



Debates

Weekly Hansard

Eleventh Assembly

6 May 2025

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Tuesday, 6 May 2025

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Tuesday, 6 May 2025

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.00): 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.

Mr Don Piper PSM
Condolence statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.02): Members, I wish to make a statement of condolence in relation to the passing of the Assembly's first Clerk, Don Piper. When the Assembly was created, after passage of the self-government legislation in the federal parliament in 1988, it fell to Don to be the inaugural Clerk, a position that he held on an acting basis from early 1989 until December that same year. Don had a distinguished and long career serving the House of Representatives in the federal parliament prior to and after working at the Assembly.

As was noted in the eulogy given by his friend and colleague Ian Cochran at his funeral service on the size of the task that would have confronted Don when he was appointed as the inaugural Clerk here—and I quote:

Just imagine sorting out the requirements of a new Assembly Chamber, recruiting suitable staff, drafting the initial standing orders to enable the Assembly to meet for the first time and to function, and managing the whims and fancies of the 17 new Members unfamiliar completely with parliamentary ways.

Although some of the standing orders and practices have been tweaked and amended since self-government commenced, the way that the Assembly currently operates owes much to Don's decisions and actions in those formative years. The Assembly owes Don much appreciation for his efforts in assisting to establish this institution. I am sure all members will join me in passing on condolences to Don's family and friends.

As a mark of respect to the memory of Don, I would ask all members to rise in their places.

Members standing in their places—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, members.

Parliamentary privilege—appointment of independent arbiter

Statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER: Members, I wish to advise that I have appointed the Hon Keith Mason AC KC, a former President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal, as an independent legal arbiter to evaluate, decide and report on privilege claims in connection with the Assembly's orders of 4 March and 19 March 2025 for the production of certain documents.

For the information of members, I propose to table the instrument appointing Mr Mason. Mr Mason has extensive experience performing the role of independent legal arbiter on behalf of the New South Wales Legislative Council.

I understand that there are seven documents where a claim of privilege has been made and where a member has disputed the claim. As required under standing order 213A, the Clerk will, as soon as practicable, provide Mr Mason with the disputed documents and any submissions made in relation to the claims of privilege.

Owing to Mr Mason's availability, it is practicable to provide that material on 13 May 2025, and Mr Mason will then have 10 calendar days in which to decide and report on the claims. Mr Mason's report will be provided to the Clerk and made available to all members but must not be published or copied without an order of the Assembly. If the independent legal arbiter does not uphold the claim of privilege, the Clerk will table the document or documents that has or have been the subject of the claim of privilege.

In the event that the Assembly is not sitting, the Clerk is authorised to provide the document or documents to any member upon request; however, the document or documents do not attract absolute privilege until tabled by the Clerk at the next sitting of the Assembly.

On a more general note, it is fair to say that, in working through the recent production orders, there are several areas where our standing order 213A could potentially be tweaked—could be improved. I will be talking to my counterparts in other parliaments as to how their practices have evolved in this area, and to ensure an efficient and sufficiently flexible approach while ensuring that the underlying principle of government accountability to the parliament is maintained.

I would note that our standing order replicates the original standing order in the New South Wales Legislative Council, which has since been tweaked on a number of occasions. The New South Wales Legislative Council has significantly enhanced its procedures since they were first introduced following the famous *Egan v Will* case. The New South Wales government has taken a forward step through the development of a protocol for the proactive release of government information to members of the Legislative Council.

I want to make it clear here that I will be discussing these and related matters through the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, and no doubt we will have more to say at an appropriate time.

Ministerial records—order to table documents

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) (10.07), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) pursuant to paragraph (1) of the Assembly resolution of 4 March 2025, the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (the Directorate) has provided documents to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly under standing order 213A on health expenditure and caretaker; and
 - (b) the Directorate has since discovered discrepancies in folio numbering and documents provided in relation to part 3 of that order. This is a result of human error and requires correction;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) disputes have been received regarding claims of privilege made over a small number of documents identified; and
 - (b) the documents subject to the dispute have been provided to the Clerk for review by an independent legal arbiter;
- (3) authorises the Clerk to return the documents provided as part 3 of the order to the Directorate, without them being tabled or circulated to enable the correction of the errors; and
- (4) calls on the Chief Minister to resubmit to the Clerk the corrected documents by the next sitting day.

I apologise to the chamber for having to deal first with something that is procedural. It relates to the points that Mr Speaker was just making. Most people in this place would be aware that, in response to the motion under standing order 213A on 4 March, a range of documents and indexes have been provided.

In the course of finalising the return, human error resulted in the descriptions of some, but not all, documents in the schedule for part 3 being incorrectly transposed, as well as the inadvertent inclusion of documents for which the Chief Minister has made a claim of privilege. These areas only affected the sections of the return for part 3. Documents provided in relation to parts 1 and 2 of the motion were not affected.

Two simple steps are required to correct this mistake. The first is that we need to provide a corrected schedule of documents that has been prepared for part 3, and that will be provided, ensuring that the description listed against each document is accurate. The second is that the documents over which the Chief Minister has claimed privilege and that have been inadvertently provided to the Clerk will be removed from the return before they are tabled or published. No other documents will be removed or added.

Mr Speaker, I note that the dispute regarding claims of privilege was provided to the Clerk, consistent with the standing order. These documents have been separately provided to the Clerk for review by an independent arbiter, who you have just appointed. Nothing changes there; this just allows a mistake via human error to be rectified.

The resolution authorises the Clerk to return the affected documents before they are tabled, with the correct schedule, and non-privileged documents are to be returned before the next sitting day.

I thank all members in this place for their support of this procedural motion and apologise that it has preceded other business, but it needed it to do so.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Government—order to table documents—documents returned

The Clerk presented the following papers, pursuant to standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly of—

19 March 2025, together with the transmittal letter from the Head of Service, ACT Government to the Clerk, dated 17 April 2025, which had been circulated to Members on 17 April 2025:

Light rail—Documents—Order to table—Copy of—

Index of returned documents.

City to Gungahlin Light Rail—Project Delivery Report—Transport Canberra, dated June 2019.

Schedule for Light Rail Stage 2, undated.

Light Rail Stage 2B Environmental Impact Assessment: Technical Report 6: Socioeconomic Impact Assessment—Social Atlas, dated 27 November 2024.

City to Gungahlin Light Rail Benefits Realisation—Snapshot—Major Projects Canberra, dated May 2020.

Light Rail Five Years On: Benefits Realisation Report 2024—Transport Canberra, undated.

Light Rail Stage 1 Review—Assembly resolution of 31 July 2019—Government response—

Scope and Methodology of Light Rail Stage 1 Benefits Review—Ministerial Statement, undated.

City to Gungahlin Light Rail Benefits Realisation—Snapshot—Ministerial Statement, undated.

Capital Metro—Full Business Case—Capital Metro Agency, undated.

City to Woden Light Rail Stage 2A—Major Projects Canberra—

City to Commonwealth Park Business Case—Cabinet in Confidence—Preliminary draft, dated July 2019 (First Pass).

City to Commonwealth Park Business Case—Cabinet in Confidence—Preliminary draft, dated July 2019.

City to Commonwealth Park Business Case—Cabinet in Confidence—
Preliminary draft, dated August 2019.

Light Rail Capital Expenditure and Commonwealth Contribution
(2013-14 – 2023-24), undated.

Capital Metro Agency—Financial statements for the year ended—

30 June 2014, dated 12 August 2014.

30 June 2015, dated July 2015.

20 March 2025, together with the transmittal letter from the Head of Service, ACT
Government to the Clerk, dated 2 May 2025, which had been circulated to
Members on 2 May 2025:

Health services and policies—Reviews—Order to table—Copy of—

Index of returned documents.

List of policy recommendations, Government responses and implementation
status—ACT Health Directorate, dated April 2025, of the following:

Discharge Accommodation program (DAP) Evaluation and Review of Safe
Spaces.

Final report into implementation of the Independent Review into the
Workplace Culture with ACT Public Health Services (March 2023).

HCCA Consumer and Family Experiences and Expectations of Accessing
Interstate Specialist Care: The Kids Interstate Shared Care Project Final
Report (2020).

Inquiry into the Legislative, Workplace Governance and Clinical
Frameworks at the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit in the ACT.

LGBTIQ+ Health Scoping Study Report.

Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing—

5 year evaluation.

Mid-Term review Final Report.

Older Canberrans Preliminary Analysis.

Recommendations for reform of care, treatment and support provided to
people deemed not guilty because of mental impairment and released from
custody into the care of mental health services—Chief Psychiatrist's Report
(January 2024).

Review of—

Children and Young People in the ACT, Office for Mental Health and
Wellbeing.

The COVID-19 Response Operating Model—Nous Review.

The Paediatric Early Warning System (PEWS) at The Canberra Hospital
August 2023.

10 April 2025, together with the transmittal letter from the Head of Service, ACT
Government to the Clerk, dated 23 April 2025, which had been circulated to
Members on 23 April 2025:

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—Documents—Order to table—Copy of—

Index of returned documents.

Work Plan Activity List for Tenancy Group—Infrastructure Canberra, dated 16 April 2025.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite and Day Centre Condition and Functionality Assessment Report—SAFM Solutions, dated 1 December 2020.

Talking Points—ACT Health Directorate—

Temporary relocation of alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility (Arcadia House), Bruce, to respite care facility (Burrangiri), Rivett, dated 2 April 2024.

Northside Hospital—

Expansion Project Board Meeting No 9—Wednesday, 20 November 2024, undated.

Project Control Group No 7—Tuesday, 4 February 2025, undated.

Project Control Group No 6—Tuesday, 3 December 2024, undated.

Project Control Group No 9—Tuesday, 1 April 2025, undated.

ACT Health's site analysis and for an alternative health service at Rivett—Holding Statement, dated 27 February 2025.

ACT Health Infrastructure Program Report—

February 2025, undated.

South Tuggeranong Health Centre—Development Approval—Talking Points, dated February 2025 (Attachment).

Strategic Asset Management Plan—ACT Health Directorate Strategic Infrastructure Division—AECOM Australia Pty Ltd, dated 5 September 2022.

AOD relocation from the Northern Block Summary, undated.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre – Meeting with Fiona Sanders, General Manager Salvos Home Care—Ministerial Brief, dated 15 July 2024.

Asset Management Plan Burrangiri—ACT Health Directorate, dated August 2023.

Northside Hospital – Enabling work workstream – Update on the relocation of Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD)/Arcadia House—Ministerial brief, dated 20 December 2024.

Burrangiri facility Rivett Upgrade and Reconfiguration Concept Cost Plan Summary—AF Project Consulting, dated 25 March 2024, including the transmittal letter.

Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure Policy and Planning, ACT Health—Minute—

Contract execution – Engagement of Consultant to undertake the Alcohol and Drug (AOD) Facility Site Feasibility Study, dated 28 January 2025.

Alcohol and Drug (AOD) Facility Site Feasibility Study and Detailed Design Procurement, dated 28 November 2024.

Alcohol and Drug (AOD) Facility – Site Feasibility Study—

Procurement Plan, dated 8 November 2024.

Request for Quotation (Short Form), dated 27 November 2024.

Approach to Market Terms and Conditions—Version 2, dated September 2024 (Attachment A).

Statement of Requirements, dated 27 November 2024 (Attachment B).

Canberra Region Local Industry Participation Policy—Economic Contribution Test (ECT) Response Schedule—Procurements with a value of \$200,000 to \$5 million, dated June 2024.

Fair and Save Employment Criteria (FSEC) Response Schedule, dated September 2024 (Attachment G).

Evaluation Plan, dated 8 November 2024.

Procurement risk management plan and assessment, dated 13 November 2024.

Conformance checklist, undated.

Confidentiality undertaking & conflict of interest disclosure—Probity in procurement guide—ACT Public Service employee, undated (Attachment H).

Northside Hospital Project Control Group No 5—Tuesday 5 November 2024—Talking Points.

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-2024—Answers to Questions (unsigned)—

Taken on Notice—

No 71, undated.

No 72, undated.

On Notice—

No 17, undated.

No 61, undated.

Communications Plan—Proposed relocation of Directions ACT to Rivett, dated 28 March 2025.

Quarterly ACT Health Infrastructure Program Report—2024-25, Quarter Two—Ministerial Brief, undated.

Private Members' Business—Ms Castley and Ms Carrick—Burrangiri Respite Centre—Dot Points, dated 4 March 2025.

Options for Aged Care Respite in the ACT (Burrangiri) December 2024—

Ministerial Brief, dated 11 December 2024.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre – Meeting with Fiona Sanders, General Manager Salvos Home Care—Ministerial Brief, dated 15 July 2024 (Attachment C).

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre – Second meeting with Fiona Sanders, General Manager Salvos Home Care—Ministerial Brief, dated 12 August 2024 (Attachment D).

ACT Government funded Respite—Short-term options paper—Final, dated 22 November 2024 (Attachment E).

Attachment F—Aged respite care grant process timeline, undated.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—

Future options for service and facility—Ministerial brief, dated 6 June 2024.

Attachment A—Information to answer MO questions regarding Burrangiri, undated.

Meeting with Fiona Sanders, General Manager Salvos Home Care—Ministerial Brief, dated 15 July 2024 (Attachment C).

Second meeting with Fiona Sanders, General Manager Salvos Home Care—Ministerial Brief, dated 12 August 2024.

ACT age care health services and system demand and future options for Burrangiri—

Ministerial brief, dated 21 February 2024.

Attachment A—Burrangiri Background—Contracted Services, undated.

Attachment B—Scoping paper: Future Respite Care Needs for ACT/Needs Analysis Paper for the Respite Care in ACT, undated.

Attachment C—Public Sector Residential Aged Care Facilities, undated.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—

Future options for service and facility—ACT Health Director-General Minutes, dated 3 May 2024.

Burrangiri funding confirmation—Email advice from ACT Health Directorate Strategic Finance, dated 1 May 2024 (Attachment A).

Letter of Variation, dated 10 and 24 May 2024.

Letter of Variation, dated 19 and 30 June 2022.

10 April 2025, together with the transmittal letter from the Head of Service, ACT Government to the Clerk, dated 24 April 2025, which had been circulated to Members on 24 April 2025:

Caretaker period 2024—Briefings to incoming ministers—Documents—Order to table—Copies of—

Index of returned documents.

Portfolio Brief—Minister for Health—Minister for Mental Health—ACT Health Directorate and Infrastructure Canberra, dated 8 November 2024.

Minister Orr—Supplementary Incoming Portfolio Briefing—Community Services Directorate, dated 2 December 2024.

Disability, Carers and Community Services—Incoming Portfolio Briefing—Community Services Directorate, dated 12 November 2024.

Canberra Health Services, dated November 2024.

Minister for Education and Early Childhood—Government achievements and future priorities—Letter from the Education Directorate-General to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, dated 7 November 2024.

Incoming Minister Brief—Education and Early Childhood—Education Directorate, dated November 2024.

Minister for Education and Early Childhood—Education Directorate priorities—Minister's First 30 days, undated.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Transport Canberra—fares—petition 51-24

By Mr Emerson, from 230 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to make public transport free. Public transport ensures equitable access to essential services and opportunities across the city, while also reducing traffic congestion, lowering carbon emissions, and fostering a more connected community. Cities across the World are shifting to free public transport, and Canberra should do the same for the following reasons:

1. The System already runs at a loss. Public transport recoups less than 10% of its operating costs through fares, with taxpayers already funding the rest. Free fares maximise the value of these subsidies, filling empty buses and making better use of resources.
2. Safer drivers, safer journeys. Fare disputes put drivers at risk and were a key issue in the recent driver strike. Removing fares eliminates a major source of conflict, allowing drivers to focus on safety and service.
3. Relief for families. Free public transport eases cost-of-living pressures, helping households save money for essentials.
4. Proven Worldwide success. Countries and cities around the world have successfully implemented free public transport, leading to increase ridership and reduced greenhouse gases and congestion. Hasselt in Belgium is a notable example. Fares were abolished in 1997 and ridership was as much as 13 times higher by 2006. Tallinn, Estonia, with more than 420,000 inhabitants (similar to Canberra), switched to free public transport in 2013 after public vote. The country of Luxembourg has free public transport. Belgrade will be the largest city in the world with free public transport, with a population of 1,380,000. Adopting free public transport will make Canberra a World leader and an even more desirable place to live and visit.
5. Improve tourism. Free public transport will make Canberra a more desirable destination for tourists, who can redirect their cash into local businesses who desperately need it.
6. Boost public transport use. Removing fares encourages more people to use buses and light rail, cutting traffic, improving air quality, and lowering emissions.
7. Saves costs associated with administering the system. Removing staff costs to administer the small amount of revenue collected will save millions annually. Staff can be redeployed to optimise routes, improve reliability, and enhance passenger experience.
8. Faster and more efficient travel. No fares mean quicker boarding, fewer delays, and a better overall experience for commuters. The payment system is currently causing an increase in delays as passengers attempt to tap on. This adds up to time wasted waiting for the bus to move to its next destination.

9. Everyone benefits. Even if you don't use public transport you will see less traffic congestion due to more people using public transport. This makes driving faster and less stressful. Cleaner air improves public health and reduces healthcare costs. A stronger local economy thrives when workers and customers can travel more easily.
10. Data collection remains. Technology exists that could be used to count passenger numbers.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to consider making public transport free.

Roads—Harry Hopman Circuit—petition 1-25

By Mr Parton, from 94 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that: The annual Christmas Light display on Harry Hopman Circuit is among the most popular in the ACT, attracting thousands of visitors every night. With hundreds of cars driving up and down Harry Hopman Circuit each night during the festive season, it causes traffic chaos on the street.

Your petitioners therefore request the ACT Government to: Implement temporary traffic controls on Harry Hopman Circuit, by making the street one way during the Christmas Season.

Planning—Ainslie Football Club rezoning application—petition 18-25

By Mr Rattenbury, from 259 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to: a proponent led proposal by the Ainslie Football and Social Club for a Major Plan Amendment (DPA-2) to the Territory Development Plan 2024.

If approved in its current form, this proposal would:

- rezone land originally provided and zoned for sporting and recreational use to high-density residential and commercial use
- set a precedent across the ACT allowing for the construction of high-density residential developments of up to 7 storeys (21.5 metres) and commercial development (no height limit) immediately adjacent to low-density residential development.

Over 80 percent of the 146 submissions to the ACT Planning Authority on this proposal opposed the rezoning specifically for high-density and raised a broad range of concerns that have not yet been adequately considered.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to refer the Ainslie Football and Social Club's DPA-2 rezoning proposal, to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services for a full public inquiry, including public hearings.

Lyneham High School—gymnasium—petition 7-25

By Mr Rattenbury, from 562 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the immediate need for new physical education learning facilities at Lyneham High School (LHS).

In the 2020 ACT Election, as a part of their election campaign, ACT Labor promised to replace the Lyneham High School Gym. Unfortunately, since then the government has backtracked on this promise, instead indicating in the 2024 Budget that they will merely refurbish the old gym. This investment is inadequate, given:

1. The current LHS gym does not meet building safety standards outlined by the National Construction Code; there is not enough space between the court markings and the wall, which is a safety hazard. Parts of the gym are also already sectioned off due to safety hazards, and the current plan to upgrade the gym floor to 'competition standard' is wasteful as neither the roof nor runoff space of the court are large enough to meet such standards.
2. The LHS student body (1061 students) is too large for the current school facility to adequately accommodate, harming students' ability to learn. For instance:
 - The existing gym, hall, and Lyneham Performing Arts Centre (LPAC) all lack the capacity to hold full school assemblies. The school can barely provide the space for school three years to assemble at once, let alone the whole school.
 - Approximately 300 students participate in Physical Education (PE) simultaneously at LHS. There is only one indoor sports facility to accommodate these students, irrespective of weather conditions.
 - Classrooms are becoming more and more crowded (some exceeding 32 students per room), due to a lack of learning spaces and educators on school grounds. LHS is already at 98% capacity of students.
3. The population of the inner north region is expected to double in the next 35 years. If the current facilities can't properly accommodate half of this projected population, it will be physically impossible for LHS to provide an adequate education for students.
4. A new gym was already promised by ACT Labor. Backing out of this promise is unacceptable and degrades trust in the ACT Government. Plans for a new gymnasium had already gone through project planning and had been quoted, so there would also be a low start-up cost to get the project off of the ground.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the ACT Government to:

1. Follow through on the original plans for a new LHS gymnasium, and provide the funding needed to accommodate the construction of the building. This building will serve as a new assembly location for students, and provide adequate PE facilities for learning.
2. Continue with the refurbishment of the old LHS gym, transforming the existing building into new classrooms to help sustain the current and future student population.
3. Ensure honesty and integrity in all future election campaigns.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre—petitions 50-24 and 21-25

By Ms Carrick, from 4,008 and 1,680 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that there are gaps in the provision of social infrastructure in the Woden Town Centre, including a 50m pool and associated green spaces. Local recreation facilities are needed to connect people and facilitate the community's physical and mental health.

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

- retain and upgrade the existing Phillip Swimming & Ice Skating Centre until a new ice rink is built and a 50m pool and associated aquatic and green spaces are available in the Woden Town Centre; and
- commission an independent review and community consultation into the high-density development in the Woden Town Centre, to ensure it is environmentally and socially sustainable, and climate adaptive.

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

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

Ministerial response

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

Hawker—Hawker Village redevelopment—petition 2-25

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, dated 29 April 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Barry concerning Hawker Village shops redevelopment.

The response read as follows:

Dear Clerk

I refer to Petition 002-25 titled ‘Hawker village shops redevelopment’ tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 6 February 2025.

The ACT Government is aware of the community interest in the proposal and direct sale application by Woolworths Group Limited for land within the Hawker Group Centre.

The direct sale application proposes the acquisition of several blocks of unleased Territory land, including a road reserve (Hawker Place) and the adjoining surface car park, Block 26 Section 33 Hawker. Refer to site 1 in Figure 1 below. The land is zoned CZ1 Core Zone. The Woolworths proposal is to expand the existing supermarket to a large format ‘full line’ supermarket with additional retail space in the Hawker Group Centre. Woolworths already owns land within the Hawker Group Centre.

As I noted in my Ministerial Statement to the Legislative Assembly on 4 March 2025, after careful consideration of the current direct sale application, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) has advised Woolworths that the proposal in its current form does not meet the Government’s strategic objectives, policy setting or community benefit for key mixed-use commercial group centres.

EPSDD has written to Woolworths to clarify the position and expectations outlined above and has offered to meet with the proponent in good faith, to provide reasonable opportunity for a revised proposal which more closely aligns with the Government’s and community’s expectations for the site. This correspondence has been acknowledged by Woolworths. EPSDD has also asked Woolworths to engage meaningfully with the community on any revised proposal.

Separately and independent to the direct sale application, EPSDD is undertaking a range of planning and technical studies at the Hawker Group Centre as part of Group and Local Centres work. Territory owned sites at the Hawker Group Centre are indicated in Figure 1 below. These works will also include assessment of remanent trees and potential contamination present including from a former dry cleaner identified in earlier investigations. Parking surveys will also be undertaken, and these align with Transport, Canberra and City Services requirements. EPSDD’s assessments are expected to be completed by 30 June 2025.

The information obtained through EPSDD’s work at Hawker will inform the Government in deciding if the land should be sold. The information will also assist

in deciding if any sale should occur through a market or direct sales process. This includes consideration of any amended proposal from Woolworths for the Hawker group centre.

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

Figure 1



Motion to take note of petitions

MR SPEAKER: Before I call Ms Carrick, I want to thank the people in the gallery for sensibly complying with the no campaign slogans request. Thank you; I appreciate it.

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

That the petitions and response so lodged be noted.

Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre—petitions 50-24 and 21-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.14): I rise today to speak on a matter of deep concern to the people who use the Woden town centre and the broader Canberra community—the future of the Phillip pool and ice skating centre.

First, I want to acknowledge the tireless and passionate advocacy of the Save Phillip Pool group. Some are here with us today in the gallery; thank you. Their dedication has been extraordinary. They have spent countless hours engaging with the community, raising awareness and collecting close to 6,000 signatures. That number speaks volumes. It reflects a community that understands the vital role that public sporting and recreation facilities play in our lives.

The petitions highlight a broader issue—the growing gap in social infrastructure in the Woden town centre. The absence of a 50-metre pool and associated green spaces is not just a local inconvenience; it is a public health concern. Recreation facilities are essential for physical and mental wellbeing. They connect people, foster community and save lives.

Let us be clear: swimming is not just a sport; it is a life skill. Yet the statistics are alarming. Nearly half of year 6 students cannot swim 50 metres or tread water for two minutes. A staggering 84 per cent of year 10 students cannot swim 400 metres or tread water for five minutes. This lack of capability is contributing to a rise in drownings. We need regular access to public pools with deep water to build and maintain these critical skills.

The community's concerns deepened when the Phillip pool site was sold to Geocon, a high-yield developer. Just weeks before the sale, the ACT government amended the draft Territory Plan, enabling the redevelopment and the replacement of the outdoor 50-metre pool with an indoor 25-metre pool. To justify this, the government cherry-picked population data, excluded people from Weston Creek and benchmarked us against Batemans Bay, a much smaller community.

In November 2024, Geocon submitted a development application for a mega-development of five towers and 700 apartments, and the removal of the 50-metre pool and ice rink. There has been no meaningful dialogue with the public, swimmers or pool users. Representations have been submitted, but there is no pre-DA consultation and no appeal rights. The proposed pool would be a separate unit title lease with a mixed-use development. The leaseholder, not the government, would be responsible for operations and maintenance, yet the development application lacks the detail needed to assess whether it meets Territory Plan requirements.

I am deeply concerned about the financial viability of this facility. Will it maintain the same opening hours and accessibility as ACT government pools, or will it become a private amenity for apartment residents? We have seen what can go wrong. The Bay Pavilions aquatic centre in Batemans Bay reported a \$1.2 million operating loss in its first nine months. Eurobodalla Shire had to commission a review into the decision-making. Here in the ACT, the Auditor-General is now investigating the transparency of the planning process for the Phillip pool site.

I ask: what happens if this pool is not financially viable? Will the government bail it out? Will it be downgraded to offer only swimming lessons, like the Oasis pool in Deakin, or will it simply become inaccessible to the public? How can the community trust this process when the ACT Supreme Court recently condemned this developer's conduct in advertising another Woden project as "disdainful, contemptuous and scornful of consumers"?

There are also serious concerns about the viability of the proposed Tuggeranong ice rink. If that project fails, what becomes of the Phillip ice rink? We must not build out the Woden ice rink until we know whether the Tuggeranong facility will be built. We must keep our options open to refurb the ice rink. There are too many unknowns, too many risks and too little transparency.

Therefore, I call on the Assembly to ensure that Geocon's development application does not proceed until the Auditor-General's review is complete, the Tuggeranong ice rink is underway, clear, sustainable funding and management arrangements are in place to ensure the pool remains a publicly accessible facility, and the government develops a comprehensive aquatic strategy, one that ensures 50-metre pools are equitably distributed and accessible by public transport across Canberra.

In conclusion, we must ask ourselves: is the loss of the Phillip pool truly in the best interests of our community? If not, let's work together constructively and transparently to plan for a 50-metre pool, whether it is on the current site or whether it is a new aquatic centre in the Woden town centre.

MR SPEAKER: Can I reinforce that filming videos and pictures from the gallery is not permitted; thank you.

**Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre—petitions 50-24 and 21-25
Hawker—Hawker Village redevelopment—petition 2-25**

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.19): For the benefit of *Hansard*, I want to point out what the Speaker has noted. We so much appreciate that the Phillip pool community is here. They have reversed their T-shirts, so they are wearing a beautiful blue, and they have obviously dodged some of the rules about not bringing in accessories and devices. Wearing swimming goggles around your neck is just regular clothing, so well done. That is really good.

I want to thank Ms Carrick for her excellent advocacy on this issue, which has brought together, clearly, thousands and thousands of people who are really worried about losing their 50-metre pool in Phillip. I want to thank the community for getting behind that and speaking up to government.

It is very clear to me that we have a bit of a problem at the moment with public access to swimming pools in Canberra. Phillip is one example; Big Splash is another. I have sponsored a petition regarding Big Splash, and we have over 500 signatures on that. It is a different situation, but it is also the same situation, and it is quite clear that there is something difficult in the business model of running a pool. That is probably why, in some places, councils run pools.

There will be lots of solutions to these problems, but we do need proactive government engagement on the issue if we are going to have public access to swimming pools in five, 10 and 20 years time. We need to make sure that we are doing that for a range of different pools across Canberra, giving everybody access to those.

We need some 50-metre pools for lap swimming. I am a lap swimmer myself. I will offer another reason to Ms Carrick's excellent list of reasons as to why Canberra and Batemans Bay may not be direct comparisons and might not be a good point of comparison. At Batemans Bay, you can swim in the ocean. Not everybody wants to swim in the ocean, but I regularly go for a lap swim, down Broulee way, and you cannot do that in Canberra. That is another thing that we do not have here.

I thank her for bringing these petitions to the Assembly. I am looking forward to government engaging really well on this issue, which is a critical issue right this second, as well as the issue of long-term planning for public access to pools in Belconnen, Phillip and around Canberra. I think it is a problem that we can fix, with a bit of goodwill and a good long-term view.

I also want to speak very briefly to another matter—the ministerial response to the petition on the Hawker Village shops. A petition has come back, and I would like to

thank Ms Barry for bringing that petition forward, and Ms Barry and Mr Cain for their work on this. That issue is currently before a committee that I am chairing, so I will not go into that issue right now. I am chairing that inquiry into the issue, so I am not publicly advocating on that issue.

I have been quite vocal about the issue in the past. Over the last few years, I have written to government, lodged FOIs and asked numerous questions in the Assembly. It is pleasing to see that one of the matters raised, as to whether we can at least consider more than one option for that site, has already been resolved, but we will look forward to seeing what the eventual outcome is for the Hawker Village shops petition.

Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre—petitions 50-24 and 21-25

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.22): I want to speak briefly to the petitions on saving the Phillip pool, and particularly in my capacity as the shadow minister for planning. It has been at the very heart of my call into politics: what is happening to our beautiful bush capital? What is happening to our beautiful city? That is what compelled me to get involved, to ask myself the question, in late 2016, as to whether there was anything I could do about what was happening to our city. I took a step to be involved. I had no idea of where that step would take me, and here I stand. This is where the step has taken me.

Planning for our city should be about the people of Canberra. It is about what is good for our community, what is good for our families, what is good for the elderly and vulnerable in our community. What is good for people is what should drive the planning vision for the bush capital of this wonderful country.

I want to thank Ms Carrick for bringing these petitions forward. Getting over 1,000 signatures is quite an achievement, and well over 1,500 signatures is a wonderful achievement. Obviously, that compels the relevant standing committee, of which I am a member, to ask itself the question: should we inquire further into what these petitions are calling for? As a member of that committee, that is something I will be discussing with my fellow committee members.

I want to thank Ms Carrick and Ms Clay for speaking so supportively of planning for people in our city. I was pleased to hold up a sign this morning. One of the signs I held up this morning was, “Planning is about people.” It is not just about the money that the government wants to make from land, and it is certainly not just about prioritising the developers’ agendas. It is about prioritising what is good for our community, what is good for the people of Canberra.

I thank the supporters who have come out in their own time to put their support behind something that goes to the very heart of what should make a wonderful city to live in, to raise a family in and to retire in—that is, community facilities that support community activity and the things that the community love.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.25): I would like to thank the members of the Save Phillip Pool group who are here today, the many thousands who supported this petition and, of course, Ms Carrick for bringing the petition to the Assembly. Ms Carrick and I have been talking about the challenges of social infrastructure, and of infrastructure

in general in the Woden area, for a very long time. Since her days in the Woden Valley Community Council, we have been engaging on this.

