



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

8 April 2025

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 22 April 2025**.

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Tuesday, 8 April 2025

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

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

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

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

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

Legislative Assembly—parliamentary privilege in litigation

Statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER: Members will recall that I made a statement to the Assembly on 4 March 2025 advising that the ACT Supreme Court had granted leave for me to appear as amicus curiae in the matter of Cover v ACT Integrity Commission, and a hearing is listed for later this month.

On a separate but somewhat related matter, members will be aware that proceedings have been brought in the Federal Court by the Hon. Walter Sofronoff KC seeking judicial review of an ACT Integrity Commission investigation report on Operation Juno, which was tabled in this place during the last sitting.

Much the same issues of parliamentary privilege are potentially enlivened and, accordingly, I have made an application to appear as amicus, which will be heard by the court next month, in my understanding.

I have noticed some public reporting on the case over the last week which was not entirely on the money. It is important to remind members and others that I take no position in relation to the underlying merits of the substantive matters that the parties to proceedings are seeking to litigate.

If I am granted status as amicus, my only role is to ensure that the Assembly's powers, privileges and immunities are given due consideration by the courts, and nothing more.

As with the Cover matter, I am to be represented by the ACT Government Solicitor's Office. I will keep members updated as both matters progress.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25

By Mr Cain, from 368 and 697 residents, respectively:

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly:

- a) There is currently a lack of police officers present in the suburbs of Hawker, Page and Scullin.
- b) Residents in these suburbs are experiencing an increase in petty and preventable crimes.
- c) The primary mechanism to solving this issue is increasing the presence of ACT Policing officers in the suburbs of Hawker, Page and Scullin, by promoting more patrols and increased numbers.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the Government to increase the number of ACT Policing officers in Hawker, Page and Scullin, and ensure that regular patrols are provided by police officers on foot and in police vehicles to increase safety for citizens.

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

Shirley Smith High School—priority enrolment area—petition 47-24

By Mr Rattenbury, from 56 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:

Hackett currently is only in the PEA for Campbell High School. Watson, adjacent to Hackett, is in a shared PEA with Campbell, Lyneham and Shirley Smith high schools.

The distance between Hackett and Campbell is approximately 6 km while the distance to Shirley Smith is approximately 8 km. The bike ride to Campbell is not safe. It is on narrow, busy roads, without any dedicated bike lane, while the footpaths are also too narrow, very uneven and constantly cross residential driveways from which cars reverse with low visibility. The school bus service from Hackett to Campbell is on a timetable which is not flexible for many children's morning routines.

In comparison, the bike ride to the light rail to Shirley Smith is on a wide road, in the opposite direction to the morning traffic, and the footpath is straighter, less bumpy, and the residential driveways are more visible. In addition, there is an off-road bike path the whole way to Shirley Smith, safely accessible with two traffic light pedestrian crossings (at Antill and opposite EPIC). This would be an

excellent active travel option especially for older students. Parents could also easily drop children at the corner of Philip Avenue and Northbourne to meet the light rail which runs at more regular intervals.

According to the 2021 Census, the number of young people living in Hackett between 0 and 4 was 176 and 5 and 9 was 226. Including Hackett in the Shirley Smith PEA would not be a significant increase in the possible number of students.

At the same time, it can be expected the Campbell PEA will experience a population increase with the greater density for some of the central suburbs. Given Hackett's proximity and easy commute to Lyneham it has long seemed unreasonable that Hackett is not in the PEA for Lyneham High School. But, as Lyneham High School PEA arrangement has been in place forever, and Lyneham is overcapacity, we accept that Lyneham is not an option.

Including Hackett in the Shirley Smith PEA would be fair, reasonable, convenient and promote active travel and provide greater flexibility to families and children.

Transport options to local high schools:

Distance from Mackenzie Street Hackett (eastern most location) to Campbell High is 6km; to Shirley Smith is 8.2km via Flemington Road and Lyneham High is 4.6km

Bike to Campbell High - there is no bike path, on road or via the fire trail on Mt Ainslie; to Shirley Smith is by off road bike path the whole way; and to Lyneham High is the safest, shortest bike path.

Private Car to Campbell High is in the same direction as morning traffic; to Shirley Smith is opposite morning traffic.

Public Transport to Campbell High is on a suburban school bus available on fixed timetable; to Shirley Smith is by regular light rail at corner of Phillip Avenue (easy car drop off, or bike ride to light rail).

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly:

The suburb of Hackett be included in the Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) for Shirley Smith High School.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—petition 5-25

By Ms Carrick, from 672 residents:

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

The following residents of the Australian Capital Territory draw the attention of the Assembly to the proposed closure of Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre in Rivett.

There is already an acute shortage of respite places in the ACT. The Burrangiri Centre offers a day-care program and short-stay respite for up to three weeks without requiring an ACAT assessment.

Day care programs and respite facilities allow carers' respite so they can support older Canberrans to stay in their homes for as long as possible.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the ACT Government to ensure that the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre remains open until a satisfactory alternative can be found.

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

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.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.05): I want to speak briefly about the petition that I have sponsored on behalf of Dimitri Psihogios, a local fellow who grew up in this part of Belconnen—Hawker, Page and Scullin. He came to me, some 12 months ago, saying he has family members living in the area and he has noticed, and it has been reported to him, growing concerns about preventable crime in that part of south Belconnen.

I want to commend Dimitri, who has been at shopping centres over the last several months—up to six months. I have been supporting him when I can. He has been visiting local shops in that part of south Belconnen, and I want to commend the local shops and businesses who have taken on board this concern for increased police presence in south Belconnen and have had multiple copies of the paper version of this petition signed and handed in.

I was pleased to lodge those yesterday to the secretariat, and as was stated by the clerk just now, my count was that there were 697 signatures on the paper version. Obviously, OLA will do their appropriate scrutiny to check the validity, to make sure there are no duplications and that all the details are in order. The e-petition itself, which is a fixed and closed number, had 368 signatures.

I am very confident that this petition will be referred to the legal affairs committee, and I make it very clear, even though I am the chair of that committee, I am speaking as a member for Ginninderra and not as a committee member.

I will look forward, obviously, to the outcome of the committee's deliberations. Given that it is almost certain that the number of approved signatures on this petition will be over 500, it means that that standing committee must consider the petition and make a decision as to whether an inquiry into it is warranted or otherwise.

I do want to read, for the record, what the petition actually calls for. These are the words provided to me by Mr Psihogios, which I was happy to sponsor:

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly:

- a) There is currently a lack of police officers present in the suburbs of Hawker, Page and Scullin.
- b) Residents in these suburbs are experiencing an increase in petty and preventable crimes.
- c) The primary mechanism to solving this issue is increasing the presence of ACT Policing officers in the suburbs of Hawker, Page and Scullin, by promoting more patrols and increased numbers.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the Government to increase the number of ACT Policing officers in Hawker, Page and Scullin, and ensure that regular patrols are provided by police officers on foot and in police vehicles to increase safety for citizens.

I will just add before I close that I have been door-knocking in Scullin since the election, and I have heard firsthand accounts from residents of one of these suburbs of their concern about growing preventable crime in their neighbourhood, including having their cars checked late at night or early in the morning and having garage doors checked to see if they are open. It is a growing concern.

I will say, as well, that this is one of many petitions that have been brought to this Assembly, particularly last term. I brought one similar regarding Kippax Group Centre, about two years ago. There is a growing concern within our community that the lack of police resourcing is, unfortunately, creating opportunities for preventable crime and creating unease in our suburbs. That is something this government should squarely face, and it should go to the community and find out what the community wants.

I endorse this petition and thank the members of the community who have got behind this to bring attention to a growing problem, not just in south Belconnen but in my electorate and, I believe, across Canberra, that is solvable by proper resourcing by this government of our police.

Shirley Smith High School—priority enrolment area—petition 47-24
Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—petition 5-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.10): I rise to speak briefly on the petition that I sponsored from a resident, Deb Shroot, about the priority enrolment area for students who are living in Hackett. As the petition notes, Hackett currently is only in the priority enrolment area for Campbell High School. Watson, which is adjacent to Hackett, is in a shared priority enrolment area with Campbell, Lyneham and Shirley Smith High Schools. So the petitioner, and those who signed it, have made the point that there are access issues, particularly, in getting to Campbell High from Hackett. They make the point that the bike ride is on narrow, busy roads, without any dedicated bike lane, and the footpaths are also narrow, uneven and constantly crossing the residential driveways.

The petitioners have done a very thorough job of outlining the alternative option of students being allowed to attend Shirley Smith school, and they outlined both the bike-riding and light rail options to get to that area. They made the point that including Hackett in the Shirley Smith priority enrolment area would be fair, reasonable, convenient, and provide active travel and greater flexibility for families and children. The petitioners have done a terrific job of outlining the various transport options to the local high schools and underlining the relative merits for cycling and private cars, as well as public transport.

I urge the government to consider this and see whether it is possible to amend the priority enrolment area for residents of Hackett to give them greater flexibility and options.

I also would like to speak on the petition on Burrangiri. I do not mean to anticipate Ms Carrick, but someone had to stand up. I want to speak in support of the petition that has been tabled. I want to thank Ms Carrick for her ongoing advocacy on this issue and for tabling the petition today.

I am glad to see the voices of those who use the service, the carers and patients of Burrangiri respite centre, and the broader community, represented in the signatures presented in the chamber today. I would also like to thank and acknowledge the work of community members who have spoken to many members of the Legislative Assembly about the ongoing value of Burrangiri respite centre. They have been busy emailing and meeting members, and I was certainly pleased to also be able to meet with the advocates recently.

I was also able to visit the Burrangiri respite centre for the first time last week. I must admit, from the news reports that I had heard before visiting the centre, I was expecting something a little less impressive. Instead, I found Burrangiri to be a facility in terrific condition. The staff, in particular, were fantastic. They spoke so passionately about their work and the care they provide for clients of Burrangiri. I would like to thank everyone who made it possible for me to visit.

We know that there is already an acute shortage of respite places in the ACT. We heard in the most recent annual report hearings that there are a significant number of aged-care patients who are waiting in hospitals for days and days, sometimes up to a month, to be able to access an appropriate facility for their care requirements. If we have a facility that is currently operational, safe, has fantastic staff and is loved by the community, why would we seek to end that service?

This is the key point that I previously mentioned during the motion on Burrangiri, and I continue to return to that central point. There has been some discussion about the condition of the facility, and yet the government's own Asset Management Plan identified that Burrangiri is compliant with all statutory obligations and there are zero assets that do not meet the building code. They also noted there are no assets that were categorised as "very poor", "potential structural, operational problems" or "not operational".

For these reasons, I, on behalf of the ACT Greens, indicate our support for the continued operation of the respite centre until the government can provide alternative capacity for

respite care. I think the key point here is that Burrangiri is providing 4,500 bed-nights a year. At the moment there is no clear alternative plan. In the absence of a clear alternative plan, I think, it is not reasonable for this service to be discontinued. I urge the government to reconsider their position.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—petition 5-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.15): I rise to speak on the petition I sponsored, the Burrangiri e-petition. I note that the paper petition will be tabled on Thursday. I would like to thank the Burrangiri action group, who continue to advocate for the facility. Indeed, they were advocating this morning with Senator Pocock at Burrangiri. Our carers need support, and Burrangiri is where many carers take their loved ones for respite.

The petition draws to the attention of this Assembly the proposed closure of the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre in Rivett. The petition states that there is already an acute shortage of respite places in the ACT and that the Burrangiri centre offers a day care program and short stay respite for up to three weeks, without requiring an ACAT assessment.

The day care programs and respite facilities allow carers respite so they can support older Canberrans to stay in their homes for as long as possible. The petitioners, therefore, request that the Assembly call on the government to ensure that the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre remains open until a satisfactory alternative can be found.

Burrangiri's day program and 15 short-stay beds are available to people without an ACAT assessment. It is a very popular service, and the beds are needed. Without Burrangiri's 15 beds, it will be very difficult to access respite. Carers ACT informed us that there was a four- to six-month wait for respite.

The vision in the ACT Carers strategy is to have a community that cares for carers and the people they care for. Supporting carers is investing in Canberra's future. Closing Burrangiri without replacing the beds is not supporting our carers.

The Minister for Health said that Canberra Health Services already runs a very similar program where they buy beds from residential aged-care facilities to provide hospital step-down respite. She said that if we were going to do something to purchase beds, it would make more sense to expand that Canberra Health Services program than to do a separate program.

With the lack of respite beds available across Canberra and with residential aged-care providers preferring permanent residents, it is not clear where respite beds can be purchased in residential aged care and how much it will cost. If people are forced to stay in hospital, how much will that cost?

An understanding of the services available to the community once Burrangiri closes would help the community have confidence in the changes. For example, where will the respite beds be? How many have been secured? How much is each bed? What will the expected wait time be?

The reason Burrangiri is closing is that the building needs a refurbishment and will have to close for a period of time. We have been to the building, and it is cozy. It has a north-facing sunroom and home cooked meals. It is very comfortable, and I have not heard any issues with the building at all. There are 12 toilets and seven showers across the building.

The Asset Management Plan states that the building is highly important to the delivery of day-to-day health services. The carpets have been replaced; it was painted last December; the electrical distribution boards have been checked and signed off, and the gardens have been upgraded. We would like to understand what the refurb is. There were no conversations with the Salvation Army about the need to close for a refurb; we are all confused.

The Salvation Army were simply advised that the facility would close in January and that the contract would not be extended, and they have a vacate possession notice to be out of the building by 30 June 2025. Is the ACT Health Directorate investigating other uses for Burrangiri? How long will it sit empty while people are looking for respite services?

The funding is also a mystery. If the state of the budget and the blowout in the health costs is the problem, then there should be conversations with the federal government and the Salvation Army about the possibility of funding alternatives.

On the crossbench, our job is to scrutinise government decisions, to hold the executive to account and to try to improve outcomes for Canberrans. On 5 March, the Assembly approved our motion which called on the government to provide information about the cost of the required refurb of the building and information about the alternative facilities that will meet the demand for respite services. Our motion called on the government to extend the Burrangiri contract until the alternative respite capacity is available. Not only did the minister not extend the contract for Burrangiri, she also did not provide any of the information we asked for about the refurbishment of the building and the alternative services.

The minister also mentioned that the FOI is being prepared. When will the information from the motion and the FOI be available? We will continue to perform our role, to scrutinise the executive decisions and to try and improve outcomes for our communities. *(Time expired.)*

Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.20): I rise to speak in support of the petition tabled by my colleague Mr Peter Cain, and I would also like to acknowledge the work of the petitioner, Mr Dimitri Psihogios. Mr Speaker, a 368-signature and a 697-signature response to a petition shows the overwhelming significance of this issue to the people of Belconnen. I also have been out there doorknocking and mobile officing, and I can tell you that there are serious concerns from the residents about how unsafe they feel when shopping around there, and also general safety concerns.

Mr Speaker, the median age for Hawker, Scullin and Page is around 25 to 64, which indicates that there are families there and there are old people there; the demographic

is quite diverse. It is really important that these people feel safe shopping in that area. Providing safety to our community is one of the foundations of a government. It is how we maintain our social contract with the people that we represent. I am looking forward to the inquiry and to the outcomes of the referral of the petition. I hope that the committee considers the seriousness of the matter, inquires into the petition and provides some comfort and safety to the people of Belconnen.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Impact of federal budget 2025-2026

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.22): I rise today to speak on the recent federal budget handed down on 25 March by federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers, and outline its impact on Canberra families, the investment it delivers for our city, and the updated economic and financial impact on the territory's economy.

Since coming to office, the Albanese government has directed almost \$2 billion in funding to the ACT—funding that strengthens our infrastructure, bolsters essential services and supports every Canberran with cost-of-living relief. Working with the ACT government, the Albanese government has been continuing to invest in public health care, Canberra schools and delivering more housing for the entire community.

Our government strongly welcomes the significant investment in public health care and the largest investment in Medicare in its history. Through the federal budget, the Albanese government announced a rapid increase in Medicare rebates for general practice, with a \$7.9 billion investment to support more bulk-billing across the country. Canberrans deserve to be able to access bulk-billed GPs, and appropriately funding primary health care is critical to address the complexities of demand in our healthcare system. The Albanese government continue to show their commitment to strengthening Medicare by growing available services in primary care and the private healthcare workforce.

We welcome the Albanese government's continued investment in women's health, including listing more items on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for women's reproductive health and treating endometriosis.

The ACT government remains committed to delivering the targets set out in the National Housing Accord, and we are working to deliver above our per capita share of the national housing target of 1.2 million homes over five years. We know that increasing housing supply will improve housing affordability, access and choice for Canberrans.

The ACT government welcomes the increased income and property price caps under the government's Help to Buy scheme, which will support more Canberrans to enter the housing market, with lower deposits and smaller mortgages. Purchase of homes of up to \$1 million in Canberra will now be supported under the scheme—up from \$750,000.

The ACT's apprentices in residential construction will benefit from \$10,000 in cost-of-living completion payments, which will support the construction industry to build more homes.

The ACT government has also agreed to the new Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, which provides an additional \$331 million over 10 years for ACT schools, ensuring that our children receive the best possible education. The new agreement will support key actions across ACT public schools, including phonics and numeracy checks, literacy and numeracy coaches, and curriculum resources to support teachers, community coordinator and mental health professionals for schools, supporting connections to meet the wellbeing and learning needs of students, and principal health and wellbeing programs and workload reduction initiatives for teachers and school leaders so that they can focus on teaching. These actions build on reforms already underway in ACT public schools, such as strengthening the inclusion of students with a disability and making sure that we have efficient and aligned allied healthcare services to support our schools.

We know that Canberrans are doing it tough, and that is why we welcome the continued investment by the Albanese government in supporting the community with cost of living. The further relief being undertaken by the Albanese government will include a further \$150 in energy bill relief for 196,000 ACT households; cheaper medicines, with prescription costs capped at \$25; and more affordable and accessible health care, particularly for women, with reduced costs for contraceptives, menopause treatments and IVF. A tax cut for ACT taxpayers will provide a benefit for the average Canberra taxpayer of more than \$50 per week and almost \$2,900 per year, once fully implemented.

The extension of electricity rebates in the 2025-26 commonwealth budget will further ease financial pressures, directly reducing annual inflation by 0.5 percentage points through to December 2025. Without these rebates, electricity bills would have been, on average, around 45 per cent higher. When considered alongside the ACT government's \$800 utilities concession, our lower-than-average power pricing and other measures like the Sustainable Household Scheme, the two levels of government are working in tandem to ensure that the hardest hit are supported.

We also welcome the further commitments from the Albanese government to support further pay rises for thousands of Canberrans by making representations to the Fair Work Commission to increase the national minimum wage.

The federal budget continues the Albanese government's infrastructure investments in Canberra, building on the investments over the term in our national institutions, the national security precinct and transformational light rail funding. Earlier this year, I joined the Chief Minister, Minister Catherine King and our federal representatives to acknowledge the start of construction for light rail stage 2A to Commonwealth Park, which is jointly funded with the Albanese government, who have made a \$343.9 million contribution.

