being updated monthly. The data provided on the dashboard is not as detailed as what was available in the previous quarterly performance reports. It does not go back any earlier than 2023-24. And it is not possible for the average user to know if the data from the reports is consistent with the data on the dashboard.

If you cannot reliably compare the data over time, you just cannot answer basic questions like whether emergency departments or elective surgery wait times are

getting better or worse. Without a single reliable source of data, you have to rely on whatever the minister tells you, which, I guess, is pretty convenient when you have an election coming up, where health is one of the major issues for voters.

In question time today, we learned that they have been hiding data about overdue elective surgeries as well. Since the election, the number of overdue category 1 surgeries, which are those clinically recommended to occur within 30 days, have gone from 21 per cent to 28 per cent. For category 2 surgeries, those recommended within 90 days, it is up from 45 per cent to 50 per cent. We should stop for a moment and think about what that means. If you need surgery and your doctor says you need it within 90 days, you have only a fifty-fifty chance of it happening in the ACT. You would not know that if you just listened to the minister and took her at her word—and you can tell that from the Dorothy Dixier she answered in question time.

That is why these public reports are so important. They provide the transparency that we need in order to know what is going on—what is working and what is not—to know where we need reform and to hold the government accountable for its decisions and its failures.

My motion calls on the minister to front up and explain what is going on here. Why is she avoiding her obligations, keeping these secrets and not being up-front with the community? The motion calls on the minister to publish the data that she has been hiding and to commit to publishing it in the future.

Finally, the motion calls for a royal commission. Mr Hanson and I have been banging the drum about this for years. It came about when the government decided they wanted to take over Calvary hospital, which, if I remember rightly, they were taking over in order to improve performance. If we could see the data, we might be able to bring that to the chamber as well. I still believe that this is the single best option we have for driving the fundamental changes that we need in our health system.

A royal commission does not need to be as wideranging, lengthy or expensive as some we have seen federally. It just needs to focus on the core issues of getting care back into the system, improving performance, cutting wait times, and fixing the culture and workforce issues. That is what we need most of all. But it all begins with transparency. That is what we are seeking here today, and I ask all members to support transparency and the building of a better health system.

MS STEPHEN—SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.16): I thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion. I note that she did not have much to say because, in fact, there are no obligations that have not been met in terms of data reporting. The dashboard that we have been talking about for some time—and I share Ms Castley's frustration about the delay in getting out some of this data, following the implementation of the Digital Health Record system—is now live and it shows an improvement in our hospitals' performance.

Ms Castley referred in her remarks, though, to some odd things. Ms Castley referred to some comments she claims that I made about the potential to cut elective surgery. As I said to her in question time, she needs to read the full transcript or the full article in

relation to that. I have not flagged any plans to cut elective surgery. Specifically, I said that, if we did not invest the additional funding that we are putting in through the budget review, through the second appropriation bill that will be introduced this afternoon, we would have to take drastic actions, such as cutting elective surgery. Ms Castley completely ignored that and has again verbalised me by saying that I have made this assertion publicly. I have not. We have no plans to cut elective surgery and she is simply making things up. It is astonishing.

As I said, there are no reporting obligations that have not been met by the ACT government. Indeed, in the previous quarterly performance report, we had publicly reported data ahead of our national reporting obligations, and that data is now to be reported publicly through the dashboard. It has been developed and it is now live on the ACT Health Directorate website. It currently displays data up to and including October 2024, and this data will be updated monthly.

Ms Castley seemed to think that only putting data up to October 2024 was somehow a problem, but data needs to be checked. Some of the data actually does not come in until quite some time after a patient has been seen. Elective surgery data is not updated for the end of October on 1 November; it actually takes time to work its way through the system. It is simply not possible to have it completely up to date to yesterday in a cleansed way, which is why, as I tried to explain to Ms Castley in question time, there is a difference between CHS operational data, which is point in time, and data that is published by the Health Directorate, which goes through a quality control process.

This new data dashboard is a web based, accessible and interactive series of data visualisations, presenting activity and performance data currently across emergency department, elective surgery, walk-in centres, and quality and safety, including hand hygiene and patient satisfaction. Additional metrics will be added to the dashboard in future releases. Ms Castley is right; some data that used to be presented in the quarterly performance report is not available in the dashboard. That is because we are still undertaking a data remediation process. Ms Castley is well aware of this. It is not my decision; it is the fact that we are undertaking a data remediation process. I am also frustrated that we do not have this data, but it is not a reporting obligation, as she has indicated, and all of our reporting obligations have, in fact, been met.

I want to refer to the sections of Ms Castley's motion which remain in Mr Rattenbury's amendment—something that Mr Rattenbury's office did not mention to us in their so-called good faith negotiations. In fact, this amendment is completely different to the last one that we saw. I will call out Mr Rattenbury's office on this, because I do not believe he knew that. I do not believe he knew that his office had given him an amendment that had not been discussed with my office. Nevertheless, we will be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment. I will respond now to parts (d), (e) and (f) of Mr Rattenbury's amendment, which reflect Ms Castley's original motion.

Firstly, I state again that there are no reporting obligations that I have failed to meet. Therefore, there are no missing reports. The dashboard is now live and will be updated monthly. To the extent that I am required to make a statement to the Assembly, can I say that I have just done so. But I will go a bit further and talk about what some of the data actually shows, and I will go to Ms Castley's point about royal commissions.

The data on the dashboard shows emergency department activity—and this is what we have been talking about in relation to the additional \$227 million that the ACT Labor government will invest in our health system to ensure that we can maintain our high-quality services for Canberrans. It covers the period July to October 2024 and, compared to the same period in the previous year, presentations to the emergency department were up 7.2 per cent; admissions from the emergency department were up 11.7 per cent; arrivals by ambulance were up 4.4 per cent; and those treated in the emergency department and discharged were up 8.2 per cent.

Despite those increased presentations and increased admissions to hospital, the figure for those starting treatment on time was 61.3 per cent, up 1.2 percentage points; those leaving within four hours was 59.8 per cent, up 6.8 percentage points; the median wait time to treatment was 25 minutes, the same as for the same period in the previous year; and the figure for “did not wait” was at 2.5 per cent, which was down 1.8 percentage points. Before Ms Castley gets excited, down is good for “did not wait”.

For elective surgery activity, the figure for removals from the electoral surgery waitlist was 5,584, up 11.6 per cent; there were 6,668 additions, up 6.7 per cent. We have been removing people from the waitlist at a higher rate than the rate at which they have been added. That is a really good outcome. Removals other than surgery are also up, but not to the same extent as removals overall.

With respect to elective surgery performance, the figure for those performed within clinically recommended waiting times is down, at 63.5 per cent; it is down 2.3 percentage points. This data actually reflects people who have had surgery. When you start with long waits, you end up in a worse position on this particular measure because it involves people who have had surgery, where they have been waiting a long time. This measure actually goes backwards. The number of people waiting has also gone up. The median wait time is 50 days. That is a slight increase. And the figure for patients overdue has also increased. We are transparently reporting that, and we are also increasing our elective surgery throughput. We have an elective surgery target this year of well over 17,000 elective surgeries, which is significantly higher than has ever been achieved in the ACT before. Our walk-in centre presentations are up 8.4 per cent.

Despite all of this busyness, our patient satisfaction remains high with respect to recommendations to family and friends. It is 92 per cent for CHS, outside North Canberra Hospital, and 96 per cent for North Canberra Hospital. All of these improvements in performance have been seen since the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital. I am not saying it is because of the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital, but it has certainly helped us to deliver a planned public acute hospital system. It has certainly helped for us to have visibility and capacity to load-share across our two public hospitals: Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital. That has helped.

One of the other things that helped has been the establishment of the Integrated Operations Centre at Canberra Hospital. Real-time visibility of the patient journey—and I talked yesterday about the clinical initiative nurse position—ensures that there is visibility when patients are breaching their clinical wait time. Someone is noticing that and saying, “Let’s have another look at that patient. They’ve breached their wait time or they’ve breached their four hours. Let’s look at that.” It is about enabling us to

load-share across our hospitals, to understand when one emergency department is particularly busy and the other one could actually take some of the load. It is about planning our surgeries with greater precision, so that we can continue to improve our performance in elective surgery.

It is not just our data dashboard that is showing these improvements. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data for 2023-24, which we discussed earlier this year, also showed significant improvements. Ms Castley's problem is that she just cannot accept that there have been these improvements. She keeps talking the system down. In typical Canberra Liberals fashion, all they can do is talk down our system. When you do that, you are talking down the hard work of thousands of clinicians across our system who strive every day to continue to improve performance, and they are doing that; they are achieving that. With the support of ACT Labor government investment in their wellbeing, in our services, in expanded and high-quality infrastructure, they are delivering improved performance across our system. All Ms Castley can do is to talk it down. All Ms Castley can do is to say, "We need to have a royal commission because our system is improving, and I don't understand why, so we need to look into this. We need to look into why our system is improving, and what more we need to do."

Ms Castley is well aware that there are a lot of reviews, inquiries, reports, recommendations, strategies and action plans across our system. A royal commission would take, from the most optimistic view, 18 months. But most royal commissions are extended. It would cost millions and millions of dollars that could be spent on frontline care, but Ms Castley would spend it on a royal commission. It would come up with hundreds of recommendations that would take years and years to implement, but it probably would not tell us anything new, because we have had so many inquiries and reports and because health is one of the most consistently examined and considered areas of government policy. It is also the area most consistently invested in by the ACT Labor government.

I noted as a starting point that the Canberra Liberals have had very few ideas in health policy, and the royal commission, which Mr Hanson came up with when he was acting leader, is really their only consistent idea. I talked about it in May 2023, when I noted:

A cynic's reading ... might suggest that the Canberra Liberals are prepared to spend \$12 million of ratepayers' money to phone out their policy development. I am not prepared to waste that kind of money. I would encourage the Canberra Liberals to do their own work and present, in the lead-up to the next election, their own alternative, fully costed healthcare policies.

It was disappointing to see that the Canberra Liberals did not take up that opportunity, and they still do not have any ideas of their own.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.29): I move:

Omit all text after paragraph (2), substitute:

“(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) continue publishing the monthly *Health Service Data Dashboard*;
- (b) continue to deliver improvements to publicly available health system performance reporting, including but not limited to:

- (i) reporting data on specialist waiting times as an outpatient;
 - (ii) reporting data on waiting times to receive an offer of public dental care appointments and waiting times for the first visit for public dental care;
 - (iii) causes of emergency department presentations, such as those arising from dental issues, and potentially preventable presentations; and
 - (iv) greater reporting on the walk-in centres, including but not limited to, patient redirections;
- (c) integrate a complete set of retrospective data, where feasible, for the data sets listed in paragraph (3)(b) and previously included in the *Public Health Services Quarterly Performance Report* into the monthly *Health Service Data Dashboard*;
- (d) require the Minister for Health to make a statement to the Assembly explaining why she has failed to meet her reporting obligations;
- (e) table the missing reports in a timely way; and
- (f) commit to publishing future reports in a timely way.”.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: Madam Assistant Speaker, I have not even started my remarks and Mr Hanson is already interjecting. Throughout 2024, the ACT Greens articulated a clear vision that we saw for the ACT’s health system. We took the opportunity during the election to be very clear about what we saw as the important future reforms of the ACT health system. Through that agenda there was a strong emphasis on particularly primary and preventive health care, knowing that is the clear pathway to a sustainable, long-term health system.