When we looked at the maps, which showed such a big gap in infrastructure in the Woden area—an area that is supposed to serve everywhere from Weston Creek through to parts of Tuggeranong—we saw that the gap was just astounding. The one standout at that time in that area was that we had the Phillip pool. But everyone has been concerned for a long time that that was something we would lose. As we have grown the population in the Woden town centre, as we have seen more and more apartments built, the concerns have increased, in that we do not have the infrastructure that people need to live good lives in that area.

I do not mind if we are going to build some more apartments around the place. People need to have homes. But we also need to make sure that we are providing the things that people need to live well, and the Phillip pool has been one of those things.

One of the things for which I am really grateful is that this petition includes not just the pool but the ice-skating rink. As someone who spent a number of years getting knocked around on the ice, playing ice hockey, it is extraordinarily valuable, from my perspective, to make sure we have facilities that contribute to all sorts of sports.

We have seen, since 2016, promises to build a new ice hockey arena, but we still do not have one, and we are still utterly dependent on the Phillip facility. We are still dependent on that facility to provide ice hockey and ice sports through the winter, and we are dependent on that facility to provide access to swimming in the summer. It is all that we have, so I think it is utterly reasonable for the community to ask the Assembly to take this matter seriously.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.28): I would also like to acknowledge the Save Phillip Pool campaign people who are in the gallery today, and Ms Carrick for bringing this petition forward. I am also heavily invested in this discussion around Woden town centre, and I was glad to hear Mr Cocks's words.

Currently, I have a petition before the Assembly to improve the livability of Woden town centre and the Phillip district, so I encourage everyone to sign the petition. It calls for a standing committee inquiry into the Woden town centre area and how we can improve things for residents. I think there is a great opportunity in Woden. There is still a lot of development to come. There is a lot that is already there, and a lot of new residents, so I think it is well and truly appropriate to have these conversations. So I also call on the standing committee to conduct a broader inquiry into the Woden town centre.

Planning—Ainslie Football Club rezoning application—petition 18-25

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.29): I wish to speak in relation to DPA-2, which is a proponent-initiated major plan amendment proposal relating to blocks 11, 16, 20, 21 and 22 of section 26—the football and social club. This

is a proponent-initiated amendment from Ainslie Football and Social Club. Following acceptance of the application, the Territory Planning Authority prepared a draft major plan amendment, known as DPA-2.

DPA-2 was prepared, and it was out for public consultation between 2 December 2024 and 3 February 2025. Community members have been able to have their say in relation to that major plan amendment. The authority let those community members know that they were prepared to accept late submissions until 14 February, and we are considering these in preparing a consultation report.

A total of 147 submissions were received. The authority is now considering these, as well as entity comments, in preparing a revised DPA for referral to me, as the Minister for Planning, under section 69 of the Planning Act. Once the Territory Planning Authority has prepared the draft planning amendment, under section 70 of the act, they will then transmit it to me and, within five working days after the day that the public availability notice for the draft major plan amendment is published on the authority website, I must refer the draft amendment to the relevant Assembly committee, together with a range of documents and a request that the committee decide on whether it will prepare a report on the draft amendment.

Given that the petition expressly asks for the Assembly committee to refer DPA-2 to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services for a public inquiry, I thought it was important to note that this would occur, anyway, through the statutory process under the Planning Act. Once I receive the report from the Territory Planning Authority, I must make that referral, and I will make that referral in accordance with the act when I receive it.

Roads—Harry Hopman Circuit—petition 1-25

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.31): I want to talk about the Harry Hopman Circuit petition. Isn't Christmas a beautiful time in the suburbs of Canberra? We do the festive season really well in Canberra. So much of that is driven by the residents of our great city. We do household Christmas lights as well as any city in Australia. As members know, there are certain streets in our town that go above and beyond in order to create the Christmas spirit in our neighbourhoods. One such street is Harry Hopman Circuit in Gordon, where the majority of households put on an amazing show in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

They do a pretty solid Halloween as well, just quietly, but what they do at Christmas is astounding. The time, money and effort that go into these displays blows my mind, and it just gets bigger every year. There are moments on Harry Hopman when I think maybe it is too big, and that is because Harry Hopman is only a narrow street. It is a long street, but it is only a narrow street and, when it is chock-full of cars and pedestrians viewing Christmas lights after the sun has set in December, sometimes it looks like an accident waiting to happen.

That is why I was most happy to sponsor this petition to the Assembly, which is very broad. It simply calls for the government to assist in whatever practical way it can with the implementation of some traffic controls during the lead-up to Christmas. I know

that residents are open to ideas and options. Their consensus at this stage is that a one-way traffic situation potentially would be the best option, but they are open to ideas.

I will wait to see a response from government on this, and I hope that we can make Christmas lights at Harry Hopman in Gordon even better in 2025.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Miss Nuttall**) agreed to:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended to enable motion to note petitions being extended by 30 minutes.

Lyneham High School—gymnasium—petition 7-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.34): Today, I am pleased to present the petition from students of Lyneham High School regarding the gymnasium at their school. Angie, Tammy, Chester, Jenneth and Nicolita came to me to raise this issue, and I acknowledge their leadership on this. They are all students. Some of these students are leaving high school and are going on to college, but they are so concerned about their campus and the legacy for future students that they took up this issue nonetheless.

This petition speaks for itself. It notes that, in the 2020 ACT election, as part of their election campaign, ACT Labor promised to replace the Lyneham High School gym. Unfortunately, since then, the government has backtracked on the promise and, instead, indicated in the 2024 budget that they will merely refurbish the old gym. The students have put forward that this is simply inadequate and give four particular reasons.

The first reason is that the current Lyneham High School gym does not meet the building safety standards outlined in the National Construction Code, because there is not enough space between the court markings and the wall, which is a safety hazard. Parts of the gym are already sectioned off due to safety hazards, and the students assert that the current planned upgrade of the gym floor to competition standard is wasteful as neither the roof nor run-off space of the court are large enough to meet such standards anyway.

The second reason is that the Lyneham High School student body, at over 1,000 students, is too large for the current school facility to adequately accommodate the whole group, which harms students' ability to learn. For instance, the existing gym hall and Lyneham Performing Arts Centre all lack the capacity to hold full school assemblies. The school can barely provide the space for three years of the school to assemble at once, let alone the whole school. They talk about the number of students participating in PE simultaneously at Lyneham High School and that there is only one indoor sports facility to accommodate those students—around 300 students at a time. And classrooms are becoming more crowded, with some exceeding 32 students per room.

The third reason is that the population of the inner north region is expected to double in the next 35 years, and, if the current facilities cannot properly accommodate half of the projected population, it will be physically impossible for Lyneham High School to provide adequate education for students.

The fourth reason is that they were promised a new gym by the Labor Party at the 2020 election. They think that the backing out of this promise is unacceptable and degrades trust in the ACT government.

Through the course of working on this issue, I have spoken to the Canberra City Stallions Basketball Club, led by James. This club started in 2015 and 2016, and they have grown so rapidly that they now have 50 teams. One of the issues that the Stallions face is that having single court facilities is hard for them, and Lyneham High School is one of their facilities. They are spread out across five or six venues. The club explained to me that having two-court gymnasiums, which is what all the new schools have, is actually much better because they can have a whole lot of teams training at once. So they are really supportive of this upgrade as well. It would enable them to continue to expand their club. This underlines not just the passion of the students at the school but also the impact this has on other community groups.

The petitioners therefore ask for the government to stick to the original plan to create a new gymnasium so that the school would have a better location for students to have their assemblies and adequate PE facilities for learning. They also want the old gym to then be refurbished to provide an increased number of classrooms to meet the growing demand at Lyneham High School.

I commend this petition to the Assembly and ask the government to take it very seriously. The students have articulated some really important points for the school.

Also, today we have seen the tabling of a petition around the Ainslie site, which the minister has just spoken to. I flag with the Assembly that there is also a physical copy of the petition, which I have now received. That is going to the Clerk today and will be tabled tomorrow. Given the time today, I will make a few remarks on the Ainslie petition tomorrow, when the out-of-order petition is also tabled. It has well over 600 signatures.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.39): I rise to speak briefly in support of the petition that has been brought forward by Mr Rattenbury—and I thank him for doing that on behalf of many Lyneham residents—about a new gym for Lyneham High School. As has been noted by the petitioners, as well as Mr Rattenbury in his speech, the population of the inner north is growing rapidly and is expected to double in the next 35 years.

Lyneham High School is at 90 per cent capacity, which means that the current gym is not fit for purpose. Even the ACT Labor government recognised this, saying in the lead-up to the 2020 election that it is not up to standard and that it is not servicing the growing number of students at that school, and it promised to replace the old gym. Planning was underway and the whole school community was invested and excited about a new facility that would benefit not only the school but also the broader local community. However, not surprisingly to many, as it is the increasing pattern that we see, the ACT Labor government backtracked on that promise and has now only promised to refurbish the existing gym, without any consultation and without any satisfactory explanation to the community. This is not just about having a large enough space for the growing school, which of course is a huge factor, but also, as the petition outlines, the gym does

not even meet current safety standards outlined by the National Construction Code, as there is not enough space between the court markings and the wall.

The school and the broader community at Lyneham have been calling for a new gym. Last year, I met with José Robertson, the president of the Lyneham High School P&C Association. Also, a number of parents, students and local residents expressed to me their strong disappointment and their frustration about the Labor government's decision not to proceed with their promise of delivering a new gym at Lyneham High School. At the time, José also highlighted that the new gym would be a facility that the whole community could utilise and enjoy; it would not just be of benefit to the school community.

I am pleased to see that this petition was signed by over 560 people. I am hopeful that this will demonstrate the strong support in the community for the much-needed facility that can be used in the inner north of Canberra, which, as I stated, is growing rapidly. Also, I acknowledge the students, who were the brains behind the petition and thank them for their advocacy. As Mr Rattenbury pointed out, some of them are even leaving the school. It goes to show how passionate they are about their school and their local community, putting effort into getting over 560 signatures for this petition. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

Transport Canberra—fares—petition 51-24

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.42): In speaking with members of our community about the free public transport petition that I agreed to sponsor and has been tabled this morning, it was clear that they felt something had to change in order to make the ACT's public transport offering more compelling. The unique strength of our city is its planned nature. It is one of the very few planned cities in the world. The planning does seem to have fallen short when it comes to public transport, making Canberra the most car-dependent capital city in Australia, with the lowest public transport usage, according to recent figures from the Climate Council.

Our community's car dependency limits access and deepens inequality. I understand there is, of course, clear revenue loss in the provision of free public transport. The relative quantum of that loss may be worth questioning as we watch empty buses sail around our capital and as we weigh the compliance costs of ensuring people have paid their fare. Free public transport ensures that everyone, regardless of income or circumstance, can participate fully in community and civic life, access employment and education, and move through our city with dignity.

Signatories to this petition argue that public transport must be public in the truest sense: open, accessible and free. Many people tell me they do not want to continue to depend on cars but feel they have no choice. If we want to be serious about reducing Canberrans' car dependency, it is time to investigate all measures to improve public transport usage, including ambitious proposals like free fares. Melbourne has its free tram zone. The Queensland government recently introduced 50 cent fares across its entire network. So I welcome the call from petitioners to ask ourselves what structure should be in place in the ACT and how we can build our city into the Canberra we want for future generations.

When I speak with people about what would get them out of their cars and onto public transport, many reasons emerge for why they feel cornered into driving. Some feel the trade-off of cost to time makes public transport unfeasible. Financial savings from catching a bus feel negligible. Even from central areas like Ainslie, routes and frequency are often inconvenient. The inconvenience felt by those in the inner north is, of course, hugely compounded for those in outer suburbs. A 20-minute car trip can turn into an hours-long multi-bus odyssey. So it is clear that free public transport is not the whole solution and perhaps is not necessary for the Canberrans for whom cost is not the primary concern, but it is certainly worth investigating, particularly for those who most need the savings. Transport poverty is a serious issue for many of our most vulnerable community members.

Oaks Estate has become a topical issue—and we will be debating a motion later today—and for good reason: it is not served by any ACTION bus routes. For example, if a child wants to take a bus to school, they first have to catch a bus to Queanbeyan, and only then are they able to access public transport routes in Canberra. We should be open to looking into various suggestions to improve public transport, including free and cheaper fares. In 2006, during the closure of two motorways, Amsterdam made public transport free. As a result, Amsterdam South became easily accessible. Even when the scheme ended, over 1,000 people continued to choose public transport over their cars.

Considering how to integrate measures like free fares alongside other complementary policies, including improved frequency and connectivity of services, greater reliability and better active transport integration, can make a significant difference in the ACT, both for Canberrans who currently continue choosing to drive because it is by far the most convenient option, and, more importantly, for Canberrans who are not in a position to choose to drive.

I thank the petitioners for drawing this issue to our attention.

Roads—Harry Hopman Circuit—petition 1-25

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.45): Mr Speaker, I rise to speak to your petition on traffic on Harry Hopman Circuit during the Christmas season. For a number of years, Harry Hopman Circuit in Gordon has been literally a beacon of light for the Lanyon Valley every December, being one of the most popular Christmas lights displays in the ACT. Each year, thousands of visitors, including myself and my family, make their way over to Gordon to look around the area and marvel at the amazing displays into which members of the Lanyon community have invested many hours.

However, particularly in the nights leading up to Christmas Day, Harry Hopman Circuit and surrounding streets can often become jammed with drivers and walkers moving through the area, looking at the lights and marvelling at the wonderful displays. Often pedestrians walk along both sides of the narrow roads, as well as on the road proper, in the dark, which results in drivers having to drive extremely slowly through the area while they are also trying to look at the lights and are trying to prevent a traffic accident with another car or a pedestrian.

Local residents naturally also have issues in driving in and out of Harry Hopman Circuit on December evenings for these reasons. As such, this petition will allow the government to look at supporting both the live displays and local residents by implementing traffic controls—possibly to temporarily designate Harry Hopman Circuit as a one-way street—but also exploring other options for residents and visitors alike to enjoy the display and keep everyone safe. This will create a safer and more fun experience for everyone each Christmas.

While Christmas is still a while away, people who create magnificent displays know the planning begins months in advance. I would not be surprised if there are people on Harry Hopman Circuit and in other areas who are already starting to think about what the displays will look like this year. I want to take a moment to thank all the people across Brindabella who create magnificent displays, particularly the Ms Christmas lights in Gowrie, which have been running for many years and have raised a lot of money for MS. They are beautiful displays, but I know they also sometimes have some traffic issues. Hopefully, looking into this issue will help them and others around Brindabella and the ACT to manage traffic each December towards Christmas. I thank them for all the joy they bring to so many families, like mine, each year. They are doing a wonderful thing for the community. And thank you, Mr Speaker, for bringing forward this petition.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice—bail law reform—Assembly resolution 19 March 2025— government response Ministerial statement

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) (10.48): I rise in response to the Assembly resolution in March, with an update on the matters required and a further announcement. Before I begin, I want to acknowledge those in the chamber who have come to listen to this statement and, in particular, thank them for their patience. I know that your presence here represents time away from your jobs, from caring responsibilities and, indeed, anything else you might prefer to do, and I thank you for your patience.

This week, I released a discussion paper: “Review of decision-making criteria in the Bail Act”. In doing so, I have signalled our intent to modernise our bail laws and introduce legislation to achieve that as soon as practicable. I acknowledge the concerns in the community and I acknowledge the feedback, the frustrations and the calls for change. I also acknowledge that bail decisions are complex and challenging for the victims, the accused, the decision-maker, law enforcement and corrections, and the broader community. I recognise that decisions on bail and on sentencing can also have a secondary impact on persons who might not be directly affected by the alleged offence but for whom a decision triggers memories or other trauma, including vicarious trauma.

I acknowledge the presence here today of Thomas McLuckie and, I believe, Lee de Percy—I apologise if I cannot see you properly—and other supporters. Through you, if I may, Mr Speaker: Mr McLuckie, I respect you and I respect your choice in not wishing to meet with me, but I want you and other victims and their

families to know what I would have said if we had met. I will not pretend that I will ever be able to fathom what you and your families have been through and what you go through every single day, but what I do want you to know, whether we ever meet or not, is that I see you and I hear you. I am sorry, as Attorney-General and as Tara, for the ongoing and persistent trauma and triggers that you experience. The depth of your pain is significant enough in and of itself, but I recognise regret, and I am genuinely unreservedly sorry that the pain has been and is being exacerbated, not least due to the time that the justice process has taken and what you and other victims have been exposed to in that time.

I recognise that grief is present in your everyday, and I recognise that this includes grief for the loss of your feeling of security and sense of safety for your loved ones and yourself. I also acknowledge the strength of your advocacy, but also that it comes with the cost of having to constantly relive your worst memory. I regret and I am sorry when my own language has been triggering, appeared flippant or has otherwise let you down. I acknowledge how uncertainty can cause its own harm, whether it is about the time that something might take, a change or a process, or why something is occurring in a particular way.

I also want to acknowledge that being in this place at this time, in this month in particular, for you, Mr McLuckie, and for the friends and family of Matthew, comes with its own distinct challenges and emotions. I thank each of you for being here today. I know that your concerns about areas you wish to see addressed stem well beyond bail reform, but this is largely the content of the statement today. I also know that I may not have gone about this in the way that you would have preferred and that I have and will continue to have my own shortcomings as a person and as a minister. I am under no illusion that many of the ways you feel are not things that I will ever be able to undo. But, like you, I do want change.

Mr Speaker, tomorrow will mark six months of me being in the role of Attorney-General. Earlier this year, I committed that this government would move on bail law reform and move more quickly than what was otherwise likely. One of my concerns with the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council was the breadth of the terms of reference for its bail inquiry and the genuine and frank advice from its chair about how long she estimated it would take. It was clear that the extended time frame to 30 June this year would not be met and that mid-2026 or late 2026 was more likely. Given the considerable available evidence, sentiment, research, submissions and access to stakeholders already, I formed a view that we could move more quickly. Rather than it being the conclusion from, the need for reform has been the basis for my intensive and extensive engagements with stakeholders, research into the history of our laws and seeking to understand the decisions in other jurisdictions.

The release of the discussion paper is not a reflection that our bail laws or the decisions being made are necessarily flawed. However, it is recognition that the legislation is complex and difficult to follow and that it will benefit from a review against the latest evidence and the observations of anyone who has a view about how it is operating. Whether bail is granted is based on an assessment that a decision-maker has made about the level of risk a person poses and whether that risk can be managed if the person is in the community. The Bail Act is the framework for that risk assessment. It provides detail about what must be considered and what may be considered in undertaking the

risk assessment and making the decision. The most recent significant reforms to the Bail Act were in 2004. Since then, it has had numerous piecemeal additions to it, and the result is legislation that is now labyrinthine in nature. How it is structured means that what is being taken into account when that risk assessment is being undertaken is not necessarily clear nor prominent.

Indeed, the inclusion in the 2004 reforms that the decision-maker “may have regard to any relevant matter” recognises that a decision-maker can be proactive in the information they seek to inform their decision, but it also introduces uncertainty about what is or is not being taken into account, noting it also may vary from decision-maker to decision-maker. Further bail applications are a high-volume activity, and the reality of time pressures may limit the ability to be proactive in seeking other information where it is not required, despite the power to do so being available. While “any relevant matter” is provided for, the clause then goes on to list what relevant matters might include. I appreciate that doing so is meant to be of assistance to the decision-maker and not necessarily exhaustive, but it exacerbates the confusion. I hope I am not verballing Mr McLuckie, but I believe he has made a similar observation in his remarks to Riotact today.

The current legislation provides for the interests of the victim, the interests of the accused and the likelihood of the safety and welfare of persons being compromised to be relevant considerations. We really have to look for it in some instances. In my view, it does not do it in a way that these matters are clearly signposted, whether for decision-makers, the general public or any person having contact with the criminal justice system.

We have an opportunity to ensure that the risk assessment framework for that decision-maker is improved. Ultimately, we want the decision-maker to have regard to all of the relevant information available to them so that their risk assessment is the most informed it can be. The better informed the decision, the greater likelihood there is for persons who present the greatest risk to be managed appropriately, for detention to be limited where it is unnecessary, and for any conditions applied to someone released on bail to be appropriate for the circumstances and level of risk and enforceable.

The question that naturally follows is: exactly what information should the decision-maker have regard to when assessing that risk? The discussion paper contemplates a potential decision-making framework that clearly signposts the lenses through which the risk assessment should be undertaken: the interests of the victim, the interests of the accused, community safety and justice integrity. Through this potential framework, the discussion paper seeks feedback on what criteria could or should be relevant considerations for a decision-maker, such as: expanding the definition of the risk of harm to a victim, including the perceived risk of harm or risk of harm to a pet of the victim; expanding the definition of “victim” in particular circumstances; having greater consideration of victims’ views and knowledge of risk; having particular regard for ACT Policing’s views and observations about the risk; having regard to the presence of any of the established high-risk factors in the context of intimate partner violence; having regard to the accused’s disability and health needs, including mental health needs; whether the accused is a primary carer or pregnant; any issues that might arise due to a person’s Aboriginality; the prevalence of the offence in addition to the existing considerations of the nature and seriousness of the offence; and whether the strength of

the evidence should be required to be a relevant consideration for the decision-maker, rather than, as it is currently framed, something that may be taken into account.

Whether all or some of these are desirable, the discussion paper seeks the community's and stakeholders' views and reactions to them. It does not matter if it is a gut reaction or a detailed consideration of the purpose, effect and consequences of each question, all input is welcome. I know that the idea of a discussion paper may exacerbate some frustrations. Certainly, I contemplated whether reform could be undertaken with consultation limited to justice stakeholders, but, as an area that has been uncertain and with the harms that come from that uncertainty—and where there is such a strength of opinion for something, when I believe I am hearing that many in our community have felt that they have no control or input into our bail laws and the decisions that come from them—I formed the view that this process needed to be as transparent as possible and with as much opportunity for input as possible.

Further, I recognise that, for some in our community, an approach where all accused persons are routinely remanded in custody is highly desirable. I understand why that may be, but I do need to be clear that a routine or a blanket approach like that is not on the table. I also need to be clear that procedural fairness and judicial independence and discretion must and will be maintained. It is appropriate that our judiciary makes the decisions with all of the relevant information available to them, and that includes their knowledge and experience. I know this may be disappointing for some, but it is important that I provide this certainty today. What is on the table is that we want the community to have an understanding of and confidence and trust in the decision that is being made. Knowing exactly what is informing the decision is a significant part of that.

In concluding on this particular matter, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the significant work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety of the 10th Assembly, led by Mr Cain, and its inquiry into the operation of the Bail Act. The report and recommendations within it provided meaningful direction and informed the government's position, and it was certainly my starting point. I note too that a recommendation, which the government response had previously only noted—Bronte's law—is in part being reconsidered in the discussion paper as a potential relevant factor.

As part of the Assembly resolution, I was also asked to provide an update today on the recommendations in the same report relating to examining why remand is increasing in the ACT and implementing specific bail support initiatives, all of which were recommendations that the ACT government agreed to in principle. Under RR25By25 and Beyond: A Justice Reinvestment Strategy for the ACT, the government is focusing on community-led early intervention and diversion initiatives alongside targeted integrated rehabilitation and reintegration supports. This is being implemented through a variety of intersecting initiatives. For example, the ACT government is undertaking a co-design process to explore the development of a Justice Futures Fund, which is something which would be intended to support justice reinvestment in community-led support bail orders. An external facilitator has been engaged and the findings are due later this year.

The Pathways Out of the Criminal Justice System study is a qualitative study that the ANU is undertaking with people who have lived experience of the ACT justice system,

to deepen the government's understanding of desistance and contribute to more effective strategies for support. The findings of this study are also due later this year. To inform the government's future direction, JACS is undertaking a desktop review of bail support services and programs in other Australian jurisdictions to identify gaps in current service provision to avoid duplication or overservicing people who do not require a higher level of support. This will assist in understanding how we compare to other jurisdictions and identify how bail support services and supervision could be improved in the ACT, including expanding existing or introducing new services or programs. That review is expected to be completed by the end of 2025 and will include bail support for cohorts with specific needs or those which are over-represented, including women, people with a disability, young people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The government is progressing initiatives related to improving bail support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people too. The recommendations of the independent review into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system will provide that guidance to ensure supports and funding are effectively targeted. The final report is due soon and, again, those findings are expected to be broad ranging and will inform the Justice Futures Fund.

The commissioning process for the First Nations justice programs is a collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, sector partners and people with lived experience to understand needs and gaps and—collaboratively with these groups—plan, design and deliver the best support services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on bail and remand. Updates and outcomes will continue to be published on the ACT Commissioning website.

We fund the Ngurrumbai Bail Support program, currently delivered by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT. It is about court based bail support, outreach bail support, AMC support and after-hours support. It is designed to reduce the number of First Nations people on remand by increasing successful bail applications and help First Nations people apply, obtain and comply with their bail conditions.

The government is giving consideration to how bail support could be expanded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and is consulting with the First Nations community on the best way to go about this.

We are also in the early stages of developing a bail app in the ACT, initially as a 12-month pilot project for First Nations people on bail. The aim is to increase compliance with bail conditions while also contributing to reducing recidivism. It is about assisting users to meet their bail conditions by providing functionality and resources that are easily available, plainly written and culturally appropriate to build the legitimacy of and compliance with bail conditions in the ACT, and by offering a service that is secure and meets users' privacy and trust expectations.

The final announcement I alluded to at the beginning of this statement is that the ACT government will be pursuing an indicative sentencing scheme. Indicative sentencing is a process which allows a judicial officer to inform a defendant of the sentence they would receive were they to plead guilty. This is known as the indicative sentence. The scheme reduces uncertainty for a defendant by providing transparency in relation to the

sentence and helping them make a decision more quickly regarding their plea. It also reduces uncertainty for the victim as a result. Earlier resolution of matters affords closure to victims sooner than would otherwise occur, as matters which may have been defended hearings are instead finalised more quickly as sentences.

Shortening the overall time to finalise proceedings is likely to reduce the overall number of people on bail and people who are remanded in custody. It is likely to streamline proceedings and create efficiencies for courts, as well as for the Director of Public Prosecutions, defence counsel and corrections. The earlier a sentence is able to be handed down the sooner the defendant is able to access supports, such as rehabilitation and other community services. While indicative sentencing is commonplace in other jurisdictions, indicative sentencing will be a trial initially in the ACT due to our unique circumstances and our court structures. I want to stress that it will be limited to offences that are not serious offences. Legislation is required for it to be enabled in the ACT. I intend to introduce that legislation this year, and I trust this very sensible reform will have the Assembly's support.

In closing, I thank all those who have been candid and frank with me, directly or indirectly, about where the issues are and what is needed to change. I thank my Labor cabinet and caucus colleagues, who have made themselves readily available for discussions on this important issue, in recognition of its significance, and have provided support for this conversation in the community. I know that many areas of the community, including persons present today, would prefer that this change happened yesterday, and I truly have a lot of appreciation for that. These areas of reform are complex and they take time. I think there are ways we could have got it started sooner, but, now that I am in this position, I am committed to seeing it through.

I especially acknowledge the often underestimated or unseen part of this process that is significant, and that is legislative drafting. We are indebted to our Parliamentary Counsel's Office for their expertise that will be applied through this process. I know that even the most skilled and experienced drafters require significant time to draft significant reforms, not least to avoid unintended consequences and to minimise any ambiguity. When we consider what is at stake here and the certainty and the confidence we want the community to have, drafting cannot be compromised in favour of speed, but, nevertheless, I wish to move quickly.

What I hope this update shows today is that, while this work is difficult, nuanced and sensitive, we are not shying away from it. This is a new direction for reform and I want to see it through. My intention is that this is just the beginning.

Again, I thank each person here today who has waited and then has listened to a very long statement. It means a lot.

I present the following papers:

Review of decision-making criteria in the *Bail Act 1992*—Discussion paper, dated May 2025.

Update on criminal justice reform areas—Bail law reform—Assembly resolution of 19 March 2025 Government response—Ministerial statement, 6 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.13): Firstly, I would like to read a statement on behalf of Ms Morris, who, as members would be aware, is the shadow minister for police and with responsibility for bail reform. Unfortunately, Ms Morris is not able to be here today. Then I will say a few things in my capacity as shadow Attorney-General. I certainly want to acknowledge the presence of Mr McLuckie and others who obviously have been impacted deeply by bail decisions and the impact of those on bail and I thank them for their ongoing advocacy to raise issues that we trust this review of bail will address, or at least go to some way of addressing, some of the previous decisions that have been impacted lives seriously.

I thank the Attorney-General for instituting this reform, but I will have a few things to say about that, especially in my capacity as shadow Attorney-General. Firstly, in the absence of Ms Morris, as she is unfortunately unable to be in the Assembly today, she has passed on to me a statement that I will read on her behalf. I will read that statement word for word.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. In moments of reform, governments are measured not by their intentions, but by the consequences of their actions. Today, Canberrans face a moment of consequence, a junction where the long-standing neglect by a government out of its depth and out of touch with community needs is finally being acknowledged. The government has been in power since 2001, and for over two decades have presided over the Bail Act, which is a key instrument in balancing the presumption of innocence against the imperative of community safety.

Yet the Attorney-General now declares it labyrinth, as though legislation appeared out of thin air one day, rather than as a result of her government's 20 years of neglect. We are told there is a lack of trust in the system, and we agree, but not for the reasons this government suggests. Trust erodes when repeat offenders are granted bail, only to commit violent crimes days later. Trust erodes when victims feel unheard, and when the rights of the accused are protected more diligently than the safety of the community. And trust vanishes entirely when the government chooses discussion papers over decisive action. Instead of acknowledging its failures, the government continues to engage in wait-and-see politics, where the solutions are forever around the corner; just one more report; just one more discussion paper; just one more expert consultation: wait-and-see.

Mr Speaker, the ACT community is not calling for consultation. It is crying out for protection. They do not need a government that deliberates endlessly on the balance of risk; they need one that understands it. Expanding the law reform council earlier this year under the guise of budget constraints was not just a bureaucratic move, it was a deliberate dismantling of an institution capable of delivering genuine principled reform.

Attorney-General Cheyne has said that granting bail is not a reward and that denial is not a punishment. On that point, we agree, but let us also be clear: bail is not a gamble, and this is precisely what this government has turned it into; a gamble with public safety. When discretion is stretched to the point of vagueness, we invite inconsistency, confusion and, tragically, catastrophe.

It is no longer a question of whether the current law is being misapplied; it is a matter of how many more communities will suffer before the government acts. Real leadership requires clarity, accountability and moral courage. The proposed reforms offer none. Leadership requires consistency and the Canberra Liberals have consistently called for the government to adopt targeted, principled reform, reform that prioritises community safety as the overarching principle for bail decision-making for all ages, introduces tougher bail tests targeted at repeat offenders, ensures that those who commit offences whilst on bail are not immediately released back into the community.

The people of Canberra deserve a justice system that protects their dignity, not one that turns their fear into footnotes in a consultation paper. We cannot legislate away risk, but we can legislate with courage. We cannot prevent every crime, but we can prevent the government from ignoring the warning signs. To the people of the ACT, we say, your safety is not up for negotiation. To the government, we say, this is not your system to tinker with. It is our community's to protect. Bail is not a loophole; it is a safeguard, but when it becomes a revolving door for repeat offenders, the law is not protecting liberty. It is permitting lawlessness.

That ends the statement that I read on behalf of Ms Morris, shadow minister for police.

In my own capacity as shadow Attorney-General, I appreciate that the Attorney-General has touched on a bail reform inquiry constituted by the previous Justice and Community Safety Committee, which made some, I felt, very pertinent recommendations to the government at the time and I do trust that this is a report that the government will reflect upon as a part of this reform into bail in the ACT.