Our government is committed to working with our federal colleagues on further contributions in future federal budgets, building on the Albanese government's initial investment of \$50 million for light rail stage 2B planning and design. The federal budget also commits another \$53.5 million in 2025-26 to support further investment in

Canberra's roads, including \$30 million to complete the Monaro Highway upgrade stage 1, \$20 million to progress further planning on the next stage of the Monaro Highway upgrades and \$3.5 million to complete the duplication of Gundaroo Drive.

The federal budget also provides a \$30 million boost over five years for the ACT under the Roads to Recovery program, which will go directly to maintaining the ACT's existing road network. This includes \$8.6 million for resurfacing the Kings Highway near Kowen.

The budget also continues investment in Canberra Avenue, with \$12.6 million for safety improvements, particularly around the Hume Circle intersection, \$112.5 million for the new bridge over the Mongolo River, \$53.6 million for the William Hovell Drive duplication, and \$46.7 million for the Athllon Drive duplication.

A \$3 billion investment in the National Broadband Network will also directly benefit thousands of Canberra households. In fact, we expect to see around 100,000 households in the ACT connected with faster and more reliable internet by upgrading remaining fibre-to-the-node connections.

In partnership with the Albanese government, we are continuing to make significant investment in renewable energy, and we welcome the Albanese government's sensible approach that is about working in partnership with the states and territories to ensure that we have clean and reliable energy.

The ACT government is gravely concerned about any proposal for a higher cost nuclear energy plan that will leave Canberrans paying more for electricity for longer. We have shown the community that investment in renewable energy is not only better for the planet but also better for the hip pocket of every family.

Mr Speaker, you cannot talk about building the future of Canberra without talking about the largest employer in this city, the Australian Public Service. Our government welcomes the Albanese government's strong support for our city through investment in the public service, but it is clear that there are alternative plans and that they pose a dangerous threat to Canberra, and they are nothing short of a direct attack on Canberrans. Peter Dutton and the Liberals say all of this will come from Canberra. A plan to gut 41,000 jobs in Canberra would have a staggering and devastating effect on the ACT economy and hurt local businesses.

The federal budget handed down by the Albanese government highlighted the strong fundamentals of the Australian economy. The federal Treasurer outlined that Australia's economic outlook remains resilient, despite global uncertainties, including ongoing trade tensions, conflict in the Middle East and Europe, and challenges in key markets like China. Nominal GDP is expected to grow by 4¼ per cent in 2024-25 and it is then expected to slow to 3¼ per cent in 2025-26, as a pick-up in economic growth is offset by a moderation in domestic inflation and sharper fall in the terms of trade.

A soft landing for the Australian economy is increasingly likely and, unlike the experience of other advanced economies in previous inflationary episodes, Australia has been able to achieve a substantial moderation in inflation while maintaining a low unemployment rate.

Recent outcomes for inflation and unemployment have been better than expected, and the near-term outlook has improved on both fronts. Headline inflation returned to the RBA's target band in the second half of 2024 and is now expected to be 2½ per cent through the year to the June quarter 2025, a quarter of a percentage point lower than forecast in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. This was reinforced at the most recent meeting of the RBA board, where the primary concern continued to be global trade tensions. The impact of President Trump's tariff policy will not be welcome.

Public final demand growth, which has been driven by spending on essential services, infrastructure and cost-of-living relief, is expected to moderate from five per cent in 2024-25 to two per cent in 2026-27 as private sector growth strengthens. This shift underscores the government's strategy of investing wherever it is needed most while ensuring long-term economic stability.

Australia's labour market remains a key pillar of economic strength. The unemployment rate has remained low, at around four per cent over the past three quarters, with over one million additional Australians gaining employment since May 2022. Employment growth is forecast at 2.75 per cent in 2024-25, before stabilising at one per cent in 2025-26 and 1.25 per cent in 2026-27.

Wage growth remains a priority, with nominal wages expected to grow by three per cent through the year to June 2025 and 3.25 per cent through to June 2026. Real wages, accounting for inflation, have already begun to recover, growing at 0.8 per cent through the year to December 2024 and forecast to continue increasing over the coming years. The commitment of both of our governments to improving productivity will further support sustained wage growth.

Business investment remains at decade-high levels, supported by resilient business balance sheets and strong capacity utilisation. Whilst growth is expected to moderate, the level of investment will remain elevated. Non-mining investment is expected to be the primary driver of business growth, increasing by 2.5 per cent in 2024-25 and two per cent in 2025-26.

The construction sector is also seeing renewed strength around the country, with inflation in building materials easing and labour availability improving. This will allow the sector to meet robust housing demand, with dwelling investment forecast to grow by 1.5 per cent in 2024-25, 5.5 per cent in 2025-26 and 7.5 per cent in 2026-27. Rental price growth is also moderating as demand softens and vacancy rates increase.

The ACT government welcomes the continued commitment of the Albanese government to our city and the investments made in the federal budget to support and invest in Canberrans. These are challenging times, and these challenges can and will be made more difficult should an alternative approach to our city be taken—an approach where, instead of investing in Canberra, the Prime Minister lounges on the lawns of Kirribilli, taking in harbourside views far away from the government agencies here in Canberra that deliver essential services for Australians.

Our government welcomes continued commitments to tackle the cost of living by the federal government and the continued investments in the budget in health, schools and

housing. A budget stands as a statement of priorities for any government, and we welcome the federal government's commitment to responsible economic management, paired with genuine support for the people of Canberra and Australia.

At the forthcoming election, I encourage Canberrans to consider the risks of electing a Liberal government that fundamentally hates Canberra, that has no plan to tackle cost of living and, instead, proposes reckless cuts that will hurt us all and cut services for Australians.

The federal budget delivers. As the territory's Treasurer and an MLA in our city, I always argue that more can be done to support Canberra, but a fair and rational assessment of the commitments made by the commonwealth shows that it delivers. It delivers for our schools, our hospitals, our roads and our families, and it delivers for every Australian and every Canberran who relies on a strong public service, quality health care and a thriving local economy.

I present the following paper:

Impact of the 2025-2026 Federal Budget on the ACT—Ministerial statement,
8 April 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.35): I would like to make a few comments on the minister's statement on the federal budget. This federal budget was a missed opportunity for Canberrans. It was an opportunity to make our city fairer and to provide the services that Canberrans need. It was an opportunity to get dental into Medicare and to have that paid for by getting big corporations to pay their fair share of tax.

We are one of the richest jurisdictions in one of the wealthiest countries on Earth. Everyone should be able to afford the basics—a decent home, food they can afford, access to excellent health care, and an education that brings choice and opportunity. Instead, federal Labor's budget has delivered \$56 billion in fossil fuel subsidies. I repeat: \$56 billion. It has delivered \$176 billion for property investors. Where are the policies to deliver a real shift in the cost of living for the majority?

Labor's small cut in income tax, which is not due to take effect for another 15 months, is not going to touch the sides for most of us. The cost of rent and mortgage interest rates is sky-high for most people. Those cuts are great for landlords and bankers, but they are not enough to help everybody else. This same government's previous stage 3 tax cuts delivered \$4,500 in tax cuts for billionaires. That is money that should have been invested in creating a better country for all of us. And this budget is cutting support for people who need it most. The federal government has forecast billions more in cuts to the NDIS. That is an unnecessary act, and it will have, inevitably, cruel impacts.

The Treasurer has just lauded two road duplications which will make a fractional difference to people's journey times. If we really cared about fast, frequent public and active transport and making sure that that was available to all, we would have asked our

federal government to prioritise federal funding requests that speed up the delivery of light rail, that complete our active travel network, that deliver the essential bus infrastructure we need and that deliver that infrastructure on time.

Investments like that would make our city more connected, safer to navigate, and feasible for everyone to rely on, with fewer car journeys—fewer of those really expensive journeys that are costing so many people so much in petrol, and they simply do not have the money for it anymore. Instead, we are seeing more and more support for the transport options that we know are not serving us.

There is some indication that pressure by the Greens is working in this budget. We are pleased to see that. Labor has committed to adopting part of the Greens' plan to see a GP for free by tripling the bulk-billing incentive rate by 2030. But, right now, we have the lowest bulk-billing rates in the country, and ACT Labor need to make the case to their federal colleagues regarding the principle that, actually, we need everyone to be able to see a GP for free—free at the point of use. If we do not have that principle that you should be able to see a GP for free, the risk is that much of this incentive will be wiped out by inflation.

We have another positive move. Labor are taking steps towards the Greens' plan to completely wipe student debt. Unfortunately, they could have locked in this commitment and cut 20 per cent off student debt in the last days of parliament. Instead, they spent that last day in parliament watering down our nature protection laws. Federal Labor, on the last day of parliament, used the cover of a budget to do a dodgy deal with Dutton to gut our environment and climate laws. While everyone else was focused on the budget, Labor and the Liberals teamed up to ram through this legislation. This legislation makes it easier for big corporations to trash our precious natural environment and to approve more coal and gas. We cannot keep voting for the same two parties and expect a different result.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Health Services—planned care reforms Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.40): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on the reforms being undertaken at Canberra Health Services to improve the provision of planned care through our public health services.

CHS's planned care reforms are aimed at ensuring our public health system delivers equity of access with care that is as timely as possible, reflecting clinical urgency. This reflects a fundamental principle of delivering a public health service. Labor has always been the party that advocates for those who have less opportunity or agency to advocate for themselves and invests in strengthening public health services to support our communities.

CHS has been undertaking significant reforms to ensure our public health services are accessible, accountable and sustainable. This includes moving to contemporary forms

of service delivery and best practice operational environments that focus on their core role—to be a public health service provider that puts patients at the centre.

We are learning from other hospitals and health systems, whether it is Townsville or Gold Coast University Hospital, Singapore’s health system or the Parkville precinct in Melbourne. But we are also learning from our own teams, and I am committed to ensuring we continue to work with our clinicians to deliver change that is fit for purpose for the ACT.

CHS’s values, developed in partnership with staff in 2019, are:

Reliable—we always do what we say;

Progressive—we embrace innovation;

Respectful—we value everyone; and

Kind—we make everyone feel welcome and safe.

We know that the way our services have been organised in the past meant reliability was compromised. That is hard for patients. We have all heard from people who had organised their lives for an expected elective surgery, only to have it cancelled, sometimes more than once. But it is also hard for staff when they have to break the bad news to consumers and carers that the care they were expecting to receive has been postponed.

That is why reform has been focused on improving the reliability of access to care in both the emergency and elective or planned streams of care. We are already seeing the positive results of the changes and investments we have been making in our emergency departments, and we are starting to see that flow through to planned care. But we know that there is more to do.

Health systems, of course, must balance the competing needs of different individuals, specialties and groups. There is an inherent tension between components of the system which are in direct competition for the same resources to deliver care to patients. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the balance between emergency and elective—or planned—surgery. This has been the subject of discussion in this place and media attention in recent weeks, particularly focused on the role of the operations centre and the planned care reforms. I will start by talking about what each of those is and does.

The Integrated Operations Centre was established early in 2024 and has brought together the different functions that oversight and support the coordination of patient movements and access to care across the Canberra Hospital every day. Operations centre models are being implemented in health services and health systems across the world.

In Canberra Hospital, the Integrated Operations Centre is focused on three streams of work—acute care, planned care and sub-acute care. Acute care is focused on the care patients receive when they present in an emergency or unplanned way. This includes care from the emergency department, and through our wards and hospitals until discharge. Planned care oversees the care CHS provides that can be planned, including processes for receiving referrals, outpatient appointments, waiting lists and elective surgery. The sub-acute stream is focused on patients in the public hospital system who

have finished their acute stay and do not need hospital care anymore but do not yet have an appropriate discharge destination. These include patients who need to go to a residential aged-care facility or have complex needs and are awaiting suitable accommodation under an NDIS arrangement.

The experienced staff that work in the operations centre have helped to ensure that the 300 to 350 people who now present to the Canberra Hospital ED every day get the care that they need. They focus on the person and moving them through the ED and the hospital in a timely way. It is important to note that this work is not just about the ED; it is about the whole hospital working together to reduce the risk of poor patient outcomes from waiting in EDs for long periods. The operations centre supports the ED by making sure patients who need to be admitted have a bed in the right place, staffed by our dedicated clinicians.

The impact of these changes to emergency access is evident in the improvement in performance. The data is clear. CHS is now outperforming other comparable health services across the country in ensuring that patients are seen, treated and leave its EDs in the appropriate timeframe as measured against national targets.

The operations centre also has a role in oversighting patient access to emergency surgery. Every day, there are operating theatres that are allocated specifically to emergency surgery to ensure patients who come into the ED can have surgery urgently if they need to. This includes patients who have had an accident or a fall, and patients who have medical conditions that need emergency surgery, such as appendicitis.

The operations centre focuses on early identification of issues or constraints in the system that might slow down a patient's journey and works with clinicians in those areas on resolving the issues. This can include arranging for additional emergency theatres to be staffed and run when there are more patients needing surgery or supporting teams to create capacity in the right specialty area for the patient to receive specialist nursing and medical care, such as in the intensive care unit.

The government has progressively increased the amount of emergency surgery capacity over successive budgets, including \$52 million in the 2024-25 budget to support additional theatre capacity. Despite the significant growth in presentations for emergency surgery over the past year, CHS has continued to improve access and reduce wait times.

At times there are issues that require a decision to be made between doing an emergency case or a planned case where a patient has been admitted to have their expected surgery. When this happens, the operations centre works with the theatre teams and surgeons to explore all options to be able to do both surgeries rather than rescheduling the planned patient, who may have waited a long time for their surgery or arranged time off work for themselves and perhaps a carer for themselves or their children.

These options often include offering extra theatre time to the specialty or considering availability of another surgeon to assist. When no alternative can be found, there is a discussion between senior staff in the operations centre and the surgeon about the health needs of the patients so that all patients receive the best possible care.

I acknowledge that some surgeons have expressed the view that the decision about whether the planned case should be cancelled should be theirs alone. However, they may not have all the information about the broader situation for either the patient to be cancelled or hospital resource allocation. The operations centre are working to ensure that cancellation is a last resort because they are looking at all options that are available to ensure everyone can equitably access their necessary surgery.

The government and CHS leadership recognise the critically important role surgeons play in ensuring the best outcomes for patients, and CHS has now introduced an escalation pathway to address the concerns raised by some surgeons. The escalation pathway supports the Clinical Director for Surgery to be the final decision-maker where there is a resourcing conflict. This also ensures there is an independent, senior, clinical arbiter when there is a disagreement between specialties, as can sometimes happen when there is high demand for theatres.

CHS is also continuing to work with the senior doctors to address concerns about the broader functioning of the operations centre to ensure that it is achieving the best outcomes for patients in their specialty area. As I have said before, the intention is to improve transparency across the system, so that the operations centre and surgical teams can work together to make the most efficient use of the theatre complexes across both acute public hospitals.

Turning to the broader work of planned care, this stream of work manages the tens of thousands of referrals, people on waiting lists, elective surgeries and outpatient appointments across our public health service. CHS is taking a new approach to improve reliability around planned care and working to streamline the system to focus on giving patients greater certainty, fewer cancellations, less rescheduling and more assurance of being seen within clinically recommended timeframes. We all know that “elective” does not mean “optional”. This is still essential care that patients need, but it is care that can and should be planned.

Reform work in this area has focused on ensuring patients are treated in turn within their clinical urgency category. Planned care works with each surgical specialty to ensure patients are booked in turn, using highest category and longest wait as the underpinning principle. The team has also moved towards booking patients further in advance of their surgery date to provide greater certainty and reduced surgery cancellations.

These changes reflect our commitment to ensuring equity of access to public planned care. It is about the people who are waiting on public lists for essential care being treated in order, being given more certainty and doing everything we can to ensure their procedure is not cancelled.

This planned care work has been the subject of engagement with teams and individuals to work through these reforms. Changes to scheduling of elective surgery to provide more certainty to patients commenced with a pilot in October 2024, with the orthopaedics and plastics specialty areas. This change in particular meant patients were able to be advised of their elective surgery date eight weeks in advance. This is a change from the previous two weeks notice and aims to enable patients and their significant others to plan more effectively for their procedure.

This financial year, CHS is on track to deliver a record number of elective surgeries. In the first nine months of the year, CHS has completed more than 12,300 surgeries. This represents an outstanding effort by all teams, supported by the opening of the new state-of-the-art critical services building last August, with more operating theatres to support the delivery of emergency and elective procedures.

There is more work being done in planned care to consult on the introduction of pooled waiting lists for some specialties, and for some conditions within those specialties. This is one way to ensure demand is balanced between specialists so that patients do not wait longer to be operated on by one surgeon than they would wait with another surgeon. This approach is not suitable in all cases, especially where there is a specific subspecialty expertise required or complex care needs. However, for some specialty areas and procedures, the use of pooled waiting lists is already in place and working effectively.

The consultation with the specialties and consumers will identify when it is a suitable approach to more broadly implement pooled waiting lists, which will support more patients getting treated in turn. Where appropriate, it will help to ensure patients do not experience a lengthy wait for one surgeon while others on the public waitlist move ahead of them because another surgeon is moving through their waitlist faster or has recently joined the organisation and can take on more new patients.

CHS is already working with all specialties where fee-for-service visiting medical officer contracts are employed in relation to changes to their contracts. CHS began discussions in January 2025 with the VMO workforce about the need to phase out fee-for-service contracts, which are outdated and can represent a high cost for a fraction of a full-time position.

The majority of conversations with specialty areas that contract surgeons in this way have been productive. I take this opportunity again to thank the hardworking surgeons who have taken the time to sit down and have detailed conversations with CHS leadership about changes that can be made to deliver a more efficient system for patients and taxpayers.

We have recognised from the start that VMOs, most of whom already work on sessional contracts, will continue to be an important part of the workforce. But we also want to recruit more staff specialists—employed doctors who are paid to devote a portion of their time to non-clinical work, such as training junior doctors, undertaking research or contributing to the broader management and leadership of the health system. I am pleased to say that, in the 12 months from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 69 new staff specialists have started work across CHS—a clear demonstration that CHS can and does attract high-quality medical staff across a range of specialties.

I have met with a number of surgeons and other health workers over recent weeks, and I am grateful for the time they have taken to share their perspectives with me and to work through their concerns with the CHS leadership team. I am confident that CHS will continue to work with all surgical and specialist teams as the planned care reform process continues, to ensure patients are getting the best public health care that we can provide.

I look forward to continuing to update the Assembly on the improvements that CHS is making to deliver a more reliable public health service.

I present the following paper:

Update on Planned Care Reforms at Canberra Health Services—Ministerial statement, 8 April 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 59—Speaker’s ruling

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Speaker, a point of order on Minister Orr’s ministerial statement: I seek your ruling on it being a breach of standing order 59, relating to anticipating discussion. Standing order 59 states:

A Member may not anticipate the discussion of any subject which appears on the *Notice Paper* ...