I have moved this amendment today in the particular context of this debate. I am pleased to have been able to work on it. I have moved the amendment in order to further increase the depth and accessibility of publicly available health data. This is a very important thing to do to enable an accurate, fair and well-informed discussion of where our health system is at. It is my hope that this will allow us to take further steps towards having a greater understanding of how health services in Canberra are working and help to identify areas that need improvement.

Last week, the government announced there was a \$227 million gap in funding for primary and emergency health services in the territory. Quality, affordable and timely health care is one of the most important services for Canberrans. It ensures a fundamental basis for people’s wellbeing and a good life. The ACT Greens will always support properly funding our healthcare system, but this needs to be done in a way that delivers accountability and better quality of care for Canberrans, with a commitment to continuous improvement.

Given the importance of quality health care, and the significant portion of the ACT budget that goes to health, the government cannot just slap a \$227 million bandaid on this issue. Instead, we need an open and transparent conversation with the community

about how to more sustainably manage the health budget going forward, while delivering better services.

We know that people in Canberra are struggling to afford preventive healthcare services. Canberra has the lowest bulk-billing rates in the country, which is a point that has been made on more than one occasion in this place and in public. This means that many people in our community—and there will be even more, as the cost-of-living pressure bites—are missing out on essential primary health care. We need to understand whether this lack of primary health care is driving the significant increase in emergency health services that we have seen with this funding gap.

An important element of this is ensuring that we have access to information regarding what is actually happening in the health system. We need to understand the wait times for specialist appointments and we need to understand the reasons for emergency department presentations. This will allow us to assess whether the increase in emergency department presentations is tied to a lack of primary health care. We want to know how long people are having to wait to access dental care. We need to know not just the time it is taking for them to get that first appointment but also what the hidden waiting times are to just get an offer of an appointment.

The Greens believe that everyone should have access to universal health care and that costs should not be a barrier to treatment. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Oral health and dental care* report found that almost one in five adults, or around 18 per cent, delayed or did not see a dental professional in 2022-23 due to cost. We need to make sure that we know how many people are turning up to the emergency department for entirely preventable dental issues—something that should never have been happening.

This is one specific area, and members will recall that I asked questions about this earlier in the week, because it presents a potential case study of an area that warrants improvement—an area where we can take pressure off our emergency department. We all know how painful a toothache or various dental issues can be. Those people should never end up in the emergency department. Ideally, they would never get there. It is an example of the sorts of things we can do to think about how we better balance and better fund our healthcare system.

I will speak specifically to my amendment. We have inserted those specific data requests. In addition to the broad ones that Ms Castley talked about in her original motion, we have identified some particular areas that the Greens think warrant improved transparency and the explicit provision of that information.

We have not included reference to a royal commission, as members will have noted. Various Greens members have spoken about that in previous debates in this place. We do not support it because we think it does not offer the solutions that it is claimed to provide. The minister's remarks on that are ones that I share. I think it would take a long time. We would rather focus on looking at specific issues. There are parts of the health system that are working extremely well, with strong levels of satisfaction from patients and good performance. There are areas that need improvement. I would rather see us focus specifically on those rather than throw the whole thing in the air and generate what is essentially a headline around having a royal commission. There are

more practical ways to get the improvements we need in our health system. That is a debate that I imagine will continue, given that it is Liberal Party policy.

I take this opportunity to apologise to Minister Stephen-Smith if there was some confusion or uncertainty about the versions of the amendment that were being circulated. We will reflect on that process. But I will use that as an opportunity, because this week we have been pestered by just about everybody in this place with respect to negotiating.

Ironically, a couple of days ago, Ms Castley came in here and gave my colleagues and me quite a serve, had another crack on social media, and then put out a press release about the marvellous win that she had had while working in partnership with us. That is having it both ways, and good luck to her for that one.

I will tell this chamber right now about how we intend to negotiate this term. We are now in a five-cornered negotiating process. We are conscious that Labor and the Liberal Party do not talk to each other a whole lot on these kinds of things, unless it suits them to get together and, say, prop up the pokies industry. That happens; but, most of the time, we find ourselves as the go-between, between these groups.

I can tell the chamber—and, more importantly, the public—that we will seek, in these processes, to get good outcomes. We will listen to the arguments that come from the various parties in this chamber, to try and find the best way through that most benefits our community. You will see that reflected in our amendment today. We talked to Ms Castley's team and the various Liberal folks involved. They outlined the views that they had. We also spoke to Minister Stephen-Smith's office.

Unlike the comments that were made earlier, there is not some secret deal with Labor. It is about actually listening to the government, who have some points to make, and some arguments. What can be seen in this amendment is an attempt to pick up the best of that, to work with the information we were given, and to take on board some of the points that Ms Castley made. Minister Stephen-Smith disagrees; she has her arguments on that, and that is fair enough.

That approach this week has provided an interesting demonstration of how it will play out across the term. Frankly, it will probably leave us caught between both sides, and the bits of the chamber that find it difficult at times to concede anything to each other. I can assure the chamber that we will do our very best to get the best outcomes for our community.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.37): What a change we have had in the attitude of the minister to issues in health in the past day or so. The contrition that we saw yesterday has gone; instead, we now go back to the same minister that we have known for quite some time—the minister who loves a little bit of petty politicking, loves a bit of semantics, and loves a loophole and a technicality. Loophole found: minister says no.

Frankly, the response of the minister on this is quite frustrating and distressing to me because, as I am sure the minister knows full well, any of the data is not the full picture. I am now talking directly to the idea of a royal commission. The data will give you a

slice of the picture, and it is an extraordinarily important slice of the picture. We need to understand what is going on in our health services.

I want to go deeper than that, because a royal commission is the thing that actually gets to the heart of what is genuinely happening, what is the lived experience of patients, the lived experience of doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, psychologists, GPs—every person who is involved in our health system in the ACT. It is not just about looking at a narrow slice from one part of the health system from which we might choose to cherry-pick data because it interests the government to put it out in that particular format.

Any first-year statistics student will hear the phrase, “Lies, damned lies and statistics.” Often it feels like that is what we are being fed: statistics that look one way, while a whole bunch of other data may be in the background telling a different story. People’s lived experiences are clearly telling us a different story, and a royal commission is important because it allows us to get ahead of the problems. It allows us to actually hear from the people who are sitting on that waitlist. They are not just numbers. We are talking about the people who are sitting there and waiting. I spoke with someone this week who is waiting for an implantable defibrillator. They are sitting in the top category and they cannot get in. It is a matter of life and death.

I have no doubt that the minister’s apology this week was genuine. I cannot imagine the weight that she must bear, knowing that a young child died on her watch. I cannot imagine it. The value in having a royal commission is getting in before it happens again. We have to remember that there are people at the other end of all of these services. We have to remember that it is incumbent on us to take every step we possibly can to make sure we are looking after the lives, the health and the wellbeing of those people.

We deserve better than the politicking and the snarkiness that we have heard today. It was absolutely appalling, and it is continuing from this minister. She cannot hold herself back. If she sees an opportunity to belittle and pull down, because it suits her agenda, she will, and she has proved it today. Canberrans deserve better. I am asking for support for Ms Castley’s motion because we can give them better.

Debate interrupted.

Visitor

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members, I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of a former senator for the ACT and former President of the Senate, the Hon Margaret Reid. Welcome.

Health—government reporting obligations

Debate resumed.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.42): Mr Rattenbury will be aware of these issues because he has been here for the same length of time as me. Dealing with hospital data, health data, in this place is not new. Ms Castley is exactly right. She wants to make sure that she has the full set of data and that it is not just presented on a website as a snapshot

in time. You have to look at the full sets of data so that you can see the analysis. And she is right not to trust this government.

Sadly, back in 2011—and you can read the Auditor-General’s report—a previous health minister, Ms Gallagher, had a friend who she went on holiday with and who then conducted a fabrication of the data within the Canberra Hospital. She was a director at the Canberra Hospital, and I think the quote was that it was done for the political imperative. It was a friend of both Ms Gallagher and her sister. It was a shameful episode that led to the doctoring of ED data to try and make it look better. That is something that happened. It was uncovered. Read the Auditor-General’s report.

Whilst Mr Corbell, who took over, was the health minister, my office, as I was the shadow health minister at the time, was doing comparative data between what had been released and previous quarterly health reports, which Ms Castley is calling for to be maintained and to be looked at. We found that what had happened was that the data in a report—I think it was the December report—was actually downgraded to the data in an older report, so that the minister was able to say, “Look; things are improving.” They actually had not. The real data had gone downwards; it had got worse. But because the data in the preceding report had changed, he put out press releases and said, “Look, everybody; ED data is improving. We’re getting better.” I had a diligent staff member who said, “Hang on; they have changed the previous report. That’s not true.” The reality was that the ED performance was declining, but the report that was printed was changed.

Again, when Ms Fitzharris was the minister, there were errors and problems with data. There were errors reported in the *Canberra Times*, showing that ACT Health was told of data problems months before the 2016 election. In February that year, there was a system-wide review launched into ACT data. Of course, that was not revealed in the lead-up to the election.

There have been changes to and fabrication of data. Staff have had to resign as a result. There have been Auditor-General’s reports. There have been changes in data, exactly as Ms Castley has said. You do not compare that data. It is right for her to come into this place and say—as I think the Greens are endorsing—that we need the full set of data so that we can do the proper analysis and see whether we are improving or getting worse. If we do not have that full set, I am sorry to say, I have been here for long enough not to trust this government, because they have form, under three separate ministers, where the data was changed so that the minister could say that things were improving when that categorically was not the case.

I fully support Ms Castley in what she is trying to do here, which is to make sure that we all have the data.

Ms Stephen-Smith interjecting—

MR HANSON: This is not about the royal commission. That is a separate issue that has been canvassed properly. This is about making sure that we, as the parliament of the ACT, and health consumers, the people whose money—hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money—is being spent, can see whether the system is improving or getting worse. With respect to taking the minister’s word—“Don’t worry,

everything's okay here"—on three separate occasions, under three separate ministers, that has proven to be false.

Members, it is right that we get the data. If things are improving, that is great. We would like to see that. But, I am sorry, we no longer trust you.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.47): First, do no harm: this is the longstanding tradition within the medical profession attributed to ancient Greek philosopher Hippocrates. It is longstanding because it is a belief that has endured the ages in the pursuit of human rights and dignity through health care.

We recognise that health care is a moral enterprise and, as such, the health profession has a duty of care to its patients. In today's day and age, the tools of modern medicine are formidably powerful. Advances in emerging technologies, drugs, surgical equipment and procedures enable us to deliver the highest standards of care to people who need it most.

Another one of those tools is data. Data helps us to fulfil our long-term obligations to deliver quality health care. It helps us to identify areas of shortcoming and development. It plays a vital role in informing the organisation and administration of health services and the allocation of resources. It helps to inform the direction of our education and maintain up-to-date health practices.

Without regular and reliable data, the ACT cannot adequately fulfil its duty of care to Canberrans whose very lives depend on it. Without data, our finite resources will fail to reach desperately needed targets, and the best efforts of our health professionals will be undermined. The result is that patient outcomes inevitably go backwards. Data matters because people and patients matter.