The sobering reality is that bail is not just a technical exercise. It is an exercise that can have devastating consequences to our community. I do recall during the inquiry last year, a report from ACT Policing recounting the story from just a few years ago, of a male domestic violence offender who had breached an apprehended violence order, was granted bail, who had breached bail with threats of violence, was granted bail again, again breached because of threats of violence, who was granted bail again and then murdered their spouse. That is not a flaw in the system. That is a preventable tragedy. That is a preventable death. So whatever the community needs to see happen, it is in the hands of this government. Whatever it is that needs to happen, it needs to result in preventing outcomes like that. Whatever it is, it needs to make sure that that outcome is not repeated in our community, particularly in the context of domestic violence.

I think the last thing a spouse coming home from the hospital after being assaulted by her partner wants to hear is that her partner is out on bail, unless the conditions of that bail are so imposing that she feels safe to be in her own home. Unfortunately, that has not always been the outcome for members of our community. There is a record, an unfortunate record; these are the facts of violent offences being committed by people on bail against someone, becoming again a victim, because of a decision to release an offender on bail. We have to find ways to do better.

I respect the balancing of the presumption of innocence and the balancing of protecting our vulnerable in our community. I respect those principles. Whatever the government does in this particularly sensitive area, surely a priority ought to be that someone on

bail should not be hurting someone else. If that is happening, then something is not working. When that is happening, something is not working. So I do welcome this inquiry, and I will certainly be keeping an eye on that in my capacity as shadow Attorney-General.

I will say, as Ms Morris has pointed out, the Canberra Liberals have for years been calling for reform of our Bail Act, including through a significant package of reforms leading up to the last election. Those who commit a violent offence do not deserve the presumption of bail. They need to argue strongly why they deserve it. The breach of bail should be an offence in itself, to be a factor that is considered by the judiciary, to say, “Well, this person was granted bail, but they have breached it. Can we trust them again?” It should be a question that is a heavy question, a significant question, for the judiciary to weigh up as a factor of granting bail again.

Can I say, I certainly agree—I believe the Attorney has thrown this sentiment strongly into her statement, and I do hope that it drives the heart of this reform—the priority is about keeping the community safe. It is keeping the community safe. We should not be seeing, in any civilised community, people being harmed or even killed by those who have been granted the privilege of bail. A death at the hands of someone at bail is a preventable death. I trust this reform addresses these crucial issues of community safety, particularly in the context of violent assaults and domestic violence, because those people deserve a system that protects them, not just once, but for every moment of their lives.

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) (11.23): I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Attorney-General’s response to the Assembly resolution on the improvement of bail law reform. I would also like to start by acknowledging Mr McLuckie in the chamber and those people here today to support him. Through you, Mr Speaker, I would like to acknowledge, Tom, your continued advocacy and say: I have always wanted to work with you to achieve reform. I want to publicly assure you that your advocacy is heard. It has been incredibly impactful and significant reform has been achieved and there is more to come.

I have expressed in this chamber my own family’s experience of being victims of dangerous driving and my understanding of the catastrophic and lifelong impacts of this. I would also like to acknowledge other victims of crime in the territory. I work with victims of crime on a daily basis and hear their stories and will always strongly advocate for victims. I look forward to the outcomes of the review of the Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime.

I strongly advocated for reform to our bail system in the last term, which is why I am so thankful for the Attorney-General prioritising this work this term in such a considered manner. I was a strong advocate for the bail inquiry when I sat on the JACS committee last term and moved amendments to shift the presumption of bail to neutral for the most serious dangerous driving offences, serious recidivist dangerous driving and for the offence of driving at police. I work with victims of domestic, family and

sexual violence on a daily basis and hear their frustrations and distress around the bail processes, the rigid assessments of criteria and the thresholds for breaching bail.

But I come to this conversation with a starting point that we need to do more to support people who are on bail. I thank the Attorney-General for progressing work to understand how we can do this better in the ACT, with particular need to better support young people who are on bail. I commend the Attorney-General for the work that has gone into this discussion paper and the commencement of this consultation process, and also the development of an indicative sentencing scheme in the ACT Magistrates Court. These reforms will also be accompanied by an education campaign to improve public understanding of bail court processes.

As Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, I would particularly like to acknowledge the critical and important frontline work that our ACT police do in keeping our community safe. Our police are on the frontline of tackling some of the most difficult matters in our community, including the roles they play operationally in relation to bail and breaches of bail.

While it should be noted that the vast majority of people released on bail do not commit further offences, what is particularly distressing is when someone who is on bail commits further offences and harm to the community. As a result of that, there is significant community interest in the bail process. The process the Attorney has outlined provides us as a government with the opportunity to listen, to take stock and to engage in constructive dialogue. I will continue to proactively work with ACT police to engage with them through the stages of this process.

I support the proposal to undertake public consultation about possible reforms to bail laws to ensure all relevant factors are taken into consideration by decision makers. This will assist in ensuring bail laws are consistent with community expectations and better align bail practices with evidence on reducing recidivism. I firmly believe that it is timely that we have this conversation about what the right settings are for our community through a thoughtful and engaged manner.

As Minister for Corrections, I want to acknowledge the significant role that ACT Corrective Services plays in administering bail within the ACT. ACT Corrective Services continue to provide support to accused people for the duration of bail in a way which positively impacts community safety and also assists with bail compliance. I would also note that half the population of people within the AMC are on remand because these people have not been granted bail. Corrective Services refers individuals to a range of services and interventions while on bail, including behaviour management, education and vocational training. These services support rehabilitation and reintegration to prevent any further harm occurring in the community. Culturally appropriate supervisions to alternative reporting sites are also available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders on bail.

I support the Attorney General's proposal to introduce an indicative sentencing scheme in the ACT Magistrates Court. This proposal has the potential to greatly improve the experience for both victims and defendants in the criminal justice system. Indicative

sentencing schemes are currently operating in the Northern Territory, Victoria and Tasmania, and they provide useful examples for the development of a fully human rights compliant scheme in the ACT. However, an indicative sentencing scheme would not be implemented without consultation and consideration of the views of ACT Policing.

In indicative sentencing, a defendant can choose to have the court indicate the penalty that would be imposed if the defendant entered a guilty plea. The defendant can accept or refuse an indicative sentence after this has been given. In relatively minor matters where a penalty other than imprisonment is indicated, a defendant would otherwise be apprehensive about pleading guilty or may take the opportunity to plead guilty and take steps to change course. This way, offenders have a better chance of taking part in rehabilitation measures and avoiding further interactions with the criminal justice system.

Indicative sentencing may also reduce the amount of time people spend on bail and achieve finalisation of outcomes sooner for victims, reducing uncertainty for defendants, avoiding traumatic processes of providing evidence in court for victims and reducing delays and improving the efficiency of the court system as a whole. These reforms and the actions announced today in the bail review will help align bail with community expectations, increase the efficiency of our courts and empower the ACT community with greater knowledge of their criminal justice system. I am strongly supporting the Attorney-General's statement today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Federal election

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.31): The 2025 federal election delivered a conclusive result and has now set the direction for our nation over the rest of this decade. Over the past three years, Canberrans have benefited from two governments working together to make the city we all love even better. The Albanese government has proudly recognised Canberra's role as the national capital and invested accordingly. This included vital investments into our national cultural institutions; the Australian Institute of Sport, including reopening the AIS Arena; and territory projects such as the extension of light rail to Commonwealth Park, the Molonglo River Bridge and upgrades to Monaro Highway. The federal government has also contributed to the Garden City Cycleway project and the Youth Foyer housing project at CIT Woden.

In addition, all Canberrans received cost-of-living relief delivered through income tax cuts and cuts to household and business energy bills. Many who are graduates of our universities would also have benefited from HECS debt relief. In the previous term of federal parliament, the federal government made the biggest investment in Medicare for over 40 years, and this certainly assisted many Canberrans to access more affordable health care. In one of the best examples of the two levels of government working together, we were also able to increase access to free health services available across the territory, through our walk-in centre network.

It has been a productive three years and so it does come as considerable relief to hundreds of thousands of Canberrans that we will continue to have a supportive partner in the commonwealth government for at least another term—if not a subsequent term, given the size of the Prime Minister’s victory. Over coming months, we will engage with our federal counterparts on how the ACT government can contribute to many of the commitments made by the commonwealth in areas like housing, health, education and climate action.

The housing partnership between our two governments has already resulted in the construction of more affordable housing, particularly more public housing, and will accelerate through the Housing Australia Future Fund. As part of the federal government’s commitment to provide 100,000 homes nationally dedicated solely to first home buyers, the ACT government will seek to bring land to the table quickly as part of our population’s shared contribution to that target, which would be roughly 1,800 of those 100,000 dwellings. We will also look to partner with the federal government on their household battery program and integrate that into the ACT’s highly successful Sustainable Household Scheme. We believe this is a practical and proven way to enable households to reduce their household energy bills.

A key priority for us is engagement with the federal government to provide more practical support for our local tertiary education institutions. Our Canberra-based universities are one of the largest employers outside of the public sector and our largest export industry. It has been a difficult period for our university sector, and I hope that we can progress some positive outcomes that support a sustainable future for those institutions.

There are also important infrastructure projects that the territory government will partner with the commonwealth on over the next three years as part of the National Capital Investment Framework. There is a \$100 million contribution to the construction of the Commonwealth Park pool and the Canberra convention and entertainment centre precinct. These projects are a significant boost to our city’s construction sector and also will provide Canberrans with new community infrastructure and that will be a key pathway for further diversification of the territory’s economy. This is particularly the case with the new convention and entertainment centre.

Work is planned for a number of road projects that are jointly funded between the commonwealth and territory governments. This includes duplication of Athllon Drive and William Hovell Drive. We are also pleased to see construction underway on the new national security precinct in the parliamentary triangle. We note its location and proximity to a proposed future light rail stop and the fact that project in and of itself is a multibillion-dollar investment in Canberra. We look forward also to working with the commonwealth on the next stage of the redevelopment of the Australian Institute of Sport in the Bruce precinct.

During the campaign the commonwealth made a commitment to provide an additional urgent care clinic in Woden, further bolstering our collective efforts to provide accessible, affordable health care where and when Canberrans need it. Labor also made funding commitments to support several smaller suburban projects across the city. We look forward to working with the commonwealth on the next stages of the Garden City Cycleway and the upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park and the Chisholm Cricket Oval.

Reflecting for a moment on what the election result means for Canberra's role as the national capital and the Australian public service, I think we can conclude that tens of thousands of Canberrans woke up on Sunday morning with their immediate job and their financial future more secure. I share the frustration of many Canberrans that our city was constantly used as a political target by one political party throughout this campaign, and not just this one, but campaigns previously. When the former opposition leader promised to cut 41,000 Canberra-based jobs, he was talking about the jobs of our neighbours, our friends and, for many of us, our family members. Had the result been different on Saturday night, I have no doubt that the loss of that many jobs in our economy would have sent Canberra into a prolonged recession. Now, we have thankfully dodged that bullet and our city has a much brighter future as a result.

The sheer magnitude of the Prime Minister's victory—although, of course, nothing can be taken for granted in contemporary politics—does set the scene though for a more optimistic and exciting future for our city and our economy. A Prime Minister who lives in Canberra and who believes in Canberra's role as the centre of public administration in our nation is a marked difference from the alternative of someone who was proposing to live at Kirribilli House, slash the Australian public service and severely diminish this city's role in national public life.

Our population, I think we can confidently say now, will reach 500,000 people by the end of 2027. With this future growth, Canberra needs governments at both levels to build our future and to address the issues that voters care strongly about, particularly affordable health care, cost of living and climate action.

Before I conclude, I will reflect on the historic nature of this election result. It is the first time in 21 years a Prime Minister has won consecutive elections at the federal level. The result was conclusive, and the Prime Minister's margin continues to build as counting continues, and I would hope it will settle a number of policy issues hopefully forever, but at least in the medium term. Nuclear energy will not be part of Australia's energy mix. Workplace flexibility, including working from home, is now firmly embedded in our industrial relations framework and is a key part of ensuring work-life balance for Australians. Hopefully, Canberra-bashing no longer has any political currency. There will always be a temptation, I fear, for conservative political parties to want to put the boot into this city, but I think the message from this election is that that no longer has the political currency it once might have. These are good things, good outcomes to be concluded hopefully forever from this election; no nuclear power, workplace flexibility, and no more Canberra bashing. That would be good for Canberra and good for Australia.

I present the following paper:

Federal election—Ministerial statement, 6 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

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

Schools—disability inclusion

Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.42): Every child and young person has the right to a good life and should be supported to fulfill their potential. Education and high quality teaching play a critical role in enabling this, providing children and young people with diverse opportunities to explore and engage in the world.

Schools are environments where children and young people can discover personal interests, make friends and build new skills that will ultimately last a lifetime. They are environments where all students are entitled to equality, dignity, respect and opportunity. All children and young people, regardless of the circumstances and abilities, have the right to a quality education.

The ACT government recognises not only the importance of quality education for all our students but also the importance of a sense of community and belonging that should be experienced by all Canberrans. We know that we have work to do to make this a reality, and there is significant effort being undertaken to strengthen our system to remove barriers for students who are not experiencing these fundamental provisions.

I want to acknowledge the families and stakeholders who have recently taken the time to express where we have not met their needs or not listened carefully enough or responded adequately. While there is some excellent work happening across the system, I recognise the challenges being experienced and the need for improvement. Although there is significant dedication and intention across our workforce, we do not always get it right. The feedback we receive is so important for continuous improvement. We will continue to work together and work hard so that all children have the best possible experiences at school.

In December 2023, the ACT government published *Inclusive education: a disability inclusion strategy for ACT public schools 2024-2034*. The strategy's vision is that every child and young person is welcomed, valued and can access quality education designed to meet their needs at their local school. In ACT public schools, this means that all children and young people can learn and participate in all aspects of school life with their peers. To ensure all children and young people who require additional supports and adjustments can access learning, the strategy is set out under seven focus areas that include culture, relationships, learning, key transitions, workforce, resourcing and infrastructure. This illustrates the importance of the whole system reform. Inclusion needs everyone's attention and commitment.

These areas were identified through extensive discussions with our community. Around 600 people engaged in the community conversation, including parents, carers, school-based staff, community members and students. A comprehensive evidence review was also undertaken to consider what is happening in other Australian jurisdictions and overseas, as well as contemporary research related to education for students with disability. This process reinforced what we know about the challenges and areas for improvement required in our system. We heard directly from families

whose children have not had a positive experience at their school, and we are still listening. The intent of the strategy is to address the barriers that families have experienced when seeking support from their local school to enable that child or young person to form positive relationships and access a quality education that is underpinned by high expectations.

The strategy identifies the shifts we are aiming for, from a reliance on passionate individuals to embedded systemic reform; from trying to change the student to fit a system to removing barriers to access and participation at school; from a diagnosis and deficit-based approach to quantifying need to focusing on individual needs and the adjustments required; and from a system that at times is disjointed and inconsistent to a connected system that prioritises communication and collaboration, whether that be between staff, within schools and staff in the directorate, or between school staff and families.

We are in the second year of the first-year action plan, and we have a 10-year reform mapped out in our strategy. While we have achieved some positive outcomes, it is clear that we still have significant work to do. As part of the work from the first action plan of the Inclusion Strategy in 2024, an inclusion coach initiative commenced in the Tuggeranong network. This has continued into this year, and the ACT government has committed to expanding this initiative into the Belconnen network. Coaches have worked with schools to support quality teaching and inclusive practice. They have delivered professional learning, worked shoulder to shoulder with class teachers and supported schools to set goals to improve education for families with disability.

The first action plan also commits to reviewing and delivering a suite of streamlined and coordinated professional learning opportunities and resources. During the first 12 months, the Education Directorate has engaged in the expertise of notable inclusion education academics, including Dr Kate De Bruin, from Monash University, and Kathy Cologon, from Macquarie University. Last week, leaders from the ACT public schools heard from Dr Shelley Moore, a Canadian educator and expert on inclusive education.

The Education Directorate has also engaged Macquarie University to provide a new evidence-based package of inclusive education professional learning for ACT public schools and staff. This professional learning suite became available in term 1, 2025 and includes topics relating to sensory processing, understanding neurodiversity, working with the deaf and hard of hearing students, complex communication and managing complex behaviours.

This year, the Education Directorate has also commenced a new project to formalise partnerships between specialist and local schools, to enable sharing of professional expertise and create greater opportunities for inclusion between specialist and local schools. As part of this initiative, Malkara School recently ran a Connecting for Change professional learning opportunity for local schools. Staff from local schools were invited to visit, tour classrooms and learn about strategies to enable all students to access learning at the local school. Visiting staff feedback was that this sharing of expertise and practice from Malkara staff gave them plenty of new ideas to take back to their schools to ensure accessibility and opportunity for all learners to experience success.

A new adjustment-based resourcing model has also been developed, and preparations are in place to phase in this model from 2026. This model aims to provide more equitable resourcing allocation to schools to ensure all children are included and can learn and play with their friends at school. The model is more equitable because it allocates funding based on need rather than a disability diagnosis. This resourcing reform was a key recommendation of the disability royal commission and has been welcomed by our stakeholders. To deliver this reform, the directorate will continue to work collaboratively with important stakeholders, such as the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, to develop guidance for schools on areas that include individual learning plans and small group learning.

While I know that we still have significant work to do, there are many examples of the commitment of ACT public schools to inclusive practice. At Calwell High School, the school has run their own student voice forum to ensure all students, regardless of their abilities, can have a say about their school and what is important to them. Staff have worked in faculties to apply a ‘universal design for learning’ lens to assessment tasks, ensuring all students have an opportunity to demonstrate their learning through being offered multiple options in assessment. At Charles Weston School, the whole school is learning key word signing, which has enabled all students to be included in playground conversations and to participate in activities such as songs at assembly. Visual schedules are used in all classrooms that support all aspects of the school day, from literacy lessons to sensory areas, that are used by students for regulation.

While we respect that there are strong views of what inclusive education should be, it must be recognised that there is a diversity of perspectives and experiences, and we will continue to take a student-centred approach in our response and we will continue to provide a range of learning options. I would like to reinforce that, while we have a clear intent to strengthen inclusive education in ACT public schools, the ACT government recognises the important role of specialist education settings as part of an inclusive education system. Families are the experts in their own experiences, and families make choices based on their deep understanding of their child or young person. We need to continue to listen and build trust that we are working hard to strengthen inclusive practices, so we can ensure every child and young person can access a quality education at their local school.

In the ACT, our work is shaped by our strategy but also by other national and local drivers, such as the response to the disability royal commission, the recently updated Australia’s Disability Strategy and the ACT’s Disability Inclusion Act. It was reassuring and pleasing to me that most of the disability royal commission recommendations relating to education can be addressed either in full or in part by actions we identified in the Inclusive Education Strategy First Action Plan. What this tells me is that we sought the right information, we listened to families and we got the action right to respond to the educational needs of our community.

As we implement the strategy, we will continue to work with key stakeholders, including the Disability Education Reference Group, whose members include the ACT Parents and Citizens Association, the ACT Education Union, Advocacy for Inclusion, and the ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability Association. We will also be guided by our Inclusion Principles Advisory Group, who have made significant

contributions in assisting the directorate to ensure that the strategy is practical and realistic in its implementation. Importantly, we will continue to listen to children and young people. Children and young people have an important voice and the right to be heard and listened to. Children and young people care about inclusion. They have a profound sense and understanding of social justice and fairness.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of these stakeholders for their ongoing commitment and advocacy in working with me and the Education Directorate to improve the lives of children and young people in the ACT.

I present the following paper:

Inclusive education in ACT public schools—An update on ACT’s Disability Inclusion Strategy for ACT public schools—Ministerial statement, 6 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra and Region Heritage Festival 2025

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.54): I rise today to give a statement about the ACT heritage festival. Since 18 April, a huge array of activities through the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival have been occurring, and this will continue through to 11 May. The heritage of the ACT and our neighbouring regions is rich and diverse, and this annual festival exemplifies the collective passion of our local community for celebrating its regional heritage.

The heritage festival is one of the ACT government’s longest-running festivals, now in its 42nd year. The festival has grown from its beginnings as a festival held over three days to what is now a jam-packed program of more than 130 events held over four weeks. It is continually expanding and reflects the vision of the festival, which has been embraced by the community, and it has established itself as a treasured fixture on the capital’s calendar.

Each year, events are brought together in a curated program by the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. The festival is an important part of the ACT government’s commitment to protecting and encouraging understanding of our important heritage places and objects. This much-loved community program sees thousands of Canberrans and visitors flocking to events every autumn to celebrate and explore the heritage of our region, and each year it brings new event holders with intriguing ideas and activities, as well as the return of beloved community favourites.

This year’s “Unearthed” theme for the festival invites us all to explore lesser-known histories and narratives and sheds new light on the cultural, natural and historic heritage

that has shaped Canberra into the vibrant city that it is today. The festival provides Canberrans with the opportunity to explore the strong and enduring First Nations connections to country through guided tours of Black Mountain.

Since the start of the festival, we have been invited to unearth stories of trailblazing women on the She Shapes History tours or step back 400 million years and uncover treasures embedded within an ancient seabed in Yass on a Fossick for Fossils expedition. There have been opportunities to explore the wonders of the Milky Way by stargazing at Lanyon Homestead and to admire the craftsmanship of lovingly built and restored historic boats on display on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, which I had the opportunity to go and see on a wonderful, beautiful autumn day in Canberra.

I would also like to acknowledge my colleague Taimus Werner-Gibblings, who, as part of the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival, was involved in hosting the Dine Back in Time event at the Hyatt Hotel Canberra, which was a reimagined 1937 House of Representatives dinner. I can only imagine what was on the menu there. That was one of the fantastic events that has been occurring around the capital, including appreciation of our local music scene and tours of the city's mid-century architectural triumphs. The festival has really been one for all ages, abilities and interests. There have been talks, tours, creative workshops, exhibitions and open days. There really has been something for everyone.

Our heritage has been intrinsically linked with our identity and sense of place and belonging, and it provides critical insight into who we are. Connecting, remembering and passing on knowledge is how heritage creates a way to understand, engage with and make meaning of the present. It plays a vital role in shaping our growing city, helping to protect and understand our unique heritage as an ancient cultural landscape and a modern national capital. Not only does the festival connect us with each other locally, it also connects with our nation's heritage, and the timing and theme for the 2025 festival aligns with the Australian Heritage Festival, which runs nationally through the states and territories.

Last weekend, I attended the Tuggeranong Homestead Open Day, organised by the National Trust. I have always driven past the Tuggeranong Homestead on my way to my daughter's swimming lessons every Saturday, and it was great to finally have the opportunity to step inside and see this wonderful heritage-listed place. There was a huge range of different activities occurring at Tuggeranong Homestead on the day, including exploring the actual history of the Tuggeranong Homestead. It reminds us about how one place can be imbued with multiple layers of meaning and significance—from the deep and continuing First Nations connections to the area, to its European heritage—including convict heritage, insights into early pastoral life, the cultural connections between Chile and Canberra embedded in its urban construction elements—and associations with distinguished Australians, including of course the famous war historian, Charles Bean, the namesake of the federal division of Bean. I had a fantastic time discovering the fascinating history of one of Canberra's hidden gems.

At this point, I would like to extend my gratitude to the passionate and dedicated volunteers, community groups, government agencies, national institutions and small businesses that have curated, organised and delivered the events that bring the festival

to life. I would like to sincerely thank them for the vital role that they play in supporting the conservation, understanding and appreciation of heritage across the territory.

I would also like to thank the ACT Heritage Council, who work closely with the ACT government and the community to recognise and protect the ACT's important heritage places and objects. I was delighted to see some council members hosting events, including David Hobbes's tour of the spectacular art deco era Manuka pool, which is not only an outstanding architectural achievement but also a thriving community hub.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Duncan Marshall AM, the outgoing chair of the ACT Heritage Council. Mr Marshall's expertise in both the heritage and architectural sectors and experienced leadership have been invaluable to the council during its period of significant transformation, particularly in the last term of the Assembly. The government is extremely grateful for his work and commitment to protecting the ACT's heritage and promoting a greater understanding of the ACT's heritage regulatory system. Several key decisions that he was involved with as part of that system on our landmark heritage places in the ACT, including the Yarralumla brickworks and the Kingston Arts Precinct, can be adaptively reused and managed into the future. His advice will be missed. I look forward to updating the Assembly on decisions that we will be taking regarding the appointment of new members to the council.

Finally, I would like to encourage members to get involved in the remaining events of the heritage festival, which runs until the end of this week. There are still plenty of activities to explore, and I encourage everyone to attend and to book for those events that require booking. The festival's popularity amongst Canberrans is a testament to our community's active interest in and value of our unique heritage. It is an opportunity to come together and connect as a community. This year's festival is my first as the Minister for Heritage, and I am excited to see how it will continue to grow and flourish in the years to come.

I present the following paper:

2025 Heritage Festival—Ministerial statement, 6 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 12.01 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Cabinet records—management

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister.

In OPD responses provided in recent weeks, there were two emails from ACT public service executives about the mismanagement of cabinet documents. One executive said

that she was horrified to find a number of documents sitting in a range of places that dated way back, even to before this term of government. Given these documents are the most sensitive documents in the ACT government's possession, why aren't they being handled appropriately?

MR BARR: That is a matter of concern, and one that the cabinet office are aware of and are taking actions on.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, isn't it a bit rich to withhold cabinet documents from the Assembly when they were already sitting in a range of insecure locations?

MR BARR: I am not sure that you can equate the two; nevertheless, security around cabinet documents is important, and I take that matter seriously.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that sensitive cabinet documents are being handled and stored appropriately, and why haven't those obligations been met?

MR BARR: The obligation will sit in a shared way between the Cabinet Office and authorised recipients of those documents. That would include, amongst others, public servants and ministers. In regard to the second part of the question, I take those matters very seriously and, particularly now that documentation is electronic rather than in paper form, I think that provides greater security protection within a closed and secure system.

Canberra Health Services—visiting medical officers

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health.

On 8 April this year, in reference to fee-for-service VMO arrangements, in this place you said:

We are talking about phasing it out over time ... We are, over time, phasing out fee-for-service contracts.

But I note in a recent advertisement for a senior specialist visiting medical officer in cardiothoracic surgery, the classification states that it can be either a senior staff specialist or a visiting medical officer. Minister, why have you misled the Assembly with claims that you are scrapping fee-for-service VMO contracts when you clearly are not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am tempted to ask Ms Castley to repeat the entire question because I think she said that the advertisement stated it could be a staff specialist or a visiting medical officer. It does not sound like the advertisement said anything about fee for service.

MR SPEAKER: Minister—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am answering the question, Mr Speaker. My understanding is that all new visiting medical officer contracts are being offered on a sessional basis, not a fee-for-service basis.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is the raft of recent resignations by senior medical professionals and surgeons the reason you are now backtracking on your decision to scrap fee-for-service VMO contracts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I said, the advice that I have received is that the new visiting medical officer contracts will be sessional contracts. In fact—and I have said this in this place before—the vast majority of our existing visiting medical officer contracts are sessional contracts.

In relation to the resignations of surgeons, I can advise this place that, of the six surgeons who indicated their intention to resign—one of whom had already previously indicated that they were retiring around this time, so that was no surprise—three have actually indicated that they will not be resigning from Canberra Health Services and will be continuing to work with the organisation. We have had some very productive conversations between the leadership of Canberra Health Services and the orthopaedic team. I thank the orthopaedic team for their collaboration in this work.

MS BARRY: Minister, when will you start being upfront and honest about the state of the ACT health system and your inability to improve even the most basic health services for Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Ms Barry to my previous answers.

Canberra Health Services—Canberra Hospital Integrated Operations Centre

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the continuing saga regarding the administrative interference in patient care by your much maligned operations centre. On 4 March this year, it was reported in the *Canberra Times* that the chief architect of the operations centre had resigned. Minister, can you please confirm to the Legislative Assembly that he has indeed formally resigned from this position as the Chief Operating Officer of Canberra Health Services?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That is my understanding and that is what was advised in writing by the chief executive officer to Canberra Health Services staff. He is certainly no longer performing the position of chief operating officer. Dr Howard is, however, it is my understanding, undertaking some work at Canberra Hospital. Dr Howard is an intensivist. He is a highly skilled clinician and my understanding is that he is undertaking some work at Canberra Hospital, but not in the role of chief operating officer.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, can you confirm that Mr Howard has done appropriate upskilling training to ensure he is adequately educated to work as an intensivist today?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Seriously, Mr Speaker, Dr Howard not Mr Howard, and this impugning of Dr Howard is absolutely disgraceful! Dr Howard in my understanding has in fact been undertaking clinical work while he was in the role of chief operating officer and the idea that Ms Castley would come into this place and question the credentials of a senior clinician is appalling.

MR HANSON: Did the employment of this person follow all proper processes including those of the Fair Work Commission with regard to his employment?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice. Obviously I am not responsible for public service employment arrangements, so I will take the question on notice to provide a response to the opposition, but I really think this level of impugning a senior clinician is absolutely beneath those opposite.

Canberra Institute of Technology—CIT Solutions

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, I heard two reports on April 16 that CIT Solutions, due to their deteriorating financial position, will be wound up and merged with CIT. When was the decision taken to wind up CIT Solutions?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. I will take that on notice to provide the specific date.

MR HANSON: Minister, what courses will be cut for students as a result of this move?

MR PETTERSSON: As Mr Hanson would be aware, CIT Solutions largely targets and focuses its activities on providing bespoke training arrangements to businesses and other providers. So ‘course’ offering is probably not a correct description; it is something more along the lines of program offering. There will be some consolidation following the decision of CIT Solutions and the CIT Board to wind up CIT Solutions. This will, hopefully, allow for a better alignment of offering than CIT.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when is CIT Solutions expected to be merged with CIT?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that on notice.

Canberra Institute of Technology—CIT Solutions

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, CIT Solutions has been announced to be merging with CIT. This was announced following CIT reporting a \$3 million deficit blowout, with costs increasing by \$16.5 million compared to 2023 and the average staffing level increasing by nine per cent. Meanwhile, subject enrolments have dropped by about 21,000 over the past four years. Minister, is CIT in a financially sustainable position?

MR PETTERSSON: CIT is in a financially sustainable position. The role of the board and the CEO is to ensure that CIT provides a worldclass offering but is also financially sustainable. I am aware that there are challenges that present themselves when there are changes in enrolments; however, I am confident that the CIT has a bright future ahead of it here in the ACT.

MR HANSON: Minister, will the merging of CIT Solutions mean any job cuts for employees?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Hanson for the question. CIT Solutions have a range of staff. The majority of their workforce is casual. I understand that there are opportunities for some of those staff to transition from CIT Solutions to CIT.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why are staffing levels increasing when student numbers are dropping?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the member for the question. I will take that one on notice.

Youth homelessness—Our Place Braddon

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

Minister, you and I both attended the Youth Homelessness Matters Day organised by Barnardos, and I am sure you were also pretty moved by the young people who spoke to their experiences of homelessness. I acknowledge those of them who are in this room, today.

I have been approached by a number of young people living at Barnardos Our Place Youth Foyer in Braddon. They are really concerned that Our Place does not have guaranteed government funding past 30 June, this year. In their words, “Barnardos has repeatedly sought clarification from Housing ACT over the past six months but has received no concrete assurances regarding contract renewal. The lack of resolution jeopardises this vital service at a time when youth homelessness remains a critical issue in Canberra.” Minister, when do you intend to advise Barnardos and Our Place residents on whether their service will continue to be funded, and whether they will continue to have a home?