Minister Orr’s statement is almost exclusively about Ainslie Volcanics. As you would be aware, there is a bill on Ainslie Volcanics on the notice paper for this afternoon. I believe Minister Orr’s statement is a clear breach of the standing orders and should be ruled out of order.

Ms Orr: Mr Speaker, on the point of order: while I take Mr Rattenbury’s point, that Ainslie Volcanics is in the title of both, my statement is on ecological considerations that have been in the public domain and heavily discussed, whereas the matter that Mr Rattenbury refers to for this afternoon is a proposal to amend the Planning Act.

Mr Rattenbury: Regarding Minister Orr’s comments, I believe she makes reference to the location of the telecommunications tower. I do not have the exact reference in front of me. I am pretty sure she references it, and, if not, I think she is splitting hairs and being a little too cute on the content of the statement.

MR SPEAKER: Members, I note that we had some time to look at the statement and line it up against standing order 59. The point of order raised concerns whether standing order 59 has been breached by the minister making a ministerial statement on ecological information regarding Ainslie Volcanics. Members will be aware that order of the day No 1 for private members’ business listed for discussion later today is the Planning (Ainslie Volcanics) Amendment Bill 2025. The standing order in question, standing order 59, states:

A Member may not anticipate the discussion of any subject which appears on the *Notice Paper*: provided that, in determining whether a discussion is out of order on the ground of anticipation, regard shall be had by the Speaker to the probability of the matter anticipated being brought before the Assembly within a reasonable

time.

At page 326, the *Companion to the Standing Orders*, which is a wonderful read, explains:

The rule is designed to ensure that matters which are scheduled for consideration and decision by the Assembly at a future date are not pre-empted by unscheduled debate.

This is the problem that I face. I think it is in breach of standing order 59. I warn members that the standing orders are very black and white, and I sense a bit of tit for tat coming later in the week. I rule that it is out of order, but I anticipate that this will not be the last point of order that is raised on a matter that may be discussed later. So, having considered the matter after going through the statement, listening to the points of order and noting the similarity of the subject matter of the statement and the bill, I rule that the ministerial statement infringes standing order 59 and, therefore, it is out of order.

Government—order to table documents

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.57): Pursuant to standing order 128, I fix the time for moving this notice to Thursday, 10 April 2025.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 4

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.58): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 4, dated 3 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 4 contains the committee's comments on four bills and six pieces of subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

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) (10.58), by leave: As always, the government welcomes the scrutiny committee's report. However, I wish to provide notice in this place that I will write to the chair of the scrutiny committee about a practice, which appears solely in this report, that appears to deviate from at least some recent reports. This does not reflect on the quality of the content, which I admire and am grateful for, but it may result in some broader procedural issues. I think the entire Assembly would benefit from advice on this.

To give some context, those familiar with scrutiny committee reports would know that there are categories which follow the committee's recommendations and analysis—namely: “The committee draws these matters to the attention of the Assembly but does not require a response from the minister or member”; “The committee draws this matter to the attention of the Assembly and asks the minister or member to respond with sufficient time to allow the committee to consider the response prior to the bill being debated”; “The committee draws this matter to the attention of the Assembly and asks the minister or member to respond prior to the bill being debated”; “The comment immediately above requires a response from the minister”; or “The committee would be grateful if the minister could respond before the Legislative Assembly's capacity to move to disallow that an instrument expires”. They are some examples, but they are all of the same tenor: they direct the proponent of the bill or the subordinate legislation about whether they need to provide a response to the committee or the Assembly before a bill is debated.

With this scrutiny report, there appears to be a new, or relatively new, approach: recommending an action but with no further ask. For example—and this is my example—“The committee recommends that the explanatory statement be amended to state the correct date.” And this is not mine:

The Committee asks that consideration be given to amending the explanatory statement to make it clear that the intention of the provision is that information required by the Commissioner will be limited to information necessary to register a provider, and to provide some examples.

Another, of many, is:

The Committee recommends that the explanatory statement is amended to be definitive about whether the development application the subject of the new proposed section 159A is held by a corporation and not a natural individual.

In and of itself, this is not problematic. These recommendations are sound. However, the final two examples are two of many recommendations which are given to Mr Rattenbury's private members' bill, which he intends to bring on for debate today. So, in my view, it appears that some of the recommendations may be substantive, may require a response or may require further scrutiny by the committee, so the timing of bringing on this debate, when the scrutiny committee has comments, may be problematic. But I do not know, because there is no clear direction given to the member bringing forward the private members' bill about whether he needs to have provided those to the committee before it is debated.

It is not clear whether this is a deliberate approach or a new approach or an accidental approach out of step with the agreed practice and will be addressed in the future. That is why I will be writing to the chair to seek some clarification, because that would provide some further guidance to the Assembly about what we should do with some very detailed recommendations that have been provided by the scrutiny committee.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.02), by leave: As members may be aware, I am also on that committee. I declare that at the start of these remarks. The committee looks forward to receiving the letter from the Attorney. To be very clear, given the particular comments she made at the end of the statement, I clearly declared at the start of that

meeting that I had a matter on the program that day for the scrutiny committee and did not recommend any changes to the report. Members will be assured to know that I have prepared a revised explanatory statement, which I circulated to members yesterday and will table as part of the debate this afternoon. So, in terms of the minister's immediate concerns, that has been addressed.

Regarding the minister's broader points, I cannot speak for the committee, but we will receive the letter and give it some careful consideration. She raises important long-term questions.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Report 1

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.03): I present the following report:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24*, dated 25 March 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 the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for the Eleventh Assembly. The Assembly referred the inquiry on 5 December 2024. The committee held public hearings between 10 and 21 February 2025. Witnesses took 11 questions on notice. The nine recommendations addressed topics including Auditor-General observations, financial relationships between political parties and associated entities, implementation of the Govey review recommendations, and improving public accessibility to the Legislative Assembly's art collection.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all witnesses for their assistance to the committee and their significant contributions to this inquiry. We also thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting the committee. I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Braddock and Mr Werner-Gibbings, and Ms Lee, who was the chair of the committee at the start of this inquiry.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to responses to questions on notice in its inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2023-24. During the inquiry, four questions on notice were submitted to the Minister for Mental Health, the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, and the Minister

for Education and Early Childhood. These questions sought copies of all handover briefing documents prepared during the 2024 caretaker period by the ACT's Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services, the Community Services Directorate, and the Education Directorate for the incoming ministers. On 27 and 28 February 2025, the committee received identical responses to these questions from the Minister for Mental Health and the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services respectively. These responses advised: "Disclosure of parts of the requested information may be contrary to the public interest. The appropriate mechanism to request access to this information is through a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2016." The same response was later received from the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, on 25 March 2025.

Continuing resolution 8B sets out the process for ministers and officials where they believe it would not be in the public interest to disclose information to a committee. This includes providing a statement of the grounds for that conclusion and the nature of the harm to the public interest that would result from providing the documents to the committee, either publicly or on a confidential basis. On 14 March 2025, the committee wrote to the Minister for Mental Health and the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services requesting this information. Responses were received on 21 and 22 March 2025, respectively. These did not include specific details of the harm that may result from disclosing the handover documents and reiterated the view that the FOI process was the most appropriate mechanism for these documents to be requested and assessed for release.

I seek leave to table a copy of this correspondence and the responses to the four questions on notice.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I table:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Inquiry—Annual and Financial Reports 2023-2024—Answers to questions on notice—

No 22, dated 27 February 2025.

No 29, dated 28 February 2025.

No 30, dated 28 February 2025.

No 41, dated 21 March 2025.

Correspondence between the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy and the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, dated 14 and 22 March 2025.

Correspondence between the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy and the Minister for Mental Health, dated 14 and 21 March 2025.

The committee considers that requiring it to submit FOI requests for executive documents requested during its inquiry is contrary to established precedent and continuing resolution 8B. Continuing resolution 8B was established following a recommendation of the Select Committee on Privileges 2010. In its report, the committee noted that it was a matter for committees and the Assembly to assess claims

of public interest immunity and stated:

Witnesses must not decide for themselves that a piece of information falls into a category which might attract immunity and on that basis withhold it from a committee of the legislature.

The committee notes that the FOI Act does not contain any express provisions that diminish the committee's inquiry power or ability to request information. FOI processes take longer than the committee questions on notice process and include several exemptions which may not be applicable in the parliamentary context. There is also no provision allowing documents to be provided to the committee on a confidential basis. As such, the committee considers that not disclosing the requested documents on the basis that they could be requested and assessed for release under FOI is not sufficient justification for withholding the documents from the committee. This is consistent with the approach taken in the Senate and outlined in the *Companion to the Standing Orders*.

Continuing resolution 8B requires witnesses to specify the nature of the harm that could result from disclosing a document. The committee is of the view that the ministers' responses have not done this and, as such, they have not engaged with the process set out in continuing resolution 8B. Therefore, the committee reports the withholding of these documents to the Assembly in accordance with paragraph (4) of continuing resolution 8B.

Also, later this week I will move a motion, as agreed by the committee, requesting an order for the production of these documents in accordance with standing order 213A.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.09), by leave: I want to briefly respond to Mr Emerson's comments on behalf of the committee. I understand the point that he is making, but I think that he has misrepresented the responses, certainly from me; I cannot speak on behalf of other ministers and how they responded to the committee's initial request for clarification, in relation to the questions on notice.

The committee wrote to me suggesting that my response to the question on notice was not appropriate. They stated that I had made a claim of confidentiality over the documents requested by the committee. I clarified in my response to the committee that I had made no such claim. What I have indicated, and what other ministers have indicated, is that the response noted that disclosure of parts of the information may be contrary to public interest and suggested that the freedom of information process would have been an appropriate mechanism for the documents to be requested, assessed and released.

I will give a couple examples of where assessment within the timeframe required to respond to questions on notice during the committee's inquiry into annual and financial reports—and we all know it has quite short timeframes to respond to questions on notice—might be an inappropriate way to seek this information which potentially requires consideration of commercial confidentiality and third-party consultation. I will give you two examples which are topical this week of information that may have been included in incoming ministers' briefs and would have required consideration of confidentiality on a commercial basis and, potentially, third-party consultation if it were

to be released on FOI and which I believe would be appropriate for a minister to consider, even if they were considering tabling a document for the Assembly.

This morning, members have potentially seen that the Interchange Health Co-Op has just entered into voluntary administration. We have been aware for some time that Interchange had some financial difficulties, and we have been in consultation with them about that. That information could have been included in an incoming minister's brief. That is commercially sensitive information which would have been entirely inappropriate to publicly release on a whim to the Assembly without any consultation with Interchange. Similarly, Brindabella Christian College could have been described in an incoming minister's brief in a way that would have been completely inappropriate to table in the Assembly without due consideration of commercial confidentiality and, potentially, third-party consultation as well.

These are examples of the type of information that may be included in an incoming minister's brief that we would not have had time to appropriately consider during the short period of time that ministers get to respond to questions on notice during an inquiry into annual and financial reports. We, of course, have longer periods of time to respond to questions on notice that are tabled in the Assembly. So, if one of the members of the committee who had put the question on notice in the inquiry into annual and financial reports had instead chosen to put a question on notice through the standard process, through the Legislative Assembly, or, indeed, had submitted a freedom of information request, they would already have this information. There are processes that have been established by the Legislative Assembly that are well tested and work in a context where there may be confidential and sensitive information included in documents, to ensure that the confidential and sensitive information is appropriately protected and that any third-party interests are appropriately considered in the public release of documents, including consideration of whether the document is tabled in full for public release or provided in confidence.

I take the point that Mr Emerson is trying to make about the pre-eminence of the Legislative Assembly over any other process, but the Legislative Assembly established the other processes for a reason, and with safeguards for a reason, and I strongly encourage Mr Emerson to understand those processes and to use them as appropriate. If he did so, he would already have received that information.

MR HANSON(Murrumbidgee) (11.13) by leave: I support Mr Emerson and what he is saying as chair of the committee. I just make the point that, if the minister is saying one would already have this information if one had done an FOI or asked a question on notice through the Assembly, it seems obstinate in the extreme. She is saying: "No. We are going to walk you through this process and fight it all the way, but you would already have this information if you had done an FOI or asked a question on notice through the Assembly." If it is so easy for the minister to provide this information to us, why hasn't she? She is saying she could have done this if we had done an FOI or asked a question through the Assembly. Why has she not done it through the committee process?

It is quite clear that the government is being obstinate and is trying to deny the committee information that they can quite easily have. Apparently, it is so easy to provide this information through an FOI process, but it is so difficult to do it through

the committee process, and she cannot do it. It does not make sense.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.16), by leave: I want to make clear that I am speaking only as the chair of the committee. I think many of those remarks were directed more to me as a member of the Assembly.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It was your question on notice.

MR EMERSON: In the case that the questions that were asked were submitted by me, but it was the view of the committee—in fact, the advice we received was—that we were required to report the withholding of these documents, in accordance with continuing resolution 8B. It is a requirement of the committee to do this, and that is what we have done. The statement I have made today was prepared and agreed by the committee and is not a statement that I am making in my own capacity. The same will be done later this week, on Thursday, when we debate the order for the production of documents: I will speaking only as the chair of the committee.

Education Amendment Bill 2025

Ms Cheyne, on behalf of Minister Berry, by leave, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.17): On behalf of Ms Berry, I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I speak on behalf of Minister Berry today, who would have been here but is unwell. This does reflect the urgency of this amendment to the Education Act 2004. This amendment has been developed in response to an identified issue with the act that could have significant impacts on the operation of non-government schools. This issue has been identified as a result of the difficult circumstances currently experienced by the students, families and staff of Brindabella Christian College, which without this amendment would be at risk of closure. The ACT government is committed to doing all we can to secure the future of the school on behalf of its many staff, students and families.

Brindabella Christian Education Limited, the proprietor of Brindabella Christian College, is currently under voluntary administration. I am aware that the administrators have advised the school community that the only option to keep the school open is to undertake a sale or recapitalisation process. I also understand that the financial position of the school is such that an urgent transfer is required, hence the administrators are progressing the sale of the school as an urgent priority in order to ensure continuity of education for more than 1,000 students. In order to transfer the school to a new proprietor, there will need to be an application made under section 98, “Registration amendment—application.”

The act currently requires the public submission period associated with an application for a registration amendment be at least 60-days. It has been identified that there may be instances where a registration amendment is time critical and so an observance of the full 60-day period could have a significant impact on the operation of a non-government school. This is especially concerning when considering the impacts on delivery of education to students and the employment conditions of staff. This critical time period is present with Brindabella Christian College, where observance of the full 60-day public submission period for the transfer of a school to a new proprietor would have significant ramifications for the school, including risking the ability of the school to remain open and to deliver education to its students.

As a result, it is proposed that section 98, “Registration amendment—application,” be urgently amended to enable the reduction of the public submission period associated with an application for registration amendment when it is reasonably necessary in the circumstances. Importantly, a shortened public submission period does not mean there will be no submission period, as the registrar must still give public notice of the application and advise how a person may make a submission. It will instead, in extreme circumstances such as this, enable a shortened period, for example, when time is critical to prevent the closure of a school. It has always been Minister Berry’s intention to do everything possible to keep Brindabella Christian College open so that students can keep learning and teachers can keep teaching. This amendment is about supporting that outcome.

Today, by presenting this bill to the Assembly, we are continuing the governments focus on ensuring all ACT schools are providing high quality education in appropriately operated environments. These amendments will ensure that, as far as possible, the learning of young people will not be compromised and will stay a priority with minimal disruption, as well as showing our continued support for our valued teaching staff in the ACT.

Mr Assistant Speaker, before I conclude, I will later be moving a motion to suspend standing orders so that debate on this can be brought on Thursday, given the time sensitive nature of this and of the ensuing bill that will be introduced. I also, on behalf of the government, apologise that sufficient notice through the usual process was not provided for this bill. That was an administrative error, a deeply regrettable one and was far from intentional. I appreciate the Assembly’s indulgence in allowing the bill to be introduced today and in recognising that members have been thoroughly briefed by Minister Berry and officials in the lead up to today.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.23): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This bill amends the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Act 2024 to delay automatic commencement of the domestic and family violence information sharing scheme by 18 months, to 24 November 2026.

On 14 May last year, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Act 2024. This act legislated a new framework for information sharing to improve communication between entities defined under the act, to more effectively identify, assess, prevent and respond to risks of domestic and family violence. It was scheduled to commence on 24 May this year. This bill presented today delays commencement of the amendment act.

A lot of work has occurred but there is still more that needs to be done to establish the scheme ready for full commencement. I see an unacceptable level of risk to the safety of women and children in the ACT if the scheme commences on the 24 May, which is why I am seeking the Assembly's urgent support to delay commencement. I have discussed this matter extensively with officials and with non-government organisations, such as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, who are involved currently in information sharing. I am assured of the effectiveness of existing information sharing arrangements, such as the Family Violence Safety Action Program, while the work continues for broad implementation of the scheme.

Importantly, commencing the scheme in May poses very significant potential risks to the effectiveness of these existing information sharing arrangements. It is why I bring this bill with urgency to delay commencement. I believe that the information sharing scheme is important for the ACT in clearly articulating and coordinating information sharing in establishing, assessing, managing, preventing and reducing the risks of domestic and family violence. While significant work has progressed since the passing of the bill, it is not at a point where I have confidence in meeting the objectives of the bill at commencement.

A key part of the information sharing scheme is the defining of sharing entities and non-sharing entities. The act, in section 14, outlines largely government agencies and leadership positions as information sharing entities. There have been concerns raised by those in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector about their role and their position in the scheme currently not being clearly articulated. This work still needs to be progressed to understand what pathway will work best for all entities to share information relating to the safety of individuals. This may include those organisations such as DVCS or CRCC being declared information sharing entities, or an MOU around information sharing, as examples.

The absence of an agreed way forward with the sector raises serious concerns regarding the commencement of the legislation and the impact it may have on existing sharing operations. I am strongly committed to working with our community sector

organisations and our Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to define a clear pathway forward to support the critically important work that they do.

Implementing this legislative change to improve information sharing requires serious changes to policy, practices and organisational cultures. The new scheme for information sharing is a piece of enabling legislation. It is premised on the support of other bodies of work that fit together in a larger toolkit of risk assessment and management, to ensure that information sharing entities are operating within a common language and understanding of risk. There is currently a program of work underway to achieve this. Procurement is progressing for the development of a centralised training package on information sharing for entities under the scheme to understand their obligations, which is expected to be fully rolled out from October.

The ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework, which is notified under this amendment act, is also currently being updated. These updates include practice guides and tools, and guidance for the workforce to respond to coercive control. They will improve the use of the framework for frontline workers and information sharing entities. Procurement for a training package on the updated risk assessment and management framework is due to commence shortly, with the training planned to be rolled out in December of this year. These training packages will improve workers' ability to confidently and consistently share information in a way that promotes the safety, protection and wellbeing of victim-survivors, prevents the occurrence and escalation of violence and better holds perpetrators to account. It is critical that the workforce is trained when the scheme becomes operational. Finally, further time is needed to develop the scheme's critical facilitation role of the information sharing coordinator to ensure that they have the suitable expertise and experience to exercise the functions of the scheme.