I thank the opposition leader, Ms Castley, for bringing forward this motion today, because this motion recognises that the health and wellbeing of patients in Canberra and the ability of health professionals to do their job are supported by accurate and up-to-date data. Ms Castley's motion recognises that. As the Minister for Health, Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith has a duty to do no harm in the administration of health care in the ACT.

In failing to report comprehensive public health data, Minister Stephen-Smith has actually failed in that duty. The minister has effectively thrown our public health sector into the arena with a blindfold on. Our nurses, doctors and hospital administrative staff do a tremendous job in providing the best level of care to Canberra patients. They work painfully long hours, sometimes in unforgiving circumstances. Many are suffering burnout and stress. They feel under-appreciated and undervalued because they are not getting adequate support. It is the minister's responsibility to give them the tools that they need to do that, and one of those tools is data.

Many patients are not getting the care they need because the system cannot support them. I am sure all of us in this chamber have heard stories from constituents about system failures—families who have to leave Canberra to get health services that used to be available in Canberra but are not anymore, and patients languishing on surgery waiting lists.

Just yesterday, Minister, you stood in this chamber and apologised for a system failure that contributed to the death of a beautiful young girl. You said that the government will not forget, and you said that the deficiencies in her care have led to improvements in the system and processes. I hope that one of those improvements will be around transparency and comprehensive public reporting of data. We need the full dataset. It is not a monumental ask. It is a call and a reminder to the government that, as the principal stewards of public health services in Canberra, you do have a duty to do no harm. It is a call to fulfil your obligation to deliver quality health care. The reporting and publishing of quality data is an important tool in doing so.

I thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.51): In closing, I would like to thank everybody for their contributions today. It is an important discussion. The history is there. We must not forget, at the end of what we are talking about, that Canberrans deserve the very best health care. We are in the nation's capital. This should not be a big ask.

I would like to thank Mr Rattenbury and his office. I acknowledge that it has been a rough week, and I thank the people in his office for working with us on this. It has meant a lot to get to a point where there is an amendment that we can agree on. Of course, I am willing to let go of the proposal for a royal commission in this particular amendment. However, that will not be the case going forward, I will continue to bang the drum for a royal commission. I know Mr Rattenbury says that it is a time issue, but I do not think that is a valid reason not to have one. Mr Cocks made some great points as to why a royal commission is important, and it is something that we will continue to fight for.

The minister can nitpick on semantics, as she did in her speech, but, at the end of the day, she is deflecting and attempting to distract us so that, again, she can tell us how wonderful the system is, when my inbox tells me differently. I am sure the minister's does as well, because normally I am only cc'd on this stuff. We hear constantly from patients—people who are trying to get health care and just cannot. It is the day in, day out experience of people that this system in Canberra is failing them. I would note that the dashboard is really not worth the bandwidth that it is taking up at the moment. There is so much detail missing, and that is why we brought forward this motion today. We must drill down on the data. We cannot rely on old information, no matter how the minister tries to spin it.

I would like to again remind members that these are human beings that need help and rely on a system that works. People are waiting year after year for some surgeries, and it is simply not enough.

I will wrap up quickly by saying we are happy to accept the amendment moved by the Greens today. Again, I thank everybody for their contributions. It is one of the most important issues that we are facing in Canberra.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Energy—electricity generation and storage technologies

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (3.55): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the:
 - (a) release of the CSIRO’s draft GenCost 2024-2025 report on 9 December 2024;
 - (b) draft report offers accurate, policy and technology-neutral cost estimates for new electricity generation, storage, and hydrogen technologies, through to 2050;
 - (c) draft report provides timely input into the ongoing discussions on Australia’s energy policy and how decisions taken will impact costs to consumers over the coming decades;
 - (d) draft report finds that introducing nuclear energy generation into the Australian Energy Network has higher costs than other technologies, including renewables; and
 - (e) draft report found “renewables continue to have the lowest cost range of any new-build electricity generation technology, for the seventh year in a row”; and
- (2) expresses a commitment to:
 - (a) acknowledge that, based on the most up-to-date evidence available, renewable technologies provide the best option for delivering electricity to consumers into the future; and
 - (b) ensure the ACT, and the nation, continue to invest in renewable energy and remain free of large-scale nuclear power generation.

I rise today to move what I trust will be a unanimously supported motion to the effect that the ACT Legislative Assembly is committed in principle and in practice to acknowledging that renewable technologies provide the best option for delivering electricity to consumers into the future based on the most up-to-date evidence available and ensuring that the ACT and Australia continue to invest in renewable energy while remaining free of the impacts of large-scale nuclear-powered generation.

Although I say it myself, this is a salient motion and a timely one about the criticality of using evidence and evidence-based discussions to shape Australia’s current and future power generation strategies, given the choice on that issue Canberrans will face at the federal ballot box in the coming months. As such, it is imperative that we keep grounding our discussions in the robust findings of scientific research, such as those laid out in the CSIRO’s GenCost 2024-25 draft report, which was released on 9 December 2024.

The report’s findings are very clear. Renewables remain the lowest-cost option for new electricity generation in Australia currently and into the future. Large-scale solar and wind power continue to outperform other technologies in terms of cost effectiveness. The levelized cost of electricity for firmed renewables ranges from \$100 per megawatt hour to \$143 per megawatt hour, while large-scale nuclear is estimated to be between

\$155 per megawatt hour and \$252 per megawatt hour. The report finds that nuclear power will be more expensive than renewable energy to build, produce and deploy for decades and decades, and will take at least 15 years to deliver in a best-case scenario. A best-case scenario that includes the need to start a nuclear industry from scratch, develop an effective legislation and regulation framework, and persuade the states and the poor communities that will have to host at least seven nuclear reactors and however many nuclear waste dumps. Fifteen years: half the time that it will take to build nuclear submarines. I won't buy it.

Yet the federal Leader of the Opposition talks about nuclear power as if it will lower the cost that Australians pay for electricity now or at least in the next term. He talks about it, although the modelling he relied on when he gave his one press conference on the issue, on a Friday in December, after the last sitting week, just two weeks before Christmas, does not forecast what the coalition's plan would do for people's electricity bills or to electricity prices. Humorously, that modelling assumes demand for electricity will not increase as much as the government expects, despite the increasing use of artificial intelligence and the growing ubiquity of big batteries and electric vehicles. Australians, in the future, electrifying as much as possible, are going to use less electricity? I am not buying that, either.

It is this "that makes no sense" logic which reminds me of the Turnbull-Abbott NBN revolution. Do you remember that? They dialled the NBN max speed down to 25 megabits per second because no-one was going to pay for 100 megabits—no Australian was ever going to need, want or use that much interwebs. Sure, it was a long time ago. I will check my notes. No, it was September 2013. Today, just 11½ years later, in many places in Australia, other than in a large part of Tuggeranong, people pay for and use gigabit per second plans—1,000 megabits.

The fact is that nuclear energy will not lower the cost of our electricity, which we will be using plenty more of, not now or even in 25 years, when Miss Nuttall is the only one of us still here. Yet, despite that, when the Leader of the Opposition was asked recently on ABC Radio Canberra whether she supported nuclear power, she responded by saying, "Yes. It does not affect Canberra." On its face, that is a fairly debatable opinion, unless the Leader of the Opposition knows what Christopher Pyne knows—but we might come to that later. Let us take her words as we heard them: nuclear energy will not affect Canberra. Well, if nuclear energy generation is included in the national energy market in place of renewable energy, its cost will clearly affect Canberra. The most cost-effective and efficient way to reduce emissions and provide reliable and affordable electricity in Australia and Canberra is by delivering renewable energy with storage.

According to the GenCost 2024-25 draft report, solar photovoltaics and wind with firming has the lowest new-build cost of all generation technologies now and out to 2030. Furthermore, the long to very long development times mean nuclear generation will not be able to facilitate a cost-effective energy transition or make a significant contribution to achieving Australia's emission reduction targets. That is the evidence. If the cost of energy is something that affects Canberra now and will do so in the future, which I think is likely, the fact that large-scale nuclear generation is not economically competitive with renewable energy will affect Canberra.

And this is not the only evidence. I noted with interest, at about 1 o'clock this morning, that last December the Smart Energy Council used modelling by the Institute of Energy Economics and Analysis, the assumptions in Mr Dutton's nuclear plant, vague as it is, for forcing 14 gigawatts of nuclear power into the Aussie grid, and the Frontier Economics report commissioned by the coalition, and found that, for Australia's four million and counting homes with solar panels, power bills increased by more than \$1,100 a year under Mr Dutton's nuclear policy. More than \$1,100 a year!

According to the Clean Energy Regulator, as of January 2025, there are 60,359 homes in Canberra with solar power. It is about the lost energy savings. See you cannot turn nuclear power on or off as you will. Once the chain reaction is running, the energy has to keep flowing somewhere, and it will, expensively—down powerlines to overwhelm rooftop solar generation for about 67 per cent of the year as wholesale energy prices rise by \$98 to \$168 per megawatt hour relative to 2023-24 levels to enable cost recovery. This will increase household power bills across the states in the National Electricity Market by between \$561 and \$961 before electricity retailers add their margin. So home owners without solar power will cop that cost burden as well. The Smart Energy Council suggests that their bills will increase on average by about \$665 a year—30 per cent.

Canberra will be affected seriously by nuclear power, if and when. We must base our decisions on evidence rather than political expediency. I am proud to bring this motion on, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.03): I rise today to speak on this motion with a deep and heavy heart. I am not quite sure if there has ever been a more cynical motion put forward to this Assembly by a new MLA than this one. As a new MLA, I would have thought that his first effort in the Legislative Assembly would have been to address the spiralling costs of living that all Canberrans are suffering under, thanks to federal Labor, or to address the challenge and cost of finding housing, again made worse by Labor. After all, we have seen dwelling approvals in freefall this week, with ABS figures showing that there has been a 50 per cent decline in new approvals. It could have been to offer practical suggestions to his colleague the Minister for Health, Minister Stephen-Smith, who has shown this week her complete incompetence when managing our health system. After all, which minister gets to keep her job when health services continue to get worse and more expensive under her watch?

However, going back to this motion, let me say this in response to this purely political motion: the Canberra Liberals support policies that deliver inexpensive, reliable, low-emission electricity supply. We support renewables. We know there is an energy transition coming. That is good. But to achieve the goal of net zero emissions we must look at all low-emission technology, and that includes nuclear. The Canberra Liberals take a sensible approach to the provision of low-emission, reliable, inexpensive electricity. We want to consider all options. We want an electricity supply that can help support manufacturing, heavy industry and our resources sector, all the while looking to reduce emissions.

To simply stick your head in the sand and rule out an option without even considering it is just ideological and naive. In this sense, I like the approach of former Greenpeace director Patrick Moore, who said, "Nuclear energy is the safest of all the electricity

technologies we have.” He also said, “Nuclear is the one technology that can actually replace a lot of fossil fuels.”