MS BERRY: I thank Miss Nuttall and acknowledge the young people—part of the Our Place youth advisory group—who are here in the Assembly today. I have met and spoken to some of them on a number of occasions and, before them, other young people who were part of the Our Place Youth Foyer program at Braddon. I have heard very clearly from them—and loudly—that their lives would be very different had they not been able to be supported by the programs that Barnardos places in the Our Place program. I can advise that the ACT government is currently in discussions with Barnardos about how we work more closely together in ensuring continuity of services, particularly for those residents at Our Place. Also, we are talking more broadly about the different kinds of youth services that we will have in the ACT, including an additional 20 rooms available at the new Youth Foyer at Woden, which will be opening some time in the middle of this year. We will be going out for procurement for the operators of that service, as well.

There is a lot happening in the youth space. Obviously, we need to keep listening to young people about their experiences and about how we can improve services to young people. What I have said to the young people who are part of that advisory group is that their funding is part of the budgetary process, so I cannot disclose those conversations

until those decisions are made by cabinet, but I did say that as soon as I could provide them with that information I would.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, in the interim, as the deadlines draws closer, what support have you provided to these young people who are having to make contingency exit plans?

MS BERRY: There is no intention to exit students from the Youth Foyer at Barnardos. I want to make that message very clear. There are no plans to exit people from that service, but I cannot give a firm commitment at this time because it must go through the budgetary processes, which Miss Nutall and everybody in this Assembly is aware of. Once that process is completed then I will be able to provide some more certainty to these young people in Barnardos going forward.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, is it acceptable, with only seven weeks until 30 June, that there is no certainty for the young people living at these facilities?

MS BERRY: I cannot be more positive than I already have been about this service and its ongoing provision of support. As I have said and tried to explain, it does need to go through a budget process. Once it has been through that budget process, I will be able to provide more information. I cannot at the moment. I would like to, and perhaps I will be able to, earlier. If I can, I will. I have made that commitment, and I make it again.

Youth homelessness—Our Place Braddon

MR EMERSON: My question is also to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, and it is on the same topic. Minister, you spoke candidly, and I thought you spoke well, regarding the need to do more when it comes to youth homelessness at the recent event hosted by the Our Place Youth Foyer. Given your response to the previous question, do you think that the budget process is deficient, if it leaves these people unsure of whether or not they will have a safe place to sleep in eight weeks time?

MS BERRY: No, I do not, because there are a number of decisions that need to be made through the budget process, and those need to be taken by the ACT government overall and not individual circumstances identified separately throughout that process.

I have made a commitment, and I will do what I can, to get earlier information to the Barnardos group as well as the advisory group. I cannot do anything more than make that commitment and send a message back that I will work towards making an earlier announcement if I can. At the moment, I can only commit to making one as soon as I can.

MR EMERSON: Minister, can you or any of your colleagues provide an indication of how many critical community service providers like the Our Place Youth Foyer, Women's Legal Centre and Canberra Community Law, for example, do not know if they will be funded come 1 July?

MS BERRY: Again, all of those are part of the budget process. You should know that by now, Mr Emerson; everybody in here does. We cannot simply announce funding if

it has not gone through a process where funding is agreed. That is the process that is required before funding can be provided and notice to these organisations can be decided. When contracts are made, they go for a certain number of years; they then go back for budget consideration by the government. That happens with all funding across the ACT. You cannot just make announcements willy-nilly without appropriately going through a budget process where all budget considerations are taken into account.

MS BARRY: Minister, can you guarantee to have these contract renewals with community organisations, to avoid uncertainty?

MS BERRY: Again, contracts are currently proceeding through a commissioning process, and I acknowledge that it has been a challenging time for a range of different community organisations and others that have depended on the government to support them to provide the support services that our community requires. However, we are getting to a point, through those conversations, where we are working together to make sure that we achieve the right outcomes for those services and for our community. But they must go through a budget process. We cannot just announce things outside of understanding where funding is going to, and the need to have appropriate contract arrangements in place. If we did, those opposite would be howling about us giving money willy-nilly and without going through proper processes, so we have to do that.

Planning and development—Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Geocon has updated its development application for the Phillip pool and ice rink site. The updated application notes that the indoor pool planned for the development will be contained within a dedicated, separately-titled unit, that the unit's owner will be responsible for all aspects of operation and maintenance, and that additional crown lease provisions will be introduced, as needed, to support the facility's successful ongoing management. Minister, how will the government ensure that the pool facility is financially viable and available to the community in perpetuity?

MR STEEL: I will take the question as the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Ms Carrick's question relates to a development application that is currently under assessment and notification by the independent Territory Planning Authority. Of course, there are lease conditions associated with this particular block on Furzer Street in Phillip, regarding the opening requirements of a public pool. That would continue in a different form than was previously required under the Territory Plan, as a result of the new Territory Plan being passed and supported by the Legislative Assembly last term. That is the basis upon which this development application will be assessed by the Territory Planning Authority. The community can have their say right now as part of stage 2 of the consultation on the now amended development application. That notification period is open until 22 May, and I encourage the community to have their say on the proposal.

MS CARRICK: What is the government's policy for ensuring private sector pools are open and available to the public? This is a question about policy—not DAs or planning but policy.

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Policy, over time, has been reflected in the law of the territory in terms of the Territory Plan, in relation to specific blocks and in historic leases for various different aquatic facilities in Canberra. The leases that exist on some of these blocks are different. We certainly acknowledge that. That is not something that is easily changed once the lease is in place. The lease is in place for the duration of the lease. Those are property rights that exist under—

Ms Carrick: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I am not asking about DAs or leases; I am talking about the government's policy about privately owned community facilities.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, is it possible to be more relevant?

MR STEEL: The policy in relation to this is reflected in the Territory Plan, and that policy was considered through the planning system review and consulted on as part of the draft Territory Plan under that planning system review, and then that Territory Plan was finalised for this block. That is the policy that applies to this particular block. Of course, if you have suggestions that might be applied to future leases, then I would certainly welcome them, as I am sure Minister Berry would, for consideration. The current law at this place is the law under which this particular development application will be assessed.

MR COCKS: Minister, what will the government do if the pool facility at Woden ceases to be financially viable and is no longer available to the community, as required under the obligations of the lease, given the government's track record with other privately owned pools, including its previous reluctance to enforce lease conditions on the Woden pool?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. That would be a matter for Access Canberra to look into—whether the owner of the pool, the lessee, is meeting the requirements under the lease and the Territory Plan. I am sure that they would consider what actions might be appropriate under the Planning Act.

Youth homelessness—Woden youth foyer

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for housing and homelessness. Minister, we are eager to see the opening of the Woden Youth Foyer, which according to the ACT government website will accommodate up to 20 young people at risk of homelessness. The current Our Place Youth Foyer in Braddon accommodates up to 25. So you could reasonably anticipate that, without funding certainty for Our Place, if it closes, Canberra loses five placements worth of capacity to house young people. Minister, can you clarify, is the Woden Youth Foyer intended to complement or replace Our Place in Braddon?

MS BERRY: I am very happy to clarify that it is in addition to the Our Place accommodation at Barnardos. There is no plan for the ACT government to reduce youth accommodation. In fact, last week I visited the Salvation Army, who are changing their aged accommodation to youth accommodation, and they currently have 10, and when they finish the refurbishments they will have another 20. So it is a really good outcome over the next couple of months and this year for youth support services and

accommodation in the ACT for young people. That is not to say we have solved it. There is no silver bullet. There is more work that we need to do and so I will continue to work with the sector to understand where we can provide additional supports. I know there are a lot of great ideas out there and we are keen to hear about what we can do to support young people to live good and happy lives, like they should be able to.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, why was the funding decision for Our Place not addressed in the mid-year budget process, given the uncertainty that Our Place is now facing?

MS BERRY: I think I have probably answered the question around the uncertainty. There is nothing more I can add to that. Whilst it would be more ideal for there to be more funding available, all the time, for every organisation that provides services, that just cannot be the case and there are contracts—

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Point of order. I am assuming on relevance?

Mr Rattenbury: It is possible the minister misunderstood my question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: I was asking her; we have just had a supplementary budget process in which this project could have been funded. Why was it not done then?

MS BERRY: Because the contract arrangements, working with Barnardos, finish at a particular date and we want to continue that contract, and so, as I have said, the ACT government is currently working with Barnardos around the supports that they provide and improvements that could be made to those and other supports for young people in the ACT. I mean, it is not unusual for the government to have conversations with these organisations. So that is what is happening currently. Supplementing that and empowering that conversation with Barnardos is the Youth Advisory Group. I absolutely appreciate their advocacy for themselves and for other young people in particular, and for the courage that it took for them to share their stories with us. I cannot give any more information than that at the moment, but I guarantee that I will give information at some point, as soon as I possibly can.

MISS NUTTALL: Is the accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness across Canberra actually meeting the current demand for services by young people experiencing homelessness?

MS BERRY: I think we can all agree that particularly in the youth homelessness space, that homelessness amongst young people is often invisible and under-counted. We have a lot of young people who might be couch surfing who are not counted in our homelessness numbers and so we know what we are doing is for the people that we can see and that are counted. We know we need to do more, and we know it needs to be specialised and specific to work with young people, and that might be different to the services that are provided to other people who are experiencing homelessness in the ACT. That is why the work that Barnardos has been doing at Our Place is so important

and why we have advocated for a new youth foyer service within the Woden CIT that sits alongside an education facility, close to transport and job opportunities. We will continue to expand on that and to work with other youth service providers like the Salvation Army, to make sure we are moving forward and doing everything we can to meet the needs of young people in our community.

Economy—federal election

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what does the re-election of the Albanese government mean for the territory's economic future?

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members, enough. I want to hear Mr Barr.

MR BARR: That is very kind, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

Clearly, the territory's economic future is brighter as a result of Saturday night. I can say that our total employment, at over 270,000 jobs, will in fact grow—rather than shrink—by 41,000 jobs, plus whatever else would have flowed on to the private sector. The commonwealth's infrastructure funding, particularly for the new convention centre and the new Canberra aquatic centre, is now secured, when it would have been cut had an alternative government been elected—it was in their costings on the Thursday just before the election they announced that they were not only going to cut 15 per cent of all jobs in the city; they were going to completely reduce the infrastructure contribution from the commonwealth by \$100 million.

So our economic future is brighter. I think inflation continues to fall. The ACT rate of inflation is lower than the national rates, sitting now at 2.2 per cent. The Reserve Bank is expected to cut interest rates again in a couple of weeks, and further cuts are expected over the course of 2025 and 2026. So we will see more economic certainty for the ACT and improved cost of living through lower interest rates flowing through to our above-national-average mortgage belt. We will see increased confidence across our economy, because the spectre of this city being viciously attacked by the Liberal Party is now at least two elections away.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what are the ACT government's priorities over the next term when engaging with the commonwealth?

MR BARR: They are to move quickly to partner with the commonwealth to implement a wide range of election commitments that are very relevant to our community, whether that is in primary health care and public health, with access to more bulk-billing and improved services across our community, or whether that is in the delivery of major infrastructure projects, including bridges, road, rail, swimming pools, convention centres and the AIS precinct renewal. It is full steam ahead on those projects.

In housing, there is a significant program of investment, now that the roadblock has been removed. With the Housing Australia Future Fund, now that the commonwealth is stepping up further with social and affordable housing, and there is a targeted program to support first homebuyers, we will see a big boost in housing supply supported by two governments working together on this task—and not being blocked in the Senate; that is an improvement on last term.

What we will also see is continued work in our education system: more funding for public schools and more free TAFE cemented. There is the new Woden CIT campus and the Youth Foyer that the commonwealth is funding, which has been topical today.

So there is a rare opportunity over the next three years: a Prime Minister who cares about this city, who lives here and who believes in this place, and a federal government with a mandate to deliver. We look forward to the next three years.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, what will the impact be of cutting \$6.4 billion out of consultancy in the ACT, in terms of both jobs and payroll tax?

MR BARR: Firstly, I will correct Mr Hanson's question. It does not imply that consultancy work would be cut from the ACT. That was a national position.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: Mr Hanson might also seek to educate himself on how the GST allocation operates. There is an adjustment if our payroll taxing capability is reduced because there is less payroll to tax; the GST process does adjust for that.

MR SPEAKER: A point of order, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: I have a point of order on relevance. In terms of jobs, the \$6.4 billion will be Australia-wide, but a bulk of that will be from the ACT. What is the impact going to be? Surely, we know what it is going to be.

MR BARR: He is debating my answer, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: He is debating your answer. Is it possible to attempt to be more relevant to the question, though, Mr Barr?

MR BARR: I am confident that total employment in the ACT will continue to increase over the next three years, as it has done in—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: as it has done in a big way—in a nation-leading way. We have had the fastest economic growth of all states and territories. Our labour market is now over 270,000 jobs. When compared to what was being dished up by his mates, Mr Speaker—

Mr Hanson: I think he is debating it now, to be fair!

MR SPEAKER: Gentlemen, it is a bit of tit for tat. Mr Barr—

Mr Hanson: He should answer the question then, Mr Speaker. You called me to order; you should call him to order.

MR BARR: The question was would employment fall or rise. It will rise.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

Suburban Land Agency—Belconnen sales

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. I am asking about the sale of the Belconnen Lakeshore land release. That includes the former Belconnen Water Police site and two blocks of land known as the Circus site. I understand an RFP was issued for the sale of the land in June 2021 and an RFT was then issued in June 2022. According to the Suburban Land Agency website, the sales process closed in August 2022. Those blocks are not listed on the SLA website as being sold. Has the Belconnen Lakeshore land, including the former Belconnen Water Police site and the two blocks known as the Circus site, been sold and, if so, who bought them?

MS BERRY: No.

MS CLAY: Can you please explain why the blocks have not been sold yet?

MS BERRY: I might take that question on notice. But I understand that, with the expression of interest process that went out, unfortunately, a proponent could not follow through—for a range of reasons, which I may or may not be able to disclose. I will take it on notice and, if I can provide further information, I will.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how will you be consulting with the community on that project?

MS BERRY: There was significant consultation leading into the initial expression of interest process—a lot over a long period of time—about those particular pieces of land. Obviously, it has not reached a point where everybody would have hoped and expected it to. The SLA will have a look at that and we will then need to go back out again for consultation with the community about a process going forward. That is something that the SLA do very well, in my view, and they will let the community know, as soon as they can, what the process will be going forward.

Fix My Street—data

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. In the 2023-24 annual reports there were very few statistics on Fix My Street requests, even after the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services recommended that greater detail on the Fix My Street complaints and service delivery results be provided. Minister, how many requests were made through Fix My Street in 2023-24?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I do have that data. It is not immediately available to me, but I should be able to provide it by the end of question time.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how many of those requests that were made through Fix My Street in 2023-24 resulted in an issue being fixed?

MS CHEYNE: I am not sure that I will be able to give a definitive answer on that, but I will try and be as helpful as I possibly can, because—as we all know, if we have had an engagement with Fix My Street—one of the frustrations with the communications that comes from it is that “resolved” may not mean resolved in the way a person expects, whatever that may be.

In terms of cases closed, I think I can provide that information, but I will have to take that on notice. It can be, of course, that multiple Fix My Street requests have been submitted for the same issue, so it is not necessarily one for one in terms of issue and request.

There has been, I would say, an extraordinary undertaking, throughout 2024, to resolve any outstanding Fix My Street requests from previous years. The teams did a remarkable job, and they have been able to get a backlog that was—I think I can be pretty clear—heading towards 40,000 jobs at that time, down to a manageable number that has been consistent for, I would say, close to a year, now.

There has been a lot of work undertaken to make sure that things get done, and done in a transparent way across the systems, but also to the community. I will get, at least, the “case closed” number for Mr Milligan, if not at the end of question time then probably by tomorrow.

MR COCKS: Minister, given the effort you have just described, why is there such a large disparity between the number of requests made to Fix My Street in 2023-24, and the number of issues actually being fixed?

MS CHEYNE: I think I went some way to answering that in the response to the previous question. For example, during what I call “the mowing crisis of early 2024”, there were an extraordinary number of mowing requests, but it became very clear to me, especially after speaking with all of the crews on the ground, that the most effective way to alleviate the issues that we were seeing across the city was to stick to the program and to respond reactively only where some place was missed. So that meant that a bit of a different approach needed to be taken from how you would normally expect a request in a response system to work. But I do have confidence in the system and the investment that we have made, and I would like to do a bit of a shoutout to the Fix My Street behind-the-scenes team. I have had lots of briefings on the things they have been able to do to better integrate the systems, and their work has been pretty amazing.

As I flagged, there is a little bit more work to do on the comms side back to the customer or the person making the complaint, but the efficiencies that they have been able to achieve, and the confidence that the staff and the crews have in the system, has improved dramatically.

Trees—dangerous trees

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. On 6 February 2025, I asked about a Kaleen resident who had a dangerous tree behind their backyard fence. It was recognised by the ACT government as a dangerous tree a year later. The tree fell and damaged their property in January. When asked if the government would cover the cost, Minister, you said that you would not describe it as a failure to act. Minister, how would you describe this situation, considering that this constituent has emailed your office, and they are still waiting for a response from the government so that it will take responsibility?

MS CHEYNE: I do not have that information immediately available to me. I suspect that there may well be a process that is underway in terms of consideration by that team. What I would say more broadly, rather than about this specific matter, is that trees can drop limbs at any time. We might be of the view that some drop them more than others, but I take the advice of our trained and experienced arborists about the condition of trees and how to prioritise any requests regarding them. Going to the specifics of Mr Milligan's question, I will take that on notice and see what I am able to come back with, noting that there might be some privacy issues.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, was the failure of the government to act due to an issue with the prioritisation of the process, a lack of funding for tree removal or changes in government policy?

MS CHEYNE: I stand by my response in February, so I reject the premise of the question. I do not believe, unless there is new information coming to me, that there was a failure to act. We are proud of our tree canopy. We are proud of the benefits that trees provide to this city. Equally, there does need to be a prioritisation process that is applied to the removal of branches and trees, where they do pose a risk. An assessment of the risk helps to determine that process. Members may recall that we experienced an extremely damaging storm season on, I think, 8 December 2023, and that carried over well into the middle of 2024. That did further delay work that had been programmed.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how can Canberrans trust this ACT government if the issues that matter to them are ignored by the government and they have to take responsibility for a government failure?

MS CHEYNE: Again, I reject the premise of the question. I do not think that the government is failing Canberrans. I think that we have been ambitious with our agenda, especially where it relates to the tree canopy. Equally, we have recognised, and I have taken steps to rectify them, that there have been some areas where process has stood in the way of some sensible outcomes. I understand that that will be a matter for debate over this week. Again, going to Ms Castley's direct question, I do not agree with it.

Health—federal election

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, it was announced during the recent federal election campaign that a re-elected Albanese Labor government will commit \$10.5 million to a bulk-billing GP attraction initiative, to attract new general

practitioners to Canberra, and \$3.8 million to support a private provider to take over and maintain bulk-billing at the Interchange Health Co-op. How will these measures complement the ACT government's existing investment in primary care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the question and her commitment to health care, particularly in her local community, where I had the pleasure of joining her and Mr Werner-Gibbings for the sod-turn for the new South Tuggeranong Health Centre.

Affordable access to primary care is and always will be a Labor priority. I was really pleased to see that the Albanese Labor government has committed to specific initiatives of \$14.3 million to attract new GPs to Canberra and to support the continued bulk-billing of the Interchange Health Co-op, which provides crucial care to some of the most vulnerable Canberrans and bulk-billing services to many people in Tuggeranong.

The fact is that Canberra has faced challenges attracting GPs. For many years, Canberra has had a lower bulk-billing rate than other parts of the country, so we welcome these really significant investments that will increase the number of bulk-billing clinics across the ACT and give Canberrans more choice when it comes to accessing affordable health care. These measures will be supported by the Albanese Labor government's commitment to invest a further \$8.5 billion in Medicare—the single largest investment in Medicare since its creation more than 40 years ago. This investment will increase bulk-billing, with the aim that nine out of 10 visits to general practitioners across the country will have no out-of-pocket costs by 2030.

It will be supported by the Albanese Labor government's recent Medicare investments, which include more than \$600 million to deliver more doctors in general practice through increased GP training, salary incentives and Commonwealth supported places for medical students. The Albanese Labor government will also invest in a new bulk-billed and GP-led Medicare urgent care clinic in Woden, complementing the current network of walk-in centres in Gungahlin, the Inner North, Belconnen, Weston Creek and Tuggeranong.

Our initiatives together will expand the GP workforce, increase the GP-to-population ratio, encourage bulk-billing and develop primary care infrastructure.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how will the ACT government support primary care as part of its commitment to an integrated health system through the biggest investment in health care in its history?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. ACT Labor was, of course, the only party to take a comprehensive health plan to the ACT election last year. In fact, federal Labor was the only party to take a comprehensive health plan to the federal election this year. A key pillar of ACT Labor's plan is to build on our existing investments in primary care and community based care, and now we can help build on the Albanese government's tripling of the bulk-billing incentives to encourage more general practice bulk-billing in the ACT as well. Our commitments include

establishing an \$11 million fund to encourage more bulk-billing by financially supporting new bulk-billing general practices to open in the ACT and for existing bulk-billing practices to expand, particularly general practices that commit to bulk-billing children and young people.

The ACT Labor government also committed to establish a \$4 million Professional Development and Wellbeing Fund for primary care, particularly responding to feedback that we had received directly from GPs, practice owners and advocates, like the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. This fund will support the wellbeing of the primary care workforce and create opportunities for GPs and other primary care professionals to participate in research, education and professional development. This is on top of the investments we already make to improve access to primary care for vulnerable Canberrans and young people, including through Directions Health Services, the Junction, Companion House, Meridian, and partnerships with private practices and GPs through initiatives such as the Primary Care Pilot.

These commitments are part of our comprehensive health plan that will develop a truly networked, territory-wide public health service across our hospitals and community based health services, and it is being supported by the largest investment in health in the territory's history. We look forward to working with all parts of the health system, GPs, the Capital Health Network and the community in this important task and in partnership with the re-elected Albanese Labor government.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will this specific investment in primary care in the ACT be progressed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. We are committed to implementing our plan for primary care that was—and I quote—“celebrated” by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. It is a plan that will deliver more bulk-billed access to primary care for those who need it most. We will do it by working with the incoming federal government and with, as I said, GPs, the Capital Health Network and the community to ensure that Canberrans can get the care they need when they need it. Canberrans—indeed Australians—have shown that they know they cannot trust the Liberals with public health care. The federal Liberal-National government stripped away bulk-billing incentives from the ACT the last time they were in power, and now we have a re-elected federal Labor government that will invest in bulk-billing here in the ACT and around the country.

I have already written to the current federal Minister for Health to start the conversation on getting the \$24.3 million in specific commitments to ACT primary care and aged care rolled out for Canberrans, and in particular to expedite the delivery of respite for older Canberrans through Labor's \$10 million commitment.

Importantly, we will work with the Capital Health Network, GPs and practice owners to ensure that our investments in primary care provide meaningful support—for example, for multidisciplinary staff, services and integrated care arrangements, freeing up GPs to focus on what they do best: provide quality care to Canberrans.

Crime—Florey Hindu temple burglaries

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Recently released security footage and local media reporting have highlighted ongoing crime issues impacting the Hindu temple in Florey in my electorate of Ginninderra.

Impacted community members have reported three break-ins already this year; 8 February, 8 April and 25 April. In my opinion, it is utterly disgraceful to see such repeat occurrences in Belconnen. Minister, why are you failing to address this abhorrent targeting of the ACT Hindu community in Florey?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. I share Mr Cain's concerns about the Hindu temple being targeted in Florey. I think it is absolutely terrible. As Mr Cain says—my records show there were four incidents at the Florey temple, two in February and two in April. ACT Policing has a dedicated multicultural liaison officer who is embedded within the community engagement team of the vulnerable persons portfolio. Through the liaison officer capability and broader community policing functions, ACT Policing is actively involved in this investigation, working with the temple leader and executive committee, and have offered all supports possible. I am advised that the liaison officer has been in regular contact, that ACT Policing are conducting increased patrols across the area and that ACT Policing have discussed a range of strategies regarding security measures at the temple as well.

MR CAIN: Minister, why has your government allowed police resourcing to become so strained that ACT Policing cannot investigate successive break-ins?

DR PATERSON: I reject the premise of that question. ACT Policing are doing exactly their job. They are working with the temple. They have been investigating these issues and they have a liaison officer who is working with the temple leadership and has suggested a range of measures. I think it is entirely appropriate and has nothing to do with police resourcing.

MS BARRY: Minister, have you met with the leaders of the ACT Hindu community to discuss this terrible issue? When was your most recent engagement?

DR PATERSON: No, I have not met with the leaders of the temple in Florey. I am very happy to. I have had advocacy from the federal member, Andrew Leigh, on this issue as well. I am very keen to support the temple and the leadership there because, obviously, everyone in the chamber feels that it is absolutely terrible that they have experienced these break-ins.

Transport Canberra—Molonglo Valley bus services

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport. Minister, Molonglo residents are facing significant congestion along John Gorton Drive and the Cotter Road and buses are competing with cars on those congested roads. The benefits of the recent bus frequency improvements to Molonglo, as delivered in the latest timetable changes, cannot be fully realised whilst those buses are stuck in traffic. Dedicated bus lanes are necessary to ensure public transport is a reliable and genuine option for Molonglo

Valley residents. What is the government doing to ensure bus services to Molonglo are not stuck in traffic?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I absolutely agree that it is important that we continue to look at bus priority measures on key public transport routes, particularly rapid bus routes where we do see congestion. We have been looking at that in a variety of locations. We are doing it in Belconnen in relation to updating the feasibility for the Belconnen Transitway. We have done it in the city as part of the process that we have gone through looking at disruption associated with major public and private infrastructure projects.

We are also getting on with that work in Molonglo, with already funded work, supported by the commonwealth as well, as part of the southwest corridor feasibility work, to look at what options might be feasible for improvements to bus priority on the Cotter Road, particularly from the Streeton Drive intersection through to the Tuggeranong Parkway, which we do know is a bottleneck for many people who are leaving the Molonglo Valley in the morning and coming back in the evening as well. So that is something we are progressing at the moment. I have not yet received information about those options, and then the government will be able to consider what we do in relation to that.

Obviously congestion at the moment has been a lot worse as a result of Coppins Crossing closing for a temporary period of time whilst the construction works ramp up on the Molonglo River Bridge and the John Gorton Drive Extension, which in the long term will provide another access point into Molonglo Valley for rapid transport services, but we need that road infrastructure to be built.

The government is also continuing work of further planning around the suburbs of Bandler and Sulman, including a new road which would link Bindubi Street on William Hovel Drive with John Gorton Drive and serve as a significant public transport route which would, as part of that planning, include bus priority measures to support the free flow of buses on that route. *(Time expired.)*

MR BRADDOCK: Will this examine full length bus lanes from the John Gorton Drive, Steve Irwin Avenue, Fred Daly Avenue intersection in Coombs/Wright to the Cotter Road, Kirkpatrick Street, Dargie Street intersection at north Weston.

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Specifically, it is looking at the Cotter Road up until the Tuggeranong Parkway. That is the bottleneck, because once you get beyond the Tuggeranong Parkway and traffic has already turned off onto the Tuggeranong Parkway, if they are heading to the city in the morning, then the traffic on the Cotter Road where the buses are flowing east of that major road separated interchange is far better. And there are bus priority measures that are that are in place further along as well.

So it will be looking at the Cotter Road, and no doubt the traffic engineers will come back with a range of different options. I have particularly asked for one option to be considered, which is the option of a potential bypass lane of the Streeton Drive intersection, heading eastbound. I think that is something that could be potentially

provided for public transport. We will ask the engineers what the best options are. That is being considered at the moment.

It is one of the first priorities of this term—getting on with the election commitment that we made to do this work. It is funded. It was funded in the budget review and it has been funded by the commonwealth, and we are getting on with the work.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what has enabled the bus service delivery uplift that began last week?

MR STEEL: Responsible management of our public transport infrastructure as well as forward planning and vision for our transition to zero emissions. This significant infrastructure investment in Woden Bus Depot has given our bus network a significant boost by providing more efficient services and reducing dead running time, which has enabled us to deliver more than 90 additional services each weekday to Canberrans. This enables us to uplift services that we committed to improve, like the R10 running out to Molonglo, like the R2, which we know has been a very busy service, and to add capacity to those routes. We have taken a step forward in delivering our election commitments, as a result, to more frequent buses, so more buses more often. We will continue steps as we as we go through further budgets to improve public transport services in Canberra, both in terms of frequency, but also our commitments around further expanding the bus fleet and looking at further improvements with new rapid services, including to the member's home region of Tuggeranong.

Mr Barr: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Access Canberra—Fix My Street

MS CHEYNE: I will give you as much as I have to hand, Mr Milligan. In response to the question about the number of Fix My Street requests lodged: in 2023, it was 51,868; in 2024, it was 46,976; and for 2025, to 26 March, it was 13,375. Generally, the trend that we have seen is that about a thousand cases are logged each week and around 750 to 1,000 cases are closed each week.

I would note that there was a question on notice from the annual and financial reports hearings earlier this year by you, Mr Speaker, that asked what the number of requests made on Fix My Street between a particular time period was. I was able to provide to you that there were 51,589 requests lodged between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024—the figures I was giving before were calendar years and this is obviously a financial year—and that, of those Fix My Street requests, 48,643 were investigated by City Services staff, resolved and closed through Fix My Street as per data reporting on 13 February.

Trees—dangerous trees

MS CHEYNE: In relation to the tree, I need to exercise a little bit of caution here, Mr Speaker, because I am aware that it is now an active ACT insurance agency claim

that is being managed by Treasury, and therefore another minister. So I have no visibility, input, influence or anything to do with that.

I would note that I believe we did provide some information to another office regarding the particular circumstances in that case. My understanding is that, when it was first inspected—which was, I think, 26 March 2024—it was deemed medium priority and, in general, would be completed within six months. But, as I mentioned, while this might not have been related to any storm incidents, it would have been impacted by the storm clean-up, which I have shared was extensive, and there were some particular circumstances with that tree and its location, which I imagine Mr Milligan and Ms Castley are familiar with. Essentially, it required some specialist equipment to even get in there and assess it. I also believe that it was further inspected on 4 December and, with no note of root plate movement, the priority level of the works was not changed.

Libraries ACT—resourcing

MS CHEYNE: I also wish to update the Assembly on a matter that Miss Nuttall raised with me in a question without notice in February and on which I provided an update in March. It relates to the return of bilingual story time to our Libraries ACT branches.

In March, I advised that it was undergoing a review—it has not been reviewed as a program since it began in 2018—and that I expected it would return in term 2. That has not occurred.

Effectively, that review has thrown up some inconsistencies regarding the offerings that were being provided against the demographics of a suburb or a catchment area for that library, in terms of the different types of content and ways of delivery, and that there could be some process improvement for selecting presenters and onboarding them. These issues mean that there needs to be a little bit more work done to ensure that those findings and those issues are sufficiently addressed before the program restarts again, because we want to achieve a sustainable offering of the program rather than any stop-start.

Canberra Institute of Technology—CIT Solutions

MR PETTERSSON: Following up on questions from Mr Hanson earlier, I was informed on 5 April of the decision of the CIT Solutions board and the CIT board to wind up CIT Solutions. In regard to the workforce, CIT Solutions have approximately 38 permanent staff. Work is underway through this transition to see what can be done to transition them into public service roles within the CIT.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR STEEL: In the last sitting week, in response to a question, I provided information in relation to two incidents of minor data breaches involving MyWay+ and committed to providing a further update to the Assembly once investigations into these matters had progressed. I provide that further update today.

The first incident related to work undertaken by NEC, following evidence provided in the current MyWay+ inquiry from a responsible disclosure of a potential cybersecurity

issue, which found personal information relating to around 61 MyWay+ accounts had potentially been seen through the course of the responsible disclosure.