In summary, to ensure a safe and effective information sharing scheme it is necessary to sequence the commencement of the amendment act with other work underway, including to: develop clear information sharing arrangements with the non-government sector; update the risk assessment and management framework; develop and roll out training for the workforce on the information sharing scheme and the risk assessment and management framework; and to see that coordinating roles and entities are appropriately declared and appointed.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the sector stakeholders that continue to contribute their expertise in developing a best-practice approach to the implementation of this framework. I am committed to working with them and our government agencies to see this scheme fully operational. I am committed to delivering an information sharing scheme that will, from the outset, meet expectations of the clear purpose and intent of the bill and work to prevent and reduce the risks of domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Education Amendment Bill 2025 and the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Bill 2025 being called on and debated during this sitting period.

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Berry for this sitting day due to illness.

Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 6 March 2025 on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.30): I rise to make a very brief contribution to the debate on the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025. The opposition has considered the bill in our usual way and we have no particular concerns. I note that the scrutiny committee and the social policy committee have both considered the bill and neither has raised any particular concerns. Similarly, we have not had any concerns come to us from stakeholders.

We acknowledge that the government has not sought to make these changes any further than the commonwealth has, something which is not true of every jurisdiction. We think that this is the right approach with this issue. I also acknowledge we were briefed by the minister's office a few weeks ago and we appreciate them taking the time for that. We will be supporting the bill today, as I imagine all members will be.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.31): I rise to speak to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025. I thank the minister for her patience in that. The ACT Greens will be supporting this bill.

In June 2024, the commonwealth government passed the Therapeutic Goods and Other Legislation Amendments (Vaping Reforms) Act 2024, and those have since come into effect. This act focused on banning the implementation, domestic manufacture, advertisement, supply and commercial possession of non-therapeutic vapes. The amendments proposed today are straightforward as they function to bring ACT legislation in line with the legislation passed by the commonwealth.

We all know that vaping is harmful. Vaping is also prevalent across our whole community, and most particularly among young people. However, rather than approaching these potential harms from a prohibitionist perspective, the ACT Greens and our federal colleagues have long focused on the importance of an approach that centres the importance of harm reduction. We know that when we prioritise harm

reduction approaches to vaping goods and, indeed, many other forms of drugs of dependence, we have better outcomes for members of our community.

By taking a regulatory approach we are able to provide medically supported options to people, so that they are not criminalised or only resorting to accessing non-therapeutic, or black market, vapes. You can imagine that for a young person that might have become dependent on nicotine the last thing we want to do is deter them from seeking help. To that end, and in fact in response to the commonwealth government's recent tranche of vaping legislation, on 20 March 2024, I moved a motion in this Assembly to provide better support to young who vape. I was really pleased to see that this motion was unanimously supported by the Assembly. I am really encouraged to see the work that has continued on this issue, and I would like to acknowledge Minister Paterson for the work she has done previously in this space too. We need to ensure we continue to have conversations about how best to support young people in Canberra when they are vaping. The 2024 Generation Vape research project lead by the Cancer Council NSW found that 36 per cent of young people regularly vape, representing a significant proportion of this cohort.

My resolution highlighted the importance of harm reduction and specifically to provide solutions that were codesigned with active consultation from young people who were best placed to understand their own needs, challenges and their unique circumstances. From this, the ACT Health Directorate, in collaboration with Common Cause Australia, commissioned a focus group that found the use of vapes among young people in the ACT has grown rapidly and that these are relatively easy for young people to obtain. Harm reduction and continued avenues for therapeutic access means better health and social outcomes for people with substance dependence, reduced death and disease in the community, reduced crime; they also relieve avoidable pressure on the health system. For this reason, I welcome the amendments that this bill presents, particularly in relation to expanding the number of people that will be able to access therapeutic vapes.

To the best of my understanding, these amendments will both change the legislation such that pharmacies do not need to obtain a tobacconist licence to be able to sell therapeutic vapes to people with prescriptions and provide adequate cessation supports for young people. These changes will allow those under the age of 18 to access a therapeutic vape where other therapeutic treatments and first line treatments have not worked. Young people in our community will be able to work with their medical practitioner to access a script for access to a therapeutic vape when appropriate for their treatment and for their healthcare. It is essential that all members of our community are able to continue to access healthcare.

We know, however, that young people are currently less likely to seek help from a medical practitioner to assist with vaping cessation. I hope that now these avenues for therapeutic access have opened, we continue to progress this and support young people who vape. Honest and non-judgmental messaging to young people about vaping and the related harms are essential in ensuring young people feel comfortable accessing services. Services such as the ACT Quitline can also continue to play a key role in providing free and confidential advice and behavioural support for nicotine dependence, as do a number of community services that provide support for young people—not just for nicotine dependence, but for their broader life circumstances.

I was initially cautious around legislation because one of the concerns that both young people and nicotine dependence experts have previously expressed to me was whether young people would continue to be criminalised for the personal possession of vapes if they were, in fact, dealing with nicotine dependence, but my federal colleagues in the Australian Greens during negotiations were able to secure changes to the federal government's legislation which ensured that the:

Possession of personal use quantities of any form of vape will not be subject to criminal charges.

I am also really grateful to Minister Stephen-Smith's office and directorate officials for their reassurance that the compliance and enforcement efforts from the National Vaping Enforcement Framework that surround these legislative amendments would explicitly exclude personal possession below a certain quantity. It is essential that we continue to see a continuation of legislation in this area that centres the role of harm minimisation to members of our community, and in particular, to the young members of our community.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.37), in reply: I thank members of the Legislative Assembly for their support for the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025. I also thank the scrutiny committee, the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, in exercising its scrutiny role, and the Standing Committee on Social Policy for its consideration of the bill, noting that it determined not to undertake an inquiry into the bill.

I presented the bill during the 4 to 6 March 2025 sittings. As others have indicated, it makes minor and technical changes to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act and consequential amendments to related legislation, which are necessary to address inconsistencies between existing ACT legislation and the commonwealth vaping reforms introduced in 2024.

These reforms built on the work that was done in December 2020. But, when the Therapeutic Goods Administration announced that nicotine would be rescheduled under the poisons standard and the rescheduling of nicotine as a schedule 4 prescription-only medicine came into effect in October 2021—which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we saw the growing popularity and public health concerns associated with the use of nicotine vaping goods—it meant that vapes containing nicotine could only be supplied legitimately where prescribed by a doctor. But we saw very clearly that this early reform did little to stem the illicit supply of nicotine vapes and contributed to misleading nicotine claims on vaping goods labels. The continuing use and availability of vaping goods in Australia increasingly became a serious public health challenge, particularly among young people. Also, as we are aware, in addition to nicotine addiction, vaping can cause lung damage and is a predictor of future smoking behaviour.

As I indicated, the commonwealth vaping reforms passed the Australian parliament in June 2024 and created a national framework for the regulation of vaping goods under the Commonwealth Therapeutic Goods Act. The commonwealth vaping reforms

regulate the importation, domestic manufacture, supply, commercial possession and advertising of all vaping devices, accessories and substances. Since 1 July 2024, the commercial possession and supply of vaping goods has been prohibited outside of authorised therapeutic pathways. This has enabled legitimate patient access to be available through registered pharmacists, medical practitioners or nurse practitioners for smoking cessation and the management of nicotine dependence. The commonwealth vaping reforms provide the controls on commercial activities related to vaping goods but do not pursue or prohibit the possession of vaping goods for personal use.

In October 2024, the Therapeutic Goods Administration further rescheduled nicotine to be a schedule 3 pharmacist-only medicine when supplied as a therapeutic vaping good with a nicotine concentration of 20 milligrams per milliliter or less to people aged 18 years and over. But nicotine does remain a schedule 4 prescription-only medicine for individuals under 18 years of age and for concentrations greater than 20 milligrams per milliliter.

The changes to the poisons standard automatically apply in the ACT through the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008. But this bill addresses the legal requirements that apply to the sale of vaping goods in the ACT to align with the commonwealth vaping reforms. Importantly, regulating therapeutic vaping goods under the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act means that substantive provisions in the Tobacco Act do not apply to these products. As a result, pharmacies that sell therapeutic vaping goods will not require a tobacco licence. Individuals aged under 18 years of age can also be supplied therapeutic vaping goods when clinically appropriate, for the purpose of vaping or smoking cessation and with a prescription. Of note, the reforms do not interfere with important controls such as a restriction on vaping in certain public places and vaping in cars with a minor present.

The ACT government will bring forward a further bill intended to improve the regulatory framework for tobacco and other smoking products and provide graduated enforcement options to address illegal supply in the ACT. I look forward to presenting that bill later this year. But, in the meantime, this bill makes important changes to the regulation of vaping goods, and its passage will deliver sensible and timely benefits for Canberrans.

So thank you again to everybody who is supporting the passage of this bill today, to those who have looked at it outside in committee processes and, particularly, to the officials who have worked on the development of this bill. I also want to acknowledge my office, which has worked with other offices to ensure that members could be appropriately briefed. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 11.43 am to 2 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01): As members would be aware, the Deputy Chief Minister is absent from the Assembly today, so I will endeavour to assist members with questions in her portfolios for question time.

Questions without notice

Minister for Health—conduct

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister.

In the last sitting week, you were asked if you had confidence in the health minister's ability to prevent further resignations, and you said yes. Since then, there have been a number of additional resignations. Chief Minister, do you continue to have confidence in the health minister's ability to prevent further resignations?

MR BARR: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Yes, I retain confidence, as do all of my colleagues and the broader Canberra community, in the good work of the health minister.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, are you also confident that the health minister has always acted with integrity and honesty?

MR BARR: Absolutely confident.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, would the minister's position in your government be tenable if it was shown that she had not acted with honesty and integrity?

MR BARR: I am confident that the minister conducts herself in accordance with the ministerial code of conduct.

Minister for Health—conduct

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. A number of resigning orthopaedic surgeons have expressed anger about degrading and defamatory remarks that the health minister's office has made by way of background to media, following the announcement of their resignations. Chief Minister, do you agree with the health minister's attacks on those choosing to leave the public service?

MR BARR: I think that the background of the matter is well known.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, is it ever appropriate for the minister to make degrading or defamatory attacks on those choosing to leave the public service?

MR BARR: I think that the accusations that the Leader of the Opposition is making in these questions—

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: If we can just stop the clock.

Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: The Chief Minister has suggested that the Leader of the Opposition made an accusation. She has only asked a question. I ask that you direct the Chief Minister not to comment—

MR SPEAKER: We are 15 seconds in. I think that the Chief Minister's earlier response is warranted.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I reject the implication in the question.

MS BARRY: Chief Minister, do these attacks from the Minister for the Public Service help or hinder public service recruitment?

MR BARR: Again, I would refer the member to my previous answer.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport.

Public transport is an essential service, particularly for people with disabilities who may have no other travel options. Minister, the inquiry into the bungled delivery of MyWay+ heard that the system has effectively locked out or seriously hampered people with disabilities. During the hearings, we heard of people with vision impairments who are unable to top up their account or do not even know when their bus is due to arrive, and of people who are deaf who are missing their stops. As one disability advocate and witness said during the hearings:

All people with disabilities want to live independently. It is a right to live independently, and now they are forced to ask for help.

Minister, how is this acceptable?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. MyWay+, which is in the delivery phase with our partner NEC, is required to meet accessibility requirements, particularly the WCAG 2.1 requirements. That is part of the contract that we have with NEC Australia. During the inquiry, we did share our collective disappointment that they had not fully met but were taking steps to achieve those requirements. That includes an audit that got underway last month through a provider who will be assessing their compliance with WCAG standards. It is certainly our expectation—and we will be holding NEC accountable—that NEC will meet those requirements under the contract.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why did you knowingly launch a transport system that did not, still does not and will not for another six months comply with the ACT's Disability Discrimination Act?

MR STEEL: We certainly had the expectation that they would comply with the requirements. They are now auditing that. I am sure that there will be improvements that can be made for them to achieve a higher level of compliance with WCAG standards. There are a range of different components to the MyWay+ system, and many of those accessibility features have been rolled out over the last few weeks, including on-board announcements. It is certainly our expectation that NEC will take further steps to improve accessibility, and the audit will provide a good basis for doing so.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will you apologise to Canberra residents and visitors with a disability who struggle to use public transport because of your decision to launch MyWay+ before it was ready?

MR STEEL: We encourage them to get in touch with Transport Canberra if they are experiencing any issues so that they can work through that. We have expressed a level of disappointment that some of those features for the higher level of accessibility were not available at launch. But NEC is still in the delivery phase of the contract. It is a new system, and they are taking steps to address those issues—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the question from Miss Nuttall was pretty clear. It was whether the minister will apologise or not. I ask that he be directly relevant.

MR SPEAKER: I hear your point of order, Mr Hanson. I think that Mr Steel is genuinely answering the basic subject matter of the question. I would note that he has still got a minute and 40 seconds to go.

MR STEEL: I have answered the question, thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, have you finished your answer?

MR STEEL: Yes; thank you.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. The brand new MyWay+ website does not meet accessibility guidelines requirements, which seriously disadvantages some of the Canberrans who are most reliant on public transport, like people who cannot see and therefore cannot drive. Is the ACT government currently in breach of the commonwealth's Disability Discrimination Act's disability standards for accessible public transport, the ACT's Disability Inclusion Act, the Human Rights Act and obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I said in the previous answer, the ACT government is introducing a new system, which is in the delivery phase, and we are confident that the NEC is taking steps to make sure the system is accessible and satisfies the requirements under those pieces of legislation.

Mr Cocks: Point of order.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order, if we can stop the clock.

Mr Cocks: It is essentially the same point of order as the last question, in that I would ask that the minister be directed to answer this question rather than a different question, particularly in the context of his actions following the last point of order, where he elected to no longer continue.

MR SPEAKER: I am going to suggest that I do not know that the minister is being directly relevant to the question here, because the question was very specifically about whether Transport Canberra, the ACT government is in breach of various—

Ms Orr: Point of order, Mr Speaker. If the question is offering a legal opinion, I would seek your guidance as to whether that is appropriate.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: If people can just have a drink or something and talk amongst themselves for a bit! I am going to seek advice from the Clerk. I am going to suggest that the question does not ask for a legal opinion; it asks whether the policy is compliant with the law. So I am going to let the question stand.

MR STEEL: I think I answered the question.

Members interjecting—

MR EMERSON: Minister, as previously stated, are you still very confident that the MyWay+ procurement process “Will provide us with a fit-for-purpose ticketing system,” given this procurement process has resulted in your government being in breach of several pieces of anti-discrimination and human rights legislation.

MR STEEL: That is a statement of opinion. I have been very clear that it is a requirement under the contract that we have with NEC Australia that they conform with the WCAG 2.1 guidelines. A range of accessibility measures have already been introduced. NEC are still in the delivery phase of that contract and they are undertaking an audit, through a third party, who undertakes disability access audits on a range of different systems around Australia. It is an organisation that is connected with a well-respected disability leader, Dylan Alcott AO. I believe that audit will assist NEC to make sure they are conforming at a higher level with the WCAG 2.1 requirements, noting that some of those requirements are subjective. But we would like to see them conform to those at a higher level.

A range of accessibility requirements have come online as the system continues to be rolled out and that has included the audio announcements of bus stops, which has been a welcome feature. There are a range of other measures that have been introduced and we expect there will be further improvements that will be made and we will be holding NEC accountable to make sure they comply with the requirements that are expected of them.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will you apologise to Canberrans who are living with a disability for the struggles they are having in using the MyWay+ system?

MR STEEL: I encourage them to get in touch with Transport Canberra. Each situation will be different for a person using the system, and, if they have issues, Transport Canberra is there to work with them to overcome any barriers that they may be facing in using public transport. So there is, of course, a helpline available for people to get in touch with—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order of relevance. The question was very clearly, will he apologise or not. What, again, Mr Steel is doing, is answering a different question. He is answering it very well, but it is not the question that was asked.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, I think there are a number of members in this chamber who would be appreciative if you would have a crack at answering it, but I am not going to direct you how to answer it. Are you finished?

MR STEEL: Thank you, I am finished.

Canberra Health Services—elective surgery

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. The resignation letter of one highly regarded orthopaedic surgeon said the number of patients he is able to see at each clinic has halved in recent years. The letter claims this has been done deliberately to limit his ability to recommend surgery, so as to reduce the number of patients on the waiting list. He says this means some patients now wait for more than a year to see him and get on the waiting list, in which time they must deal with agonising and unnecessary pain. Minister, is the surgeon wrong?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I have asked Canberra Health Services specifically about that claim. They have stated that that is not their understanding. But that, to the extent that the number of appointments in clinics has been reduced over the years—which they were surprised to read, and we are going to follow up on—that would be a decision that was taken by that clinical service area in that specialty of orthopaedics, because they are actually responsible for managing both their outpatients as well as their elective surgery list.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is the goal of your policies to improve the quality of life of Canberrans or to massage the numbers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The goal of our policy is very clearly about ensuring that we can deliver an equitable and accessible outpatient and public elective surgery service. I refer Ms Castley to the ministerial statement I made this morning about planned care. The entire purpose of our planned care changes is to ensure that we can deliver greater equity and ensure that people are being seen for their planned care, whether that is an outpatient appointment, or, particularly once they have had that outpatient appointment and a clinical urgency category has been determined, that they then receive their elective procedure—we all know that is a misleading term; it is urgent and it is important care—and that they can be seen on the basis of their clinical urgency and seen in turn.

We know that in some specialties that has not been the case, and that some people have been waiting longer than others because of the surgical waiting list—the surgeon's

waitlist—that they are allocated to. That is how these specialties have worked. That is not a criticism; it is a concern about that practice, and there is a need to move forward to a practice that provides greater equity. That is what our planned care reforms are seeking to do: if you are a category 2 or a category 3 patient waiting for your elective surgery, you will be seen in turn, according to the longest wait—taking into account your clinical urgency category, which will always be determined by the specialists.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you provide on notice the average waiting time for each clinic?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not understand Mr Cain’s question, unfortunately—

Mr Cain: The average waiting time for each clinic.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure whether Mr Cain is referring to each speciality or each individual person that provides outpatient clinics. If the opposition would like to clarify their question in further questioning, then I would be happy to take it on notice. But, with the way that Mr Cain has phrased his question, I cannot take that on notice, because it would be impossible to answer.