Put simply, Australia needs to consider all electricity generation options. We have 30 per cent of the world’s uranium resources, which are virtually untouched. We are heading down a path of nuclear technology to bolster our defence capability. The ANU has a nuclear physics department, and we currently use nuclear medicine as part of everyday life. We all know why we are here today. It is a political motion. I have already put our view on the record. This motion is unscientific and it is simple politics. We deserve better.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.07): I will be supporting this motion, and I thank Mr Werner-Gibblings for bringing it forward. The Canberrans I am hearing from want politicians to follow the evidence. They want to see the ACT continue to lead the nation in accelerating the energy transition. They also want to see the benefits of that transition distributed more equitably, with the cost savings associated with renewables and electrification enjoyed by all, not just by those in a position to own their own home, and with an EV in the garage and solar panels on the roof.

The majority of Canberrans do not want to be part of an expensive, unrealistic, ideologically-driven debate about nuclear energy and delaying the renewable energy transition in the name of maybe at some point, perhaps in the distant future, going nuclear. Most people in our communities see this faux debate for what it is. They see it as part of a broader attempt to reignite the culture wars, where evidence is discarded in the name of ideology, where good policy is overridden by the desire for political differentiation and where what is best for us tomorrow is sacrificed for what might win votes for us today.

We do not have to follow the lead of our federal counterparts. We should form sensible positions in this place based on the interests, priorities and aspirations of the people we are here to represent. When it comes to climate and energy policy, we can be more ambitious than the federal government and we can be more evidence-oriented than the federal opposition. I am hopeful that the debates we have and the decisions we make in this Assembly remain focused on what is best for Canberrans, rather than succumbing to the party lines being drawn on the hill.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.08): At this very moment, we stand at a crossroads. The decisions we make today rule the final future of our planet, and the decisions we made yesterday are already defining them. I have lost track of how many times I have stood in this chamber calling on Labor and the Liberals to treat the climate crisis with the urgency it demands. Even now, the Liberals treat renewable energy as nothing more than a political football, most evidenced by their latest proposal to build dangerous, costly and time-intensive nuclear reactors right across the heartland of this country. This is nothing more than a misguided fantasy, a conservative pipedream that holds no real vision for the future. Not only is it reckless; it is politically dangerous and threatens to derail the important progress we have made in moving towards net zero electricity.

I will remind you, Mr Speaker, and the chamber, that it is the people of Canberra who have led the way on this front. Thanks to the Greens holding the balance of power and

the dedication of environmentally conscious Canberrans, we have successfully reduced our emissions by 50 per cent below 1990 levels. This is a remarkable achievement, especially given the limited budget we have for such a significant transformation here in the ACT.

In contrast, Peter Dutton's proposal, a staggering \$331 billion commitment to build nuclear power plants by 2036, borders on the absurd. It is not just impractical; it is a dangerous distraction from the renewable energy revolution we so desperately need. How can the Liberals justify pouring billions of dollars into a technology that is not just outdated but could potentially set us back decades—a technology that is years if not decades behind schedule and, at best, will require vast sums of public money; half the size of our annual federal budget—for a solution that may never actually materialise?

We cannot ignore the track record of the Liberals when it comes to managing public funds. The history of budget cuts, deregulation and underfunding public services makes it incredibly difficult to trust them with a multibillion-dollar nuclear project on our shores. After all, the story of the world's worst nuclear disasters all share a common narrative: they all start with government budget cuts and a lack of regulatory oversight. That is what has driven so many of those disasters we have seen around the world. Truly, it is quite ironic that the very same Liberal Party that wants to set up a department to out government waste wants to spend \$331 billion on nuclear reactors that will not even see the light of day until halfway through the century.

Let us talk about some of the practicalities, which have been well articulated in the public domain by a range of well-informed and well-researched people. It does seem that in their eagerness to stir the pot the Liberal Party have forgotten what country they are in. Australia is a dry, hot continent and we do not have the luxury of vast water reserves. Nuclear reactors do require huge amounts of water to operate—water that we simply cannot afford to waste, especially when every drop is vital to farmers, to families and to the very survival of our ecosystems. This plan is a direct threat to our environment, our agricultural sector and everyday Australians who just want to turn on their taps without worrying about running out of water or having water restrictions imposed upon them.

Perhaps the greatest oversight of all is the fact that Australia is blessed with one of the world's richest solar resources. We have in abundance a clean, reliable and flexible energy source that others could only dream of. Yet the Liberals seem bent on ignoring this gift in favour of a technology that will only drag us backwards. Experts across the country have already shown us the path forward, transforming old coal sites into hubs for renewable energy, battery storage and green hydrogen. These are not just sustainable options; they are economically viable as well.

But what is worse is that the Liberals' nuclear plan would actively hinder our progress in scaling up wind and solar energy across the country—and this is a point that Mr Werner-Gibbings made. The grid simply would not be able to accommodate both nuclear reactors and the growing supply of renewable energy. What does that mean for everyday Australians? For Canberrans who have invested in rooftop solar panels and now enjoy lower energy bills, Peter Dutton and the Liberals want to strip away that self-sufficiency and replace it with higher costs, higher bills and dependence on energy

produced by private corporations running government-funded and government-built nuclear reactors.

Of course, we all know this means higher corporate profits for Liberal Party cronies and less money in the pocket of not just Canberrans but people across the country. In fact, the nuclear lobby has actually admitted this. They have openly said that the energy grid would not be able to handle both the capacity of the rooftop solar we have already introduced and their new nuclear power plants. Something will need to give, and, under Peter Dutton's plan, the Liberals are hellbent on it being your rooftop solar.

While Mr Dutton touts that nuclear will lower grid energy costs by 44 per cent, the CSIRO's own data suggests that nuclear energy would cost over 50 per cent more than current, already available, clean, renewable alternatives. So much for cheaper energy bills! This is absolutely something that we should be concerned about here in the ACT. Let us be clear: when the Leader of the Canberra Liberals defends this reckless proposal by claiming it will not affect Canberrans, that is not only shortsighted; it is a gross misjudgement. Energy crises are not confined to local jurisdictions; they are driven by national trends. So, yes, Canberrans will pay the price for this disastrous nuclear plan. For the Leader of the Canberra Liberals to downplay this and dismiss it with a shrug is not just irresponsible; it is both hopeless and heartless. It is a denial of the impact this policy will have on working Canberrans and Australians across our great nation.

Around the world, nuclear projects have been plagued with cost overruns, delays and unresolved safety issues—and these are in countries that actually already have some sort of nuclear industry. They have some capability, unlike Australia, in this particular field. To propose nuclear as the cornerstone of this country's strategy for net zero emissions by 2050 is not only unrealistic; it is a political stunt designed to push an agenda that tries to prolong the fossil fuel industry with a big-ticket, shock-and-awe energy policy. At the end of the day, that is what this is about. It is about creating space for coal and gas to continue to operate in this country, because it is clear from the time lines that there is no way those nuclear power stations can be ready in the next decade or so.

I went to an energy conference in Sydney last year. There were a thousand-odd people in the room, and the Liberal Party energy spokesperson stood up and gave a presentation on what might be described as a policy. There were more emojis in it than I have ever seen in a presentation about energy policy. That was somewhat surprising in itself. But, shortly afterwards, the head of the Australian Energy Regulator was asked what she thought of his policy. Of course, she is in a delicate position as a non-political operator, but her factual comment was that it would take at least two decades to build these power plants. This is someone who is an expert in this space and knows the material very well. I think that sums it up, and it highlights the fact that this is actually about prolonging the life of the fossil fuel industry in this country.

Mr Dutton's nuclear proposal represents a regressive mindset, a refusal to embrace the renewable energy future that is well and truly underway in this country. It distracts from the urgent need to invest in technologies that are safe, proven and ready to be scaled up right now—and, in fact, are being scaled up at an enormous rate. What the Liberal Party are proposing is not progress. It is a high-cost, high-risk energy solution that compromises both our environmental and our economic future. We need to stop looking backwards and start looking towards the future. Australia has the tools and the resources

to build a cleaner, more sustainable future. But, to do so, we need leadership that is brave enough to reject the outdated and, frankly, dangerous technologies—leadership that is brave enough to say it is time to move beyond fossil fuels. We need the political will to get those things done for the sake of both this generation, which is already being impacted by the effects of climate change, and the many generations that come afterwards.

I should disclose, but I think most people know, that I did work for Greenpeace before coming here. It is always amusing when somebody rolls out Patrick Moore as a sort of justification for their position. He was actually originally opposed to nukes, but then he changed his mind somewhere down the line. I did not have much time, but a quick look at the Wikipedia page for Patrick Moore notes:

Greenpeace has criticized Moore, calling him “a paid spokesman for the nuclear industry, the logging industry, and genetic engineering industry” who “exploits long-gone ties with Greenpeace to sell himself as a speaker and pro-corporate spokesperson.”

I will leave it at that, but it is a pretty desperate grab when you start citing Patrick Moore and his Greenpeace connections.

In closing, the Greens have led the charge for renewable electricity in the ACT and across the country, and we will continue to do so. We must reject outdated, dangerous technologies and embrace renewable energy to build a cleaner, more sustainable future for Australia. I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion to the Assembly and providing an opportunity for this important discussion in this place. I urge all members of this place to vote in favour of a positive, clean and renewable future not just for Canberra but for all of Australia.

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) (4.19): The ACT has a clear pathway over the next 20 years to phase out fossil fuel gas and to transition to an all-electric Canberra, done in a sensible and measured way. We are the first jurisdiction to have 100 per cent renewable electricity and a plan to phase out natural gas. This approach taken by the ACT government is already having an impact on reducing emissions and energy bills. The most recent ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory report shows our emissions are 50 per cent below the 1990 baseline levels and dropped a further four per cent over the year and, because of our switch to renewables, ACT residents have already benefited from lower energy prices.

As Mr Werner-Gibbings’ motion points out, the most cost-effective and efficient way to reduce emissions and provide reliable and affordable electricity in Australia is by delivering renewable energy with storage. Large-scale nuclear generation is not economically competitive with renewable energy. As noted in the GenCost 2024-25 draft report, solar PV and wind with firming has the lowest new-build cost of all generation technologies. Small modular reactors or SMRs are an unproven technology whose lower power output presents a less cost-effective option.

Having a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels which ensures nobody is left behind is a priority for our government. That is why the ACT government has prioritised energy efficiency upgrades to social housing dwellings to help reduce tenants' energy costs and usage. It is why we are investing in public EV charging infrastructure across our city to ensure postcode or geography are not a barrier to owning an electric car. It is why we are providing support to households and business to help them with the electric transition. In the ACT, if you have an eligible concession card, you can apply for the electricity, gas and water rebate on your energy bill. All of these practical and tangible actions that we are taking right now to reduce energy bills and emissions and support those doing it tough during the energy transition are proven and practical.

Nuclear energy is not a practical or tangible approach to reduce energy bills and emissions. The energy wars of past federal governments are a timely reminder of what happens when we as legislators move to a purely ideological debate and ignore the evidence. Unfortunately, the proposal to put nuclear into the mix despite the merits of the evidence before us feels like the federal opposition are steering us back to the inertia of that time and the negative consequences that come from a lack of progress to transition.

It is incredibly disheartening to hear the comments from the ACT Liberals and their leader that indicated support for the federal Liberals' nuclear plan. I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition in her comments saying that we need to consider all options and that that is a reasonable thing to do. Certainly, on the face of it, that premise is completely acceptable. We should consider all options. The issue with that argument in this particular debate is that that consideration has occurred and we have a lot of evidence. We should do more than just consider; we should consider and support the evidence which says that renewables are the way forward, not question the evidence that is very clear before us.