I previously stated to the Assembly that this vulnerability was addressed on 13 December 2024. Based on further advice from Transport Canberra, I would like to correct this to state that Transport Canberra was first alerted to this breach on 13 December 2024 through the responsible disclosure, and NEC responded to address the vulnerability over the following 48 hours. Within this timeframe, NEC's response confirmed that the vulnerabilities had been identified, and immediate and subsequent changes were made to the MyWay+ system to close off the vulnerability.

Further work undertaken following the provision of further information about the responsible disclosure by the Standing Committee on Planning and Transport involved a deeper investigation into the access logs around the time of the original disclosure. This analysis was conducted on 3 April by NEC, who then, subsequent to my office being notified of the incident on 9 April and my statement to the Assembly the following day, formally reported to Transport Canberra on 10 April that six occurrences of repetitive API calls, totalling 9,260 calls, were made to the MyWay+ system using incremental account identification numbers between 5 and 12 December 2024.

Further analysis found that, of these 9,260 calls, it resulted in 104 successful responses. Of these successful responses, ticketing and fare media was connected to only 61 MyWay+ accounts. Of the 61 MyWay+ accounts, 31 were created through an ACT Digital Account. This is important to note as the integration of the ACT Digital Account with the MyWay+ account means personally identified information within the MyWay+ account is communicated to the MyWay+ system in encrypted form and is unable to be read without further authorisation.

I previously stated in the Assembly that early indications were that a variety of details were corrected depending on the account impacted, such as first name, surname, postal address and MyWay+ account. I have since been advised that further investigation by NEC determined that, in some instances, de-identified or truncated credit or debit card numbers were also exposed. There is no evidence that this data has been accessed in a malicious manner or that there were any other attempts made to exploit the vulnerability.

Furthermore, the person reporting the disclosure advised these records have been deleted, thus reducing the risk that this information is in the public domain. However, NEC and the territory have treated this occurrence as a data breach and are reporting accordingly. The breach was reported to the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner within the ACT Human Rights Commission on 16 April 2025, for advice on notification. OIPC have agreed with the assessment of the data breach being minor; however, it does warrant communication to those exposed. Transport Canberra support the recommendation and have commenced procedures to notify their 61 customers next week.

The second incident related to the release of some information from 296 MyWay+ accounts being sent to one email address on 13 March 2025. As I previously advised the Assembly, for these 296 affected accounts, only 110 of these instances contain first

names and other details released in some emails, including a combination of concession type, concession expiry date and/or a truncated credit card or debit card number.

Transport Canberra, NEC Australia, and the ACT government Cyber Security Centre are in agreement as to the cause of this breach, which is the accidental override of one email address onto 296 others as part of account maintenance and notification being undertaken by NEC staff at the time. Multiple controls have been improved and put in place since this incident such that all parties feel a repeat of this should not occur again in the future.

While any exposure is regretful, the assurance that these emails were deleted within hours of being sent and received reduces the risk that this information is in the public domain. Transport Canberra informed the OIPC of this incident on 31 March 2025, who reported the assessment of the data breach as being in the lowest risk category, given its likely non-appearance in the public domain. The OIPC advised that, while notification would not be considered mandatory in the ACT, it is considered highly advisable. Transport Canberra is in agreement and took the decision to notify the 296 individuals, plus the recipient, being 297 notifications in total, which is expected to be completed by this Friday 9 May.

These two breaches are unfortunate, and I acknowledge the anxiety that this may have caused for those people who may have been affected. We have been as diligent and responsive as we can be in relation to these matters. I would like to thank those members of the community that brought them to our attention. We will be providing further information to the individuals affected, within those timeframes.

Suburban Land Agency—Belconnen sales

MS BERRY: Very briefly, Mr Speaker, I have no more information to share on the reasons why the sale of the Circus site and other sites failed to proceed, on the grounds that it could be seen as commercially sensitive to the proponent. But I can say that the SLA is considering options, going forward, for those sites.

Canberra Health Services—Canberra Hospital Integrated Operations Centre

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can advise that Dr Grant Howard is currently on a period of leave ahead of his resignation from CHS taking final effect, which is not an unusual way of doing these things. During this time, he performed some ICU work. I can also advise that Dr Howard was employed by CHS through a full open recruitment process, including an executive search.

Leave of absence

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

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

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General’s Report No 1/2025—Management of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, dated 23 April 2025.

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

Bill—Inquiry—Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 30 April 2025.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker, from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 29 April 2025.

Education Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 29 April 2025.

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, dated 16 April 2025.

Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 23 April 2025.

Veterinary Practice Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 15 April 2025.

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 23 April 2025.

Custodial Inspector Act, pursuant to section 30—Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Custodial Inspector—Suspected drug overdose, endangering life of a detained person at the Alexander Maconochie Centre 21 May 2024, dated May 2025.

Independent Legal Arbiter—Appointment 2025 (No 1), pursuant to Legislative Assembly standing order 213A, dated 28 April 2025.

Standing orders—

99B—Petitions—Referral advice—Correspondence—Inquiry—e-Petition 005-25 and Petition 017-25—Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—Objection to closure—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 23 April 2025.

191—Amendments to the Education Amendment Bill 2025, dated 14 April 2025.

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

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Biosecurity Act—

Biosecurity (National Livestock Identification System) Regulation 2025—Subordinate Law SL2025-2 (LR, 17 April 2025).

Biosecurity Regulation 2025—Subordinate Law SL2025-3 (LR, 17 April 2025).

Electronic Conveyancing National Law (ACT)—Electronic Conveyancing National Law (ACT) Operating Requirements 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-38 (LR, 29 April 2025).

Gaming Machine Act—Gaming Machine (Payment from Gambling Harm Prevention and Mitigation Fund—Minimum Community Contributions) Guidelines 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-37 (LR, 17 April 2025).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation 2008—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods (Vaccinations by Pharmacists) Direction 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-33 (LR, 31 March 2025).

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Disability Services) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-39 (LR, 24 April 2025).

Planning Act—Planning (Further Rural Leases) Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-35 (LR, 3 April 2025).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Mcnamara) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-36 (LR, 7 April 2025).

Taxation Administration Act—Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable—Utilities (Network Facilities Tax)) Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-34 (LR, 28 March 2025).

Residential Tenancies (Posting Termination) Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Cain, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.18): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise to present this important bill to the Assembly in my capacity as shadow attorney-general. The Residential Tenancies (Posting Termination) Amendment Bill 2025 simply seeks to modernise the posting termination clause in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.

This bill intends to extend the scope of the posting termination clause to include recognised domestic partners of lessors being posted to or away from the ACT in the course of their employment. This small but significant change will ensure that tenancy laws better reflect the contemporary circumstances of households and families working in fields that require postings, especially benefiting those serving in the Australian Defence Force.

This bill was instigated by correspondence received by Ms Elizabeth Lee, the Liberal member for Kurrajong, from a Kurrajong constituent, who raised an issue with schedule 2, part 2.1, clause 102(1) and (2) of the Residential Tenancies Act. This constituent raised concerns with how the Residential Tenancies Act deals with home owners who are in a formal domestic partnership with a member of the Australian Defence Force but where their property is in their name only; that is, the property is not in the name of the person who is being posted. In these circumstances, the current posting termination clause, although agreed to by the incoming tenant, is not able to be legally activated, simply because the property is not in the name of the partner who has been posted.

For the sake of those who may not be entirely aware of this seemingly minor clause, the posting termination clause in the Residential Tenancies Act is an optional standard tenancy clause that can be included in a tenancy agreement by agreement with both parties. Where the clause is added in the tenancy agreement, it allows the lessor to end the tenancy agreement if they are posted to the ACT for work. Likewise, it allows the tenant to end the tenancy agreement if they are posted away from the ACT for work.

Currently, this posting termination clause applies only where the lessor is the person who is posted. This clause does not cover situations where the lessor's recognised domestic partner is posted, as evidenced by the aforementioned scenario involving this Kurrajong constituent who reached out to Ms Lee. Fundamentally, this bill seeks to address that issue.

There are 12,690 ADF servicemen and women currently residing in the ACT. Many of these servicemen and women will be here in Canberra because of a posting, or they may be expecting to be posted away from the ACT. Similarly, federal government departments, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence, often post employees in the course of their employment, often with short notice.

In total, there are approximately 70,000 APS employees in the ACT. While not all of those in the ADF or APS will be subject to a posting to or away from the ACT in the course of their employment, we should make sure that our tenancy framework accommodates the possibility that they are.

As contemporary household and family settings progress or change, our laws must progress or change to keep up. More and more Canberrans are involved in domestic partnerships away from the traditional construct of marriage. The ADF and Defence Housing Australia, in particular, already recognise de facto relationships as being equal to married relationships. I find it unusual that, in a situation like the one I described earlier, this should occur under ACT tenancy laws to a household that is committed to serving our nation.

Our tenancy laws must catch up with the existing policies of the ADF, Defence Housing and other relevant agencies. That is why the bill very simply inserts references to the lessor's domestic partner into existing schedule 2, part 2.1, clause 102(1) and (2). The bill also inserts a number of examples to ensure that the intent of the amendment is as clear as possible; namely, evidence of posting and evidence of domestic relationship. These are simple, practical and commonsense changes to a clause that can impact both

lessors and tenants. We want to ensure that both lessors and tenants are protected in the case they or their partner are posted to or away from the ACT in the course of their employment.

In summary, this bill seeks to resolve the impractical and outdated scope of the posting termination clause in its current form. This minor reform to the act will better reflect contemporary families and households working in professions where they may be posted in the course of employment, particularly families and households with ADF members.

I was very pleased to conduct consultation with various non-government stakeholder groups, including from the legal profession, the defence community and the real estate industry; and, in particular, Defence Families of Australia. I am truly honoured to be introducing this bill to this place, particularly on behalf of ADF members and public servants who are often posted to or away from the ACT in the course of their employment, and often with short notice.

I encourage all interested members in this place to please reach out to my office to receive a briefing on this bill or to chat to me about it. I am very hopeful of the support of all members of this Assembly.

To borrow from one of the stakeholders that I consulted with, “This bill modernises the clause and will have positive outcomes.” It is my sincere hope that we can all come together to get this simple but significant reform over the line. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Oaks Estate—strategic plan

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (3.25): Together with Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the suburb of Oaks Estate faces complex socioeconomic challenges, compounded by its geographic isolation from the city of Canberra and shortage of public amenities;
- (b) despite comprising 47 percent of all dwellings, public housing is poorly maintained, including units on George Street that have remained vacant since a fire in 2023;
- (c) there are semi-permanent homeless people living with very little support;
- (d) despite many residents living with chronic and acute health problems, there are minimal health and other support services available;
- (e) the absence of ACT public transport means residents experience severe social isolation;
- (f) students do not have access to public schooling close to where they live;
- (g) serious crime incidents are common, including drug dealing and violent altercations;

- (h) aggressive roaming dogs mean elderly people and children feel unsafe to walk in the street;
 - (i) neglected maintenance of the suburb includes overgrown grass, cracked footpaths and a deterioration in the suburb's aesthetic; and
 - (j) residents have limited access to local amenities, including the community hall and election polling booths;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) after the Oaks Estate Residents' Association wrote to the Chief Minister in March 2023, a working group was set up but there have been no reported outcomes;
 - (b) in 2024, the Inner South Canberra Community Council called for a cross-portfolio government taskforce to be established;
 - (c) residents have reported that ongoing unaddressed violent crime, drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour has resulted in residents taking the law into their own hands; and
 - (d) vulnerable people living in public housing, including National Disability Insurance Scheme participants, aged pensioners, women, and people experiencing mental illness, feel unsafe in their homes; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) develop a five-year strategic plan, in consultation with the Oaks Estate community, to holistically address the problems that are entrenching Oaks Estate residents in disadvantage, including homelessness, crime, drug use, low community service availability, and lack of public transport;
 - (b) include short-, medium- and long-term actions including:
 - (i) multi-agency action to address anti-social behaviour;
 - (ii) action to ensure public housing is fit-for-purpose;
 - (iii) action to address the lack of public transport options for residents;
 - (iv) action to provide community health facilities for residents, including those with complex mental health and drug dependency issues, such as through a new mobile alcohol and other drug service;
 - (v) action to ensure students have access to schools close to where they live and can travel safely to school;
 - (vi) action to revitalise Oaks Estate, including general maintenance and cleaning of the park, streets and public areas; and
 - (vii) action to improve access to the community hall and other local amenities;
 - (c) table the strategic plan in the Assembly within six months; and
 - (d) report back to the Assembly within 12 months, and annually thereafter, with a data-informed update on the implementation of the Oaks Estate Strategic Plan.

Oaks Estate has a rich history. It takes its name from "the Oaks", which formed part of Robert Campbell's original farm, Duntroon. It is surrounded by beautiful bush. It is home to an abundance of native wildlife and houses the historic Queanbeyan railway

station. Houses in Oaks Estate sit on large blocks, and its rural setting is an opportunity for families who are looking for more affordable housing that is close to both Canberra and Queanbeyan.

It is a small suburb, home to just over 375 Canberrans. Because of its proximity to Queanbeyan, I am sure many Canberrans are probably not even aware that it forms part of the ACT. But it does. Its residents and home owners are part of our community. They pay their rates and taxes, and they contribute to our local economy.

But the people of Oaks Estate rightly feel that they have been forgotten by this ACT Labor government. For years, they have been forced to deal with issues and a lack of basic government services that Canberrans in any other part of our territory would not accept. I refer to ongoing community safety issues, a basic lack of essential government services, including adequate public transport, or any public transport, access to schools near where they live, and neglect of maintenance in their suburb, including in Housing ACT stock. Limited access to health and other essential support services and a poorly maintained large public housing stock add to the grievances of the residents of Oaks Estate.

When I received the letter from the president of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, Fiona MacGregor, I got a strong sense of déjà vu, because these issues are not new. In fact, these issues were raised in this very chamber by my predecessor the late Steve Doszpot back in March 2015, when he moved a motion which raised very similar issues to the issues that are contained in today's motion. Mr Doszpot was a great champion of the residents of Oaks Estate because he was a great local member. Being the great champion that he was, he advocated strongly for the people of Oaks Estate and the issues that had been neglected for far too long.

In his motion back in March 2015, he spoke about the issues that the local community had raised time and again with him, including the rising levels of crime, lack of public transport, increasing social disadvantage, and the lack of basic services for the local community. In speaking to his motion, Mr Doszpot said:

The residents at Oaks Estate are used to this. As the article suggested, they rarely complain and are proud of where they live. They have a grudging acceptance that they are rarely paid much attention by the ACT government or its bureaucrats.

Mr Doszpot went on to say:

The issues affecting Oaks Estate are not new. They have been identified in successive planning studies, and each time recommendations are agreed, they appear to get conveniently shelved until the next round of consultation or committee engagement and planning.

As I said, these comments were made by the late Steve Doszpot over a decade ago, in March 2015, yet here we are, more than 10 years later, sadly, still having to talk about the same issues because nothing, it seems, has changed.

Since being elected as a member for Kurrajong in 2016, I have lobbied a number of ACT ministers on a number of occasions on behalf of the residents of Oaks Estate, on public safety issues; concerns about the management and quality of the public housing

stock; the lack of suitable—or any—public transport; and access to basic community facilities, like the community hall that they have there, and which they are not able to use to hold their meetings and community functions. As a member for Kurrajong, I also lobbied federal government ministers for crucial black-spot funding, and all of these requests have fallen on deaf ears.

This motion is, in a way, historic. Having tripartisan support for action shows how important these issues are and shows that this is not a political issue. The residents of Oaks Estate deserve so much more and so much better than that. I know that Mr Rattenbury has previously advocated for better services for the people of Oaks Estate, raising concerns about the social isolation of the vulnerable people who live there. And I welcome the actions and advocacy of Mr Emerson, as a new member for Kurrajong, on behalf of the people of Oaks Estate.

This motion is fairly simple. It is seeking an acknowledgement of the serious issues that the people of Oaks Estate have been dealing with for years—some issues for decades—and that have not been taken seriously by this ACT Labor government. Importantly, it is calling for action. It is calling for a five-year strategic plan to holistically address the problems that are entrenched in Oaks Estate. It is calling for that strategic plan to be developed in consultation with the residents of Oaks Estate, not separate from them.

The residents of Oaks Estate have been neglected for decades. The residents of Oaks Estate feel that their voices have not been heard. They are proud people. They love where they live, but they are saddened by the neglect and lack of basic government services from this Labor government.

This is Canberra. These people are part of our community. They pay their taxes; they pay their rates and contribute to our local economy. And they deserve so much more than what they are currently getting.

In closing, I thank Fiona MacGregor, the president of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, for her passionate and long-term advocacy on behalf of the residents of Oaks Estate. I also acknowledge Bronwyn Spackman and other members of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, and Colin Walters and members of the Inner South Canberra Community Council, for their work in lobbying and advocating for these very local and important issues.

I also take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the previous chairs, presidents and heads of the Oaks Estate residents representative groups who engaged with various members representing Oaks Estate—Michael Starling and Kate Gauthier, for their longstanding advocacy on behalf of their local community.

I spoke earlier about the strong and passionate advocacy for the people of Oaks Estate by the late Steve Doszpot, and I conclude my opening statement with words directly from Mr Doszpot: “All Canberrans, no matter where they live, deserve proper local services, and we are committed to services for Oaks Estate.”

I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.33): I rise as a co-sponsor of this motion and to express my sincere thanks to Ms Lee for allocating her private member's slot to allow us to debate this matter today, and for her remarks. I also thank Mr Rattenbury for co-sponsoring this motion and for working collaboratively and proactively with Ms Lee, with me and with our respective offices to bring the voices of Oaks Estate community members into this chamber today.

From my read, this motion is an example of politics done right. It is an example of effective multi-partisanship that is focused on real local issues, with party politics put aside to do what is right—to advocate for and prioritise the best interests of people in the ACT, who, in this case, desperately need our support.

The Liberals, the Greens and I have joined forces to call for change in Oaks Estate, and I hope that our Labor colleagues will join that call today. I would like to think that, if we had a non-executive Labor member in the electorate of Kurrajong, they would have signed up as a co-sponsor of this motion, too.

Today, we have an opportunity to make a commitment to get behind what is likely to be our most disadvantaged community. When you drive to Oaks Estate, you would be forgiven for thinking that you have already crossed the border into New South Wales. The suburb is a long way from the city and sits isolated from other suburbs and public infrastructure.

Oaks Estate is also the poorest suburb in the ACT; but, despite its physical isolation from services and lack of infrastructure, almost half of all dwellings in the suburb are public housing. This means that a huge proportion of residents are facing significant disadvantage—people who rely significantly on public infrastructure, like social services, public schools and public transport.

But here is the catch: there are no schools in Oaks Estate. There are no ACT public transport services through Oaks Estate. That means residents need to get to Queanbeyan and take a bus from Queanbeyan back into Canberra. That is a lot of effort to get to school, to get to the doctor or to access other vital services. It is just not good enough to pass the buck to New South Wales. Oaks Estate is part of our jurisdiction. Its residents are part of our community, and they should be treated as such.

As Ms Lee reflected, residents do not currently have readily available access to their own community hall, and the Oaks Estate polling booth was discontinued at the last territory election. These are factors that further cut off residents from social, community and political participation that most of us Canberrans can take for granted.

There are also very limited social services available in Oaks Estate, despite the high demand for such supports. This means that people with complex physical, psychological and social challenges are often stranded, with nowhere to get help. It should come as little surprise to us, then, that drug-related crime, break-ins, burnt-out vehicles and street violence have become a big issue, leaving residents feeling unsafe.

Often, the very public and very frequent drug dealing and consumption involves people from outside the Oaks Estate community, but it directly affects everyone who lives

there. Two residents that I spoke with last year said that they had accepted their public housing dwellings in Oaks Estate because there was no other option for them. They were afraid in their own homes, and they were trying to get out.

Despite all of these challenges, what stands out to me most from my conversations with residents is the enduring sense of community in Oaks Estate—the desire to lift up and support one another and to ensure that those community members experiencing disadvantage are not marginalised but are given the appropriate supports to lead a fulfilling life.

I refer to the spirit of inspiring people like Fiona and Bronwyn from the Oaks Estate Residents Association, who are not trying to get out and who, despite their own very real experiences of fear, are standing by and standing up for their community. That spirit is at the core of this motion. It is what, ultimately, drove residents to reach out to their political representatives again, after many years of seeing their calls for support either going unanswered or being met with ineffective, piecemeal responses. They reached out to demand urgent action, following a recent escalation of concerning behaviour and crime in their neighbourhood.

All Kurrajong MLAs received a letter recently from Fiona, the president of the association, who has lived there with her family for over 20 years. She said that it has never been worse. She has never wanted to go public for fear of demonising fellow residents but feels that she has been left with no choice. The letter made for tragic reading. It was a desperate cry for help from people living in fear each day, feeling neglected and asking why they have been forgotten.

Notwithstanding all of the challenges faced by the people of Oaks Estate, it is not hard to see why they love their community. Each time I have visited, the people have been friendly, warm and inviting, and everyone seems to know each other. Oaks Estate is also a beautiful place. It is bordered on three sides by the Molonglo River, and it is full of green spaces. It has so much potential. Residents just want the government to help realise that potential, step up and help residents to rebuild their community into a safe, thriving place. They are willing to do the work, and they have been doing everything they can, but they cannot do it alone.

The ask is simple, and it is obvious—a five-year strategic plan, developed in consultation with the community, to holistically address the range of problems that are entrenching Oaks Estate residents in disadvantage. They want more social services; an increased police presence; access to their own community facilities; a mobile alcohol and other drug service; a dedicated ACTION bus route; and public housing upgrades with supportive case management for tenants, as part of a forward-looking plan for the housing mix in Oaks Estate.

For most of us here in the ACT, these are not things that we have to ask for. They are taken as a given, and they are taken for granted. These residents do deserve better, and I am glad to stand alongside Ms Lee and Mr Rattenbury in calling on our Labor colleagues in the Assembly to join us in making a unanimous commitment to implement community-backed, evidence-based changes so that Oaks Estate residents can once again feel safe and supported in the community that they love.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.39): I acknowledge Fiona, president of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, and other Oaks Estate residents who wrote to each of us raising concerns around the escalation of problems in Oaks Estate. I was pleased to work with Ms Lee and Mr Emerson. Each of us, having received that letter, made a visit to Oaks Estate and, finding that the other had been there as well, realised that working together would be a terrific thing. So I really acknowledge my Assembly colleagues for coming together to jointly sponsor this motion. I also thank Ms Lee for providing the slot today for it to be discussed.

The story of Oaks Estate is perhaps one that could happen only in Canberra—a meticulously planned city that has managed to leave an entire suburb behind. Oaks Estate is a small suburb on the city’s eastern edge, impacted by historical boundaries and bureaucratic quirks and, as a result, it has ended up in limbo—technically part of the ACT but too often treated as if it is not. But the reality is it does exist, and it does matter. The people of Oaks Estate are proud of their suburb. They love where they live, they want to stay there and they have every right to expect the same respect, services and dignity as any other Canberran. They are Canberrans, Mr Deputy Speaker, just like you and me, and they deserve to be treated that way.

The Oaks Estate community faces many significant challenges. Many of these challenges are not unique, but in Oaks Estate they are so concentrated and so persistent that they are impossible to ignore. Roads are deteriorating, footpaths are incomplete or missing altogether and public transport is almost non-existent. How is it that in the capital city of one of the world’s wealthiest countries we still have a suburb where residents cannot even catch a bus?

Then there is the lack of basic services. Oaks Estate has no proper community centre, no nearby shops, and even waste management and maintenance can be patchy. We also cannot ignore the social issues that grow out of this, like isolation, unemployment and limited access to health and support services. Many residents face real disadvantage, but support networks are thin. Oaks Estate has a high proportion of public housing, yet the least access to essential services. Before we even talk about specialist support, there are no doctors, no dentists, no shops, no transport—nothing. Even the basics are completely missing in this community. Let’s be clear: the people of Oaks Estate are simply asking for a fair go. They want what every other Canberran wants: safe streets, decent services and a sense of pride in their neighbourhood.

I will not speak too much more about the circumstances. Ms Lee and Mr Emerson have summed it up and all the members of Kurrajong received the same letter, which outlined some of the particularly recent incidents. Having visited Oaks Estate many times over the years and worked on various of the issues there, when I received this letter, it really felt like there was a step change in the circumstances and an escalation of some of the challenges facing the Oaks Estate community.

On that basis, I think Oaks Estate is a test of this Assembly’s commitment to inclusion, equity and shared prosperity, because you cannot talk about fairness while leaving behind communities like Oaks Estate. That is why we have identified in the motion a series of proposals that seek to address the challenges that Oaks Estate faces. The motion seeks to encompass the idea that there are short-term issues that can be

addressed relatively quickly but also recognises that it is not a click of the fingers—that there are some significant challenges for Oaks Estate. That is why it specifically talks about a five-year strategic plan to work with the community to, over time, build up services, address more challenging elements and deal with things that can take a longer-term action. The motion is seeking to reflect the need for a sustained effort over time to address issues in Oaks Estate.

We urgently need the ACT government to work with the Oaks Estate community to develop a strategic plan that addresses the needs the residents have been raising for some time and issues which have become even more pressing, despite the efforts that have been made. As I said, I have visited Oaks Estate many times as a local member for community events that the community has sought to put together but also as a minister, visiting service providers and visiting members of the community. The efforts that have been made over the years—and there have been the programs run by St Vincent de Paul and the visits of other community service providers—are important and do provide some support, but it is clear that those efforts have not been enough and that more effort is required.

It is encouraging to see the majority of the Assembly backing this plan. I hope we are able to work with the government to turn our understanding of the challenging issues in Oaks Estate into a clear plan of action, going forward, to ensure that this community does get a fair go. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.45): I rise in support of this motion. Oaks Estate has often been referred to as “the forgotten suburb”, and that phrase alone speaks volumes. It reflects a deeper truth that this community has long been overlooked and gains attention only when something goes wrong. That is not fair to the people who live there, and it is not the kind of society we aspire to be.

This is a community that should be thriving, but entrenched disadvantage, a small population and low socioeconomic status have allowed the government to ignore it. Yes, there are problems, but they are symptoms of a broader, systemic failure. Canberrans are a compassionate people. We believe in fairness, inclusion and lifting each other up. It is time for the ACT government to take a holistic approach to Oaks Estate, one that recognises its potential, respects its heritage and invests in the services and support that this community deserves.

I would like to thank Ms Lee, Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury for bringing this really important motion forward. Let’s not allow Oaks Estate to remain forgotten. Let’s remember it and insist that the government works with the Oaks Estate community to address the issues in the short, medium and long term.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.46): As members would be aware, the original movers of this motion in the last sitting were myself, Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury, when I was privileged to step in for Ms Lee while she was on leave. We have had some adjustment to that, and Ms Lee is rightly sharing responsibility with Mr Rattenbury and Mr Emerson. As has been commented on, it is good to see members from different political persuasions join together for, in my opinion, such an obvious calls-on.

My own connection with Oaks Estate happened in late 2022, because some planning issues cropped up. Under the proposed district plans, Oaks Estate was due to be included in the east Canberra district, whereas they felt they much more naturally fit in with the inner-south Canberra district. Obviously, the east Canberra district would have meant Oaks Estate was basically the sole residential area in a whole new district of Canberra—really, as a message, saying, “You are not really part of the proper part of Canberra.” It was a concerning message.

I really appreciate, Fiona MacGregor, the president of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, for reaching out to me on that very discreet planning issue. It really went to the core of her and the residents’ concerns, which are just not taken into consideration enough—a residential area that basically sat on its own in a brand new district in the government’s planning review. It is fortunate to see them being moved into the south Canberra district, but it is interesting that it was never originally the case.

As members have touched on, there are certainly incredibly challenging service issues for the residents of Oaks Estate, particularly touching on the portfolios of Minister Steel, with transport and planning; Minister Berry, with housing and education; and Minister Cheyne, with City Services. I really do hope that this motion brings a light onto Oaks Estate, the light of quality service delivery. They do not deserve to be neglected nor forgotten. I have driven through there a couple of times, and it really just signals that this is a neglected part of our city, the capital city of Australia. I think, “Am I in Canberra?” I must admit, I just got a little bit of a jolt when I first went there in late 2022. I was like, “Is this part of Canberra? Why are they so neglected?”

There is a challenge being issued through this motion—a challenge that I hope the government accept. It is nice to know that, at this stage anyway, there are no amendments being circulated by the government to this motion. While I am sure that we are going to get hearty support for this motion from the Greens, the Independents and the Canberra Liberals, I would encourage the government members in this place right now—and the three ministers I have named are here—not just to let it go through on the voices quietly but to give a resounding “yes” to putting a light on Oaks Estate and ensuring they get the services that they deserve as Canberrans. They have been too long forgotten and neglected. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON(Brindabella) (3.50): Do I know Oaks Estate? I was the shadow housing minister for eight years. So I know Oaks Estate—let me tell you. I have spent a lot of time in Oaks Estate, where I encountered a wonderfully warm, resourceful, honest and unpretentious community that was constantly swimming against the tide. Although my advocacy for this community and the individuals in it goes back a decade, I have very clear memories of interviewing the late, great Steve Doszpot about this very same issue—pretty much exactly the same as it appears on the notice paper today—in my former life as a radio announcer at 2CC. I cannot tell you what year that was, but it was more than a decade ago.

Oaks Estate is a beautiful community, but it is often disrupted by the ongoing issues of the social housing tenancies at Oaks Estate. Having visited there many, many times over the past two terms, there were moments when I was genuinely worried for my own

safety when we had some meetings there late in the day. I can only imagine how those who live there feel on occasions. The current social housing presents some complex socioeconomic issues which have been exacerbated by recent drug decriminalisation. The current public housing was constructed before 1974 and continues to be maintained to a low standard.

There is too much lawlessness. There is too much dangerous and disruptive behaviour. This has included the use of improvised explosive devices, dangerous driving, violence and drug-related activities and fires—these were the sorts of issues that I was dealing with as the shadow housing minister—which have resulted in major injuries in the past, including someone being shot in the arm, a single woman being strangled and animals attacking residents. These issues occurred during the time that I was the housing shadow. Overcrowding has previously been a major issue, with multiple visual evidence of people living in garages. In 2019, a resident representative of Oaks Estate met Housing ACT to detail, in great detail, the major concerns that they face living there, with the distribution of the minutes of this meeting being circulated to many people in this place. But it kind of appears that nothing has changed.

As those opposite would be aware, as the shadow minister for housing, I frequently raised my genuine concern about the potential for extreme and tragic outcomes occurring if these issues were not dealt with—and I still have those concerns. It surprises me that now, in 2025, after 10 years of being aware of these issues—previously raised by Ms Lawder, by myself, by Mr Doszpot and others—that this motion again brings to light the seriousness of issues faced at Oaks Estate. Should we really have to call on the government to complete these simple tasks of looking after a suburb facing severe antisocial behaviour, neglected public housing stock and access to the most basic of government services?

I am sure we are going to hear some strong words from ACT Labor. We have heard some words of care from the Greens. They have marched on down here and they have become almost as noble as Mr Emerson on these issues. It is a big call, I know. But the reality is that this territory has been governed for decades by a Labor-Greens alliance. Mr Rattenbury stands here and says, “Yes, we have to get this five-year plan in,” but what about the past decades? How long have you been in this place, Mr Rattenbury? How long have Labor and the Greens been running the place? It is your electorate. The people of Oaks Estate have formed a view that this government does not give two hoots about them—and the proof is in the pudding; you do not. You simply do not. Mr Rattenbury was a part of cabinet for how long? How can these things be so heavily on his radar now that he no longer has access to the steering wheel?