Primary health care—bulk-billing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. With increasing concern, I note today’s story in the *Canberra Times* regarding the closure of a 100 per cent bulk-billing practice in Tuggeranong. Minister, despite your continued claims that health and hospital services in the ACT are improving, what has either your government or federal Labor done to prevent the 4,900 patients in Tuggeranong from losing access to bulk-billing medical treatment, at the same time that Labor is responsible for the biggest increases in cost-of-living expenses in a generation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What I can say is that, despite primary care being a commonwealth responsibility, the Interchange Health Co-operative was established with the support of the ACT government. Half a million dollars went towards the establishment of the Interchange Health Co-op as a bulk-billing practice in Tuggeranong, specifically to address a gap that was identified through a previous ACT government initiative that we are now building on with an election commitment for \$11 million to support the expansion of bulk-billing in the ACT, including the establishment of new bulk-billing clinics. We have also continued to support the Interchange Health Co-op through the life of that organisation, including this year, having committed \$353,000—as is my understanding—of ACT government money to the Interchange Health Co-op, seeking to support them with the financial challenges that they have been facing as a result of 10 years of neglect of the Medicare system by the previous coalition government, which saw MBS rebates frozen for years and years and made it very difficult to sustain a bulk-billing practice.

I am very concerned for the Interchange Health Co-op patients who will be affected by this closure. The ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services will work with patients individually. We already have information about one patient who called ABC Radio Canberra. We have that information.

Ms Castley: Yes, because I went to your office to tell you about it, because you wouldn't get on the phone.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We were listening to the radio as well. We have that information and Canberra Health Services will make direct contact with that patient. We do not have information of those patients, but we will work with the Interchange—*(Time expired.)*

MS CASTLEY: Minister, despite your claims that the ACT health system is fine, why is the bulk-billing rate in the ACT the worst in the nation, with fewer than two out of three Canberrans—66.1 per cent—able to access bulk-billing?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Primary care is the responsibility of the commonwealth government. State and territory ministers have been saying for years that we want the commonwealth government to lean in and provide more support for primary care. That call fell on absolutely deaf ears—

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance—

MR SPEAKER: Well, she has not started debating yet!

Mr Hanson: She is clearly going down the track of debating the question, which is one point of order. The second is on relevance. It is not about the issue of bulk-billing across Australia; it is the specific issue of why the ACT is the worst.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister is doing her best to be relevant to the question. Perhaps she is not answering it in the way that you want her to. Minister, if you have more for us, please share.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is as a result of the lobbying of state and territory ministers, like me, that the Albanese Labor government have continued to commit more funding to primary care, including the commitment to expand the tripled bulk-billing incentive—which they implemented for children, young people and concession card holders—to all patients attending general practice, which is something that, of course, the Liberals jumped on board with, but nobody believes—

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance, the question was about why the ACT is the worst in the nation. The minister is not going to that point; she is answering a different question.

MR SPEAKER: I kind of agree with Mr Hanson, but I am not going to direct the minister on how to answer the question. I am wondering whether there is the ability to be more relevant to the question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The ACT has long had challenges in relation to bulk-billing rates, but the reason that they are so low is the 10 years of neglect of the previous coalition government.

MS MORRIS: Minister, why do Canberrans pay, on average, over \$80 per GP visit at the same time that they are struggling to pay their grocery bills, their electricity bills

and their fuel bills?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would suggest that Ms Morris might direct that question to her colleagues in the federal Liberal Party, including the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Dutton, about what the previous coalition government did and what that has contributed to—

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister is, once again, debating the question and seeking to bring in issues which are not directly relevant to the question.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: I am not sure that she is. I think she is answering it, just not in the way that you would like her to.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If the opposition are going to continue to ask questions that are specifically in the realm of commonwealth responsibility, they cannot be surprised when the minister answering talks about commonwealth responses to that matter.

Federal government—budget 2025-2026

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, how does the federal budget handed down on 25 March help Canberrans with the cost of living?

Mr Hanson: A point of order on relevance. The minister just said that we should not be asking questions that are not related to the ACT government. Surely, if it is a question about the federal budget, how can it be relevant?

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr Cain: A point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a time for questions without notice. Clearly the minister is about to read a prepared statement. That is not permitted. That is not a question without notice, surely! It does not qualify

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Cain; there is no point of order.

Mr Steel, we are all waiting for your reply.

MR STEEL: What happens on the hill and what happens in the federal budget does matter to the ACT's economy, and that is why we welcome—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members, order! I will start naming people!

MR STEEL: What happens in the federal budget matters. That is why we welcome the Albanese Labor government's investment in our city. It provided a range of strong and important measures to help Canberrans with cost of living. We welcome that. Further

to the tax cut that the Albanese government will provide to every single Canberran, they are also providing 190,000 ACT households with cheaper electricity, helping to drive down prices and deliver outcomes for cost of living.

We also welcome the investment the federal government is making to further cap the cost of prescription medicines at \$25 and investments they are making to make it cheaper to see a doctor here in the ACT. Canberrans have already saved hundreds of thousands each year on cheaper prescriptions under the Albanese Labor government.

We welcome the continued investment by the government, particularly the cuts that they have made to taxes, which will mean a benefit of around \$50 a week, or almost \$2,900 a year, for the average taxpayer, which will be welcome further relief for Canberrans.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, which of these measures will have the greatest impacts on Canberra?

MR STEEL: It depends who you are. But what we do know—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order on relevance. Mr Werner-Gibbings just asked for an opinion. The Minister said, “It depends who you ask.” This is asking for an opinion.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I am done! There is no point of order. Mr Steel?

MR STEEL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to particularly highlight the Albanese Labor government’s further investment in Medicare that will make it cheaper and easier to see a GP. That will be greatly welcomed by our community, as it builds on the work that they have already done after 10 years of neglect by a federal Liberal government, as we have been discussing in the Dorothy Dixon asked by the Canberra Liberals to the health minister.

Every Canberran will benefit from the \$7.9 billion program to significantly increase the bulk-billing incentive, with the commonwealth’s goal being nine of 10 GP visits bulk-billed by 2030 across Australia. We know how important it is for Canberrans to see a GP, to get earlier care and to stay out of emergency departments and hospitals. It is why our government has made investments in nurse-led walk-in centres and community health services for all Canberrans to access. It is great to see the Albanese Labor government investing in the commonwealth’s responsibility of delivering primary health care. More bulk-billing, cheaper medicines and better healthcare services are an important priority for a Labor government federally and an important priority for us to deliver the important acute healthcare services that we have responsibility for.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, how do these measures build on the existing measures being pursued by the ACT government?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. As I have outlined, there is continued strong investment in health and Medicare and it builds on our government’s strong record of investment in free healthcare services that Canberrans rely on.

Beyond health care, the \$150 electricity rebate for all households will, of course, be added to the existing \$800 energy rebate for low-income Canberra households, supporting them with \$950 this year in total. Canberrans will continue to benefit from a strong and early investment in renewable energy, which is supporting Canberrans to have the lowest average household electricity bills in the country. We expect that to continue.

Eligible apprentices across the country will be particular beneficiaries from the budget. Those involved in residential construction will see a \$10,000 financial incentive, which is critical to help both our government and the federal government in our combined efforts to deliver the national housing targets to build 1.2 million homes across the country and our fair share here in the ACT.

Our government will continue to support residential construction, and the workforce required to deliver it, through our planned housing reforms and our work to continue to invest in the skills sector, after a decade of neglect under the coalition, when they had not signed a new national skills agreement. We will continue to invest in apprentices here as well, and we will continue to work together with the federal government to support continued cost-of-living support for the community.

Taxation—short-term rental accommodation levy

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer.

Your government is pressing ahead with yet another new tax—the five per cent so-called short-term rental accommodation levy. According to your own explanatory statement, this levy will have little to no impact on housing affordability. Its sole purpose, as explicitly stated, is to raise revenue. How do you justify introducing a tax that does nothing to improve housing affordability, while piling additional costs and red tape onto small-scale accommodation providers, just to plug holes in your own budget?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I reject the premise of the question. We said that the primary purpose is to generate revenue to support critical government services, but we have also said that it may have a modest incentive for short-term accommodation providers to provide more longer term rentals. We do think that that will be modest, but it will also have the effect of making sure that there is a fairer or more level playing field when it comes to the broader accommodation sector, because we acknowledge that hoteliers do pay a range of taxes that short-term rental accommodation providers do not have to.

The important thing about the structure of the levy provided for in the bill is that it is a tax on the short-term rental accommodation platforms. There are very few of those. They will be the providers that have to pay the tax, not directly the people who are letting out their accommodation on a short-term basis of less than 28 days. We have been engaging this year with those platform providers around the implementation. That has been a good discussion. We are confident that we will be able to implement that, without having a significant distortion of the market, from 1 July.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, isn't it the case that this levy has nothing to do with housing

and everything to do with squeezing revenue to make up for your government's inability to rein in spending?

MR STEEL: No. A range of governments across the country have introduced this levy, specifically to provide revenue to support important services like health and hospitals, and important services like education and schools, community services, and housing as well, with the investments that we are making to build more homes. Yes, it is important that we have a sustainable revenue basis. We have said that that is the purpose of the levy. The Liberals cannot have it both ways. There may be some modest benefits as well, in terms of the longer term rental market. We have also said that it will create a more level playing field for accommodation providers more broadly.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr and Mr Hanson, there are anterooms here, if you want to have a discussion.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, was any modelling undertaken on the impact that this levy would have on Canberra's tourism sector and local accommodation market? If not, why was that overlooked?

MR STEEL: We have certainly looked at what has occurred in Victoria, and we do not think that it will have a very significant impact. We expect that the levy will be passed through to the cost of booking that short-term accommodation. Ultimately, largely, that would be paid by people coming from interstate to visit here. Over the last 12 months, since the announcement of the new levy in the last budget, there has been an increase in the number of short-term rentals on the market. It was around 1,200 at the time that the policy was developed, and we now understand that it is around 1,700. We expect that the short-term rental accommodation market will continue to grow, despite the levy, and we expect the broader accommodation sector to grow. They will be, of course, playing on a more level playing field as a result of this levy being introduced.

Primary health care—bulk-billing

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, as Ms Morris has stated, today the community found out that the Tuggeranong Interchange Co-op, one of the only GP clinics in Canberra that still provides 100 per cent bulk-billing, is closing. It provides essential preventative health care to LGBTQI+ folks, women and people living on a low income. Minister, what will you do to ensure continuity of care for trans and gender-diverse patients who are relying on the co-op to access gender-affirming care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question, which enables me to speak a bit more about how Canberra Health Services and the ACT Health Directorate will work with Interchange and the administrators to ensure that patients can be transitioned and supported with other services. We obviously do not have direct access to a patient list for Interchange, because that is information that is held by Interchange, but ACT Health Directorate officials have been in touch with them. They have also been working with Capital Health Network to ensure that plans can be put in place.

The Canberra Health Services Alcohol and Drug Service were also aware that there was a potential for Interchange to go into administration and so has been planning for the possibility that they will need to support more individuals who, for example, require access to opioid replacement therapy. Specifically in relation to LGBTIQ+ patients who require that safe support, the teams are happy to work individually with people. But, clearly, we fund organisations like Meridian and Directions Health Services, which provide safe services for the diversity of our community.

We will continue to understand what we need to do to support both the patients themselves and, if there is anything that we can do to support the administration process at Interchange in a smooth a transition as possible. We have also been in contact with the commonwealth government, which, as I have previously noted, has responsibility for primary care. They are well aware of this situation and they are also considering any action that they may take in this matter.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, if you are a young person waiting to access lifesaving gender-affirming care, how long can you expect to wait for that care if the Interchange Health Co-op does in fact close?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: First of all, if you are a young person up to the age of 25, I would suggestion the Junction, which the ACT government funds, which is run by Anglicare, might be a good first port of call. Giving the Junction a call about your primary healthcare needs if you are a young person would be a good starting point. Otherwise, if there are specific individuals who are concerned about their lack of access to care with the closure of the Interchange that Miss Nuttall is aware of, she should feel free to pass those details onto my office and we will try to connect them into the right place—whether that is Capital Health Network to identify another GP who may be able to provide that service, or whether that it is through to Canberra Health Services to provide some support.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, will you consider using ACT Labor's \$11 million election promise to increase bulk-billing rates to support trans and gender-diverse people who rely on the Tuggeranong Interchange Co-op?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We are working through that election commitment in the context of the 2025-26 budget. We have said from the start that this will be a co-designed program with practices, with GPs and, of course, with consumers. So those decisions have not yet been taken in relation to whether there will be specific targets.

But, certainly, I am very conscious that we have a range of deep end GPs and GPs in the ACT who are interested in providing support for specific cohorts of patients, and trans and gender-affirming care is one of those specialisations that some of our GPs are interested in. We have worked with A Gender Agenda to ensure that there is availability for GPs to access training and a better understanding about how to support trans and gender-diverse patients within their practice. We will continue to undertake that work as well as continuing our work to establish both paediatric and adult gender services within the ACT public health system.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

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

On 5 March this year, this Assembly passed a motion calling on you to:

- (a) provide all documents and briefings regarding the effectiveness and suitability of the Burrangiri Respite Centre, including details of estimates for retrofitting the facility;
- (b) provide information about alternative facilities, including those that are capable of meeting the demand currently serviced by the Burrangiri Respite Centre;

When will you provide this information?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Carrick for her question and I did hear her comments this morning. Unfortunately, I was not able to be in the chamber when she made her comments in relation to the petition this morning. I will follow that up, Ms Carrick, in relation to the motion. I note that there was no timeframe placed on the provision of that information in the motion. Some of that information has already been provided through responses to questions on notice, and some of it was included in my comments during the debate. I think Ms Carrick, if I heard her correctly, claimed this morning that we had never provided information about the potential cost of refurbishment of the facility. That is untrue. Not only have I tabled the report that indicates what those required refurbishments were in terms of the asset management plan, but I also talked about that in my response to the motion on 5 March, including identifying:

The Health Directorate's advice to me was that the program of work would come at an estimated cost of over \$900,000 and a necessary temporary closure of the facility itself. Extending the useful life of the building and increasing its amenity for aged-care respite to modern standards would require a further significant capital investment, estimated to be in the range of \$6½ million to \$12 million, and, of course, this activity would require an even longer closure.

MS CARRICK: Minister, the upgrades in the asset management plan are very minor. What specific refurbishments are needed that would require the investment of \$6 million?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So there are two issues here. The refurbishments in the asset management plan, which was undertaken in 2023—I think in my speaking to the debate motion earlier I did say 2022—identified the HVAC, the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, as needing replacement within one to three years. Now that was undertaken in 2023. It also identified some electrical work. Both of those activities would require the closure of the facility for a period of time. So this is what I have been talking about. This is what the \$900,000 relates to. This is a conversation I had with the Salvation Army last year where we all agreed that to undertake some of the work that had been identified in the asset management plan would require a temporary closure of the facility.

In that environment—and also the environment where our current contract with the Salvation Army was coming to an end and the Health Directorate was having to undertake consideration of procurement activity in line with the Procurement Act—that

was the context in which there were then ongoing conversations about: do we make those changes to electrical and HVAC, to only close the centre for a short period of time, continue using it for this respite service, go out to procurement to test the market for the provider of that service, and all of those things would have had to be done while this service was temporarily closed. Do we close the service and try to find an alternative way to fund respite services? That was an option that was explored and, ultimately, I concluded that that was not going to be a useful activity given the work that has already been done under the commonwealth aged care reforms and the fact that Carers ACT manages a carers gateway that provides access to respite services for older people.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, have you asked the federal government to financially support Burrangiri respite centre given the budget blowout in your health portfolio?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have not asked the commonwealth government to financially support the Burrangiri respite centre because, as I have just been indicating in my comments, this is a facility that is owned by the ACT government that needs to close for a period of time to undertake work on heating, ventilation and air conditioning and electrical. The roof also needs to be replaced in the next few years. You would not close the centre once to replace the electrical, heating ventilation and air conditioning, and then close the centre again in another two years to completely replace the roof. If you were going to do that work to continue using the centre for its current purpose, you would do all that work at once. That would be what made sense. So that would be more than \$900,000 worth of work, particularly given the escalation in construction costs.

So what I expect the commonwealth to do is to continue to provide funding for respite through their aged care systems. As I was just starting to say, that is managed in the ACT through Carers ACT, who have a carers gateway that anybody can call. Carers ACT can organise both emergency respite and planned respite care. They are funded by the commonwealth to undertake that service. Residential aged care facilities are funded to provide respite. Carers ACT also has the cottage program, which is funded by the commonwealth, to do that respite service that is their responsibility. Of course, the Albanese Labor government has been increasing funding and undertaking reform in aged care, again to address the decade of neglect under the previous coalition government.

Australian Federal Police—professional standards investigations

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On 5 April 2025 the *Canberra Times* reported the Professional Standards unit of the Australian Federal Police concluded that Sergeant David Power breached the AFP Code of Conduct after admitting in court it appeared he had given ‘false evidence’ in the hearing of South Sydney Rabbitohs teammates Jack Wighton and Latrell Mitchell—noting that his evidence led to the charges being dismissed.

Minister, in such a high-profile case that has the capacity to erode public confidence in the AFP, when the officer involved admitted to hallucinating and giving inaccurate evidence, how is the Canberra community meant to have faith in the AFP when we are told that, for privacy reasons, we not allowed to know the findings of the breach and the sanctions applied to the officer involved?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. Yes, I am aware of the reporting about the AFP officer in the media this week. The AFP has confirmed that the sanctions will not be made available, due to privacy reasons. The confidentiality of information relating to integrity issues, including the personal information of AFP appointees, is subject to the secrecy provisions in section 60A of the AFP Act and regulations 28 and 29 of the AFP Regulations.

I am confident that there are multiple avenues for external oversight of ACT police, and that they are appropriate avenues, and that where oversight finds areas for improvement, this occurs. ACT Policing is subject to more internal and external oversight than most other agencies or organisations. I am confident that there are no inherent structural or cultural issues affecting the overall performance of ACT Policing.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, are you concerned that there may be other First Nations people in Canberra who might be subjected to similar injustices at the hands of territory police officers but not have the financial capacity available to Mr Mitchell and Mr Wighton to engage a top legal team to defend their case?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. Obviously, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system is of much concern to the ACT government. The Jumbunna report that will soon be released is looking into issues around the engagement of justice agencies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and I am sure there will be some recommendations out of that which speak to ACT Policing's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. I look forward to working through those recommendations when they come.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what steps will you take with regard to professional standards investigations, so that the public, who are important stakeholders, can be aware of such findings?

DR PATERSON: I will support ACT Policing's and the AFP's professional standards that currently exist. There are a whole lot of complaint mechanisms. AFP Workplace Issues and Complaints Resolution teams are there to address these concerns.

Planning—Ginninderra Falls

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. I imagine the Chief Minister will be amply able to answer this question. It is about Ginninderra Falls.

There is currently a subdivision application through Yass Valley Council of a property on Parkwood Road which sits in Ginninderra Falls. My understanding is that the sale process of the falls might be delayed due to the subdivision of this property. Has the ACT government been consulted about this subdivision, given that the site can only be accessed through the ACT?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Clay for the question. I will need to take that on notice.

MS CLAY: Will the ACT government, on behalf of the Canberra community, advocate

to include a public access road to the Falls as part of the subdivision discussions?