All members of the Legislative Assembly should be proud of the immense progress the ACT has made to reach our own targets and support a national transition to renewable energy and the benefits that this will bring for all Australians, including Canberrans.

I would like to thank the member for Brindabella for bringing this motion forward. It is a timely discussion to be having, given the very significant impacts that it will have for our country, our climate and everyone who resides in the ACT.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.23), in reply: I thank you all. I appreciate your comments. I am a bit surprised and disappointed by Ms Castley describing this motion, this clear statement of principle, as cynical, particularly in light of the nature of the previous motion we discussed. Nonetheless, I do suspect that, in her interview on the radio, Ms Castley was right: nuclear power will not affect Canberra. Even if, during my late night-early morning research last night, I began to feverishly speculate on where the radioactive waste of the 30 per cent of the world's uranium, once used, would be stored if a coalition federal government which has not supported Canberra since Prime Minister Menzies retired, is looking for a spot to dump its nuclear waste, which will remain radioactive for tens of thousands of years. Some elements will remain

radioactive for a million years. You will have to build it somewhere. You are not going to build it in a safe rural seat. You are not going to build it in a swing seat or even a swing state. You might be forced or be happy to build it in a federal territory over which you have significant constitutional power and where you will never win a seat. I am sure they were considering all of their options.

However, I rather suspect Ms Castley knows what Senator Canavan and Christopher Pyne know, because they well and truly have belled the cat that there will never be nuclear power in Australia. Senator Matt Canavan has conceded that nuclear power is not a serious solution to Australia's energy challenges because it is not viable economically compared to other forms of power. It is, rather, a political fix, which is why the coalition policy is so vague. That is precisely the point: a never-ever policy, a political fix, does not need detail.

According to Christopher Pyne, it is, however, quite a stunning political fix, not a serious energy policy, because its support within the coalition indicates that the Liberal and National parties have accepted that climate change is a thing. Human emissions are making it that thing and steps should be taken to mitigate those emissions, even if the long-term, very expensive, impractical nature of those steps means a lot more gas—and why not coal?—needs to be used in the near and medium terms. Political unity at the expense of genuine progress towards renewable energy solutions is not good enough for Canberra or Australia. Mr Dutton's coalition needs to wake up.

The CSIRO report provides clear guidance: renewables are our most cost-effective path forward. In the most literal sense, nuclear power is a toxic, budget-breaking distraction from this goal and a demonstrably inappropriate policy in cost and practicality. Let us recommit to policies that genuinely address our energy needs and contribute to a sustainable future for all Australians.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Coroner's report into the death of Luke Anthony Rich—government response

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) (4.27): I welcome the ACT Coroner Court's report titled *Inquest into the death of Luke Anthony Rich* and the ACT Custodial Inspector report titled *Death in Custody at the Alexander Maconochie Centre on 1 February 2022*.

Mr Rich sadly passed away at the Alexander Maconochie Centre while accommodated in the Management Unit. I would, firstly, like to extend my sympathies to Mr Rich's family and friends. Mr Rich was 27 years old at the time of his death. He was born on 15 October 1994 in Gosford New South Wales. He left behind three siblings—two brothers and a sister. Prior to his passing, Luke was working as a site foreman at a construction company, and he was described by family and friends as a hard worker. The coroner's report found that, while Mr Rich's suicide could not have been reliably predicted, failures in the care and supervision of Mr Rich contributed to his death. Similarly, the inspector found that, while the apparent suicide of Mr Rich was not reasonably foreseeable by ACT Corrective Services, the potential for actual or attempted suicide through the method employed by Mr Rich had previously been identified.

The ACT government has reviewed both reports and carefully considered their findings and recommendations. The coroner's report provided 19 findings and three recommendations. The ACT government notes the coroner's findings, and I am pleased to announce that the ACT government agrees to all of the recommendations. The inspector's report contained 11 findings and five recommendations. I would like to take this opportunity to report on the work that the ACT government has commenced or completed in relation to these matters. First and foremost, Corrective Services has been progressing the development of a suicide prevention framework. The framework is well-progressed and expected to be released by 31 March 2025. The government is committed to ensuring the wellbeing of detainees and recognises the need for suicide prevention as a shared responsibility for all staff in both custodial and community correctional environments.

The second recommendation outlined in the coroner's report was in relation to publishing guidance to staff on the requirement and process for undertaking detainee observations. I note that the coroner's recommendation regarding detainee observations was also identified in a recent report by the ACT Integrity Commission titled *Operation Falcon*, which found that a correctional officer failed to conduct mandatory medical observations of a detainee. A new Detainee Observations Operating Procedure was notified on 30 October 2024 to facilitate improvements in detainee observations. This included updates to the observation forms and guidance provided to staff. Furthermore, correctional officers are now personally issued with Intervention Hoffman knives to further improve responses to suicide incidents.

Finally, the Code Blue Triple Zero Checklist, which addresses processes relating to calling ambulance services at AMC was implemented in September 2024. Upgrades to the Management Unit's rear cells to address the risks associated with Mr Rich's death were completed on 31 May 2022, and a process is underway to scope and commission a further review to assess the safety of the rear doors in the Management Unit in light of the evidence in the inquest. Corrective Services will make this review public to the greatest extent possible, subject to operational sensitivities as well as safety and security considerations.

As you will note, the ACT government is in strong agreement with the recommendations provided and has proactively taken steps to realise improvements for

detainees and staff. More broadly, reviews of critical incidents by independent agencies ensure policy, procedures and legislation promote best correctional practice and support transparency with the public around such incidents.

In conclusion, I would note my appreciation to the coroner and to the inspector for providing their reviews and assisting the ACT government to identify and address these issues, which are key to ensuring the health and wellbeing of detainees. The work done by both the coroner and inspector is crucial to building and maintaining public confidence in the ACT's correctional system and ensuring the continuous improvement of the correctional services provided to our community, including for staff and detainees.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)

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

Explanatory statement to the Bill, incorporating a compatibility statement, pursuant to section 37 of the *Human Rights Act 2004*.

Budget 2024-2025—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 13—

Budget Review, dated February 2025.

Supplementary Budget Papers, dated February 2025.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.33): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to present Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2) and present to the Assembly the 2024-25 budget review. As members will know, this is the first time that I am presenting a significant economic and fiscal update to the Assembly and to our community. As I did in my statement of priorities yesterday, I acknowledge my predecessor, Chief Minister Andrew Barr, who has been the territory's Treasurer for more than a decade, and I thank him for his guidance and mentorship, as well as my Expenditure Review Committee colleagues, Deputy Chief Minister Yvette Berry and Minister for Finance Rachel Stephen-Smith.

We are a Labor government. That means we will always prioritise the health of our community, and it is why the budget review commits significant and ongoing investment for critical healthcare services that Canberrans rely on. It delivers on the promises that we campaigned on at the election and reflects the faith and trust that Canberrans have put in us to implement the healthcare plans that we outlined in October.

But there is no way to sugar-coat the scenario that we are facing. During the first half of the financial year, there has been very significant growth in activity and demand for

services in our healthcare system. This level of consumption, combined with increases in costs for delivery of healthcare services, was not anticipated in the 2024-25 budget. More people are presenting at our emergency departments and our walk-in centres, and are nominating for and receiving elective surgeries, while also accessing the wide range of other healthcare services across the territory. While it is good that more Canberrans have been receiving the health care that they need, it has resulted in significant pressures on the ACT budget.

As Treasurer, I am focused on delivering on our progressive and practical agenda, as well as ensuring 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 that we can continue to deliver these services.

There are significant pressures on health and hospital systems across the country. The ACT is not immune from this and we are compelled to make investments and decisions that strengthen the provision of health care for our entire community. That is why the ACT government will be investing an additional \$227.3 million in the 2024-25 budget review to support these services. However, in recognising these pressures, we are also acting to address the sustainability of our health system.

The government has considered and made a range of initial savings and process improvements to support the sustainability of Canberra Health Services. This has been coupled with a whole-of-government effort to manage other expenditure within existing appropriations to ensure that investments can be directed to the critical frontline healthcare services that Canberrans rely on. It means that the 2024-25 general government sector headline net operating balance is now forecast to be in deficit by \$971.7 million.

As we work on the 2025-26 budget, the government is considering what further ongoing measures are required to put our public healthcare system and the budget on a sustainable footing. Firm fiscal discipline will be pursued and tough decisions will need to be made so that we can continue to make the investments that support the growing and vibrant city that we call home.

But, while we face this challenge, the fundamentals of our economy remain strong. The territory economy is performing better than expected. GSP growth, employment rates and participation, strong wages growth and lowering inflation all point to sound economic management and the capacity to manage short-term impacts.

Treasury forecasts that strong growth in 2023-24 will be supported by even stronger economic growth than expected in the 2024-25 budget. Gross state product increased by four per cent in 2023-24, compared to the three per cent estimate in the 2024-25 budget. Forecast GSP growth has been revised up to 3½ per cent in 2024-25, reflecting strong growth in the first quarter of 2024-25.

To give the Assembly an accurate sense of the figures and economic outcomes that have been realised across Canberra, we have to look at finalised data from previous updates and budgets. That means going back a couple of cycles where the economic picture is clearer and realised. Our city has a strong economy. Employment growth remains robust, growing 2.2 per cent in 2023-24. Inflation has eased faster than expected over

the 2023-24 period due to a gradual adjustment in the balance between the demand for and supply of goods and services and the degree of tightness in the labour market. Canberra's 2024-25 consumer price index is also expected to be lower than forecast in the budget, now forecast to be 2¼ per cent this year.

Whilst our economy is strong, the government will continue to support our city by investing in free public health care and will deliver on our election commitments around frontline services and cost-of-living measures. Support in the budget review includes support for families and working people with fare-free Fridays and free school camp, as well as better wages and conditions for our police force through a new enterprise agreement. It invests in the Housing Australia Future Fund through provisions that we have set aside as another mechanism to help us to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030. The budget review also includes an additional \$24 million to support out-of-home care services to respond to increased service demand and the costs of delivering that care, so that we can continue to support the most vulnerable in the community.

With the release of the 2024-25 budget review, the territory's Infrastructure Investment Program is now expected to be \$8.2 billion over the five years to 2028-29. Major infrastructure projects will continue, including the completion of the new CIT campus at Woden and light rail to Commonwealth Park, while planning for the new north side hospital and the Canberra Theatre Centre redevelopment continues. These investments will continue to support and improve Canberrans' quality of life and promote our city's status as a destination of choice to work, study, visit and raise a family.

While our economy is strong, wages are growing and inflation is easing, the territory continues to be exposed to risks like interest rates and geopolitical events and continues to wear the impacts of the recent inflationary period. The Appropriation Bill shows that we are in a strong position to manage the risks and pressures I have outlined in this speech and to take advantage of our strong economic position. It provides for investments of \$387.7 million, including net controlled recurrent payments of \$374.2 million and payments to be made on behalf of the territory of \$9.7 million. The bill also includes an appropriation of \$3.8 million for additional Treasurer's Advance.