But I will move on from that stuff, because I am over the moon that we have a motion here involving three different MLAs of different political colour. That is a positive thing, but let’s make this much more than a talkfest and actually get things done.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.55): I thank Ms Lee, Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. ACT Labor will be supporting this motion; however, I would like to put on the record some of the supports that have been provided by the ACT government to the residents of Oaks Estate, particularly in the area of public

housing. I would note that this motion is not about demonising public housing tenants at Oaks Estate in any way. However, I would say, Mr Parton, that your comments came very close to the wire in your representation this afternoon when speaking to this motion, which surprised me, I have to say—but it is your speech; you wrote it.

This motion paints a picture of this suburb that probably is a little bit disingenuous and a little bit unfair to this community. Last week, I attended Oaks Estate—as I have a number of times in my role here in the Assembly—to check in with the residents and some of the support services who visit there regularly. There really is a sense of community within the Oaks Estate, with residents knowing and looking out for one another. I also got to see all the upgrades and refurbishments that have been made to the units that were impacted by the fire. These units are looking modern, safe and secure, thanks to the work that is underway to repair the damage. They really are beautiful homes, and I cannot wait to see people move into them.

Members will know that Housing ACT owns over 70 social housing properties in Oaks Estate. The majority of government-owned properties are head leased under the Housing Asset Assistance Program, including more than 50 properties to St Vincent de Paul, or Vinnies, and a small number managed by Havelock House and Everyman Australia. Under the Housing Asset Assistance Program, the community partners utilise the properties to provide supported accommodation to clients. Properties are utilised to meet a range of housing needs, including for clients with complex needs or for a specific cohort under a program, such as for people with disability or those exiting incarceration. There are 14 units currently tenanted by public housing tenants and are managed by the Connected Communities Team, a more intensive public housing service team, in recognition of the additional tenancy support that is required. Staff members from Housing ACT attend Oaks Estate on a fortnightly basis with Vinnies staff and our facilities maintenance contractor to support all of the residents and the community.

The ACT government funds St Vincent de Paul to deliver the Community Inclusion Program for social housing sites in Oaks Estate. The program funds two case workers who actively work to stabilise the community. Housing Assistance staff work closely with Vinnies staff, who have an ongoing presence at Oaks Estate daily and run a community room onsite. The Community Inclusion Program was previously funded by the commonwealth government. However, the ACT government currently provides over \$454,000 to support the program, with funding in place until the end of the financial year 2025-26. Vinnies, through the Community Inclusion Program, work to address concerns within the Oaks Estate community. They support social housing residents presenting with complex needs and behaviours and, while working intensively with residents, the broader community and the ACT government on issues arising in the area.

Several additional services attend Oaks Estate, providing information sessions and support. They include Directions Health, Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation, Feros Care, Reclink and Orange Sky. While I was at Oaks Estate having a barbeque lunch with some of the tenants out there and with St Vincent de Paul and Housing staff, Orange Sky were out there and were having some wonderful conversations with some of the tenants and helping them with their laundry. It really is a lovely place to visit and spend time with those tenants and talk to them about their lives and where they see themselves, going forward. These kinds of essential support services that operate within

Oaks Estate are there on a regular basis. This motion notes that there are semi-permanent homeless people living there with very little support, but it really is dismissive of all the work that organisations like Vinnies do.

The safety of tenants and the community is absolutely paramount. In August 2023 a fire occurred, which resulted in damage to 15 units. As a result, the tenants in these units were relocated either permanently or to transitional properties. There was quite extensive damage due to these fires. Major electrical and safety compliance work was required and there were additional works which were unrelated to the fire that were also identified. It has taken some time to complete the necessary repairs. However, all of the insurance rectification works are complete. There are some further vacant works required before bringing the properties back online. The vacant works are almost complete, with both blocks ready to hand over to Vinnies by the end of May. As I said, they truly are really beautiful. The team has done a great job in making them just really lovely places for people to move into. The improvements and upgrades that have been made to these two blocks have resulted in these lovely new homes. When operating again, these units will provide a safe and modern home for some of Canberra's most vulnerable members.

The motion also notes that students do not have access to public schooling close to where they live. Oaks Estate is located in the priority enrolment area for Red Hill and Forrest primary schools, Telopea High, and Narrabundah College. There are a range of factors taken into consideration when planning school catchment boundaries, including geographical considerations and travel factors, to ensure students who live in a catchment have easy access to nearby local schools.

Of course, in the case of Oaks Estate, the priority enrolment area schools are the nearest schools located to the suburb—although I understand that they are some distance away. But I would like to assure the chamber that I will write to the New South Wales education minister, because I understand that the Oaks Estate community wish to explore attendance at Queanbeyan schools. So I will write to the education minister and see if I can work with her to explore Queanbeyan schools being included as part of an option for residents at Oaks Estate.

In closing, I want to make it clear that this suburb is not neglected, as implied in this motion. But, of course, everybody wants the absolute best outcomes for their suburb, and we are happy to work across a range of different areas, which is what this motion is asking us to do. There are residents with complex needs, absolutely, but this is not something that is unique to Oaks Estate, although I note the number of tenants who are living there.

I want to thank and acknowledge the various community organisations who work to support all of the residents at Oaks Estate in public housing. I am committed to ensuring that the ACT government continues to support the public housing tenants at Oaks Estate and will work alongside various community organisations that operate there.

In times past, when I used to go to Oaks Estate, the residents' organisations and groups used to join the tenants who lived as part of the Oaks Estate's public housing being supported by Vinnies, for their barbecue lunches on Mondays. Maybe that is something that could be revisited, if it is something that tenants would like to do and invite the

broader community in to have a conversation with them. But I can assure you that the tenants at Oaks Estate are as proud of their suburb as every other resident out there and they want the best possible outcomes both for themselves and the broader community. We will work across government to make sure that we can address some of the issues that have been raised in the motion, and I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.04): First, let me say welcome back to Ms Lee, and I thank her for bringing this motion to the chamber, along with Mr Rattenbury and Mr Emerson.

As a fellow member for Kurrajong, I have been engaging with the residents of Oaks Estate for the past nine years or so, having spent time there when I was campaigning in 2016 and a number of times since. I have even been known to set up the polling place in Oaks Estate for Labor for a federal election, Mr Emerson; of course, there is no executive control over the location of polling places, and I was also sad not to see it there this time round.

Ms Lee is right that the issues raised in this motion are not new. During my time in this place, the degree of challenge, however, has waxed and waned over the years. As Mr Rattenbury has acknowledged, significant work has gone into working with the community to address a range of issues over the years, and the Deputy Chief Minister has also discussed this.

Two weeks ago, I met with members of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, including Fiona MacGregor, and was concerned to hear from them about the recent escalation of the issues at Oaks Estate. It was indeed distressing to hear that, in the words of Fiona and her daughter, “It has never been worse.” As others have said, though, this is a strong community. The way that we address the challenges faced by Oaks Estate, including crime, antisocial behaviour and community safety, must be built on this strength.

In particular, in that discussion I heard that residents do not want to demonise public housing tenants in their area. They want to ensure that public and community housing tenants in Oaks Estate are well supported, as a valued part of their community. They want long-term planning, and they want residents to be engaged in this work. They want to take a community development perspective and approach, rather than focusing on a punitive policing response—although, of course, including community policing in this response will be important. On access to health care, they noted that access to bulk-billing is an issue in their community, as it is across the ACT, but that the new urgent care clinic in Queanbeyan has helped.

The motion from Mr Emerson, Mr Rattenbury and Ms Lee seeks to address a range of concerns of the Oaks Estate community through a five-year plan. Relevant to the health and mental health portfolios, the motion asks the Assembly to note that, despite many residents living with chronic and acute health problems, there are minimal health and other support services available, and it calls on the government to, among other things, as part of the proposed five-year plan, include short-, medium- and long-term actions. And it includes action to provide community health facilities for residents, including

those with complex mental health and drug dependency issues, such as through a new mobile alcohol and other drug service.

Again, as the Deputy Chief Minister has talked about, there are already a range of targeted community health services that provide outreach to the community at Oaks Estate. These include the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy, CAHMA, which hosts fortnightly barbecues at Oaks Estate, where they provide peer treatment support, with trained workers available to assist community members. They also provide naloxone distribution and training and needle and syringe packages during scheduled outreach visits to prevent opioid overdose, and provide for safe disposal and access to sterile equipment to reduce transmission of blood-borne viruses.

The Directions “Chat to PAT” mobile outreach van attends Oaks Estate fortnightly, at the same time as CAHMA’s barbecue event. The “Chat to PAT” van is a purpose-built mobile health clinic that provides wraparound support to marginalised Canberrans who cannot otherwise easily access health services. Hepatitis ACT, in partnership with CAHMA, also provides biannual hepatitis testing and support at Oaks Estate. The last testing was in October 2024, with plans to go out again this month.

While the ACT Health Directorate does not fund specific mental health NGO outreach programs for the residents of Oaks Estate, it does provide a range of funding for community mental health NGO programs that can provide outreach and/or psychosocial support for the residents of Oaks Estate. Examples of these include the Youth and Wellbeing program provided by CatholicCare Marymead, which uses a case management model to provide home-based outreach for young people experiencing mental health difficulties. The Transition to Recovery—TRec—program provided by Woden Community Service includes short-term step-up, step-down intensive outreach support services that includes after-hours support, using a recovery-oriented and strength-based psychosocial outreach approach.

The Psychosocial Support Program, also provided by Woden Community Service, provides a mental health recovery program that supports people whose ability to manage daily activities and live independently in the community has been seriously affected by mental health issues. The program aims to support people from the missing middle who are not supported by NDIS, but where psychological therapies alone are not enough. The Detention Exit Community Outreach program provides short- to medium-term intensive outreach support using a case management approach to assist people exiting detention to transition back into the community.

Through the mental health commissioning process, the Health Directorate will also be examining opportunities to deliver programs and services across the spectrum of need in the ACT community, including outreach and psychosocial supports for people experiencing mental illness.

There are, of course, a range of other services provided to Oaks Estate, which my colleagues will speak about and have spoken about, including the St Vincent de Paul Community Inclusion Program, which I have visited a couple of times to catch up with residents and staff in a couple of my ministerial roles.

There are some incredible community workers in these programs who have built enormous trust with the residents of George Street and whose work is much valued by the broader Oaks Estate community. I would like to put on record my thanks to those staff and to St Vincent de Paul for its ongoing work in Oaks Estate.

In closing, I am pleased to support this multipartisan motion in the Assembly today. As Mr Emerson noted, there is no non-executive Labor member for Kurrajong, but I am pleased to speak as a local member. While we will not be moving amendments to this motion today, I want to put on record that I think it falls short of appropriately acknowledging the incredible work that the community sector currently does in supporting the Oaks Estate community, and which is largely funded by the ACT government. I am pleased to have the opportunity to work with the community, building on its strengths, to look at the future of Oaks Estate in partnership with them.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.11): I rise to talk about transport access in Oaks Estate and surrounds. The ACT government is committed to ensuring that the residents of Canberra's urban areas have public transport access. There has been a longstanding arrangement, together with the New South Wales government and their contracted bus service providers, to support residents of Oaks Estate, whilst also serving Queanbeyan and providing access to the ACT.

We have been engaging with the New South Wales government for some time, and it is a topic of conversation not only with me and with New South Wales ministers, but also with the Cross-Border Commissioner that has been established in New South Wales. The government has engaged in the 16 cities improvement program in New South Wales, part of which delivers bus service improvements in regional cities, including the Queanbeyan area and Oaks Estate, and which is designed to better meet customer travel needs; ensure equitable access to public transport; provide integrated multi-modal, end-to-end journeys; improve services; and enhance cross-border journeys.

Whilst residents of Oaks Estate do not have a Transport Canberra service, they do have access to CDC Canberra local and cross-border commuter bus services to travel into Canberra and, indeed, to access services in Queanbeyan. The reality for Oaks Estate residents is that, whilst Oaks Estate is a valued part of the Canberra community, its geographical location is directly next to Queanbeyan, and many people in Oaks Estate access Queanbeyan for a range of different services, simply because of its proximity. Of course, they also want to access services in Canberra, and that is why bus connections into Canberra remain important.

CDC route 838 services Oaks Estate directly, with a bus stop at Hazel Street, in the heart of Oaks Estate. This bus stop is accessible for most residents of Oaks Estate within around a six-minute walk, depending on where they are, and whether they are on the edges of the Oaks Estate suburb. From there, using that service, residents can connect to other services offered by CDC, including the 830 and the 844X, towards the city centre and Civic, and the 831, which is a service that takes people towards Woden.

Those bus services can also be accessed directly, without using the 838. They are available within around a 450-metre walk from Hazel Street. There is a bus stop on the

corner of Uriarra Road and Crawford Street in Queanbeyan, so those services that go directly to the city are available within walking distance.

Oaks Estate residents have also been accessing a longstanding agreement with CDC Canberra whereby they can transfer their tickets from a CDC Canberra service to a Transport Canberra service within 90 minutes of purchase by presenting their ticket to the driver when boarding, along with proof of their Oaks Estate address. This agreement allows Oaks Estate residents to travel to hub locations and complete their journey without incurring the cost of an additional fare, when transferring onto a Transport Canberra service.

It is not quite true to say that there are no transport services in Oaks Estate. There are bus services that directly service the Oaks Estate area. That is not to say that we will not continue to have conversations about what can be done to improve services there. Indeed, that has been occurring through the 16 cities improvement program. Bus services have already been enhanced, with additional services on route 838 to and from Oaks Estate for onward connections to Canberra city and Woden on routes 830, 831 and 844X, as well as the 834 service to Majura Park and Canberra Airport.

We will continue to look at what options could be made available to Oaks Estate residents in terms of public transport. We did not bring to the election last year a plan for additional services. We have identified additional priority services for Canberra. That remains the ACT government's priority, but we are happy to consider—and we do this on a yearly basis—what network improvements can be made to service the people of Canberra, including this important area of Canberra in Oaks Estate. We will continue to look at New South Wales services and the arrangements with CDC to understand whether they are adequate.

The ACT government will be supporting the motion today, and we will certainly consider transport as part of the work that will be undertaken to respond to the motion. I thank the members for bringing it forward.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (4.16), in reply: In closing, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate and, of course, acknowledge Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury, as the co-sponsors of this motion. I especially thank Mr Cain, who stepped in for me whilst I was on leave and took carriage of this matter.

There were different contributions from all of the members in this debate, but one of the common threads that seemed to come through from the contributions made by the non-Labor members was the word “forgotten”. It is the word “forgotten” when it comes to talking about Oaks Estate. It is highlighted in the words of the Inner South Canberra Community Council, who wrote in March this year:

Oaks Estate is the forgotten suburb of the ACT. Responses to the issues described above have in recent years been piecemeal and haphazard at best.

Sadly, in March 2015, when Mr Doszpot moved a motion on Oaks Estate, he said something very similar

Frankly, it is an indictment of all of us who live in Canberra that we have a community that has, to all intents and purposes, been forgotten, with the residents left to manage and put up with whatever this government sends their way. Oaks Estate is a study in what can happen when communities get forgotten by successive bureaucracies. When you have a minister's office in the ACT believing that Oaks Estate is part of Queanbeyan, as one Oaks Estate resident read in a letter, you have probably reached a sad level of irrelevance.

Mr Emerson, Mr Rattenbury and I all acknowledge that this is a complex issue. We know that there is no one simple solution that will fix everything. That is reflected in the motion that we have brought. The motion that we have brought is eminently sensible in that it calls for a five-year strategic plan. We also do not want that plan to just be a piece of paper that gathers dust as a result of a tick-box exercise, as a result of this motion. That is why it also calls for short-, medium- and long-term actions, as well as an annual report back to the Assembly on its progress.

I turn to the contribution made by Ms Berry. She mentioned that she thought the motion was a little bit disingenuous in the way that it talked about the community. It is a classic response, and it deflects from the fact that, in the spirit of working together on this motion, this motion was also put together in direct consultation with Fiona MacGregor, who has been a passionate advocate for Oaks Estate in her role as the chair of the Oaks Estate Residents Association.

There is no doubt that the community sector has picked up a lot of the basic services that the government has failed to deliver. This ignores the reality that—despite all of the services that Ms Berry went to great lengths to recite—things have not improved. In fact, Ms Stephen-Smith acknowledged that, in the direct words of Fiona and her daughter, things have never been worse. Fiona wrote a letter to all of the Kurrajong members of the Assembly—and I know that Ms Stephen-Smith received it. In that letter, Fiona said:

My family and I have resided in Oaks Estate for over 20 years and things have never been this problematic and unsafe as they are currently.

Ms Berry can recite all of the services and all of the apparently wonderful things that the ACT Labor government has done for Oaks Estate, but let us get real here: the reality is that things have not improved.

Ms Stephen-Smith went into great detail about some of the essential health services, and they have been a major concern of the residents of Oaks Estate. Accessing essential health services is one of the most important functions of any government, and no more so than during the pandemic, of course.

Mr Assistant Speaker, you can understand my concern, and I actually wrote an opinion piece about this in 2021, that Canberra smashed our goals in getting the COVID vaccine—I think we were at 99 per cent first dose and 83 per cent second dose at one point—but at the same time, east Canberra, of which Oaks Estate forms a part, was at 57 per cent first dose and 43 per cent second dose. If that does not tell you how starkly

different Oaks Estate is, if that does not tell you how starkly forgotten Oaks Estate is, when you see those stats that are so different, I do not know what does.

In relation to transport, Mr Steel went to great lengths to talk about some of the services that he says are being provided in Oaks Estate. Perhaps the problem is more of a public awareness issue; because, of course, the lack of public transport is an issue that is raised with us on a regular basis, including the clunkiness in the way they have to switch, change to different payment methods and the like, and have to obtain a separate ticket. That, obviously, needs to be looked at.

We welcome the support of ACT Labor in relation to this motion; but, as we always know, words can be hollow, and the proof will be in the pudding. On that, only time will tell.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.23), in reply: I will add briefly to the end of the discussion. I welcome the discussion today. I think there is a good understanding in this Assembly of the challenges faced by the Oaks Estate community, and I am pleased with the support for this motion. As Ms Lee outlined, the thinking we did in trying to come up with a suitable “calls on” was very much about trying to create something practical and pragmatic that could make a real difference to the residents of Oaks Estate. I think that, with the support of the Assembly today, we can achieve that.

It would be remiss of me not to touch on the remarks of Mr Parton. If I were to follow Mr Parton’s approach to its logical extension, which is to say that, because it was never fixed while I was in government, I could never work on it again, that would be highly problematic, and it ain’t going to happen. That is not how it will be. I will continue to take up issues from the crossbench. I am a member of this place, and I will work hard to represent my community on the important issues that Canberrans face.

I thank members for their support for the motion today. I particularly thank them because this is about the residents of Oaks Estate and making sure that they get a fair go in this city.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment—artificial grass

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.25): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the increasing prevalence of artificial grasses, which are comprised of polymers and colloquially known as “astroturf”, throughout Canberra’s urban landscape;
- (b) artificial ground coverings, including artificial grass, prevent the development of vegetation supporting natural water filtration, lead to increased runoff and prevent the storage of water in the landscape;
- (c) artificial grass contributes to the urban heat island effect, with applicable surfaces in full summer sunlight able to reach temperatures capable of causing severe burns, with young children at particular risk;

- (d) artificial grass can decompose into microplastic particles, contaminating our waterways and potentially becoming lodged in the digestive systems of local wildlife;
 - (e) risks may be enhanced in more advanced sportsground applications, where these utilise crumb rubber as a loose infill product in conjunction with the artificial grass;
 - (f) artificial grasses create a biodiversity desert, hostile to all forms of wildlife;
 - (g) once degraded, artificial grass is almost never recycled;
 - (h) many of the above stated issues are not well known amongst the Canberra community and, as such, the use of artificial grass is becoming increasingly common across Canberra's suburbs;
 - (i) where the Government has implemented schemes disincentivising the installation of artificial grass, such as in the Suburban Land Agency's landscaping rebate schemes for Ginninderry, Jacka and Whitlam, this has proven to be effective at preventing the proliferation of artificial grass within the areas covered by those schemes; and
 - (j) there is precedent internationally for imposing further regulations on artificial grass including in the Netherlands, the European Union, and California; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) commence a public education campaign about the negative impacts of astroturf and promote the use of more environmentally friendly, easy-care alternatives;
 - (b) set a timeline for phasing out the installation of artificial grass in ACT Government projects and developments, and look to feasibility for replacement on public land;
 - (c) develop a program to support the phasing out of artificial grass products from private use to transition to more sustainable products, including the consideration of subsidies and incentive schemes as appropriate;
 - (d) examine regulation options for artificial grass in the ACT to be used in only limited, specific and environmentally-regulated applications;
 - (e) prioritise, and incentivise where possible, the planting of appropriate vegetation throughout Canberra's urban landscape, including through fostering gardens for wildlife;
 - (f) explore options to test for the presence of microplastics in the ACT's waterways, including to identify likely products of origin for any occurring contamination; and
 - (g) report back to the Assembly on progress by no later than 29 October 2025.

Imagine it is a beautiful summer's day without a cloud in the sky. A picture-perfect, low-maintenance, green lawn is in your back yard. This is a dream sold to many Canberrans—a dream that, unfortunately, is not matched by the lived reality for so many different reasons. I am talking about artificial grass.

Firstly, let's start with what it is. Also known as synthetic turf, it is essentially a carpet of plastic blades with an underlay of sheeting and a granular inner film. Installed and

maintained correctly—which it is frequently not—it will imitate a pristine lawn to an uncanny degree, at least for a period of time. The more it is walked on and the less it is maintained, the quicker it will flatten. Weeds will sprout along the seamlines. You can smell the dog's pee from last week. Storms start washing away parts of it and it will start to shift and wrinkle. What was promised in a glossy pamphlet from the manufacturer as a picturesque, no-maintenance garden fixture can become a ghastly and cheap eyesore.

Manufacturers have put a lot of effort into marketing this product. The greenwashing is rife. We will see claims that it does not need watering, despite the fact it does need washing. They will describe it as climate-friendly, when substantial fossil fuels go into its creation. There will be some claims about recycled materials, but the turf itself will end up in landfill. I thank Minister Cheyne and her office for that timely answer to my question on notice on this issue.

Fortunately, people have caught onto the spin. Researchers are progressively uncovering a range of issues and recommending that action be taken to wind back on this product. For example, in California, focus has been on the chemical substances found in the rubber infill, which is frequently made from ground-up tyres, and there has been the detection of so-called forever chemicals, including polyfluoroalkyl substances. As any experienced firefighter will tell you, PFAS is not something you want to take risks for, and therefore California has acted appropriately.

In the Netherlands—one of the earliest adopters of synthetic turf on sports fields—they are now getting rid of the product entirely due to finding carcinogenic products above commercially permissible limits in the vast majority of professional clubs' fields. They have found arsenic, lead, mercury and benzene, just to name a few. To press the point further, there was a study by the University of Washington which examined 237 soccer players who predominantly played on artificial grass and had subsequently developed cancer. The majority were goalkeepers, who have increased contact with the plastic grass. While it may not be definitive evidence, it rings alarm bells and demands the application of a precautionary principle. Is this the type of substance that we wish to see our children playing on, falling down on and rolling around on?

More broadly, the European Union has categorised crumb rubber as a microplastic to be banned under its associated regulations. There is growing acknowledgement that the pollution caused by microplastics is not limited to cosmetic beads and that artificial grass is a real contributor. From 2031, the infill products used in artificial turf cannot be rubber or plastic objects less than five millimetres in diameter, which is forcing a complete rethink of the products across Europe. I would not be surprised if they go beyond that date, because the plastic grass blades also break down into microplastics over time.

Microplastics flow into our waterways and get lodged in vegetation and animals. A bird or small animal which ingests too much in the way of small plastic particles can find it overfills their digestive system and causes them to starve. From river systems, microplastics can end up in irrigation systems, contaminating our food supplies. In answer to a question on notice, Minister Orr has acknowledged that synthetic turf can end up in our waterways as microplastics. Also revealed is that testing for this has only ever been done as a once-off. It confirms that we know the problem exists. I would like

to know more and have ongoing information about what is running into our waterways. Microplastics and the substances that leach from them are a growing risk to our ecosystems and human health, and we remain blind to them at our collective peril.

I move on to heat, the Aussie factor. Natural vegetation breathes. Ordinary grass has a gas and moisture exchange with the atmosphere that produces an urban cooling effect. Artificial grass, being plastic, simply heats up. In Strathnairn, Jessica Stewart, Head of Sustainability and Community Development at Ginninderry, conducted a thermal imagery comparison between two neighbouring streets, Fairbrother Street and Lorroway Street. The former was part of the Ginninderra Estate, which has been mandating natural vegetation, incentivised through the provision of landscaping packages and enforced through a compliance bond scheme. The latter has no particular design requirements, so it was featuring a lot of gravel and AstroTurf.

Thermal imagery taken on an overcast summer's day in 2022 showed that the latter street with AstroTurf was substantially hotter. Even in overcast conditions, the AstroTurf was reaching temperatures of 31.8 degrees Celsius, and so was the gravel and the asphalt on the road. By contrast, Fairbrother Street, with its natural vegetation, came in at 19.4 degrees Celsius, and both the surrounding concrete and asphalt also ran four degrees cooler. Studies have shown that, in full sunlight, artificial grass can get as hot as 80 degrees Celsius. Eighty degrees Celsius can burn someone. It can cause heat stroke. You do not want a child running outside onto this, nor do we want that kind of radiant heat spilling into our homes and raising our air conditioning bills.

Despite being marketed as an all-weather terrain for sports grounds, increasing the useable days of a playing surface, this is another example of greenwashing, because artificial turf becomes unusable on a hot day, particularly when the whole sports ground is not shaded, which it almost never is. Artificial grass might solve the problem of an unusable muddy pitch, but it creates the problem of a scorching hot one instead, thus reducing the number of days and times that it can actually be used. Under climate change, the number of hot days is slated to increase, making artificial grass surfaces hotter more often.

We have an entire strategy here in the ACT of planting trees to reduce urban heat, but the proliferation of artificial grass is pushing us in the opposite direction. Reducing urban heat requires not just trees but also consideration of a vibrant understorey vegetation structure that incorporates bushes, shrubs, grasses and groundcover—the kind that attract wildlife to our neighbourhoods and the kind that turn houses into homes.

There are certain areas in which the ACT government is doing a good job, particularly at the Suburban Land Agency. I am particularly impressed with the SLA's guide for eligibility guidelines for the landscaping rebate in Jacka, which helpfully point out some of the reasons why artificial grass is not helpful and therefore not eligible for the rebate scheme. The challenge is for the government to take the efforts made here and extend them more broadly across the ACT, including into existing suburbs.

An effective education campaign is needed to bring the community along on the journey of abandoning artificial grass. The Greens know from experience that moving our city away from one particular type of product requires time and effort. As with our

abandonment of wood-fired heaters, we need to make sure that the Canberra community is alert to the problems and supported to transition to better alternatives over time.

One of the biggest reasons it is still getting put in is that Canberrans are often unfamiliar with the problems that come with it. I know; I did that once a number of years ago at a previous house, and it was only after the installation that the issues became evident to me. There is a journey here that we need to embark on and I would like to see us take some very purposeful steps towards making our city a better place. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.33): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion today. The section of Mr Braddock's motion I will be responding to today is focused around the benefits that sport brings to Canberra. We need to support our sporting community and encourage innovation, particularly in the development of AstroTurf for our sporting fields. My concern with this motion is the potential impact it may have on current and future sporting infrastructure throughout Canberra. If this motion is successful today, unamended, it appears as though it would require wholesale reform of our sporting facilities.

We all know the benefits for our health that playing sport gives us. Did you know that just 150 minutes of physical activity a week will increase our lifespan by up to seven years? I am not sure that I am actually doing 150 minutes a week of physical activity. Maybe I should get out there and do a little bit more to increase my own lifespan. It is a lesson learnt from my own speech! There are many other benefits as well. Sport can reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Sport can help people form long-lasting relationships. Many of the friends that my family has today originated from my son playing sport over the years. Sport increases social cohesion and reduces isolation and loneliness. Playing sport improves a child's attention, problem-solving, language and memory. Some studies show a 38 per cent reduction in cognitive decline later in life.

Canberrans know the many benefits of sport, and that is why we have close to 100 different sports played here in the ACT. Some of these sports are played on outdoor playing fields; some are played on our lakes; and some are played indoors on hardwood floors; and, also, some sports make use of our modern artificial grass technology. Let's be clear: it is not the same hard plastic that you or I grew up with when we played sport. The technology has changed. Through innovation, businesses created modern products to meet the needs of our modern world. Even as far back as 2009, the Chief Minister, who was the education minister at the time, said that technology around synthetic playing fields had evolved considerably over the previous decade or so and that some of the new synthetic surfaces utilised, both in the education area and in the sport and recreation area, were a significant advance in terms of their sustainability and design. As recently as the annual reports hearings in February this year, Minister Berry was praising the benefits of artificial turf in sporting infrastructure. She said:

The technology is changing all the time; synthetic fields are much better than they used to be.

The motion today seems to refer mainly to the issues around older technology that previously included a loose-fill product called crumb rubber. Sporting groups that

I have spoken to no longer use this product. The motion also refers to the lack of recycling, but many companies today are dedicated to promoting sustainability with innovative ways to reuse and recycle artificial grass and choosing eco-friendly material where possible.

Artificial grass has become more popular for many sports because it can reduce the cost of maintaining a natural grass field. People are more conscious of the water consumption required, and some sports simply have no alternative. For example, we have hockey that is played on synthetic grass. We have soccer that is also played on synthetic grass. What about all our cricket pitches across the ACT that have a synthetic cricket pitch? Can you imagine growing turf for an indoor sports centre? I am not sure that would work. The impact this motion could have on these sporting organisations could be detrimental. Some clubs may simply not be able to meet the unreasonable measures that are being proposed.

The motion by the Greens, as it currently stands, is proposing phasing out these products. In other words, it is another ban being imposed on the Canberra community. But the Greens have not thought through the details, because, ironically, in this case, the innovation of the private industry has beat them to it. A sustainable alternative referred to in the calls-on section is already available. Private industry wants the best possible product, and it will always get there through innovation. Our job is not to impose heavy-handed regulation; our job is to let them innovate for a better world.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.39): I rise to speak to Mr Braddock's motion on AstroTurf. As we talk about this product, we need to not scare sporting communities who are currently using AstroTurf as a means to undertake their sporting activities and certainly not make judgements on people's landscaping choices. They have made the decision for their own reasons and I do not think making judgements or scaring people is the way forward on this. This is something that we can investigate to find a way forward and ensure that our sportsgrounds are meeting the needs of our community; and families and others can make various judgements on what they want to do, going forward.

Of course, the ACT government is aware of the concerns around appropriate use of artificial grass. We continue to monitor ongoing research and policy decisions in other states and territories, which will inform future decisions on its use. For context, in the ACT there are 124 sports fields managed by the ACT government, out of which seven are fully synthetic. Artificial grass is used in sportsgrounds after much consideration—where natural turf does not meet the demands of grass and soil types, irrigation coverage, high-frequency sporting use and foot traffic. Mr Milligan was right to talk about hockey using AstroTurf for decades because of its surface consistency. It can be played on in all weather, it reduces maintenance, it has enhanced safety—the ball is not going to jump up and knock you in the face—it has longevity, it is hardwearing and it uses less sand on a hockey field. It has a water spray prior to use.

Before we start switching the clock off on those kinds of surfaces, we really need to understand more about the kinds of surfaces that can be used. We need to look at some of the technology changes in AstroTurf itself and whether there could be a more environmentally sustainable artificial grass type of surface that is permeable but may

be safer and a more recyclable and reusable type of artificial grass. It is something that we really do need to carefully consider and we need to take the time to do the research.