MR BARR: I will take that as part of the question on notice that Minister Berry will respond to.

MISS NUTTALL: Will the ACT government work with the New South Wales government and the buyer of Ginninderra Falls to ensure the ecological values of the land are protected and that sites of significance to First Nations people are managed by First Nations people?

MR BARR: I think I missed a key word in the first sentence. Did you say—

MR SPEAKER: Could you please repeat the question for us, Miss Nuttall?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes; indeed. Will the ACT government work with the New South Wales government and the buyer of Ginninderra Falls to ensure the ecological—

MR BARR: “The buyer”. Sorry—I thought the question might have implied that we would be working with the New South Wales government to buy the falls. Thank you for the clarification. I will take that on notice.

Planning and development—Molonglo Valley

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Planning. The 2018-19 budget announced land releases for the Molonglo commercial centre in the 2021-22 financial year. In 2020, Labor promised to fast-track the centre’s development, but in 2021 the ACT government postponed the land release to 2023-24, which is now in the past. As recently as last year’s budget, it appeared the land release would commence this financial year. Is the town centre land release going to be delayed again?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We will update the community as part of the budget and the release of the housing supply and Land Release Program, which is the new name for the Indicative Land Release Program. We will do that around budget time to provide an update to the community on the timing of release of a range of blocks. Of course, it is an indicative program.

The Suburban Land Agency, under Minister Berry, has been working on the development of a subdivision design application to support the new Molonglo town centre. The government has undertaken works in the past, under Minister Gentleman, to fast-track some of the planning work that was required to support the new commercial centre. I undertook the work to declare Molonglo a town centre and to advocate for changes to the National Capital Plan, which have come into force, and the subdivision design application is being prepared on that basis, which will need to go out for consultation with the community under the statutory process. That is a necessary step before the land is released to market, and we expect it will take a number of years for the actual construction to occur on the site.

The first work that will be required by the SLA is already underway in terms of the work that the government has been undertaking on John Gorton Drive, not just to build the new bridge over the Molonglo River but the lead-in roads which are critical for the

development of Molonglo because they provide the intersections and access points into the town centre. Work is well progressed on that, and the Suburban Land Agency will be undertaking further work, as well, to progress the town centre as quickly as possible.

MR COCKS: Minister, has there been any impact or delay to the town centre land release related to the Urban Forest Act? If so, precisely what?

MR STEEL: Not that I am aware of, but that would be a question for the Suburban Land Agency. I am happy to take that on notice.

MR HANSON: Minister, on what date will you be releasing the land for the town centre? Will you now apologise to the Molonglo community for continually breaking the 2020 Labor election commitment to fast-track the land release?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the answer to the earlier question, where I did note that Minister Gentleman had undertaken some of that fast-tracking work with the planning changes in the Molonglo Valley, and I have extended that work on declaring Molonglo as a town centre. The Suburban Land Agency is now undertaking work as quickly as possible to deliver that site, and the government has also been investing in the necessary enabling infrastructure through new roads, in particular, and the augmentation of existing roads to support the intersections in the future development. We are getting on with the work for Molonglo town centre. I look forward to updating the community as the Suburban Land Agency progresses, and they will need to consult with the community as they undertake their subdivision design application.

Vocational education and training—fee-free courses

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the uptake of fee-free TAFE and how this initiative is supporting Canberrans in getting the skills they need to succeed?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question and for her commitment to fee-free TAFE here in the ACT. Fee-free TAFE is, of course, a joint initiative of the commonwealth and ACT governments. It is designed to help people to learn, retrain or upskill themselves. It provides 600 free places per semester until December 2026, helping to remove barriers to access for many in our community.

Since commencement, just over 1,200 students have completed their free TAFE course. 778 of them received a full qualification; 452 of them undertook a short course. The top courses were in some of our most critical areas of need in the ACT, including cert III in early childhood education and care, cert IV in cybersecurity, cert IV in information technology, and cert IV in school-based education and support. Of the 1,200 students who have benefited from free TAFE, over 38 per cent were young people, 19 per cent were women experiencing financial hardship and 11 per cent of them were unpaid carers.

Free TAFE is a great practical initiative being delivered by the federal Labor and ACT Labor governments, and it will remove barriers to accessing training.

MS TOUGH: Minister, noting that free TAFE is a joint initiative of the ACT and commonwealth governments, what risk is there to the future of free TAFE and access to a CIT education should the coalition form government following the upcoming federal election?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. She is right; there is a real risk to free TAFE under a Peter Dutton prime ministership. Free TAFE is at risk in this election. Just recently, the Albanese government's Free TAFE Bill passed the Senate. This important piece of legislation will support the delivery of at least 100,000 free TAFE places across Australia each year.

The bill recognises the key role of the public provider at the heart of our vocational education system, and how it is critical to deliver the skills needs of our growing economy. Over the next decade, nine out of 10 of the new jobs in this economy will require post-secondary qualifications. Almost half of those will come from VET pathways, and removing financial barriers to entry will help to ensure that our workforce will continue to have the skills it needs in the future.

The federal Liberal opposition voted against this bill. They fought it. They do not support it. When the coalition last left federal government, the VET sector was underfunded and under-supported. Even when out of government, the federal Liberal opposition still tried to hold our VET sector back by trying to stop the Free TAFE Bill.

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: If we can stop the clock, please?

Mr Cocks: I have listened for some time to the minister, and it is clear that he seems to have ventured into the space of debating the merits of different federal positions on the issue.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, that was the question. He is being directly relevant to the question.

MR PETTERSSON: I will note that this is a joint initiative between the territory and federal governments, so it is hugely consequential as to who our partner is in delivering it.

It is only a federal Labor government that will support TAFE in Australia and give it the funding it needs to secure education opportunities into the future.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister—get the cane out, if appropriate—but how—

Mr Cocks: Point of order!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Werner-Gibbings, that is a preamble. We appreciate your theatrics, but if we could just remove the preamble.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I apologise.

How will our local VET sector be impacted if free TAFE is scrapped under a Dutton-led coalition government?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. It is hugely consequential. The commonwealth has committed \$7.36 million to the ACT under tranche 2 of free TAFE. This funding, provided through to December 2026, will continue to support training opportunities for some of Canberra's most vulnerable cohorts. Our community is one that values and truly understands how vital education and training are at all levels. The commonwealth support is critical to keeping this important pathway open to Canberra's community. If the commonwealth were to exit the scheme, this would come at the direct cost of learning opportunities in Canberra, and could see around 1,200 Canberrans miss out each year on the opportunities that free TAFE provides.

Crime—firearms

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, the ACT Chief Police Officer recently disclosed on ABC radio at least six public shootings across Canberra in recent weeks, causing significant injuries, the death of a pet dog and damage to family homes. Police believe at least four of those shootings were linked and the work of a least three men.

Minister, why have Canberra suburbs become a warzone for targeted gun attacks?

DR PATERSON: I strongly refute the Canberra Liberals' description of Canberra as a warzone. We live in one of the safest communities in Australia. We are seeing crime rates decreasing. I acknowledge that the incidents that Ms Morris is referencing that occurred last week are very concerning to the community. But what the ACT Chief Police Officer stressed on radio that morning was that these are targeted attacks and they are not a threat to public safety.

ACT Policing have been doing excellent work in tackling firearm related crime over the last few months, which has seen the ACT Firearms Registry seizing over 2,000 firearms in operations over the last two months. So there is a lot of work going on in this space to keep our community safe.

MS MORRIS: Minister, when will you admit that your government's failure to prioritise community safety is making Canberra less safe?

DR PATERSON: Again, I strongly reject that assertion. ACT Labor and this government's investment in ACT Policing and a raft of other measures to support the community have seen a decrease in crime rates in the ACT. Again, we live in one of the safest cities in the country. We are seeing significant decreases in crime rates, which is really a testament to the excellent work of ACT Policing and our community sector partners.

MR HANSON: Minister, when were you first briefed on these shootings? What action have you taken to ensure that there is no ongoing threat to the community?

DR PATERSON: I have listened to the advice from the ACT Chief Police Officer,

who has assured me that there is no ongoing threat to the Canberra community and that these are targeted incidents which ACT Policing are currently investigating.

Roads—speed limits

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City Services.

Research shows that the introduction of a 40 km/h speed zones in high pedestrian areas, significantly reduces the risk of death for vulnerable road users. A 10 km/h decrease in speed can reduce the risk of death from approximately 80 per cent at 50 km/h to 30 per cent at 40 km/h. Minister, why are the roads surrounding St Clare's and St Edmund's in Griffith, not 40 km/h school zones?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I did cover quite a lot of this this morning on radio, and I recognise that Mr Solly is present in the chamber.

The short answer is that a school zone is generally installed on the length of the school boundary, located in front of the school's frontage, where safe access can be provided. A 40 km/h zone is also usually associated with set downs and pickups, and that is already available for St Edmund's and St Clare's colleges from their existing designated school zones on—I never know how to pronounce this—Barrallier Street, Blaxland Crescent, Will Street and McMillan Crescent. I think what Mr Milligan is referring to in saying streets around is one street, which is Canberra Avenue. It is 60 km/h for some different reasons. It is an arterial road. It also is designated land under the National Capital Authority because it is a main corridor and it is linked in with the Burley Griffin plan for Canberra. So it is of very big interest to the NCA and will need engagement if ever we wish to make any changes to it, because preserving that is so important. Also an arterial road is designed to move lots of vehicles. So it is not just 60 km/h because it is an arterial road, but it is moving 20,000 vehicles per day. So that explains why Canberra Avenue is not a 40 km/h zone in that area.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what interventions for Canberra Avenue has the government considered for better safety for pedestrians?

MS CHEYNE: A feasibility study was commissioned last year. I have that and I have asked TCCS for some further advice about timing and options. What appears to be the most logical solution is to install a signalised pedestrian crossing mid-block between McMillan and Burke Streets. However, my understanding is that the original advice also reflected that the Hume Place roundabout, which connects Wentworth, Sturt and Canberra Avenues, is one of our most dangerous intersections. Canberra Avenue, in that area that we are talking about, is not considered a particularly dangerous spot. Other areas of Canberra Avenue absolutely are, down near Fyshwick, but it is that intersection actually that has been the priority.

We do have federal funding for that. There has been considerable amount of design work undertaken. But the original recommendation, as I understood it, was that that work needed to be completed first because then it would have flow on effects for Canberra Avenue. However, in the context of the absolute tragedy that occurred the other week and the representations that I have received, we are having another look at that and I will keep the community and the Assembly updated.

MR HANSON: I believe it is Barrallier Street, Minister.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you.

MR HANSON: It is named after Francis Louis Barrallier.

MR SPEAKER: I think that is a preamble too Mr Hanson!

MR HANSON: It is indeed! It is indeed!

Mr Barr: It is the most helpful one he has ever given!

MR HANSON: You cannot win, can you!

Minister, are you aware of any other inadequately protected school zones or other interventions, leaving Canberra children vulnerable outside Canberra schools?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Hanson for helping me out and also for the question. Certainly a school that is top of mind for me is Melba Copland. There was an accident there some weeks ago where a young person was injured by a vehicle. I have received representations from that family, and Minister Berry and I have been working with TCCS and with the school safety program about interventions that might be appropriate in that area. We are limited for some of the interventions such as mobile van speed cameras—there is not an appropriate place due to the curvature of the road. What we do witness is some of the parking behaviours can be problematic. All of that needs a bit of a closer look at. But again, I look forward to updating the Assembly in due course.

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

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner Act, pursuant to section 12—Annual Statement—2024—Office of ACT Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children & Young People Commissioner, undated.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—
Bills—Not inquired into—

Heritage and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 1 April 2025.

Planning (Ainslie Volcanics) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 1 April 2025.

Short-Term Rental Accommodation Levy Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, dated 8 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—

Animal Welfare Act—

Animal Welfare (Advisory Committee Member) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-29 (LR, 20 March 2025).

Animal Welfare (Advisory Committee Member) Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-30 (LR, 20 March 2025).

Canberra Institute of Technology Act and Financial Management Act—Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT Board Chair) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-23 (LR, 13 March 2025).

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-26 (LR, 17 March 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act—Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Limitation to Coverage Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-31 (LR, 20 March 2025).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Denman Prospect) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-21 (LR, 6 March 2025).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Venues) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-20 (LR, 6 March 2025).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (ARC Rally Test Day) Declaration 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-22 (LR, 7 March 2025).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Rally of Canberra) Declaration 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-28 (LR, 18 March 2025).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (TGRA Ride Day) Declaration 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-32 (LR, 21 March 2025).

University of Canberra Act—

University of Canberra Council Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-18 (LR, 6 March 2025).

University of Canberra Council Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-19 (LR, 6 March 2025).

Urban Forest Act—Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-16 (LR, 6 March 2025).

Urban Forest Regulation—Urban Forest (Canopy Contribution Agreements—On-Site Canopy Contribution) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-17 (LR, 6 March 2025).

Veterinary Practice Act—

Veterinary Practice (Board) Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-24 (LR, 14 March 2025).

Veterinary Practice (Board) Appointment 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-25 (LR, 14 March 2025).

ACT Policing—Molonglo Valley and Weston Creek

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.09): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Canberrans have a right to be safe and feel safe in their homes, places of business and in their community;
- (b) crime and criminal behaviour are significant community concerns across the ACT; and
- (c) local policing is essential for crime prevention, crime response, and for building positive relationships between police and the community;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) residents of Weston Creek and Molonglo Valley depend on the Woden Police Station which is up to 16 minutes drive away;
- (b) crime rates in Weston Creek exceed the ACT average in both property crimes and violent crimes;
- (c) total crime rates in the Molonglo Valley are higher than the ACT average; and
- (d) crime trends in the Woden region surpass the ACT average in total crimes, violent crimes and property crimes;

(3) acknowledges that:

- (a) the Canberra Liberals have been advocating for a new, properly resourced police station in Molonglo Valley since 2019;
- (b) ahead of the 2024 election, ACT Labor promised to establish a police station in the Molonglo Valley; and
- (c) since the election, the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services has distanced herself from the commitment by stating “that is a longer-term plan”, and pushing responsibility to the community by indicating residents should simply “input all the above issues through ACT Region Crime Stoppers or report to ACT Policing, so police can target their work more effectively”; and

(4) calls on the Government to:

- (a) commit to delivering a police station in Molonglo Valley before December 2026;
- (b) finalise a site for the Molonglo Valley police station by January 2026;
- (c) ensure the next Budget allocates sufficient resources to build, equip and staff the Molonglo Valley police station without reducing police resources in other locations; and

- (d) report back to the Assembly by 23 October 2025 with a plan for delivery of the Molonglo Valley police station.

As this motion states, everyone deserves to be safe and to feel safe in their homes, in their communities and in their day-to-day lives. But too often this is not the case across our city, and especially in Molonglo Valley.

For years, the government have ignored the concerns of the community. They spent years and years denying that there was any need for a police station. They refused to invest; they refused to anticipate the emerging issues in the Molonglo Valley; and they refused to deliver a police station.

The community could see that the problems were going to get worse without action—and so could we. That is why we, the Canberra Liberals, committed to a new police station for Molonglo Valley at consecutive elections and why we have consistently advocated for more police. It is why four years ago—exactly four years ago next Sunday—my colleague Mr Hanson brought a motion to this place calling for the Molonglo police station to be built. It is also why I highlighted this issue in my first speech to this place.

The Canberra Liberals have been consistent in our calls for community safety and community policing—and so has the community itself. Let me paraphrase Mr Hanson’s 2021 speech, or one part of it, for a moment, just to make this point. He said:

In the lead-up to the election forum that was held in 2020 there were comments from Tom Anderson, former president of the Weston Creek Community Council. He was quoted in the RiotACT news—

and then by Mr Hanson, as saying:

“We have been saying for years that there is no meaningful police presence in Weston Creek or Molonglo,” Community Council president Tom Anderson says, ahead of the council’s ACT election debate on Wednesday. Unfortunately, that has only been highlighted by the tragic events of this weekend.”

Mr Hanson went on to say:

He was referring to the stabbing of a teenager at the Weston Creek skatepark, but the council says they have been deeply concerned for years by the threat to property from multiple burglaries. They say they have been consistently requesting a permanent police presence in the area, citing attendance times of well over an hour for callouts. It goes on: “We’ve been promised a police station in the Weston Creek town centre, but we’ve seen no plans and have no idea when it will be developed.”

Residents in Molonglo and Weston Creek are sick of being told to wait. They are sick of rising crime and sick of slow response times, and they are increasingly frustrated by a government that keeps walking back its promises on community safety.

Right now, the entire central region of Canberra—from Molonglo through Weston Creek, Woden and all the way to Fyshwick—is serviced by a single police station in

Woden. That station is already under pressure. At any given time, there are often only two patrols available to cover the entire region. That includes thousands of homes, multiple business precincts, schools, parks and major transport corridors.

Residents in Coombs, Denman Prospect and Whitlam are up to 16 minutes drive away from the Woden station—and that is before we consider peak hour traffic or competing callouts. When people call for help—when there is a break-in, an assault or a suspicious vehicle—it is not uncommon for them to wait 20, 30 or 40 minutes for a police presence. In some cases, there is no response at all.

The Molonglo Valley is one of the fastest-growing regions in the territory. It is home to thousands of Canberrans. It is home to people who moved there with the promise of modern services and safe communities. But those people are being short-changed. Total crime rates in the Molonglo Valley are now higher than the ACT average. In Weston Creek, property crime and violent crime rates also exceed the territory average. In the broader Woden region, we see the same trend: more break-ins, more assaults, more stolen vehicles and more reports of threatening behaviour.

The ACT still has the lowest police-to-population ratio in the country, so the people of Molonglo are not just underserved; they are structurally disadvantaged when it comes to policing. Over time, the issues have only become worse and more frequent. As I said in my first speech in this place, no-one anticipated the cuts in real terms to police funding and numbers that this government would deliver and no-one predicted that the problem could reach the point where police would be unable to attend significant crimes like theft. You only have to look at social media and you will see the reports in Molonglo Valley—property invasions, theft and assaults. It has become almost a rite of passage for new businesses opening in the area to be robbed—and, quite often, it is more than once.

The frustrations and anxieties of the community are only exacerbated by the lack of a local police presence. I know the police do their best, but police response times to Molonglo Valley are simply not good enough. How can they be if there are only two patrols trying to cover an area that takes well over 20 minutes to traverse and if the supposedly local police station is up to 16 minutes away? Molonglo Valley needs local policing.

We put those community comments and those concerns to the government in the past, and every time we tried to raise issues around policing and community safety, at every step, the response from the government amounted to: Labor say no. Labor said no right up until an election campaign where Labor were under pressure. That is when suddenly, miraculously, they decided a police station for Molonglo might be a good idea—and they promised it.

In August last year, after the Canberra Liberals again led the charge on the commitment, Labor promised a police station for Molonglo Valley—and that promise, promoted throughout the election campaign, helped them. It helped return their two local members, Mr Steel and Dr Paterson—the now Treasurer and the now police minister.