While I have outlined some near-term challenges that we face, our city's future is bright. Canberrans can rest assured that we will work within the parameters of the context that I have outlined and deliver on our commitments in a fiscally sustainable way while supporting our economy and community. I commend the Appropriation Bill to the Assembly.

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

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Reference

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.42), by leave: I move:

That, notwithstanding the provisions of standing orders 174, 175 and 176, the Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2) be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration to decide whether or not to undertake an inquiry, and, should the committee decide to inquire, the reporting date will be 13 March 2025.

This is a motion relating to the referral of the second appropriation bill to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration. As members are aware, the public health system has experienced significant increase in demand and the Appropriation Bill provides a significant investment to support the continued delivery of those important healthcare services, particularly at our ACT public hospitals. The government is seeking the agreement of the Assembly to provide a report back regarding a possible inquiry into the appropriation by 13 March to allow for the prompt passage of the appropriation and to ensure that there is no unnecessary disruption to the delivery of critical healthcare services.

The timeline for inquiry into the second appropriation bill is consistent with those agreed by previous Assemblies, including twice in the previous Assembly, of roughly four weeks. The government is committed to appropriate scrutiny of the appropriation and notes that the annual report hearings will also take place over the coming two weeks, providing an additional opportunity for government scrutiny. This would give five weeks for a potential inquiry by the PAC. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.44): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting the referral to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration. I would like to draw attention to the importance of the scrutiny that PAAC can apply to this type of bill. I absolutely encourage the committee to closely consider how important it would be to inquire into such a bill, given the degree of deterioration in the budget position.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.45): The ACT Greens will also be supporting this motion today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Invictus Games 2025

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) (4.45): This coming Saturday, the 2025 Invictus Games will kick off in the city of Vancouver. The games are an international sporting event for wounded, ill and injured serving and former-serving defence force member athletes. The games are a triumph of the power of sports to support recovery and rehabilitation. They promote a better understanding of and respect for those who serve their country and offer a unique competitive experience for participating athletes to showcase their talents and support their recovery journey.

I am proud to say that, of the 33 current and former serving ADF members on the Australian team, four are based here in Canberra. So, to Squadron Leader Belinda Culley, as well as Trisha Reynolds, who both served in the Royal Australian Air Force, and to Doug Griffiths and Luke McCallum, who are currently serving and served in the Royal Australian Navy, I acknowledge and congratulate you on your remarkable efforts in representing Australia and the ACT on the international stage at the 2025 Invictus Games, and for your career in serving this country. I wish all of you the best. We know that you will continue to make yourselves, the ACT and your country proud. You can be sure that we will all be cheering you on.

Neurodivergence—role play

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.46): Last month, I had the pleasure of meeting with Dads for Diversity. Dads for Diversity uses a range of tabletop role-playing games, TTRPGs, such as Dungeons and Dragons, to engage with both children and adults who want to improve their social skills. As a lifelong fan of TTRPGs, I think this is an absolutely brilliant idea. The ability for any of us to practice social skills by stepping into the role of a fictional character lets us take a step back from our own anxiety and baggage. We can flex our skills and potential without being weighed down by what we see as our own limitations. TTRPGs are also great for fostering cooperative approaches, negotiation skills and dispute resolution skills. I know I find that helpful as a neurodivergent person and a productive interparty drama starter.

One of the most interesting things about speaking to Ian and Tanya was their observation that a lot of kids with disabilities are not used to being asked for help in real life. Growing up not being able to see yourself as someone who is expected to help others is a problem. Letting these young people play the role of characters who are essential to the success and survival of their friends helps them see themselves in a more positive and constructive way. It also helps them learn to look for ways to help others in real life.

I am hopeful that the NDIS reforms do not negatively impact Dads for Diversity and that their plans to expand their offerings to the community go as planned. They are a wonderful organisation to have as part of our community, and I am so glad they see the potential of their services as much as I do. I wish them all the best and am so keen to see where they go from here.

Law courts—bomb threat

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.48): I rise to speak about the recent evacuation of the ACT law courts. At approximately 11 am last Friday, 31 January, a bomb threat was made to the law courts, causing the building and surrounding area to be evacuated. I can only imagine how concerned and even frightened members of the public and court staff were as they were being escorted away from the precinct. Thankfully, the bomb threat proved to be false, allowing court staff and members of the public to return to the law courts an hour or so later to continue their work.

I want to pass on my sincere gratitude and commendation to the ACT Policing officers and AFP bomb response team for responding so promptly. They did an amazing job in a very short time and in a high-pressure situation. Truly, thank you.

I urge anyone who may have information about this situation to please contact Crime Stoppers to assist police with their further investigations.

Brindabella electorate—youth engagement

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.49): I rise this afternoon to make an announcement that I think will not reverberate around these hallowed halls as much as announcements made by other esteemed colleagues have and may. I announce my hope that this is the last 90-second statement I will make in this place this term in my own words. From now on, my 90-seconds statements will be all about you.

If you are a school student in Tuggeranong who has something to say that we should hear, think about what you would like to see improved or celebrated in Tuggeranong. Maybe you have ideas about environmental initiatives, school programs or ways to support your peers. Whatever it is, your voice matters. I am here to get it heard and taken down in the *Hansard*, where it will remain until the end of recorded history. That is important because you are not our future; we are. You are your future. Send 200 words of bold creativity to me at Taimus.WG@parliament.act.gov.au and I will share with us what matters to you in your words.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Belconnen—police presence

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.50): I rise today to speak about a community petition that I am currently sponsoring seeking to increase police presence in Hawker, Page and Scullin.

We all deserve to feel safe in our homes, in our communities and at our shopping centres. However, the increase in crimes in south Belconnen, no matter how minor, has had a significant impact on that community's sense of security and quality of life. This is evidenced by the incredible uptake of this petition by residents of these suburbs and beyond. There is a sense, particularly in south Belconnen, that enough is enough, and the government needs to do more.

I have spoken to many residents in Hawker, Page and Scullin, and the stories of criminal incidents, preventable incidents, occurring in these wonderful suburbs is very saddening. I have also spoken with business owners of shops across south Belconnen, many of whom have similar stories. More needs to be done; plain and simple.

At the last ACT election, the Canberra Liberals made a commitment to make our city safer. Although we have not formed government in this term, our commitment to making our city safer for Canberrans has not waned and will never wane. The Canberra Liberals

will always stand with residents and ACT Policing officers to ensure that law and order is a priority for this Assembly and an ACT government. Our community deserves to feel safe and secure in their homes, neighbourhoods, streets and shopping centres.

The petition is simply a call to action, for the government to take steps to enhance the safety and security of our suburbs in south Belconnen. By increasing police presence, we can work towards creating a safer environment where residents can live without fear of crime and where our children can play freely.

I want to thank the principal petitioner, Dimitri, for his advocacy in this space and his persistence in promoting this cause. We seem to be well on our way to achieving more than 500 signatures, so that this issue can receive the due consideration before a committee that it deserves.

I encourage everyone to visit my social media pages or the Legislative Assembly website to sign this petition until 1 April this year. It is a worthy and noble cause to promote community safety. As a member for Ginninderra, I am proud to be doing so for my constituents in Hawker, Page and Scullin. I also thank my Ginninderra colleague Ms Barry, who is certainly of the same mind and certainly an advocate for this as well.

Middle East—conflict

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.53): For the last almost 70 weeks, Palestinians and their allies in Canberra have rallied regularly to bring attention to, and call for action on, the State of Israel's invasion of Gaza and the genocide of Palestinians in their own lands.

The ACT Greens have had the honour of attending those weekly rallies and speaking in solidarity on this cause, for the safety and self-determination of the Palestinians. The attacks of Hamas in October 2023 were unforgivable war crimes, as is the scorched earth genocide of Palestinians by the State of Israel.

The Greens here in the ACT, and our colleagues across the country, have been consistently calling for a permanent ceasefire since the State of Israel's relentless violence began in earnest. We are glad to see a six-week ceasefire in Gaza. It is a testament to the peaceful and persistent actions around the world and speaks to the power of the collective calls for change. But as these Palestinians return to their home—if we can even call it that, when it is a pile of unrecognisable rubble—there is no promise of a lasting peace. There is no promise that children will be able to continue their studies—if there are even schools to return to. There is no promise that they are safe to attend their places of worship. There is no promise that the hospitals can deliver care that so many Palestinians so desperately need.

What they do not need is cack-handed US proposals to occupy their land and relocation off their land to other countries against their will. Such a step would be against international law and it would be a war crime. The State of Israel, time and time again, has flouted international law. A permanent ceasefire is absolutely necessary to allow Gaza to rebuild. There is still more that Australia can do, such as ending two-way arms

trade, sanctioning those involved in war crimes and upholding the International Criminal Court warrants.

The Australian Greens have recently called for a war crimes investigation unit to make sure that Australia is not a safe haven for war criminals. A permanent body is needed to investigate and prosecute these horrific acts. Other countries like Canada, the UK and Germany already have them. I am sure other members in this place will agree with me that the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and cultures in our community is one of Canberra's greatest strengths. We owe it to our communities here, who may have come to Australia in the hope of safety, to call for accountability for horrific acts such as war crimes.

In the previous Assembly, I sponsored a petition by residents of the ACT calling on the ACT government to honour my motion passed by this Assembly to review and divest from companies involved in the State of Israel's occupation of Palestine. Yesterday, the Labor government responded to the petition with a mealy-mouthed yet definite no. The Labor government continues to ignore the local community, its party membership and its conscience. It talks a good talk about Canberra being an accredited, advanced-level "welcoming city", and is proud about being a refugee welcome zone. Yet the response implies that this is about having a multicultural community.

This is a gross minimisation of the issue here. We have seen mass destruction and killings. This is about human rights. Israel is blocking the United Nations from providing food aid and support to the Palestinians, and the statement that it is not in a position to pursue these activities tells us that ACT Labor thinks that these human rights can wait. Ultimately, the Labor government continues to profit financially from companies identified by the United Nations as being involved in breaches of international law and genocide in Palestine.

The ACT Greens will continue to call for a permanent ceasefire and stand against genocide and war crimes. We will continue to be a proud and strong advocate for human rights, while other parties continue to falter. I would like to encourage others in this place and Canberrans in our community to do the same: to stand on the side of humanity, to stand on the side of peace.

Mr Robert Hargreaves—tribute

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.57): It is with immense honour that I rise today on behalf of my colleague, Ms Elizabeth Lee, to pay tribute to Robert Hargreaves, or Bob as many knew him by, who passed away on Sunday 12 January 2025 at age 91. It is wonderful to see Bob's daughter, Christine, and Bob's grandchildren here today. It is also good to see a number of his former colleagues here, including former senator for the ACT, Margaret Reid and Robert Altamore.

Robert Hargreaves, as many of you in this chamber know, was one of the founders of Canberra Radio Reading Service 1RPH, a wonderful community service that turns print into sound for listeners across Canberra and regional New South Wales. Ms Lee herself was a presenter on Radio 1RPH for over eight years. It was something she

thoroughly enjoyed and stopped doing only when family commitments made it difficult for her to continue.