It is typically installed, as I said, in high-use fields to accommodate training and day and night games. Of course, during climate change, we will see hotter and wetter summers. We have experienced that recently with La Niña, where a lot of our grass and turf fields could not be used, or were used and were damaged significantly and took weeks and months to recover; whereas synthetic fields can be used all the time. Particularly in addressing climate issues, where sport might not be able to be played in the middle of the day because of heat concerns, on an AstroTurf type of field they can play at night, whether it is wet or dry weather, in the cooler hours of the evening.

In the ACT, we have had rubber crumb, which is commonly used as infill. It is made from recycled tyres. Rubber is used as a top layer on sports fields to add to the cushioning surface; although when I was at the Eastern Suburbs District Rugby Union Football Club last year, I saw that they used cork instead. Those are the kinds of things that we should be investigating—ways that are much more sustainable, if that is a place that we can land, going forward.

However, concerns about environment and health impacts mean that we have to look at exploration of alternatives, like cork, for example, and what the synthetic grass is actually made of, if that is even possible, going forward. For example, in the ACT, for some projects that we have on sports fields, we use BrockFILL. However, we have been starting to trial coconut fibre for our turf sportsgrounds. That is new and is currently being used in some trial installations to see how the reuse of that product can support our turf fields. I also understand that coconut fibre has been used in products that are claimed to be more environmentally-friendly artificial turf. I do not know how environmentally friendly they are, but it is something that we should definitely investigate and explore. Those are the kinds of things that the ACT government should be concentrating on: exploring alternatives, if there are any, and then looking at how we can repurpose and recycle artificial grass.

I saw the work that the New South Wales government has done around their investigations into AstroTurf. Whilst the chief medical officer—I think that is his title—did not recommend a moratorium, he said that there was a lack of information on the recyclability or otherwise of artificial grass. However, more investigations were required to understand all of the different types of artificial grass, because there are many, and we needed to continue to explore that.

I also understand that in New South Wales an organisation has set up a recycling facility that can pull out the different products that make up some of the synthetic grass. As I understand it, not all of it can be recycled. These are the kinds of things that we need to explore, because not all plastics can be recycled either and not all products that we use every day can be recycled; but we should explore it, if this is the point that we are going to get to. Rather than have all of the synthetic grass end up in landfill, we need to find ways for it to be reused or recycled, if that is the future that we all agree on.

Currently, in the sport space, we recycle synthetic grass in locations like cricket practice nets over concrete pitches, which is very popular with the community; the run-ups to cricket pitches in natural grass ovals; the interchange bench areas on grassed surfaces,

so that there is no damage in muddy areas—I think the GIO Stadium still has some synthetic grass around the edges of the stadium in those interchange areas—high-traffic areas at changeroom walkways; and under surrounding bleacher and seating areas. As much as we can, we are making use of reused synthetic grass in different areas.

I am also aware that the New South Wales government is developing guidelines to support councils and other stakeholders to determine the best places for synthetic grasses and services as an alternative to natural grasses in public spaces. We should look at those guidelines when they are available and see whether they could meet the needs of the ACT community, being an island in New South Wales. At the end of the day, nobody wants to see our waterways polluted with plastics and microplastics, going forward; but switching off the tap immediately without understanding the alternatives and what we do with all of the synthetic turf that exists already in our community—those are the kinds of things that we need spend some time on getting right: recycling, reusing if appropriate, and seeing whether there are any other more environmentally sustainable options for AstroTurf, going forward. Those are the kinds of things that the ACT government is keen to work on. Ms Orr will have some comments about this more generally. It is an area that we certainly need to do some work on to have a better understanding of it. I do not think we have that understanding right now.

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) (4.48): I thank Mr Braddock for moving this motion. We represent the same electorate and, if he knocked on as many doors as I did, he would know that artificial grass has become quite an embraced factor in our community. I note that Mr Milligan is laughing; I reckon it has been the same for him, regarding artificial grass.

While I certainly share a number of Mr Braddock's concerns about the environmental impacts, he is probably a little braver than perhaps the rest of the members in Yerrabi, in trying to move towards getting rid of this product in the whole electorate, when it has been embraced so wholeheartedly. That anecdote goes to the core of the situation here. We have something that, from all evidence, and mounting evidence, is quite negative for the environment and has quite a significant impact, and within our community that is perhaps not quite as well known as it could be.

We can have a bit of a discussion about this, and this motion today means that we can begin to have that chat, and we can go out and say, "I understand that you would like something very easy, in maintaining your garden, so that it can look neat and tidy, and it's easy to vacuum and so forth." People tell me that they vacuum their grass. "But here are the actual impacts of what's going on, so let's have a bit more of a chat."

In working through that discussion, and in the consideration of Mr Braddock's motion today, it is about balancing those two sides of the discussion—those who want the convenience and those who want the good environmental outcome—and looking at how we can work through this so that we are not taking one particular view and forcing

it upon someone else; we are getting that buy-in and understanding from the community, and we can move towards a much more sustainable approach to grass.

I have some notes which go over a lot of the comments that others have already made, around some of the things that are in train and that we could potentially look at, including recycling, a phase-out and the use of other alternatives. I note that, in some cases where fake grass is used, and where we say, “We’re not going to use it anymore,” it is perhaps not the most straightforward way of responding to the situation.

In supporting Mr Braddock’s motion, and certainly the intent of the motion, I propose to move an amendment, which has been circulated in my name. The amendment that I will move provides more nuance on some of the points, and provides a bit more clarity regarding paragraphs (2)(b) and (c) of the motion. Mr Braddock, if I heard him correctly, used the banning of wood heaters as an example. I know that, while lots of people who do not enjoy the effects of smoke will be very excited by that prospect, others who are very attached to their wood heaters will be very upset.

When we start looking at these things and we move to implement bans and other things, it makes it harder to prosecute the discussions around good environmental outcomes, because people just see what they are losing; they do not see the benefit that they are gaining from the impact. Much to Mr Braddock’s disdain, I am sure—but I appreciate his good humour, in humouring me—I will move my amendment today, which will do what I think he would characterise as softening these clauses; actually, I would just like to work through them.

Those in the community who enjoy having a very low maintenance garden will be able to see that maybe there is another way that they can have a low maintenance garden that does not have quite as big an environmental impact, and we can win them over, rather than force them to change their ways.

That is the intent behind my amendment. I believe there will be another amendment that will probably go to some other concerns about not getting too heavy-handed. As soon as we raised the issue of wood heaters, and we heard Mr Braddock’s comments about that, a few people were probably worried about where he might want to go with respect to this. I would like to assure everyone that I am looking for the sensible middle ground as we work through what is genuinely an environmental problem that we need to address, and doing so in a way that does not get people offside, and in a way that gets them to want to support some good environmental outcomes in the process.

I will leave my comments there, and I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly with my next set of feedback. I move:

Omit paragraphs (2)(b) and (c), substitute:

- “(b) undertake an analysis of the use of artificial grass on public land and the feasibility for its progressive removal and the phasing out of its installation in the future;
- (c) develop a program to support the use of alternatives to artificial grass on private land;”.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibbings): The question now is that Ms Orr’s amendment be agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.53): I move my first amendment, to Ms Orr's proposed amendment:

Omit paragraph (2)(b), substitute:

“(b) without prejudice, undertake an analysis of the use of artificial grass on public land and the feasibility for its progressive removal and the phasing out of its installation in the future;”.

The second amendment that I have circulated would amend Mr Braddock's original motion rather than the amendment itself.

The Canberra Liberals had an extensive discussion around this proposal. We came to the conclusion that we could not support the reduction in consumer choice and the outright banning of artificial turf that this motion would have led to. However, I have to commend Mr Braddock on bringing forward an issue on which I have previously had some extensive engagement with the government. In a previous life, before joining this Assembly, I was the chair of the Monash Primary School board. In that role, and in my role as a member of that board for a long time beforehand, we advocated for years to try to get the school oval fixed and improved, because what we saw there was the worst problem that you can experience with artificial turf.

We saw there an oval that had been neglected for so long and that had gone so far past its use-by date that there was an accumulation of rubber crumb that children would get in their eyes and their underwear. There were children sent to hospital because of their experience with an oval that was in such a terrible state of disrepair—and it is still not fixed—that there were piles of rubber crumb; there were piles of the microplastics that Mr Braddock has referred to. So I am on board with the problem.

Mr Assistant Speaker, you have to remember that the reason this problem arose in that instance was not because Mr Barr, in 2007, made a decision that we needed to droughtproof ovals in the ACT, which was the decision that led to the first installation of the Monash artificial turf oval. The problem was that the government then neglected to do anything with it. It was left entirely to the school to try to keep this thing up to date and upgraded, and to try to deal with a problem that was entirely predictable.

The problem came about because those ovals have a relatively short life span. It needed to be replaced or repaired within about 10 years. I believe it is heading rapidly towards 20 years. The problems come about when the government, particularly with these larger facilities, does not take steps to look after them. A problem may arise in some small yards, where there might be three square metres of grass. Occasionally, if the job has been done badly, it might wrinkle a bit.

I take the point that Mr Braddock does not really like it. I take the point raised by Mr Braddock that some installers sometimes might give a slightly different impression of what the final result will be. Maybe people have been sold a slightly cheaper version when a better version would have done the job much better. But I am not really okay with the argument that, because people prefer this, because they are choosing to install artificial turf, we should just ban it.

The first amendment that I have moved is to make sure it is absolutely clear that, when the government undertakes its proposed analysis of the use of artificial grass on public land—the feasibility of its progressive removal and the phasing out of its installation in future—that must be done without prejudice. It has to be done without a decision already having been taken that a ban is the way to achieve the outcome we are looking for.

Maybe—just maybe—the solution could be that the government looks after the things in its care. Maybe—just maybe—the answer will be that we need to update, in order to have modern ovals. There are a range of possibilities in the future. Therefore, I am seeking to make it absolutely clear that we cannot support a direction that says we are just going to ban this stuff. We cannot support an implication that a ban is the direction that this government should pursue.

I wrote to Minister Berry in 2022, raising my concerns about the Monash school oval. The problem has been known for some time. The idea that they do not know that there are problems, particularly with ovals that are degrading, does not stack up. It is important, though, that the government should look at every different option here, and that they do not just launch straight into banning something when education, or different alternatives to different products—all those different options—could provide a better outcome for the community, particularly as we look to potential droughts in the future.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.00): I will speak briefly to Ms Orr’s amendment and Mr Cocks’s first amendment, and I will also address his second amendment, so that I do not have to speak again. Personally, I approach this in terms, firstly, of great satisfaction and then with an element of frustration. There is satisfaction in terms of no-one having disagreed with the “note” section of my motion. Everyone has agreed with that, and it includes details about the effects of this product. Everyone here has agreed in terms of the heat island effect, the environmental impacts and the health impacts. I am very grateful that everyone at least can come to a common understanding of that. That is something to be celebrated. We are all acknowledging that there is an issue with this product.

It then becomes a question of: what are we going to do about it? I think that many parties here, with respect to the motion, have seen what they think they want to see or what they believe they see. It does not mention the word “ban” once. It is not there. It deliberately leaves it very open in terms of the future of artificial grass. Unfortunately, everyone has jumped straight to that.

Whilst Ms Orr might say she is providing clarification or nuancing, I actually regard that as watering down. Therefore, there is an element of frustration, but I also recognise the numbers within the chamber, and I still want to see something being passed today. I still want to see something useful come through this process; hence the Greens will not be voting against the amendments. We do see that they are taking away some of the imperative for action regarding what everyone in this Assembly has acknowledged, by agreeing to the first part—that this product does have an issue.

I would like to thank Mr Cocks for providing a picture-perfect example of the problem that we are talking about; hence that is why there is a need for some form of action. We might disagree as to how that action should be implemented, and that is totally okay.

I would disagree with Mr Milligan, who has taken, hook, line and sinker, the industry line in terms of artificial grass. Yes, they are making some improvements, but this is still the same industry that sold it to us in the first place. This is still the same industry that has been pushing this product, without any regard for these environmental and health issues. We need to caveat any claims made by them with a great degree of salt.

I was very grateful to hear Ms Berry admit that, due to the health and environment issues associated with this product, we need to examine it in greater detail. I was also grateful to hear Ms Berry's enthusiasm for exploring recycling options for this product. I would love to see that because, at the moment, it is becoming an increasing part of our waste stream into landfill. That is something that will become more expensive and a greater issue over time, as we deal with the fact that there have been large amounts of this product installed across the territory.

In terms of Mr Cocks's amendment, I have no problem with it. I am happy to have "without prejudice" included. Whatever consideration is made in terms of regulatory options, they need to be examined, and they need to stand on their merits. The desire to include the particular words "without prejudice" is interesting, when everyone has already agreed with part (1), in terms of there being a lot of issues with this product. But they then say, "No; without prejudice, we cannot even consider any regulatory options." We should accept that there needs to be an element of prejudice—that is, the environmental impacts and the health and safety impacts of this product need to be considered as part of that process. That cannot be ignored.

Mr Cocks's amendment to **Ms Orr's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Ms Orr's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Braddock's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.04): I move my second amendment:

Omit paragraph (2)(d), substitute:

"(d) without prejudice, examine regulation options for artificial grass in the ACT."

I believe this amendment is a fairly important amendment, even though it seems minor, in that the original wording of 2(d) of this motion set a very clear direction for the government. I believe it is right for us to be a little gun-shy when it comes to statements of this kind in an Assembly motion, because we have seen statements like this used to justify things like the gas ban and the wood heater ban as having set the stage for a direction the government was going to take anyway. That is the reason why we believe it is so important to be clear: yes, look at the regulation of these products; however, do it without prejudice, without a specific direction already decided upon, because we need the government to examine all options to deal with the environmental impact of these products.

Mr Cocks's amendment agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.07): I would like to thank all members for their contributions and support. I also express my appreciation for Minister Orr and her office to help us land this over the past week, despite being distracted by a federal election campaign.

At this point, it is probably worth reflecting on why the Greens do not want to go down the same regulatory route as that being proposed by the New South Wales government. The New South Wales Chief Scientist has correctly recognised the issues relating to astroturf. While the science is not conclusive in all respects, there is enough there for us to know that action needs to be taken, both to limit urban heat and apply a precautionary approach to public health, particularly for our children. Unfortunately, the NSW government response reads as a collaboration between professional sporting codes and astroturf manufacturers.

The problems I have outlined today, I acknowledge, are treated as an inconvenience to be managed rather than a critical issue for the avoidance of these substances. My colleague in New South Wales, Amanda Cohn MLC, was scathing in her assessment. The discussions in New South Wales are very much centred on sportsgrounds. The considerations Ms Berry have been making are evidently relevant here.

Creative approaches are definitely needed to retaining and advancing public space as our population densifies. However, we must remain alert to convenient solutions being sold without warnings about the potential downsides.

Amanda Cohn has recognised that the real problem is the funding of New South Wales councils to properly support their management of urban infrastructure and successfully moved a motion in the Legislative Council calling on the New South Wales government to act. Since then, the draft strategy in New South Wales has gone conspicuously quiet.

I fully recognise that a hard cutaway from synthetic turfs to natural options would be impossible for our government to implement immediately. I recognise that our sporting codes have needs to be accommodated. I also recognise that new technologies are underway, including hybrid sportsground services that utilise synthetic grating supports to improve water infiltration into real grass. These would still qualify to be called an artificial turf, even if not an artificial grass, and could be found acceptable as an alternative solution with the right environmental regulations.

I am looking forward to the government's response to this motion. Again, I would like to thank members for their support. In the ACT, we know we can do better by our children.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Order of business

Motion (by **Ms Castley**), by leave, agreed to:

That Assembly business, order of the day No 1, be called on and debated forthwith.

Government—order to table documents

Debate resumed from 10 April 2025, on motion by **Ms Castley**:

That:

- (1) this Assembly orders the Chief Minister to table, on the last business day of each month, for the duration of the 11th Assembly:
 - (a) a list of decisions made under section 8 of the *Government Procurement Act 2001* in the preceding month, where the decision or function relates to a procurement worth more than \$250,000, and where the decision was made without a business case, economic appraisal, or similar evaluation that credibly demonstrated that the benefits of the procurement exceeded the cost;
 - (b) the written record of each such decision worth more than \$5 million, as required under section 8(5), with appropriate redactions for private or commercial-in-confidence information (noting the relevant Minister must make unredacted records available to any interested Member, on the condition any sensitive information is used responsibly); and
 - (c) a statement from the responsible Minister for each such decision worth more than \$5 million, stating the basis by which they are satisfied the procurement represents value for money; and
- (2) any Member may take note of any documents tabled under this motion on the next day of sitting.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.11): I move:

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

“(1) orders the Chief Minister to table:

- (a) by 30 May 2025: all post-implementation review summary reports, for Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects, which were finalised between 1 January 2024 and 31 March 2025;
- (b) by the final business day of each month:
 - (i) all post-implementation review summary reports for Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects which have been finalised in the preceding month;
 - (ii) a statement including the summary of the approved business case(s), the project timing key dates, the final cost of the project and the post-completion asset performance metrics, for each tabled report which does not include this information; and
 - (iii) a list of any Tier 1 or Tier 2 projects where a decision has been taken not to produce a post-implementation review or a summary report, including an explanation for the decision; and
- (2) agrees that any Member may take note of any documents tabled under this motion on the next day of sitting”.

Very briefly, I have moved this amendment in order to facilitate consideration of the motion today. I understand that the amendment has the support of all sides, following some extensive discussions across the three main parties in this place, and will help to improve some of the transparency around major projects.

I note the approach today is a little unusual procedurally, but it is leading to a positive outcome. I note that the Manager of Government Business has also been involved in these discussions, and I acknowledge our appreciation of her assistance in securing this outcome.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.12): This motion is a product of significant back and forth between my office, the Chief Minister’s Office and Mr Rattenbury’s office. It has been a little messy, but we are all still learning and we are working together really well. I have been struck by the good faith that has been shown by all sides, and I am really grateful for that—thank you.

This is a different Assembly to the last one—there is no doubt about it—and I appreciate that it is a lot more work than in the past and operates at a higher degree of uncertainty. But I believe that we are securing better outcomes for the community, and that is very welcomed.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 5

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.13): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 5, dated 30 April 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR CAIN: Scrutiny report No 5 contains the committee’s comments on six bills and 16 pieces of subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 1

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.14): I present the following report:

Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Inquiry into the Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill*

2025, dated 5 May 2025, including a dissenting report (Ms Tough) together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

This report was circulated to members pursuant to standing order 254C.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the first report by the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services for the Eleventh Assembly. The Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025 seeks to amend the Planning Act 2023 to classify public housing and public health facilities as Territory Priority Projects, which affects the ability of third parties to make appeals to ACAT.

The inquiry received 38 submissions and held two days of public hearings. The committee has made five recommendations. As well as recommendations to improve the development approvals process resourcing for ACAT, the committee also recommends that the Assembly not pass the bill. I would like to thank everyone who participated in this inquiry, particularly our secretariat who did a lot of work under very tight time pressures. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I would now like to speak in my capacity as the Greens spokesperson for planning and Member for Ginninderra. This bill has an admirable goal: to increase public housing. But the bill the government has put up will not actually achieve that. It may decrease social and community housing. It could do other harm as well.

The objectives of the bill are clear. The explanatory material and government witnesses say that this bill intends to address the housing crisis and lead to more public housing. The material and government also say the bill intends to ensure public health facilities can also be declared Territory Priority Projects. These are sound goals and everyone shares them. But the powers to do these things already exist, and so this bill does not take us forward.

This bill will remove social and community housing from the provisions for territory priority process. That might make the housing crisis worse. The bill will not give us more public housing than if the government already built it going through the existing process they have, a process that has sat on the books since November 2023 and has not yet been used.

The Planning Act already allows the government to declare high-priority projects like health facilities and public, social and community housing as Territory Priority Projects. To do this, two ministers need to agree that it is a priority. It needs to be notified on the Planning Authority's website for 15 days and the minister must consider any written comments made by the community. Then the minister must put the issue to the Assembly so the Assembly can agree it is a priority. This is a clear chain of accountability and consultation. Once a project has passed through these steps it is a territory priority, and it is no longer subject to third-party appeals in ACAT. That is the existing process in 218. The government can use it. They have had it since November 2023, but they have not used it yet. Instead, they have put up this bill.

The bill before our committee bypasses the 218 process that I just described. Instead, it lists public housing and health facilities directly as a priority. There is no need for two ministers to agree on it and take responsibility. There is no need for public notification. There is no need to read comments made by people who found out in time and managed to lodge within the 15 days. There is no need for Assembly scrutiny.

The bill put up also removes social and community housing from the Planning Act. It removes community and social housing from the existing section 218 process, and it does not add it back in to the new process. A lot of witnesses were very concerned about that. Back when the Planning Act was passed in 2023, the Assembly made it clear we wanted to include social and community housing as a territory priority. Social and community housing were listed in the explanatory material and in the act itself. If we pass this bill, it means the Assembly has changed our mind and decided that, in a housing crisis, community and social housing are no longer territory priorities. I cannot in good conscience do that.

There are other problems with the bill. We heard a lot about the need for community consultation. It is interesting that the government did not consult on this bill except with their own agencies. They did not talk to the community or to the housing experts or to the community housing organisations. The only external consultation that appears to have been run on this bill was by our committee. Early consultation leads to a better outcome, both for law and for policy. I wonder if the government would have put up a different bill, and a better bill, if they consulted on the draft.

We heard that Housing ACT used to run a lot of consultation. They prided themselves on this. The data backs that up. Housing ACT told us they do not run consultation on projects anymore because they are not required to do so and they are not resourced to do so. They could not say whether consultation would lead to better outcomes. They could not say if consultation would lead to better design and fewer appeals. But they did tell us that each appeal costs them at least \$50,000.

We heard a lot of examples of why you need to consult, including from the housing sector itself. The Property Council told us that good developers always run pre-DA consultation, regardless of whether or not they are required to. Some government agencies do it frequently, like the SLA. So do many private sector developers. There is a reason to consult. I will run through the example that stands out most clearly from the evidence. But there are many more examples in the report and in the submissions.

Two public housing residents in O'Connor told us that Housing ACT did not consult with them on the design of the new public housing in their street. They were sad about that because they have lived experience and have great feedback to help in the design. They told us that Housing ACT's design did not comply with TCCS standards. Housing ACT's design involved putting 33 bins from other people onto the property of these two public housing residents. Those two people were worried that they would have strangers traipsing through their property every week for the rest of their lives. One of them is visually impaired and feels particularly vulnerable. Thankfully, a better design solution has now been found, but it highlights the problems you get with a model that has no consultation on it. That solution would not have come up if they had just spoken to the public housing residents and the people in that street.

We heard about planning decisions that caused permanent problems in the community. One involves Brindabella Christian College and the car park they built that ACAT found was not compliant. That car park causes endless angst for the community and means children cannot walk or ride safely to their local public school.

There are many examples of poor and noncompliant decisions that should not have been made. The committee noted findings about Housing ACT programs and projects from the ACT Ombudsman, from ACAT and from the ACT Auditor-General. The committee said it would be unwise to assume that the ACT government will not make any mistakes on planning or public housing decisions.

We heard about how much the ACT needs more public, social and community housing. Housing and community groups like ACTCOSS, the Salvation Army, Community Housing Canberra and the YWCA all told us this. We also heard it from community groups who work primarily for another purpose, like the Conservation Council, Friends of Grasslands and the Environmental Defenders Office. We also heard it from the community. Witness after witness told us that they want more public, community and social housing in their area, and they have been asking government for it.

The ISCCC has asked government for years whether there will be public housing in East Lake after the redevelopment and whether government will guarantee existing public housing tenants can stay there. I have asked the same question many times. We are all still waiting for the answer.

The government told us repeatedly that the community attaches a stigma to public housing and objects to it in principle. I did not see that in the evidence. I heard about community members welcoming public housing residents in their street with barbecues and gardening bees. I heard about public and private housing neighbours sharing veggies and strawberries with one another as their kids grew up together. I heard about community members asking government repeatedly when they were going to put new public housing tenants in an empty home or on a vacant block in their suburb.

We also heard conflicting evidence about DA appeals and whether existing powers in the act will work. This came from many places, but the starkest example is the conflicting evidence we heard from the government's own witnesses. The planning minister told us that public housing DAs are overrepresented in ACAT appeals and that nearly 95 per cent of appeals of public housing projects have come from a small number of inner north and south districts. But, in giving evidence, an ACT government directorate official said:

Under the Growing and Renewing Program, until the end of March 2025, we have lodged around 219 development applications. Only 15 of those have been appealed to ACAT. Of those projects, so that is 15 projects, we have had to redesign, following consideration by ACAT, to the extent that we have lost seven dwellings and one bedroom. It is a small proportion of the program. So I think there is something right in the settings of the program if the number of appeals to ACAT are that small, and then the number of successful appeals are smaller still.

Her evidence suggests that around only seven per cent of public housing DAs are appealed, and she told us that the settings are right as they are. The planning minister

later confirmed that there have been only two public housing DAs lodged under the new system since November 2023. It is really hard to reconcile those different stories: appeals out of control, appeals that are small in number, and two appeals in 18 months.

ACAT figures were not being reported in an open and accurate manner. ACAT decisions that led to mediation and redesign have been conflated by government witnesses with ACAT decisions that dismissed an appeal outright. We asked ACAT for clear data, and ACAT said they are not resourced to provide it. That is fair enough, but, if we do not have the data and if we are given these conflicting stories, how can we possibly understand the problem?

The planning minister told us he could not use the existing section 218 process to declare public, social and community housing as a territory priority. He spoke about administrative problems. Exactly what those problems are was not made clear to me on the committee. The planning minister said he needs to declare, notify and consult on individual projects, but that is not specified under the act. On the other hand, the health minister told us the administration is fine. She said she consults on designs and she knows how to do this. I would encourage the planning minister to chat to the health minister about her processes and learn from them. Our committee has made some recommendations about how to reduce any administration involved. I am certain that, if our different government ministers put their heads together, they can come up with a process that works really well.

The planning minister also spoke about technical problems with section 218. These were also not clearly explained. I still do not quite understand what the problems are. We did not see an amendment to address the technical problems that were raised. That amendment would have been an amendment to section 218, not the amendment that was put up. It is also contradicted by the health minister, who tells us that she can use section 218 as it is. I will quote from the health minister's evidence now. She said:

I am confident that we would be able to declare a TPP under the existing provision ... My expectation is that that we would be declaring upcoming health facilities as territory priority projects ... It would be my expectation that we would use the territory priority projects process ... obviously, there is a mechanism under section 218 of the act that could be used.

There is one clear piece of evidence on which all witnesses agreed: the ACAT process is not working well for planning. Richard Johnston summed it up. He said:

... nobody likes going to ACAT. Nobody wins there, except the lawyers.

Our committee has made some recommendations about that, too, and we look forward to seeing constructive solutions from government in that area.

Evidence from multiple witnesses told us that the biggest barrier to building more public housing is that government is not building more public housing. Housing stock has decreased over the past few decades. Many witnesses, including ACTCOSS, confirmed that the government's current targets, even if those targets are met, will take us backwards compared to population growth. This is the single biggest barrier. If we want more public housing, the government needs to fund and build more public housing.

There are some other critical problems in the bill. The committee asked the government about concerns raised by witnesses in waiving environmental appeal rights and First Nations cultural appeal rights without the protections offered in the existing section 218 of public notification and Assembly oversight. The government did not appear to have considered the issue in depth. I do not think that is good enough. When we are making planning decisions, we need to take into account the environment and First Nations cultural rights. It is important.

I am really looking forward to working with Labor, the Liberals and the Independent parties on constructive solutions that address the housing crisis. I am pleased that Mr Rattenbury has announced that he will bring forward some amendments that address the problems raised by government that were not actually addressed by the bill. I share the community's view that we want more public, community and social housing and we want it near good services, schools and public transport.

There are many problems with this bill, but I think the biggest one is that it will not make the housing crisis better. It removes community and social housing from the act; it does not reinsert community and social housing anywhere else. There is a much better way to address technical problems with section 218 and administrative problems. Fix that section, deal with your administration, get together with your colleagues and work out how the system can work.

I encourage others to read the full report and the evidence that the committee received.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.28): I rise today to talk about my dissenting report as a member of the committee. Firstly, I echo what Ms Clay said and thank the committee secretariat for their work on this inquiry. We have quite a number of other inquiries and work going on at the moment, and we had school holidays, Easter and Anzac Day. It has been a really busy time for the committee, so I thank them for their work. I also thank my fellow committee members. While we did not agree on everything, I appreciate the collegiate nature of all meetings and discussions that we had. It made writing a dissenting report a little easier.

In my dissenting report I make two recommendations: firstly, that the Assembly pass the bill; and, secondly, that it be expanded to include social and community housing projects. Throughout the inquiry, the committee heard evidence of third-party appeals being used to stop public, social and community housing in Canberra, which creates delays and uncertainties for developers, including not-for-profit organisations and ACT Housing. If we want to see more public housing, more social housing and more affordable housing, we need to make the process faster and provide more certainty to developers, including government, so our most vulnerable community members have a home. While I am proud of this government bill, I would love to see it expanded to include social and community housing providers.

Passing this bill will help increase the public housing stock in Canberra. Expanding it to social and community housing will increase the housing stock even further. As a government, we want to see 5,000 more public, social and affordable homes available by 2030. To be on track to do that, we need to speed up the process and have certainty that, when a development application is lodged, the proposed dwellings will actually be

built and become homes for people to live in. This is a commonsense approach to doing that. The Housing Australia Future Fund, for example, relies on social and community housing providers to help build more houses across Australia, but we need to support the builders and the developers to do that.

During the hearings, the committee heard evidence from social housing provider YWCA Canberra and their experience of trying to build homes for women escaping violence, which, to me, seems like a pretty good development idea. For the YWCA, it turned into a nightmare. It took years and cost them an estimated \$350,000, which would have been enough for them to buy another one-bedroom apartment. So a family has missed out on housing because of this process. The YWCA gave evidence that they were subjected to harassment and lies throughout the DA process, from accusations they were going to build an IKEA in Ainslie to lies that they did not own the land and had no right to build on it, and that they would destroy a local park in doing so. There was no truth in it. The YWCA undertook community consultation throughout and was still subjected to harassment, and ultimately a time-consuming and costly third-party ACAT appeal that saw their proposed 16-dwelling development reduced to 10 dwellings. So, again, another six women missed out on housing in our community.

If social and community housing had automatic TPP status, this situation would not have happened. We do not want to see a repeat of it or a repeat of the numerous public housing developments that are held up by third-party appeals. Evidence was provided by social and community housing providers that they are nervous about housing developments because of the unknown cost and timeframes involved. We need to be able to provide developers with certainty. We need to build more housing to reduce our public housing waitlist and help people in our community have a home. Also, I feel for the future tenants of these homes, with the knowledge that people in their community had actively worked to stop them from living there. How unwelcome that would make them feel, with the stigma already in society around being in public and community housing.

In conclusion, I commend the bill to the Assembly and still hope that there will be a pathway forward for us to build more housing—more public housing, more social housing and more affordable housing—in our community.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.32): While I am the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, I rise today in my role as the Independent member for Murrumbidgee to speak in support of the findings of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services in its inquiry into the Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025.

We agree that building more public housing is critically important, but democracy is not about shortcuts; it is about process and it is about listening. And, yes, sometimes it is messy, but it is far better to work through community concerns to build trust than to cut the community out of any dialogue or opportunity to appeal government decisions.