The community took them at their word, and—perhaps naively—so did I. I assumed, like everyone else did, that Labor had seen the problem and were actually committing

to taking sorely-needed action. And like everyone else in the community, I thought that would mean that they meant to do it this term. But, since the election, the police minister, the member for Murrumbidgee, has spent the last few months walking back that promise. In one of her first statements after the election, she told the Molonglo Community Facebook page, that the police station is just a “longer term plan”. The minister suggested that residents just log their concerns through Crime Stoppers or report them online. That is just the sort of response that undermines confidence in the ACT government’s commitment to community safety. It undermines confidence in the community belief that someone is actually going to turn up when they are needed in their community, in their belief that the police can actually attend when something is going wrong.

Indeed, the minister’s position now that we are past the election is that a police station will be delivered “as part of the town centre”, which she has confirmed will commence at some point within 10 years. So the question is: what happens between now and then? What happens to the families who are already there, the businesses already investing in the community and impacted by the crime, and the people already calling the police without a satisfactory result? We cannot wait another decade for a police station, and we certainly cannot let Labor get away with retconning their commitments. Everyone saw their broken promise. It was there in bold black, red and white—often with Labor members’ faces on it.

This motion is simple and it is reasonable. It calls on the government to commit to delivering the Molonglo Valley police station before December 2026; to finalise a site by January next year; to ensure the next budget includes funding to build, staff and equip the station, without pulling resources from other areas; and to report back to this Assembly by October with a clear delivery plan. There is nothing radical here; it is just responsible.

Molonglo is growing; crime is rising; and residents are asking for the Legislative Assembly and the government to do the right thing. It is time for Labor to learn to listen and take action for the community, not just for their election prospects.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.20): I rise to support Mr Cocks’ motion. As I doorknock Molonglo, many residents talk about break-ins in their area. While the community waits for the new station, the Woden station should be allocated more police to serve the growing Molonglo region. The new station should be built this term and funding should be in the upcoming ACT government budget. The new station should not be left to the never-never.

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) (3.20): I move:

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

“(d) the ACT Government is strongly committed to addressing the underlying social determinants and criminogenic factors of offending, with a strong focus on reducing recidivism through significant investment in

evidence-based programs that provide support to at-risk individuals;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) residents of Woden, Weston Creek and the Molonglo Valley are serviced by the City, Woden and Belconnen patrol zones;
- (b) ACT Policing have an average response time of 7.5 minutes in the 2023-2024 annual report, surpassing the 5-year average target of 8.2 minutes;
- (c) the number of offences reported to ACT Policing overall decreased by 7.3 percent in the 2023-2024 financial year when compared to the 2022-2023 financial year;
- (d) the number of offences reported to ACT Policing overall has decreased by 16.9 percent in the last ten years;

(3) acknowledges that:

- (a) the ACT Government has committed to recruiting 150 additional police officers by 2029;
- (b) in the 2024-2025 Budget Review, the ACT Government allocated an additional \$9.658 million to support the ACT Policing Enterprise Agreement;
- (c) the ACT Government has a broad infrastructure program for ACT Policing including a new City Police Station and Headquarters, and the Strategic Asset Renewal Program, in addition to a Molonglo Valley Police Station;
- (d) there is bipartisan support to see a police station built within the new Molonglo Valley Town Centre; and
- (e) since the election, the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services is strongly committed to progressing ACT Police priorities of a new ACT Police Headquarters and City Police station, as well as the development of the Molonglo Station, which is predicated on future land release; and

(4) calls on the Government to:

- (a) deliver a police station in the Molonglo Valley;
- (b) work through budget processes to continue work to progress the Molonglo Town Centre and a Molonglo Police Station; and
- (c) report back to the Assembly by 23 October 2025 with a progress update for the Molonglo Valley Police Station.”.

I rise to speak to Mr Cocks’s motion and strongly rebut the fear and inaccuracies Mr Cocks and the Canberra Liberals are spreading throughout our communities. However, I am very happy to talk about how strongly Labor is committed to delivering a police station in Molonglo.

ACT Policing play such an important role in our community. The Canberra Liberals are constantly discrediting the work that police do in ensuring that Canberra remains one of the safest cities in Australia to live in. The Canberra Liberals are actively working to undermine community confidence in ACT police. The amendment circulated in my name corrects a range of inaccuracies put forward by Mr Cocks, which

are blatant fear-mongering.

Based on current crime statistics, Weston Creek and the Molonglo Valley are in one of the safest regions to live in the ACT, and I encourage the public to go online and check the publicly available statistics. Across the ACT, the number of offences reported to police have decreased by more than seven per cent in the last financial year. Over the last 10 years, this number is even greater, with a reduction of nearly 17 per cent in reported offences. In Woden, offences reported to ACT Policing have decreased by 15 per cent in the last year. In Weston Creek, reported offences have decreased by 33 per cent. In the Molonglo Valley, reported offences have increased by 11 per cent in the last financial year. This comparative increase is not unexpected, due to the population continuing to grow and crime fluctuating significantly from year to year.

However, since 2020, total offences reported to ACT Policing in the Molonglo district, Weston Creek and Woden have reduced by 5.5 per cent, 43.7 per cent and 24.9 per cent respectively. Over the same period, property crime is down 23 per cent in the Molonglo Valley and 31.9 per cent in Woden. Over five years, person offences show an increase in all regions of the ACT. However, again, this data fluctuates greatly from year to year. To provide an example, crimes against a person in Molonglo decreased in 2023 to 2024 by 20 per cent, and, if current year-to-date offences against a person rates of crime continue, they will be significantly down in Molonglo.

Mr Cocks is wildly distorting the current situation regarding police responses. The Molonglo Valley is serviced by Woden, Belconnen and City patrol zones. Response times of ACT Policing are surpassing their targets. In the last annual report, ACT Policing reported an average response time for priority 1 incidents of 7.5 minutes compared to the target of 8.2 minutes. I strongly encourage the ACT community, if they have a concern or need police assistance, to call ACT Policing.

ACT Labor is strongly committed to supporting our local police and, in the 2023-24 budget, committed the largest single investment in ACT Policing of \$106 million and increased its commitment, through the last election, to see 150 new police recruited by 2029. The ACT government has also provisioned an additional \$9.65 million in the budget review to support the new ACT Policing enterprise agreement. Supporting ACT Police through investment in infrastructure projects and upgrades is a significant priority for me as minister and for the government. There is the strategic asset renewal program, which is a key part of the broad infrastructure agenda. This project is funding works to renew current police assets.

The ACT government is also strongly committed to working with police to see a new headquarters and City Police Station as a priority. Several procurement model options are currently being considered for this project. They include an integrated public-private partnership model, traditional design and construct funded by the territory model, and a staged approach which includes lease options for headquarters. The 2023-24 budget allocated \$3.8 million over two years for a comprehensive feasibility study and business case for the new ACT Policing headquarters and City Police Station, as well as to assess policing infrastructure needs in Woden and Molonglo.

JACS have been developing early feasibility work for Molonglo Police Station, including consideration of the operational linkages with Woden Police Station and the

long-term policing infrastructure requirements for the region. Once the feasibility work is complete, the project can progress to the next stage of detailed planning, including the development of a business case. This stage will be led by Infrastructure Canberra in collaboration with JACS and ACT Policing. Further detail around time frames and site selection will be developed as part of this detailed planning and business case process.

The ACT government remains strongly committed to delivering a police station in the Molonglo Valley. As I have said previously, the delivery of a new station is predicated on land release of the SLA as part of the town centre development. I look forward to updating the Assembly in October this year, in line with the reporting date of the motion.

I reiterate for the Assembly that crime rates are dropping in the ACT. However, this does not take away from the harm that even one incident of crime can cause to an individual or a family. That is why our Charter of Victims' Rights and the current consultation process announced by the Attorney-General yesterday are so important to our community. This is why having many reporting options available for the public is critical. This is why supporting crime prevention campaigns and community education is critical. This is why investing in health, education and social services in our community is such a priority for this government.

I end my speech today by thanking our ACT police and emergency services for their service to our community.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.27): The Molonglo Valley is obviously a rapidly growing area. Located on Ngunnawal country, the valley will be home to nearly 70,000 people by 2050. It is certainly a beautiful part of Canberra, encompassing Mt Stromlo, picturesque waterways and a range of new developments that are housing an increasing number of Canberrans. As its population expands, it is entirely appropriate that the area is serviced by a police station as well as other emergency services and community facilities.

I certainly agree with the opening parts of Mr Cocks's motion that Canberrans have a right to be safe and feel safe in their homes, their places of business and their community. I was reassured to hear some of the data provided by the minister. It is data I am familiar with, but it is updated data that shows that Canberra is a safe place to live and we are seeing decreasing levels of crime across a number of key indicators, and that is very welcome for our city. It reflects well on both the work of ACT Policing and a range of government programs in the justice reinvestment space that have worked to target the underlying causes of crime.

We know that ACT Policing currently have more sworn police officers than in any other year in the last five years and that they operate on a priority response basis. Reports are prioritised in accordance with dispatch protocols, meaning that calls will have different response times. We heard from the minister the positive data in terms of response times against benchmarks. Clearly, the fact that there is currently no station in Molonglo does not mean that the area is not being served by police. Clearly, police will spread their resources as necessary until we reach the point where the station is developed in Molonglo.

Having made those few remarks, the Greens are clearly in support of the provision of the right services for Molonglo as it expands, but we will support Dr Paterson's amendments to Mr Cocks's motion because we accept the various data points that have been provided and the process by which the policing facilities in Molonglo will be rolled out as part of the development of the town centre.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.29): I want to speak briefly, not to the policy question that is under debate today, but rather the call in paragraph 4(c), which states:

- (c) ensure the next Budget allocates sufficient resources to build, equip and staff the Molonglo Valley police station without reducing police resources in other locations ...

As the Assembly may be aware, in the last sitting week I moved a motion relating to ACT libraries which included a similar call, to ensure we had sufficient staff to adequately run those libraries. My motion was amended by Mr Milligan on the basis of the budget implications of those calls. This was despite me providing references to detailed benchmarks and the actual staffing that would be entailed under my motion. The Greens voted against this amendment, but, unfortunately, it passed. I would like to note that we are seeing the Canberra Liberals moving a motion with an open-ended call to build, equip and staff the police station with no detail on the budget that would be required or the impost on Canberra ratepayers.

I will not return the favour by seeking to amend the motion, as I note that the minister's amendment has already removed this clause, but I ask that we provide logical consistency to our arguments when we seek to amend private members' business motions and when there are calls of this nature. I would rather have that approach than picking and choosing whether we wish to apply that logic based on our particular interest in a topic.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.31): I thank my colleague Mr Ed Cocks for his consistent hard work and advocacy to make his community a safer place. That is a very important task that Mr Cocks has undertaken, because everyone has the right to be safe in their homes, at work and in the community.

The Molonglo Valley, in Mr Cocks's electorate and also in the police minister's electorate, is one of the fastest growing regions in Canberra, and population growth has already outpaced forecasts. In a decade, more people will live in Molonglo than in the Woden Valley, and by 2040 Molonglo will have more people than Woden and Weston Creek combined. Anyone who has sat in back-to-back traffic on the Cotter Road at peak hour or has fought for a car park at Cooleman Court understands some of the pressures that come with a growing population. Sound and strategic planning and investment are critical for the future success and growth of the Molonglo Valley.

As the population grows, so too, naturally, does demand for local policing services. That is why the role of ACT Policing is and will continue to be intrinsic to the successful future growth of the Molonglo Valley. As it is, ACT Policing are navigating major challenges in demand in their workload against a rapidly changing landscape. The shifting trends in the ACT's crime profile, police resourcing and the ACT's legislative environment all contribute to community safety and social cohesion. In 2023-24, police

attended more than 50,000 incidents and the police operations centre experienced a surge in the number of calls to 000. They now receive more than 3,000 calls per month. Police are dealing with difficult and upward trends in domestic and family violence incidents, sexual assaults, dangerous driving and motor vehicle fatalities as well as demand for non-traditional roles, like responding to mental health incidents.

As Mr Cocks has noted, crime rates in Weston Creek exceed the ACT average in both property and violent crimes, and total crimes in the Molonglo Valley are higher than the ACT average. Residents of Weston Creek and the Molonglo Valley depend on the Woden Police Station, which can be quite a significant drive in a time of need. Even without factoring in the community policing needs of Weston Creek and the Molonglo Valley, officers at the Woden Police Station are responding to some of the highest crime trends in Woden, which surpass ACT total crimes—violent and property crimes included. Because Canberra has the smallest police force per capita in Australia, it is increasingly difficult for police to respond to all incidents of crime in a timely manner. Our officers are stretched very thinly on the ground and are doing their best to fulfill community expectations of policing.

To add to the challenges that stem from inadequate accommodation in existing police facilities across Canberra, police are responding to crime from stations that are not fit for purpose or are unsafe work environments that are frequently subjected to sewage leaks, flooding and toxic contaminants. The Woden Police Station's faulty air conditioning means officers are working in sweltering conditions that impact on staff morale and wellbeing. The government has failed to appropriately accommodate ACT Policing so that they can do their job. This has been demonstrated time and time again at police stations across Canberra.

With the shifting demographic change occurring in the Molonglo Valley, the Canberra Liberals have been advocating for a new and properly resourced police station in the valley since 2019. The Canberra Liberals have advocated for a new police station that can sustain the future growth of the rapidly growing region. While this necessitates a new building and appropriate equipment, importantly it also needs new police officers to service the region. We cannot afford to dilute the scarce police resources at other locations, such as Woden Police Station, because that will only threaten community safety and social cohesion in those communities and make the job of the remaining police officers that much harder.

Ahead of the 2024 election, ACT Labor promised to deliver a police station in the Molonglo Valley. This was very welcome news as the Canberra Liberals had already, and for a very long time, fought for this outcome and committed to delivering it should we form government. Sadly, what we have seen in just a few months since the election is the police minister distancing herself from that commitment. Perhaps it is because it was drawn up on the back of a beer coaster, designed for little more than to neutralise public pressure and the Canberra Liberals' own election commitment, or perhaps it is because, after years of poor economic management and the wrong priorities, the government has run out of money and is now trying to put out fires with a watering can.

Years of neglect of ACT Policing accommodation means there is an eyewatering and expensive to-do list to bring ACT Policing accommodation to the 21st century. Increasingly, the Barr government find themselves in a position where they cannot

afford to deliver the essential services and infrastructure that Canberrans rely on, because they have blown the budget. Whatever the reason is, the government cannot afford to not deliver on their commitment for Molonglo. If the ACT government have any interest whatsoever in ensuring community safety and successfully accommodating the growth of the Molonglo Valley, they will ensure that the next budget allocates sufficient resources to build, equip and staff a new Molonglo Valley police station. To do anything less is a disservice to the residents of the police minister's own electorate and to the men and women on the front line, who work so hard to keep our community safe. Also, it would demonstrate that this government does not have a vision, let alone a plan, for a growing Canberra, a safer Canberra and a better Canberra.

I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this important matter forward, and I commend his motion to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.38): I rise to make some brief remarks on this motion and the amendment. I thank Mr Cocks for bringing forward the motion and welcome all moves in this chamber to hold the government to account in delivering on its commitments. I also thank Dr Paterson for her amendment.

Looking beyond some of the political notes around election commitments and the like in the original motion and the amendment, I would like to explain my support for the substance of Dr Paterson's amendment. I am sympathetic to concerns I have heard directly from local police officers regarding the sufficiency of their accommodation. Our police force is stretched thin, with conditions that are not keeping up with what is available in other jurisdictions. Police are responding to some 20 daily call-outs for mental health or family and domestic violence related incidents. Much of this work is not really policing work. We have a lot to do in the ACT to address the underlying causes of the mental health and FDV crises in our community. Over the longer term, this work will alleviate the pressure on our police force.

In the meantime, I note the minister's recent response to my question, taken on notice, indicating that an average of 39 sworn ACT Policing members are working overtime every day. I also note that we have the lowest number of police officers per capita. With that said, my team's analysis suggests that we have the highest number of police officers per reported crime in the country. So, although our police force is stretched, Canberra is a safe place—the safest in the country, as measured by the ratio between the number of police officers and the total number of reported crimes.

As I said, I am sympathetic to the intent of the motion, but I am not convinced that it is helpful to attempt to paint the ACT as a dangerous place, notwithstanding the tragic reality that some community members feel unsafe and have good reason to feel unsafe. It is not helpful to dismiss the tragic reality that some Canberrans suffer serious consequences because of crimes committed in our community. Crimes reported to ACT Policing in the Molonglo district increased by 11 per cent in 2024 compared to 2023. It is concerning, although some increase might be expected, given population growth in the area. But I note that total crimes reported decreased in Weston Creek by 33 per cent and in Woden by 15 per cent, so the data is not clear. It tells a complex story.

Also, as a member for Kurrajong, I worry that prioritising a new station in the Molonglo Valley on the timeline proposed in the original motion, given budgetary constraints,

which Mr Braddock touched on, would necessarily be to the detriment of the new City Police Station. We have heard of sewage running down walls in the City Police Station, significant water leaks when it rains, and urine and faeces contaminating the station. I thank the opposition for raising these issues in the Assembly. I look forward to learning more about the reasons for the slow progress on this station, courtesy of Ms Morris's motion in accordance with standing order 213A later this week. It is my view that completing construction of the new station in the city and, importantly, fully staffing it must be a first-order priority for the ACT government, alongside the delivery of a new Molonglo station soon thereafter.

Given all these nuances, I support the changes to this motion brought by Dr Paterson's amendment.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.41): I will speak on the amendment and close the debate.

I guess we should have expected this. Maybe we should have seen some signal that the Labor Party's commitment to a police station in Molonglo Valley was not all it seemed, when it never made it into any costings that they submitted for the election. Maybe it should have been a suspicion that we held, but it has really been affirmed today, as we have seen this extraordinarily disappointing display from the now police minister, where she fundamentally lifted her remarks from her 2021 speech, and said the same things she said then. At that time, she was not committed to a police station for Molonglo Valley; she told us that. And she sent the same messages today. She has told the people of Canberra that she is not taking their concerns seriously, because she thinks that Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo Valley are the safest parts of Canberra.

This is a minister who, four years ago, decided that anyone raising issues around crime apparently was using it as a political tool to exaggerate the perception of crime and inadequate policing. Apparently, four years ago, the now minister saw Mr Hanson's point about a police station as just being political rhetoric. We have tried and tried to raise this issue in front of this Assembly and the Labor government that we have before us today. We have tried and tried. The community has tried and tried, and this government has turned a deaf ear.

Let us be very clear regarding what this proposed amendment will do to motion. The fundamental thing is to remove any timeline for Molonglo to have a police station. It removes any timeline. There is no commitment to deliver this at any time in the next decade. There is no commitment to deliver it at any time in the next two decades! It has gone. The people of Molonglo Valley, Weston Creek and Woden deserve better than this.