Robert was born in Kiama in New South Wales and in his early life trained as a fitter and turner before completing what was then compulsory national service, followed by two years in the Citizen Military Forces in the engineering corps. It was following his time in the engineering corps that he truly found his passion and vocation—film and radio. His first radio announcer position was at 2AY in Albury in 1957. Robert then moved to 4WK in Warwick, where he worked as an announcer, television news reader and camera operator. It was in Warwick that he met his beautiful wife and they married. They have been married for 65 years.

Upon moving to Canberra, Robert worked with the Australian Information Service, which produced films and videos for the Australian government. He was as an active member of the Australian Cinematographers Society and was made a life member in 2002. Robert also worked as an announcer on 2CA and became well-known to many in Canberra as the weekend newsreader on ABC radio.

As mentioned, Robert was one of the founders of Radio 1RPH and an integral part of getting this service up and running. He served as a committee member from 1986 to 2003, was president from 1993 to 2003, and represented Radio 1RPH at the national Radio Reading Network from 1986 to 2003. In 2001 Robert was awarded lifetime membership of 1RPH in recognition of his contribution and service to the station.

In 2004 Robert moved to Kiama, where he continued his commitments with radio reading at 2RPH. Robert hosted the weekly program *Get Together*, which he produced from his home studio in Kiama. *Get Together* was a program that presented stories from a variety of publications on a broad range of topics and Robert's lively presentation would bring these stories to life for his listeners. Robert produced over 1,000 episodes of *Get Together*, which is a truly remarkable achievement. He produced and oversaw many special programs for 1RPH network, including the broadcasting for the national network of the national ANZAC Day commemoration from Canberra.

Robert was a true leader in the industry at both a local and national level. He had a passionate belief in radio as a practical and effective means to address the disadvantage and social isolation experienced by people who cannot otherwise access print and digital information. He was a leader in the training of other broadcasters and had a strong commitment to excellence in radio broadcasting, ensuring the highest standard of content, presentation and style. He carried this sense of excellence through the acquisition and maintenance of broadcast equipment and the studio, overseeing the extension of the radio 1RPH building.

There have been many tributes to Robert since his passing. One that stood out was by Di Collins, the former chair of radio 2RPH. Di said:

Bob Hargreaves is the kind of person I thought would be around forever. He was the kind of person we all wanted to have around forever because of who he was and the qualities he exemplified.

Ms Lee and I extend our sincerest condolences to his wife Robina, his children Libby, Christine and Susan, and their families and friends. She would also like to extend her condolences to his many hardworking colleagues and friends at Radio 1RPH here in Canberra.

Canberra Games Society—Cancon 2025

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.02): I rise this afternoon to share with the chamber the story of a great Canberra event, Cancon. Cancon is Australia's largest and longest-running tabletop games convention and takes place right here in Canberra. I was invited along over the January long weekend and was given a guided tour by the President of the Canberra Games Society, Stephen Burg. I understand Ms Barry and Miss Nuttall also attended Cancon during the weekend.

Cancon has actually been operating for 46 years and is run entirely by volunteers. The event includes miniature war games, tournaments, card games, board games and role play events. There are also trade stands, participation games, a board games library, and dragon painting rooms. I was particularly taken with the bring and buy pavilion, which enabled people to bring along their unwanted items and sell them to another enthusiast. Not only was this a highly organised operation that involved some serious bargaining, but it was also a massive recycling exercise.

The event drew around 3,000 signed-up competitors across the weekend, with estimates of up to 20,000 people overall attending each day. Based on the number of people I saw, there is little doubt this is a very popular event that drew a very enthusiastic audience. Many participants had travelled for the weekend, with attendees from every state and territory of Australia, also making it a tourism drawcard for Canberra. The organisers run a little competition each year to see who has travelled the furthest to attend Cancon. The record appears to have been set in 2020, with competitors from Scotland and Norway coming. When it was calculated, the competitor from Scotland prevailed, having travelled just 50 kilometres further. He also brought his family, who toured Canberra while he was here. This year saw attendees from the US, UK and New Zealand joining the many domestic visitors.

The event was held at Epic, and such is the scale and growth of the event that they now use every pavilion at Epic for the weekend and could frankly do with more space. It is another example of why we not only need to protect Epic as a wonderful community facility, but also why the government needs to continue to invest in Epic to keep facilities up to a modern standard and allow for successful events to grow.

I was delighted to see Epic buzzing with the energy of the event, opening at 8 am and continuing until midnight. There is almost no limit for the enthusiasts who do attend. I would like to congratulate the team of volunteers from the Canberra Games Society, as well as other helpers, for staging such a successful event right here in Canberra that has a reputation far and wide. It takes a lot of effort to put together such a well-run event and I hope the team felt a real sense of satisfaction at seeing so many people having a good time.

Australian National University—parking fees

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.05): I rise to speak about recent parking fee increases at the Australian National University. Students have been made aware of a more than 510 per cent price hike for daily on-campus parking, while off-campus student parking will see a 276 per cent increase. Cost of living and accessibility issues at ANU are already a serious concern for many students. The high costs of residential accommodation, with the most affordable option reaching \$300 a week without meals, present a significant barrier for most. Now, students face a massive hike in parking costs, amounting to up to \$2,624 per year.

The university must carefully consider how these rising costs will impact the diversity of its student body and the future of higher education access for people from disadvantaged communities. It is critical for our universities to minimise financial barriers for their students and to work to make education accessible for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, ANU is making its campus increasingly unaffordable for the very students it is meant to support, which is sad for me to see as a former student of this world-class institution.

Meanwhile, the ACT government continues to ignore calls from students to reinstate the Daley Road bus route, the absence of which leaves some 4,000 ANU students in a public transport dead zone. We need our governments and universities to ease the financial pressure on students, rather than continuing to bury them in rising costs that make it increasingly difficult to just be a student.

Recycling—toys and textiles

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.07): My daughter and I have just recently done our annual recycling clear-out. It is an annual clear-out we get to at least once every four years, so there was quite a lot of stuff to go through. It is a really great way to spend time together. It does take a bit of effort. We first packed up all of our clothes and books and toys that were in nearly new condition, and we have taken those down to Roundabout in Holt.

Roundabout is a great recycling community service. They make gift packs for Canberra kids who need clothing and books and toys. The stuff really needs to be in as-new condition, and when you drop it off, you need to check the website and make sure that you are taking it at the right time so that Hannah, or somebody else there, can collect it.

After that, the clothing that was still in quite good condition and the toys that were quite good we dropped off at our local op shop. I always go to the Salvos and Vinnies in Jamo and Belconnen, and sometimes the Green Shed Underground and the Red Cross shop here in Civic. Again, the general rule for most of the second-hand shops is that if it is not good enough for you to give to a friend, if you would be embarrassed by the state of the condition, it is probably not good enough to go back to an op shop. That is always a good rule of thumb. And, again, check the hours—you need to make sure that you go into the shop and give them the things that you no longer want so that they can check them and accept them. They really appreciate your donations, but please do not dump them outside; that really is not helping anyone.

What I do after that is I pack up the clothes that are not good enough to wear anymore—there are a lot of ripped and stained things and things that are worn out—and I send them to a place called Upparel. That is a great fabric recycling service. It does cost money, so it does not suit everybody, particularly at the moment when the cost of living is a real pressure. We do not spend a lot to get our stuff; we tend to buy most of our things second hand, so I do not mind paying for recycling. But every time I do this, it does remind me that it would be great if our federal government could hurry up a little bit with the national product stewardship schemes that have been coming for so long. All of these options for recycling, if done through national product stewardship, mean that people are not paying at the back end, and that would be a much, much better way for this recycling to happen.

I was reminded, too, how important it is that we make sure we have federal and local government recycling services that make our lives easier. It is really important to a lot of people in our community that we are recycling well, and we are operating in a circular economy, but, unfortunately, the effort and the cost is often put back on individuals, and that is a great shame.

I was disappointed to hear that our brand-new recycling facility that will be built for 2028 may not be able to recover some of the common materials that I think people probably expect it to recover, like supermarket packaging and soft plastics. And I have not yet heard that the national product stewardship scheme being put together by the federal Labor government will be able to recover those either, so I am very much hoping that, one way or another, by 2028, all of those standard materials will be easily recycled for free, for Canberrans, from their convenient at-home service, rather than asking people to go to a great deal of time and effort to do that themselves.

Brindabella Christian College—Community for Constitutional Reform

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.10): I would like to speak briefly of the hard work done by the Community for Constitutional Reform at Brindabella Christian College, or Reform BCC for short. The work and commitment that any P&C or association puts into maintaining a school community and helping in the smooth running of the school calendar is remarkable. It is a use of time and energy that does not get nearly as much credit as it should. Reform BCC shows just how far parents will go when their children's education and, possibly, safety are endangered. They have also absolutely shown-up for the staff at the college, who are, as I understand it, yet to be paid the super that they are owed.

I sincerely thank them for taking the time to meet with my colleague Shane Rattenbury and me. Meeting with Reform BCC was truly awesome. They are one of the most prepared and well-researched organisations I have ever had the pleasure of meeting, and they have been so proactive in advocating at both territory and federal levels to ensure the Brindabella Christian College school community has its voice heard.

Something has to change at BCC. Young people are expected to go back to school even though there are active questions about whether the school is safe and compliant. Staff are expected to continue to show up while they have yet to be paid their super. Many

staff have quit, and students are leaving in droves. The legislation and regulation that schools must ensure they follow is there to guarantee that students are safe and that their educational experience is, at least to some degree, standardised. Students, parents and staff deserve to have faith that the leadership of Brindabella Christian College has their best interests at heart.

If we can support Reform BCC with their calls to action, I am confident that the community will be able to rebuild effectively and efficiently. The skills and dedication that I have seen from Reform BCC are truly remarkable. It is sad to see that they are forced to use their time and energy to lobby for compliance and governance reform, even if they are great at it. I look forward to a time when the people who make up Reform BCC can focus on improving their school, rather than having to advocate for their school's leadership to meet the bare minimum requirements of school governance. Thank you.

Mr Greg Blood OAM—tribute

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.13): I rise to pay tribute to and to congratulate Greg Blood of Florey, one of 320 people awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the general division of the 2025 Australia Day honours. Greg was awarded his OAM for service to sports history.

Greg has had an extraordinarily long career as a sports historian. He began as a librarian at the AIS Information Centre, or what was then known back in 1983 as the National Sport Information Centre. He worked there until 2011, when his final role was as senior librarian, which is remarkable in and of itself. Since then he has worked as a consultant for the Clearinghouse for Sport, for about three years. He was the ethics committee member at the AIS. He was a researcher at the AIS. He has been at the Australian Sports Commission. He has been a sports researcher and librarian throughout the 1990s for the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games. Since 2011 he has been a sports historian and Wikipedia editor for the Australian Paralympic History Project. He has been publications officer for the Australian Society for Sports History, and he has been a member since 2020 of the Heritage and Awards Committee for the Commonwealth Games of Australia.

Mr Speaker, on top of that, he has been a volunteer. In his citation, it is recognised that he has been a volunteer for quite a number of years with the Canberra City Care harvest garden, which during this cost-of-living crisis has been so needed. It is so welcomed—what people there have been able to provide at a very, very low cost to community members.