This bill, while well-intentioned in its aim to accelerate the delivery of public housing and health infrastructure, ultimately presents a false choice. It suggests that we must choose between faster development and community rights. But, as the committee has rightly found, this is not the case. The bill proposes to bypass the existing territory

priority project declaration process under section 218 of the Planning Act 2023. In doing so, it removes essential democratic safeguards, public consultation, Assembly oversight and the transparency that underpins public trust.

The committee found no compelling evidence that third-party appeals are a major barrier to public housing delivery. Instead of removing community input and legislative scrutiny, we should improve the system we have. That is why I strongly support recommendation 5—that the ACT government identify areas where the development application process can be streamlined. This is a constructive and forward-looking recommendation.

The committee heard from a wide range of stakeholders, developers, housing providers and community groups who agree that the planning system is too slow, too complex and too costly. Streamlining the development application process would benefit not just public housing but also all forms of housing and infrastructure. But let's be clear: efficiency must not come at the cost of democracy. We need a planning system that is efficient so that projects can proceed without unnecessary delay, transparent so that the underlying assumptions and criteria informing decisions are visible, and inclusive so that the voices of residents are heard and respected. That means investing in early and meaningful community consultation, ensuring that the Planning Authority and Housing ACT are properly resourced, and reforming ACAT processes to reduce delays without removing appeal rights.

The committee's report is a thoughtful and balanced response to a complex issue. It recognises the urgency of building more public housing, but not at the expense of democratic safeguards or community trust. Let's not weaken our planning laws in the name of expediency; instead, let's strengthen our systems, streamline our processes and ensure that every development, especially those for our most vulnerable, is done right, with the community not against it. In a healthy democracy, the ends do not justify the means. The process matters and the people matter.

I commend the chair and the committee for its work and urge the Assembly to adopt the report's recommendations in full.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.35): I speak initially as a member of the committee. I thank our wonderful secretariat for going above and beyond to make sure the committee report was produced and tabled yesterday, on the due date. I also thank committee members. It is a very collegiate environment that I have found myself in after stepping into the role Ms Lee originally occupied while she went on leave. It was a delight to be part of a committee that worked pretty cooperatively, even though there were some points of differences, as we see with the report.

Now I speak in my role as shadow minister for planning. During the hearings, the case from the government for the bill was not very convincing, I have to say. As Ms Clay, in particular, has pointed out, we received contradictory evidence. The drive for the bill seems to be that ACAT is holding up public housing and appeals are holding up public housing, and yet there are very few. I think the number taken to ACAT was two in one of the financial years of recent times. And yet there is power within the Planning Act, since the new act was passed, to allow the government to declare a significant project a territory priority project.

I must say that the minister's response about why the government had not used the power for social housing was pretty unconvincing. He said, "There are deficiencies," and that was it. In giving the benefit of the doubt to the minister, recommendation 2 said, "If there are deficiencies, then perhaps you could look at legislation to fix any so-called deficiencies." In terms of the processes that await an appeal in ACAT, there is a recommendation touching on looking at the ACAT process and seeing whether there are any ways in which that can be reviewed and better supported, so that third-party appeal rights, if exercised, are run efficiently and quickly.

I am not trying to be too critical, but this bill smacks of lazy policy and a lack of transparency, as has been pointed out by two of the speakers. With the DPP declaration, there is a transparent and open process that the community can be aware of—and that this Assembly can be aware of and speak to—whereas a blanket exemption in legislation puts it under the covers, so to speak, and we would not always know what was really going on. Is what they classify something as, such as a TPP, just in the hands of the director and, hence, it just goes through?

So I think the bill reflects lazy policy, and the government should do better. I hope it takes to heart the five recommendations presented by this committee and puts some real action behind its own planning agenda. I do not think any member in this house would oppose a speedier and more comprehensive public housing package being provided to our community. I believe none of us in this place would want to hold up public housing being provided to our community when needed. The government has the tools available to ensure that happens.

There are many other factors involved in the lack of supply of public housing over quite a period of time, I must say. Obviously, that is in the hands of the government. I really do hope they take to heart these recommendations and bring about better outcomes for the community that are actually more transparent for all of us.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.40): Yesterday, the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services released a majority report outlining significant flaws in Labor's proposed legislation to remove consultation and Assembly oversight when public housing projects in Canberra are built without third-party appeal rights. The report's findings are a disappointing setback in making public housing priority projects. In fact, as my colleague Ms Clay identified in her speech, the bill will not provide reprieve from the housing crisis. The bill, as it is currently drafted, removes the note in the act that explicitly includes social and community housing as part of the territory priority process. That means that, if the bill passes, arguably, community and social housing will no longer be considered territory priorities. This is the antithesis of the importance we should be putting on the housing crisis. We cannot change our mind now and decide that, in a housing crisis, community and social housing are no longer territory priorities. This is an unacceptable backflip that will have a real-world impact on the lives of Canberrans.

I have already issued a public statement saying that the Greens will move amendments to the bill to make sure the Assembly can pass their proposal to make public, social and community homes priority projects. We will be coordinating with all members in the

Assembly, but particularly the government, to pass this legislation for the benefit of Canberrans across the city.

I thank the majority of the committee for producing a report that highlights key practical steps the ACT Assembly needs to take to get this done and to get public, community and social housing identified as priority projects. The report has underlined the need for the government, in cooperation with the crossbench, to go back to the drawing board and come together with a path forward to ensure we can make public housing priority projects.

At the last election, the Greens came to the table with an ambitious plan to build more public housing in this city. We still consider that the best way to increase public housing is build more of it. That has been the key issue and that is why we took that policy to the election. We are committed to making public, social and community housing priorities, alongside good community consultation measures to make sure public housing tenants live in homes they actually want to live in.

We should be using social, community and public housing to provide housing for more Canberrans, especially vulnerable people. In good faith, we cannot support legislation that could operate to have the opposite impact, and that is why we will accept the majority of the recommendations of the committee—made up of Liberals, Greens, Labor and the Independent, Ms Carrick—to chart a multipartisan pathway forward towards making public housing priority projects in this city.

Housing is a human right. I have already introduced legislation to enshrine the right to adequate housing into our Human Rights Act. This, together with our future amendments to the bill, will ensure public, social and community homes are priority projects, and it will demonstrate that, with Greens on the crossbench, we can work with Labor to make public housing priority projects.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Report 1

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.43): I present the following report:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24*, dated 29 April 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the first report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the Eleventh Assembly. The committee began the inquiry on 3 December 2025. The committee held over 20 hours of public hearings. Witnesses took 88 questions on notice. As the

committee's first inquiry, it was an opportunity for members to dive into the complex areas of social policy that fall within our remit. The 50 recommendations address a range of areas including health, education, the community sector, housing and youth justice. The committee has sought to make recommendations that will improve the way social policies are designed, funded, implemented and evaluated.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank each minister and official who appeared at public hearings for their assistance to the committee, alongside those officials who assisted in answering the large number of questions taken on notice during the hearings or lodged on notice afterwards. The committee looks forward to the government's response to its recommendations and the opportunity to seek further updates across a range of areas in the next annual reports inquiry later this year. I thank the other members of the committee, our Deputy Chair Ms Barry, Mr Hanson, Miss Nuttall and Ms Tough for their hard work during the course of the inquiry, and I also thank the secretariat for this. I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.45): I rise to speak to the report. Firstly, in my capacity as the deputy chair, I would like to thank the secretariat for doing an incredible job and to thank my colleagues and members of that committee for the collegiate way we worked through all 50 recommendations. I would now like to speak to the report as a member of this Assembly and as shadow minister for community services.

This was obviously my first annual reports hearing, which gave me an insight into the internal workings of this current government and its bureaucracy. I would encourage all members in this place to read the committee's report, which identifies a considerable number of issues that are important to the Canberra community. All 50 recommendations are really important.

One thing that struck me during the process is the way the government has set up its programs of work. Programs are characterised by lofty aspirational goals, which play well into media bites but do not readily provide clear guidance for public sector managers about what or how to tackle problems. Operational controls generally focus on counting the number of activities, meetings or reports generated, without any accurate linkage to how those activities contribute to the achievement of the lofty goal.

I particularly noted the absence of evaluation in program design. As many of us in this place would know, evaluation is important, as it helps to keep a program focused on its objectives and helps managers decide whether a particular activity is helping the attainment of that objective. This process also enables government to assess whether the investments are leading to effective outcomes, ensuring that taxpayers receive value for money. Value for money is particularly important when there is a limited pool of money but the needs of the community continue to grow.

In the absence of a clear and practical program objective and a lack of evaluation results, programs are just a continuation of doing things the way we have always done them, where the only possible response when the problem being addressed gets worse is to spend more money and achieve less. It is no surprise then that many government programs built on this faulty design keep failing to shift the dial. We see this in practical examples around programs to address domestic and family violence, despite the hard work of many ACT public servants. I see this as a problem of leadership. Objectives

should be set by ministers and provide clear guidance. Programs need genuine evaluation so that they can be adjusted, changed or scrapped if they are not working.

Transparency is critical to maintaining public confidence in the government, which this government would have you believe it is an example of. Sadly, though, the community found numerous examples of lack of transparency in CSD, ranging from extremely poor responses to FOI requests and decisions not to publish directorate work across gender equality strategies and action plans. An example of poor program design and the lack of transparency highlighted by the committee was the delivery of domestic violence counselling services for multicultural communities, which was lauded by the government. However, the committee found that, in practice, the referral pathways were closed. What is the point of having a program if it is not open for users and the community sector to use? This just raises and dashes expectation and is particularly damaging for vulnerable people.

This was a common theme across the board when we looked at the funding for the community sector. Officials advised that CSD understands the reality faced by the sector, which is always oversubscribed, and that there is often demand that we cannot meet. I am pleased that the committee endorsed my recommendations to adequately fund the community sector to meet demand. When government prioritises budget allocation, underfunding community services has severe consequences for vulnerable individuals. It is a choice with harsh outcomes. Adequate funding is essential to ensure that those in need receive the support they deserve. It is important that the government has the needs of our most vulnerable at the forefront of its mind during budget consideration and fund community sectors, housing and homelessness services based on needs.

Government also needs to provide clear and timely insight into program changes and the decision-making process. This transparency enables the sector and individuals to prepare and to adapt. By doing so, government can better support the needs of those in need and to improve the overall effectiveness of programs. For carers, for example, we identified that details of the implementation of the Carers Recognition Card is important. For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, a roadmap for the transfer of Boomanulla Oval and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm's community control, including dates of transfer and when that will take place, is long overdue.

The government also needs to create appropriate cultures in its workplace to ensure ministerial accountability. The culture of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre is clearly skewed towards security, rather than the needs of children and young people in detention. A culture of avoidance of scrutiny will amplify and demonstrate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that we are not concerned or serious about addressing the issues that face them. This was exemplified by the denial of the Children and Young People Commissioner's access to Bimberi, giving a narrow window to control visits. The decision to employ unqualified and inexperienced youth workers at Bimberi also raises red flags. Concerns about the lack of appropriate parenting and sexual exploitation of young people and children in residential and out-of-home care should be concerning to Canberrans.

In closing, I really appreciate the opportunity presented by this committee process and the opportunity to reflect on the major challenges we face in reforming governance in

the ACT. This is a big task but one that the Canberra Liberals are up to, to improve outcomes for all Canberrans.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.52): I rise briefly as a member of the social policy committee, and I, too, want to thank the secretariat and fellow members for the work we did together to pull together the 50 recommendations in this report. I think there are some good recommendations in there to help improve government policy, going forward, in a number of policy areas. The remit of the social policy committee is broad and, as such, the report touches on a number of areas across multiple directorates and ministers, and I want to express my gratitude for everyone who appeared in front of the committee.

I do, however, want to touch on one recommendation, recommendation 12, about the Safer Families Levy. The Safer Families Levy was originally introduced on 1 July 2016 to provide community support and to raise awareness of domestic and family violence in the ACT community. The levy provides a partial offset to the ACT government's broader investment to address domestic, family and sexual violence. Funding for all non-frontline ACT government positions was moved out of the levy in the 2024-25 budget, which means that all levy funding will be directed to frontline services to provide support to the ACT community. Recommendation 12 of the report, however, states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the Safer Families Levy, including all income and expenses.

While there is a need for the collection and use of the levy to be fully transparent, and the Auditor-General's inquiry into the Safer Families Levy recommended clearer and transparent reporting, the report just above the recommendation includes evidence provided by the minister, Dr Paterson, to the Assembly on 19 March 2025, that:

It would not be practical or cost-effective to create a discrete fund.

The minister went on to say that, although it is not practical to establish a separate account, she is "dedicated to ensuring expenditure of the levy is fully transparent and targeted to where it is most needed".

So, while I appreciate my committee colleagues wanting to make sure the fund is transparent, as recommended by the Auditor-General—and I do, too—I do not think this recommendation is necessarily an effective one to achieve that. However, I fully support anything we can do as an Assembly and as a community to address the family and domestic and sexual violence that is happening around us.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.55): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation. Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to

inquire into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT. The committee will examine access and barriers to community sport participation in the ACT across a range of areas, including: implementation of the ACT government's Sport and Recreation Strategy 2023-2028; the range, management, location and quality of sporting facilities; government initiatives, funding and policies to support community sports; and opportunities to improve participation rates for under-represented demographics.

Submissions for this inquiry are open until Friday, 26 September 2025. The committee hopes to hear from a wide range of stakeholders, including sports clubs, individuals and peak bodies.

Social Policy—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.56): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to a new inquiry. Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into male suicide rates. I preface this statement by acknowledging that the issues the committee will address during this inquiry are complex and may cause distress for some people. The committee has included on its website information about organisations that are available for people to contact, if they are affected by the issues raised in this inquiry.

Annual cause of death data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics last year showed that Australian men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women. Each of these deaths represents a life lost and a loved one who will be missed. Given the significance of this statistic, the committee will consider the factors contributing to male suicide rates in the ACT, including engagement with health services, risk-taking behaviours, social and emotional development, and educational outcomes and participation. The inquiry will also examine ways to promote positive health behaviours among boys and men, including increased access to mental health services, socialisation opportunities and emotional supports.

Submissions for this inquiry are open until 6 June 2025, and the committee hopes to hear from a wide range of stakeholders.

Statements by members

Macquarie—swimming pool

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.57): I rise to speak on a matter that has caused me deep concern and concern to the community of Belconnen, and that is the reported permanent closure and potential demolition of the Big Splash water park in Macquarie. This is a deeply disappointing development. Big Splash has been a long-treasured part of Canberra's summer landscape, a place full of memories for families across generations.

What is more concerning is the lack of public consultation or transparency about this decision. Belconnen residents feel blindsided, and rightly so. The current state of the Big Splash site is totally unacceptable. The government has turned a blind eye to the present owners allowing the site to deteriorate into an eyesore. Windows have been smashed;

graffiti is scrawled across walls; and debris, from wheelie bins to fire hydrants, has been dumped into empty pools. The main pool now resembles a dumping ground.

I urge the government to be transparent with the community, to explain how this was allowed to happen and to seriously consider all options to keep the water park open. Belconnen residents and, indeed, residents from around Canberra do not want apartments at the Big Splash site; they want a wonderful water park.

Transport Canberra—bus services

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.59): I am rising this evening to share a statement sent to me by Nick from Gordon, to be brought to the attention of the Assembly. With his permission, I share the following.

My name is Nick. I am 16 and live in Gordon. I am concerned about the future viability of Canberra's bus networks. Despite numerous leaps forward by the ACT government, it still seems like there is more to be done. Sunday and public holiday bus timetables see regular routes run every two hours, which is not workable for people without cars, such as myself. Bus interchanges such as the one in the Tuggeranong Town Centre feel dodgy and uncomfortable, scaring potential users away, and some suburbs, such as Macarthur, Fadden and Gilmore, are poorly served by bus routes.

Altogether, this leads to an experience that could be improved considerably. I think all of these are solvable problems. Adding more services when they are needed, getting more transport officers at interchanges and looking at how suburbs are served by certain routes are all achievable and would make using public transport easier and better for many. Public transport is crucial as it provides for those without a car, eases congestion and helps reduce carbon emissions, among other benefits. When we have these problems solved, usage should hopefully go up, which benefits everyone.

Dunlop—shops—amenities

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.00): I was really pleased in April to join the Dunlop Community Micro-Forest, and my colleague Mr Cain was also there on that day. It was so good to see many people out at that planting. The Climate Factory has been helping the community put together these micro-forests. I think Dunlop is particularly excited about this. There is not a lot out there in Dunlop. They have a supermarket and not too much else out there. We had multiple shifts all day long planting that out. It is going to be absolutely amazing when it grows up.

We are very much looking forward to Labor building the toilet block that was in their election commitments some time ago. Dunlop is very much looking forward to that. There is a playground there and the micro-forest there; so that would be good. It would be great if we could work out if there is a way, when we are doing those works, to see if there is any way to give power to The Coffee Scroll at the same time.

It is clear that the Dunlop community is very much coming together in this area. It is a real gathering point already, with the supermarket and the coffee van. With a micro-forest there and a playground as well, that really is going to be a hub for the whole area.

Health—influenza vaccinations

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.01): Last week I had the pleasure of attending a free community flu vaccination event, hosted by the Immunisation Coalition, right here in the ACT at Albert Hall. This initiative offered flu vaccines to anyone who needed one—no cost, no catch. It is a perfect example of preventative healthcare done right: accessible, inclusive and grounded in community care. In a time when health services are stretched and illnesses can have quite a wide rippled effect across families, workplaces and schools, something as simple as a flu shot can make a huge difference.

It was also great to be joined by my colleagues Fiona Carrick and Laura Nuttall—we all turned up at the same time by accident—both of whom led by example and rolled up their sleeves on the day as well. Their presence reflected a shared commitment to public health and the wellbeing of all Canberrans. Events like this remind us that investing in public health is not just smart policy; it is the compassionate commonsense thing to do. These kinds of grassroot partnerships between healthcare professionals, advocates and the community are how we keep Canberra safe, healthy and resilient.

I want to thank the Immunisation Coalition and all the healthcare workers involved for their incredible work. I hope they come back again next year and the years to follow. I urge all Canberrans to get their flu shot, whether it is from their local pharmacy, a GP or in their workplace.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

St Vincent de Paul Society—CEO Sleepout

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.03): I would like to take a moment to share an initiative that I have personally committed to this year—something that has already proven to be both humbling and deeply powerful. In June, I will participate in my first Vinnie's CEO Sleepout, a national fundraiser event that supports Australians who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.

It is a small act, spending one night out in the cold, but it symbolises something much bigger—standing in solidarity with people in our community who face these conditions every night, not by choice but because of systemic issues and immense needs.

When I first signed up, I set myself a fundraising target of \$4,000. I am proud and deeply grateful to share that—with the support of my friends, family, colleagues and community members—I have surpassed that goal, and I am well ahead in surpassing my goal of \$8,000. Every dollar raised helps to ensure that Vinnies can continue its essential services, and it is a way of providing shelter, meals and wraparound services for people in need in Canberra.

To put it into perspective, \$4,000 can fund 16 individual support programs. It can provide 42 nights of safe shelter, and it can deliver 168 warm meals. These are not just numbers; they are lifelines. There is a person behind every number. It is a bed. It is a meal for someone—someone who might be experiencing a crisis, escaping violence, struggling with mental health issues, or simply unable to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Homelessness is not inevitable. It is not a failure of individual character. It is sometimes a failure of system, of policy and sometimes of compassion. But it is also a challenge that we can address, if we are willing to respond with empathy, with coordinated support and with strong, long-term investment and community partnerships. The solutions are there. We just need to reach out, and we just need to grab them.

I am also delighted to see that I will not be alone. I will be joined by Mr Mark Parton, the Speaker, and by my colleague Mr Emerson. I would encourage everybody to get involved. Please donate to us, if you can, and cheer us on.

ACT Ambulance Service—appointment of Chief Officer

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) (6.05): I rise to formally acknowledge and warmly welcome Mr David Dutton as the new Chief Officer of the ACT Ambulance Service. His is a true homecoming. David began his career with ACTAS nearly 30 years ago, as a student paramedic, and now returns to lead the service he helped to build. Over the years, he has worked across every aspect of ambulance operations—on the front line, in clinical education, support services and executive leadership.

David has spent the past 12 years with New South Wales Ambulance, including as Deputy Commissioner, where he led major reforms and oversaw one of the largest emergency response operations in the country. He played key roles during events like the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race disaster, the 2003 Canberra bushfires and the 2014 Lindt Café siege, bringing operational skill, calm leadership and compassion to some of our nation's most challenging moments.

As we work to better support the ACT's first responders with the facilities, resources and infrastructure they need, I look forward to partnering with Mr Dutton to advance the shared priorities of ACTAS. Together we are committed to delivering a service that is not only representative and responsive but also grounded in excellence.

Quality in ACTAS means providing consistent, person-centred care, driven by evidence and innovation, to improve patient outcomes. Equally, safety remains paramount—minimising risk for both patients and staff to ensure care is delivered with confidence, compassion and professionalism. Mr Dutton also champions the mental health and wellbeing of emergency responders—a commitment forged through experience and one that will continue to shape ACTAS under his leadership.

I also acknowledge Mr Patrick Meere, who has served as Interim Chief Officer with professionalism and care during this transition. We thank him for his steady guidance. To Mr Dutton, I say welcome back. Your leadership will strengthen ACTAS and

support the wellbeing of our community. We look forward to working with you as you begin this next chapter on 12 May.

Canberra grassland earless dragon

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.08): Today I gathered with 80 or so Canberrans who want to save the Canberra earless dragon from extinction. The rally, coordinated by the Conservation Council, had a great turnout, despite a very busy few weeks that have resulted in Australia voting for a more progressive parliament, with heavy shifts away from the right.

A progressive parliament should inspire hope for more action on environmental protections; but, unfortunately, the federal government weakened environmental laws during the week that they called the election. In February, they shelved their own nature-positive laws at the last minute. This is Labor's second chance to uphold their commitment to no new extinctions, and we hope so much that they will take this chance.

We need the federal Labor government to strengthen environmental protections and follow through on that promise of no new extinctions. They already have the power. They could already stop the road. The former federal environment minister agreed to reconsider the approval after she listed the dragon as critically endangered—the last stop before extinction—in 2023. But she did not follow through and she did not make that reconsideration.

We need the new federal environment minister to do that reconsideration and to make that decision with care, with advice from government and community ecologists. We need them to do that with a view to doing all we can to give the dragon the best chance of survival in its own right and for our children.

It is not just the federal Labor government that needs to act urgently; the ACT government can act, too. There are only a handful of earless dragons left in the ACT and, with only one per cent of their habitat remaining, we need to do all we can to protect and support our dragons. They are amazing creatures. They eat spiders and insects, and sometimes they bunk up in the same burrows with spiders and insects.

They are very elusive. We thought they were already extinct because they are so hard to find. They are tiny, weighing less than 10 grams. And they are strong feminists. Their females are really fussy over who they choose to mate with. When you pair that with fragmented, degraded and lost habitats, you face a lot of challenges to get these dragons to thrive in nature. They are amazing creatures, and I want a world that still has dragons in it.

We need the ACT government to restore grasslands across the ACT, to genuinely back the critical, important work that our environmental volunteers are doing, and to progress with that work for tenure-blind management to make sure that, regardless of who is managing the land, it can be used for environmental purposes for the first or second purpose.

It is not enough to conserve our grasslands; we need actively to restore them, connect them and create healthy habitats for our dragons to thrive. We need our government to

work with the landholders and the federal government to find and set aside that land so that it can be used for nature. We will not have enough of the right kind of habitat for our dragons, and for our other critters, if we do not do that.

There is a government breeding program in place. It is great to see that that program is working. It is excellent news, because breeding in captivity does not work with all animals. With the dragon, we need to do that breeding to help increase their numbers. We need to go further and faster with that breeding program, and we need to make sure we are improving the genetic diversity to give those dragons the best chance of survival out in the grasslands.

The Greens met with Canberra Airport Group the other day. I am pleased that the Airport Group will be meeting with Friends of Grasslands shortly. The best way through will always come with good information and good dialogue.

The Airport Group has had this road on their books since the 90s. They have explained to me what the purpose is. It is primarily an alternative entry and exit out of Fairbairn precinct. They have—and this was really good to hear—again recommitted to not undertaking any road works in the sensitive area until the federal environment minister has made the reconsideration of the original approval. It was really good to hear that.

Just the other week, I was with my daughter, and she was experiencing a bit of environmental grief. It was interesting that this rally was organised by a young woman who stood up and explained that she was experiencing environmental grief. I think climate and environmental anxiety and grief are pretty common for all of our young people at this stage. My daughter and I drew a picture of a dragon, and I am hoping that that is not the only way she ever gets to interact with one.

Our children, their children, and their children, deserve better; and nature and the creatures that live on this planet deserve better. We want a world that still has dragons in it. We all have a role to play, and I am very hopeful that together we can save the dragon from extinction.

Planning—Hawker shops

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.12): I rise today to speak about the Hawker Village shops redevelopment, and briefly to address the government's response, as per today's program, to petition 002-25 tabled earlier this year.

First, I would like to acknowledge my colleague Ms Chiaka Barry MLA, who is in the chamber at the moment, for her outstanding work in bringing forward this petition on behalf of the Hawker community. Ms Barry's advocacy and dedication have been instrumental in forcing the government to respond. I commend her for standing up so strongly for residents and businesses.

The Hawker group centre is more than just a set of shops; it is at the heart of the south Belconnen community. It is where people gather, support local businesses and maintain the strong social ties that make Hawker such a special place in which to live.

Today I would like to stress, regarding the future of the Hawker Village shops, the critical importance of genuine community consultation on planning decisions that affect our neighbourhoods. Recent discussions about the proposed redevelopment, led by the Woolworths Group, have caused significant concern amongst many. While I note the government's decision that the current proposal does not meet its strategic objectives or community expectations, the process simply cannot be a back-and-forth negotiation between the government and a large corporate entity, which is the case at the moment.

The community ought to be at the centre of conversations about Hawker Village's future. Their voices must not just be heard; they must be acted upon. Meaningful consultation is not an optional extra; it is essential. It must happen early, openly and transparently. It must respect the character of Hawker, support local businesses, maintain accessible parking and public spaces, and ensure that any redevelopment genuinely enhances the community's way of life.

Residents expect transparency. They deserve timely access to the findings from the government's studies on environmental impacts, contamination risks and parking requirements. They expect that any decision regarding the sale of public land will be made in their best interest, not behind closed doors.

While the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development has acknowledged that the Woolworths proposal in its current form does not meet the government's expectation, the government's response falls far short of what the community deserves. Simply advising Woolworths to revise their proposal behind closed doors is not good enough. It is also not good enough for the government to assure the community that consultation is at the very heart of this and then leave it to Woolworths to talk to the community. That is a role that the government itself should undertake.

The people of Hawker, residents, small business owners and families, deserve a genuine seat at the table, and not be an afterthought. The government's response places far too much emphasis on private negotiations with a corporate developer and not nearly enough on open and transparent engagement with the community who will be directly impacted by this development.

This is public land. This is a community hub. This should not be treated as just another commercial deal. The government has stated that it is conducting planning studies, environmental assessments and parking surveys. While these are necessary steps, there has been no clear commitment that the findings will be made public, and no commitment that it will undertake a genuine, community-led planning process. Too often, we have seen such studies finalised in the shadows, decisions quietly made, and the community being left with no voice. The people of Hawker and south Belconnen deserve better.

I call on the government to guarantee that no sale or redevelopment of public land at Hawker will proceed without the government engaging in proper consultation, with the release of all relevant information and a transparent process that puts our community first.

The people of Hawker have built a vibrant, resilient centre. Their voices deserve to be heard, and not just as an afterthought to a commercial exercise. We have a responsibility to protect the soul of our local centre and to listen to the people who know and love those centres best.

I am grateful to many for their advocacy, particularly the Belconnen Community Council and Friends of Hawker Village, and I urge the government to engage directly with our community.

Charles Conder Primary School

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.17): Over the weekend I had the pleasure of joining the wonderful school community of Charles Conder Primary School in their election day barbecue—a classic democracy sausage sizzle, complete with sizzling snags, smiling volunteers and plenty of local spirit. They had democracy sausages, vegetarian options, egg and bacon rolls, a cake stall and even some gluten-free options available. They blew many people away with the ability to pay by tap-and-go.

It was a joyful event, with snags, cakes, dedicated volunteers, friendly conversations and the unmistakable energy of a community that cares deeply for its kids and their future. But it was not just about the sausages, although, I have to say, they were excellent. Parents and carers were also raising awareness of something serious—the need for improved parking around the school. Like many of our public schools, Charles Conder Primary School is growing—almost doubling in the past 10 years. That is a good thing; but, with growth, there are growing pains. Pick-up and drop-off times are becoming increasingly difficult, with congestion and limited safe options, putting unnecessary strain on families, staff and neighbours.

While I ate my democracy sausage and stood outside the school, parents told me about near misses, about children walking through busy car parks unsupervised, and about staff trying to manage traffic, whilst also trying to do their jobs as teachers. The pressure on the school community is immense, and it is not sustainable. This is not a problem that should fall solely on the shoulders of the teachers or the parents to solve. It is something that we, as representatives of the community, must help to address, because every school should be a safe place inside and out.

That is why I am supporting their petition calling for action. The school has set a goal of 1,500 signatures this term. These are parents and carers, a school community, who are not just worried but organised and determined. They are advocating for their kids and their community, and they are doing it with strength, commitment and optimism. When parents come together to protect their kids, when educators go above and beyond every day, when neighbours gather around a sausage sizzle to support one another, it is not just a school community; it is the beating heart of Canberra.

I am pleased to support their petition calling for action, because every child deserves a safe trip to and from school, and every parent should be able to do the school run without risking a near-miss in the car park.

I want to thank the Charles Conder Primary School community, particularly Samantha and Andrea, who were reaching out, and we got this petition up and running last week,

ahead of Saturday, so that we could capitalise on the number of people coming through Charles Conder Primary School. I want to thank them not just for the sausages and the good times on Saturday, but for their strong advocacy. I look forward to collaborating with them in the future.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.20): I had the solemn privilege of attending Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yom HaShoah, at the National Jewish Memorial Centre on 27 April. This year marks 80 years since the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps, the end of World War II, and, with it, the end of the Holocaust. I found it particularly pertinent. At a time when there are fewer direct witnesses of the Holocaust, marking the twilight of what historian Annette Wieviorka calls “the era of the witness”, we must commit ourselves with ever greater gravity to the perpetuation of its memory. It is beholden on us to remember the six million Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to counter antisemitism, racism and all other forms of intolerance that may lead to group targeted violence.

It should also be remembered that the Jews were not the only victims of Nazi persecution. The Nazi German authorities also specifically targeted other groups because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority, such as the Roma, people with disabilities and certain Slavic peoples—in particular, Poles. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological and behavioural grounds, including communists, socialists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and homosexuals. Such ideology did not die with the end of the Second World War, nor was it constrained to only Europe.

To bring it home to the current day here in Canberra, I remind people of recent events: the spray painting of a Nazi swastika and hate speech on the walls of a Buddhist temple in my electorate just last month, and the dissemination of a National Socialist Network flyer in the suburb of Florey—a flyer filled with racism, hate and violent calls. Canberra is not immune, and we must confront the demons within.

Our responsibility goes beyond remembrance. It also entails educating about the causes, consequences and dynamics of such crimes so as to strengthen the resilience of young people against the ideologies of hatred. As genocide and atrocity crimes keep occurring across the world, and as we are witnessing a global rise in antisemitism, Islamophobia and hate speech, this has never been so relevant.

I extend my appreciation to the National Jewish Memorial Centre for inviting me into their space to share this important moment. I thank Dr Simon Holloway, Head of Education, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, who gave an enlightening and very thoughtful speech about those who survived, those who did not and what it means for our understanding of the Holocaust.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.22 pm.