On top of that, and the way through which I know Greg, is his work with Florey Neighbourhood Watch and Florey Community Action. He is an incredible advocate for the Florey community, and I believe he has been a good friend to someone that you and I both know as well, Mr Speaker, who has certainly enjoyed the support of the Florey community. Greg has been a terrific friend to me, and I think it is wonderful that he has

been recognised in this way. It comes after he was also awarded the service award from the Australian Society for Sports History in 2023.

I will give examples of some of the research that Greg has done. Since 2000 he has been tracking changes in the CEOs, chairs and presidents of major national sports organisations—24-and-a-bit years of data. And he has been doing studies every 10 or so years of the Australian Olympic Team that we send. He just completed, last year for that Olympic Games, a study that detailed all of the athletes—an analysis of their age, gender, experience, longevity, location, education; whether they are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; their family, and if they have family members who are also Olympians; and the direct athlete support they have received—to see if he could identify any trends. Back in 1983, when he first applied for his job, he said:

I have found the area of sport information very challenging and interesting. The rapid growth in sport information over the last decade has created many problems, especially in Australia. I perceive the Information Centre of the Australian Institute of Sport as playing a vital and positive role in the control and dissemination of sport information in Australia. The Librarian Class 1 position would enable me to play a role in this development.

Mr Speaker, we can say that that position, all of the positions that he has held since, and his ongoing contribution to Australian sports history are certainly very worthy of the awarding of the OAM for his service to sports history. I thank him for his friendship and congratulate him on this honour.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.18 pm until Tuesday, 4 March 2025 at 10 am.

Questions without notice taken on notice

Canberra Health Services—patient numbers

Ms Stephen-Smith (*in reply to a question by Mr Rattenbury on Tuesday, 4 February 2025*):

The additional 85,000 patient episodes were reported based on the period 1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024, in comparison to the same period in the previous year. The care types contained in the overall figure are included in the table below.

Patient Type	Care Type/Group	2023/24 YTD	2024/25 YTD
Admitted Patient Care	01 - Acute care	54,069	61,089
	02 - Rehabilitation care	1,156	953
	03 - Palliative care	526	573
	04 - Geriatric evaluation and management	296	262
	05 - Psychogeriatric care	26	19
	06 - Maintenance care	1,150	1,057
	07 - Newborn care	2,853	2,808
	09 - Organ procurement—posthumous	5	2
	11 - Mental health care	1,583	1,724
	12 - Outsourced Hospitals	2,004	1,587
	14 - Renal Dialysis	10,895	11,043
	99 - Unknown	439	528
Admitted Patient Sub Total		75,002	81,645
Non Admitted Patient Care	10 - Procedures	1,006	2,461
	20 - Medical Consultation	117,600	143,403
	30 - Diagnostic Services	10	10,657
	40 - Allied Health &/or Clinical Nurse Specialist Interventions	257,949	292,114
Non Admitted Patient Sub Total		376,565	448,635
Emergency Dept Patient Care	01 - Admitted	31,408	35,438
	02 - Non Admitted	45,177	47,001
Emergency Department Patient Care Sub Total		76,585	82,439
Grand Total		528,152	612,719

Hospitals—dental presentations

Ms Stephen-Smith (*in reply to a question by Mr Rattenbury on Tuesday, 4 February 2025*):

Data on potentially preventable hospitalisations is published annually by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in its Admitted Patient Care publication via following link: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dental-oral-health/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia/contents/hospitalisations/potentially-preventable-hospitalisations>.

This data is currently available up to 2022-23 and is the most appropriate data to consider in seeking to identify trends.

Figures reflect hospitalisations across public and private hospitals in the ACT, and data for all Australian hospitals, where the patients' usual state of residence is in the ACT.

The increase in 2020-21 can likely be attributed to the COVID-19 restrictions implemented during this period, with many private dental practices in the ACT reducing their services.

During the COVID-19 restrictions, generation of aerosols within a dental setting was prohibited, which meant only standard extractions were permitted and may have attributed to higher cases of Emergency Department presentations for dental conditions due to routine dental treatment delays.

Ms Stephen-Smith (*in reply to a supplementary question by Mr Rattenbury on Tuesday, 4 February 2025*):

The Directorate has developed a draft methodology for identifying patients presenting to emergency departments with a dental related principal diagnosis. Prior to being able to consider public reporting, the Directorate will progress a detailed program of work to:

- Undertake an assessment of the power of the metric to identify dental presentations in light of the limitations of using administrative data to report on performance in the emergency department context.
- Work with relevant stakeholders, including Canberra Health Services, to reach agreement on the proposed methodology to identify patients presenting to emergency departments with a dental related principal diagnosis.

Once it is established that the metric is appropriate for reporting, it will be considered for inclusion in the Health Services Data Dashboard.

Hospitals—dental presentations

Ms Stephen-Smith (*in reply to a supplementary question by Ms Clay on Tuesday, 4 February 2025*):

- Specific groups including those with disability, special needs and the Targeted Access Program (TAP) (partnered organisations who support vulnerable ACT residents can refer clients for check-ups, fillings, extractions, and dentures at our community dental clinics), are prioritised for dental care. This does however impact on the general waitlist, potentially leading to increased wait times.
- Children and Youth do not have a waitlist with CHS Dental and are booked for the next available exam or emergency appointment.
- The Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACF) Mobile Dental Clinic visits partnered facilities and provides dental exams, treatment and dentures on site. Since May 2023, eight RACFs have received visits from the mobile dental clinic.

- The School Mobile Dental clinic will resume services at Ngunnawal Primary School in Term 2, 2025. The School Mobile Dental clinic is moving to a screening program performed onsite at Ngunnawal Primary School, with treatment performed separately if required. If dental treatment is needed, identified families can utilise their Child Dental Benefit Scheme package and pay a co-payment of \$77.95, or if eligible receive identified treatment at no cost at their local ACT Government community dental clinic.
- Onsite dental services are provided at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) three times a week where a mix of urgent and non-urgent dental services (including dentures) is offered. There is a current waitlist for non-urgent dental treatment of approximately 12 months.
- Since January 2023, three dental clinics have been undertaken at the Bimberi Youth Detention centre utilising a visiting mobile dental clinic. By delivering dental services on site, young people have been declared dentally fit without the need to transport to a community dental clinic.
- ACT residents who access CHS Dental with dental pain are offered the next available emergency dental appointment in house or may be offered a voucher to treat their presenting concern with a partnered private provider.
- CHS Dental has partnered with the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health to undertake the National Child Oral Health Survey at the Gungahlin and Tuggeranong Community Dental Clinics between March 2025 and May 2025. Epidemiological dental data collected from this survey will be used to inform future dental policy in the ACT.
- CHS Dental has partnered with CIT, Charles Sturt University and Adelaide University to support dental assistant, oral health therapist and dental student placement across several community dental clinics. The engagement with tertiary institutions has led to the development of the Oral Health Therapy new graduate pathway since January 2024, providing a variety of networking and training opportunities for clinicians working with child and youth clients.
- During Dental Health Week in August 2024, CHS Dental undertook dental health education exhibitions at the Belconnen and Phillip Health Centres. This was further supported by visits to several community playgroups in the second half of 2024.

Taxation—levies and duties

Mr Steel (*in reply to a question by Mr Cocks on Tuesday, 4 February 2025*):

Duties and levies are taxes. There can be some differing definitions of these across jurisdictions.

An overview of ACT Government taxes, duties and levies, and the circumstances where they are applied, is publicly available in a combination of the Territory Budget papers, available at treasury.act.gov.au/budget, and on the ACT Revenue Office website at revenue.act.gov.au.

Planning—approvals

Mr Steel (*in reply to a question by Ms Carrick on Wednesday, 5 February 2025*):

Since the new planning framework (i.e. the *Planning Act 2023*) took effect on 27 November 2023, two applications were made to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) in relation to development applications (DAs) for public housing. Out of the two ACAT applications, one was in relation to a DA decision made under the *Planning Act 2023*.

Mr Steel (*in reply to a supplementary question by Ms Clay on Wednesday, 5 February 2025*):

From 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2024, a total of 135 applications were made to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) in relation to development applications (DAs).

Libraries ACT—resourcing

Ms Cheyne (*in reply to a supplementary question by Mr Braddock on Thursday, 6 February 2025*):

Bilingual Storytime will return to a regular programming schedule at the commencement of Term 2 of the 2025 school year.

The decision to pause Bilingual Storytime was not related to staff numbers in libraries.

Ms Cheyne (*in reply to a supplementary question by Miss Nuttall on Thursday, 6 February 2025*):

Bilingual Storytime will return to a regular programming schedule at the commencement of Term 2 of the 2025 school year.

Lake Ginninderra—water management

Ms Orr (*in reply to a question by Ms Clay on Thursday, 6 February 2025*):

- The maintenance valve on Lake Ginninderra (and other ACT Government managed dams) are periodically opened for scheduled and unscheduled maintenance of the dam infrastructure, and for other maintenance-related matters. The dam valves are regularly opened for maintenance purposes, a process known as “exercising”.
- Generally, valves are exercised (a check of functional operability) twice yearly. This includes briefly opening and then closing of valves, releasing a relatively small volume of water, to review ease of operation and consideration of the response of the valve and gearboxes. This is undertaken by experienced operators and any observations are used to identify the need for maintenance or developing deterioration.
- Additional operations can be undertaken throughout the year and are assessed on a case by case basis.

Taxation—registration fees

Ms Cheyne (*in reply to a question by Mr Cocks on Thursday, 6 February 2025*):

The ACT's vehicle renewal fees are largely comparable with those of NSW. I believe the figure quoted by Mr Cocks relates to only the registration fee component. If compared against the ACT registration fee component, the example NSW registration fee of \$649 is \$1.40 *more expensive* than the equivalent ACT registration fee of \$647.60. A lower emitting vehicles of the same weight category will have even lower fees in the ACT, encouraging people to consider a more fuel efficient, lower running-cost vehicle that will fulfill their needs.

The registration fee is only one part of the total cost to renew a vehicle. Other fees and charges to renew a vehicle include:

- Motor Accident Injury insurance
- ACT Registration Road Rescue fee
- Road Safety Contribution
- Motor Accident Levy
- Reg Lifetime Care and Support Levy.

For example, the complete fees of a 10-year-old Toyota Dual Cab utility weighing 1,865kg being renewed for private use for 12 months would be:

NSW:

Periodic Inspection fee	\$49
CTP (Insured by Allianz, km travelled, youngest driver, demerit points, driving offences and at fault claims all unknown)	\$485
Registration (\$79 registration, \$570 Motor Vehicle Tax)	\$649
TOTAL	\$1,183

ACT:

MAI (NRMA is cheapest of the approved insurers for this category of vehicle)	\$472.40
MAI Regulator Levy	\$14.00
Life Time Care and Support Levy	\$105.40
Vehicle registration fee (category C or D vehicle weighing from 1505kg to less than 2,505kg, 2% discount for paying 12 months in full)	\$647.60
Road Safety Contribution	\$2.50
Road Rescue Fee	\$31.30
TOTAL	\$1,273.20

In this example, the total cost to register a vehicle in the ACT is \$90.20 more than it is in NSW. However, when considering additional factors such as the need for registered operators to travel for a vehicle inspection and secure Compulsory Third Party (CTP) insurance — the effective cost of registering a vehicle in NSW in many cases will exceed that of the ACT.