The minister has decided that she will go back to Mick Gentleman's playbook and tell people that there are no problems out there. She is using interesting statistics—and I note other contributions that have relied on those statistics that the minister has given—to suggest that things are getting better.

It is important to understand the detail of this. Mr Emerson hit on it, although I do not think he quite picked up on it. The data that the minister is talking about relates to reported crimes. The number of reported crimes will go down if people give up

reporting them. Mr Assistant Speaker, if you watch what people are saying out in the community, you will see that they are giving up on reporting the crimes. The only reason they see to report crimes in so many instances is to try and get the data up so that maybe the government will pay attention. That is the discussion that you will see online. That is the discussion that people are having with me. People are giving up on reporting crimes.

The other interesting thing, I thought, was about the timeframe for which the minister likes to point out a decrease in crime and, in particular, that fairly significant seven-plus per cent decrease. Something very interesting happened in that particular year; that is, the government decriminalised drugs. Fundamentally, you need to look at these statistics, because I did this before the election. I went back and looked, and the precise area that decreased for that year was the category that would have included those drug offences. If you decriminalise crime, your numbers will go down. That is just what is going to happen. As my university lecturers liked to remind me, sometimes it is a case of lies, damned lies and statistics.

In these areas, you have to look with a little bit more nuance because, fundamentally, people do not feel safer now than they did four years ago, than they did eight years ago or than they did 10 years ago. They do not feel safer in the Molonglo Valley. That is a very simple fact. You can go out there and ask people. Things do not feel like they are improving. That is why we have to get to the basics and make sure we have a local police presence. That is why we could not possibly support any move that removes, that gets rid of, a timeframe for the delivery.

The minister has said that the timeframe is dependent upon land release for the town centre. That is all well and good, and it seems to make sense in a lot of ways. However, just today, we tried to find out when that land would be released for the town centre, and whether there were yet more delays, after years and years of delays. We have been talking about this. It has been in what was then called the Indicative Land Release Program since the 2018-19 budget, and it has been delayed and delayed. Now, as far as we can tell from the minister's response today, it will be delayed again! That will have an impact on when the government will finally get around to delivering a police station.

As I said, people in the Molonglo Valley, in Weston Creek are sick and tired of waiting for everything. Everything is delayed and deferred—everything, whether it is the overdue Emergency Services facility, the overdue roads or the overdue bridge, let alone the massively overdue commercial centre, the now town centre, that people in Molonglo deserve. Frankly, people in Molonglo, people in Weston Creek—people in Canberra—deserve better than the way this government and this minister are treating them. I refer to the utter disdain that it shows for people who have genuine fears about people who appear in their yard, people looking over their fences into their children's rooms, the legitimate fears when people are seen stalking and having a look through everyone's car in the car park, and the legitimate fears when they cannot get police responses on legitimate issues.

People in Canberra deserve better and, frankly, it is time that the government, as I said, listened to what the community is actually saying. Sure, say that what I am saying is political; that is a natural assumption. But, fundamentally, listen to the people in the community who have been asking for this for years. If the government had acted four

years ago, when the predecessor to this motion was first brought by Mr Hanson, we could have had a police station in Molonglo Valley by now. For how much longer do we have to wait?

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 9

Andrew Barr	Michael Pettersson	Chiaka Barry	Mark Parton
Andrew Braddock	Shane Rattenbury	Peter Cain	
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Fiona Carrick	
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Leanne Castley	
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	Ed Cocks	
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Jeremy Hanson	
Suzanne Orr		James Milligan	
Marisa Paterson		Deborah Morris	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Planning (Ainslie Volcanics) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 20 March 2025 on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.55): The government will not be supporting this bill. This bill lacks transparency, and it undermines the independence of the Territory Planning Authority and rule of law in the territory.

Since 1991, the most fundamental feature of the ACT's planning system has been the independence of the ACT Planning Authority and Chief Planner. The planning system is designed to separate strategic policymaking responsibility from the assessment and determination of specific development applications. The minister and the Legislative Assembly set the overall strategic direction for planning rules and approve the Territory Plan and amendments to it, outlining land use policies and zones. The Territory Planning Authority and the Chief Planner administer the Territory Plan and the Planning Act. Critically, the authority is responsible for assessing and deciding on individual development applications based on their compliance with the Territory Plan and relevant legislation. This assessment is intended to be technical and merit based, applying the established rules.

The intention behind this structure is to ensure that decisions on individual development proposals are made based on planning merits, consistency with the Territory Plan and legislative requirements, rather than short-term political considerations or lobbying pressure. While independent in its decision-making on DAs, the authority's processes and decisions are subject to public notification, scrutiny and review, including through the courts, contributing to accountability.

The Greens' bill undermines the independence of the Territory Planning Authority and the independence of the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. It lacks transparency and it lacks integrity.

Development application 20234238 was approved on 18 October 2024. In accordance with the law, the Territory Planning Authority made that decision independently. Expert advice about the environmental impact and compliance with the broader planning framework was provided and is published online for the community to see. Today's bill asks us to ignore that advice, to ignore the existing law and to substitute our own political views in its place. To take that step would undermine confidence in the entire planning framework. It would also, more fundamentally, undermine all independent statutory decisions.

As a matter of principle, the Assembly should respect individual decisions made under its own laws. Sometimes those decisions will be criticised. The reason that we as an Assembly create these frameworks is specifically to avoid political pressure influencing an outcome. This is doubly important when decisions of government require consideration of expert advice on the environment and technical matters, which this decision did.

The government believes that the role of this Assembly in planning is to make laws and policies that provide guidance to the Territory Planning Authority. Independent assessment against the rules that are published in advance ensures transparency and fairness. Any member of the public can look at the planning rules that we have. The TPA must publish reasons for its decisions against those rules and, importantly, the TPA is accountable to the law. If the TPA has not followed the law, its decisions can be challenged in court.

The fundamental problem with MLAs making individual planning decisions, as we are being asked to do today, is that none of the transparency requirements we have in place apply. There is no framework for when a DA can be reversed by political will. It is up to the individual member and their party process as to whether a bill gets introduced.

In introducing the bill, Mr Rattenbury cited general human rights. It is important to be clear here that there has been no allegation by the Greens or anyone else that the TPA broke any laws. In the first explanatory statement, there were very broad references to human rights and the environment. There was no specific claim that the Conservator of Flora and Fauna is wrong about the low environmental value of the site.

The updated explanatory statement says that the bill is "a precautionary and preventive approach to conservation"—it is not that the conservator's advice was wrong, or that the TPA's consideration of it was in error. We are now being asked to reject the conservator's advice and the TPA's decision because the ACT Greens believe the site

might have environmental value in the future, even though the conservator found that the site had very low value.

I have no doubt that many home owners, builders and community groups who are unhappy with a planning outcome would like legislation introduced for their own situations. They all, doubtless, have reasons why they believe it would be better to have a different outcome. If we accept that it is okay to change individual decisions then it is reasonable for all of those people to ask the Greens why their specific case should not be handled by legislation.

What is the standard for getting an MLA to introduce a bill to approve or revoke a specific DA? As an Assembly, do we accept this any time there is a headline, or do we need a minimum number of signatures on a petition? What level of connection to a party does a group or individual need to get their own bill? How should we handle allegations about the integrity of an MLA who brings forward a bill to revoke or approve an individual DA? These are questions that, if today's bill passes, we have to answer. The government's answer is one of principle, and we believe that our community supports transparency and fairness, and that we are better off as a city with an independent planning authority, even if we may not agree with their lawful decisions all the time. Independence of the planning system and the Territory Planning Authority must be respected.

I note that the Greens have said in the past that they support the principle of independence in planning. They have been vocal critics of the previous ministerial call-in power, which no longer exists under the Planning Act 2023. But I know that the old call-in power had to be exercised in accordance with the existing planning law and rules. Call-ins did not change the planning rules after the fact. The decision-maker on a call-in had to apply the rules and the decision was still subject to judicial review. Today's decision does not apply the existing rules; its substance wipes the entire Planning Act and all its rules from application to one particular piece of land in Ainslie, and it does so after a decision on that site has already been made independently.

The Greens have also compared this bill to legislation that the previous Minister for Planning introduced last term regarding waste facilities in Fyshwick. That legislation is fundamentally different from this bill. It was a broad-based planning policy that applied to the whole division of Fyshwick, prohibiting any future DAs relating to a broad land use—waste facilities. The bill did not seek retrospectively to reverse a decision already made about an individual DA. Mr Rattenbury's bill is fundamentally different and far more extreme in its approach. This bill would set a terrible precedent for the ACT's planning law.

There is also a very practical economic problem to consider with this bill. Development applications represent significant investments. All Canberrans, homeowners, businesses, community groups and others should be able to rely on planning decisions once they are made. Confidence in those investments will be greatly reduced if we pass today's bill. The compensation provisions in this act will not change that fact. If the Assembly is willing to revoke a development application after it has been approved, builders and others will notice. They will treat investments in land here accordingly. Reversing decisions already legally made is a sure-fire way to increase uncertainty and deter investment. This is a basic consequence of increasing the level of sovereign risk

in the economy.

It is also worthwhile to consider why this DA was lodged in the first place. Indara is proposing to put up a mobile phone tower to improve phone and internet services in the area. By their estimate, 4,500 households will be directly affected, and the entire Optus and Vodafone network will benefit from the project. As part of the planning process, Indara went through the full legal requirements of considering the impacts. This included considering alternative sites. They recently sent me a letter, and I will read it out for the Assembly, because, as far as I am aware, they have not been able to provide feedback in relation to the specific bill. The letter reads:

Indara considered several alternative locations before selecting the current site. We note that objectors have suggested ‘better’ sites are available, specifically the Doma ‘Foothills’ site and a location adjacent to Ainslie Village and Lodge.

We confirm that both of these locations have been considered previously by Indara—in both cases landowners were approached and declined to accommodate a facility. Both sites also had other constraints.

This means that—in addition to undermining the independence of the Planning Authority, creating real transparency issues and deterring investment in Canberra—this bill also risks depriving the inner north of Canberra of better phone and internet services. I know that all parties—Labor, Liberal, Greens and independent parties—have heard about the need for better phone and internet services from their constituents. That is a community voice that needs to be considered in this debate as well.

In closing, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to acknowledge that Mr Rattenbury has been up-front with me that he considers this bill to be a last resort and that he expects this to be a one-off interference in the planning system. Neither of these reasons overcome the fundamental problems with legislating for a particular DA outcome. The fact is that supporting this bill could only make sense if you reject the expert advice of our Conservator of Flora and Fauna and reject the substantive conclusions of our independent Planning Authority.

We have to consider today whether it is appropriate for us to individually make those decisions. The government opposes this bill because we believe in respecting the integrity of our public institutions. We believe in and value the role of the independent environmental advice and independent planning expertise, and we also want to demonstrate that we will stand by lawful decisions that have already been made.

I call on the Assembly to vote against this bill and the terrible precedent that it would set for the ACT’s planning system and planning law.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.06): The Planning (Ainslie Volcanics) Amendment Bill retroactively revokes an approved development application for block 3 section 60, Ainslie, and prohibits future development on the site. As the minister stated, this is a private member’s bill presented by the ACT Greens leader, Shane Rattenbury. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this bill.

The development application that this bill refers to is to erect a telecommunications tower at block 3 section 60, Ainslie, also known as the Ainslie Volcanics Grasslands,

which will improve mobile phone reception for residents and businesses in Ainslie and the surrounding suburbs. It is also my understanding that it will take pressure off an existing tower in the Civic region, particularly during peak-hour time of usage, and particularly between the hours of four and six in the afternoon.

We recognise the utility of this bill. Obviously, every time that something is put up as a utility structure, you need to consider the impact on the area in which it is being erected. Having weighed up the advantages versus the disadvantages, we will support the construction of this tower, as approved.

This bill arose out of concerns about the ecological impact and the inadequate community consultation process related to the proposed telecommunications tower at this site. I will be speaking on behalf of Ms Lee as well, as a local member for Kurrajong, particularly on the very flawed consultation process behind this development application.

There were claims that the DA was incorrectly classified and lacked full consultation regarding alternative technical solutions, which was made apparent to the residents, and that the options were not made very clear to them. Other concerns raised by interested stakeholders included that the notice of decision published on 18 October 2024 did not adequately reflect the class 10 structure's reviewability or properly inform the community regarding alternatives. It is noted that consultation by the government was limited, and interested parties have said that their views were not considered and that their concerns were not addressed. In addition, and rather concerning, interested parties were advised by ACTPLA that the decision was reviewable, and an application was subsequently lodged in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Subsequently, despite doing some significant work on this application, advice was then received that it was not a reviewable decision and that the application could not proceed. There is much work for the government to do on its consultation approach and the accuracy of advice given by its own department.

The bill sets a precedent, as the minister has touched on, by retroactively revoking an approved development application without, in my opinion, or in the opinion of the Canberra Liberals, strong justification. Unfortunately, this bill sends a message to stakeholders, including investors looking at the ACT, developers, residents and businesses that planning approvals in the ACT may not mean anything if the Assembly, through a private member's bill, can overturn them. Normalising the introduction of legislation to overrule DA decisions presents a very dangerous precedent for future planning decisions.

Before I get to some closing words on behalf of Ms Lee, as the local member for the Canberra Liberals in the electorate of Kurrajong, I want to thank Mr Rattenbury, the minister and his staff for briefings last week, on 3 April. I appreciate the openness with which those briefings were conducted.

I would like to close with some words provided to me on behalf of Elizabeth Lee MLA, the member for Kurrajong for the Canberra Liberals:

We are concerned with the way this government has once again failed to consult fully and in good faith with the local community. Member for Kurrajong Elizabeth

Lee met with Marianne and other representatives from the Friends of Ainslie Volcanics Grasslands recently to hear their concerns. They are passionate and dedicated volunteers who have invested countless hours of their own time restoring this critically endangered grasslands, and I acknowledge Marianne, Peter, Graham and Ann for their time and insights.

They, and countless other local residents and volunteers, have been badly let down by this government time and time again. They feel the evidence that had been put forward was not considered and their hard work protecting this area, which was encouraged by this government, was ignored. If that wasn't bad enough, they also faced the farcical situation of receiving advice from planning that the DA approval was a reviewable decision through ACAT, which they accepted in good faith. They spent countless hours and resources preparing, turned up on the day to their ACAT hearing, only to be told that in fact this was not a reviewable decision—at best, an embarrassing error by the government.

This is not good enough. We must do better. By that, the government must do better. Time and time again, we hear these stories from members of our community that they are being ignored by this Labor government, that they feel the required consultation process is just a tick and flick, and their real and genuine concerns are ignored.

That is the statement from the member for Kurrajong, Ms Elizabeth Lee. Despite the high-sounding rhetoric from the minister, the consultation was a terribly-run process. However, going to the point, as I have already made, in terms of the merits of the DA and whether it should stand, as it has been scrutinised, the Canberra Liberals support the utility of this tower and the importance of it to the local area. The importance of having much more adequate mobile phone reception is something that would be appreciated by the community around the War Memorial site, as well as the proposed DOMA site and the local high school, thousands of residents nearby will benefit.

For that reason the Canberra Liberals will support the construction of this tower and oppose the bill.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.13): I rise to speak in support of Mr Rattenbury's bill to protect the Ainslie Volcanics grasslands from development, having heard and shared the concerns of many local community members about this matter over recent months. I am disappointed to hear the government is backing this development, noting that ACT Labor made a commitment in their supply and confidence agreement with the Greens to protect key areas of environmental value and that this agreement specifically mentions protecting the Ainslie Volcanics site. My mum taught me you do not make commitments you do not intend to keep.

I also want to reiterate that my support for this bill does not mean I seek to prevent a new proposed telecommunications tower from being built in Ainslie. Wanting a new 28-metre tall telecommunications tower to be located sensibly does not make you a NIMBY; it makes you an engaged citizen. As a Dickson resident and former resident of Campbell, I have plenty of firsthand experience with black spots close to the middle of Canberra. Improved access to the telecommunications network is vitally important for Ainslie residents.

This bill, though, offers an opportunity to move this tower to a more appropriate location that does not damage an environmentally significant site. This is what concerned Ainslie Volcanics grasslands volunteers and other local community members have called for. But the government and the telecommunications company Indara have not sufficiently answered questions about exactly why alternative sites could not be used instead. My decision to support this bill comes after engaging in good faith with the planning minister, Indara, members of the Ainslie community, volunteers who have been active on this site and Mr Rattenbury.

Unfortunately, the government's approach to environmental conservation has been quite clear. They have a track record of prioritising development approvals in almost all circumstances, except when community disapproval is so loud that it cannot be ignored. The ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment made this clear in her testimony at recent annual reports hearings, indicating that she had never encountered an example of environmental conservation being prioritised ahead of development. This habit has consequences. You cannot offset everything. It is just not right to encourage environmental volunteers and to provide grants supporting those efforts only to turn around and approve development on the land they have been cultivating. This bill offers an opportunity to intervene and do the right thing for our environment and the Ainslie Volcanics volunteers.

The government have shown a willingness to intervene when it suits their agenda. As the minister mentioned, he deployed controversial former call-in powers and skipped steps in order to approve development plans at Denman Prospect on environmentally significant sites. The bureaucracy has also shown its willingness to be flexible about changing land use approvals when allowing commercial activity to occur on land not intended for that purpose, such as in relation to block 709 in Majura, which was inconveniently not zoned for commercial use but as rural land. It had, however, been used commercially in violation of how it was zoned. In that instance, the government quickly moved to retrospectively change the land use approvals to benefit the lessee and to retrospectively permit what had been an inappropriate illegal use of this land. But, apparently, retrospective changes to planning decisions are absolutely inconceivable when it only serves to address critical environmental concerns or to fulfil an agreement upon which formation of government was based.

I also wonder why the government has not bothered to understand and map the enormous efforts of volunteers who work tirelessly, often really doing the government's work for them, to preserve and restore the ecological diversity of Canberra's public lands. The efforts of volunteers who have worked for years to cultivate the Ainslie Volcanics grasslands site has been acknowledged but underappreciated by the government. The ACT government's own volunteering strategy indicates that volunteers contribute \$14 billion per year to our economy.

Lip-service, acknowledging their efforts while building over their work, does not mean much. These volunteers, some of whom are in the chamber today, have now been told their hard work will be destroyed for a development that could have been located elsewhere. The government really needs to put its money where its mouth is when it comes to environmental conservation or, if it cannot, it should not make promises in its agreement with other members of this Assembly that it does not intend to keep.

The ACT prides itself on being a progressive jurisdiction that values and promotes its incredible natural landscape. Our community has been clear that we expect the government to prioritise environmental conservation. It is time to start delivering on those expectations. With that in mind, I thank Mr Rattenbury for his persistence in pursuing a solution here, and I also thank community members for standing up against the government and Indara on this matter.

It should not be up to frustrated residents to fight for the preservation of threatened ecological communities, to fight against the government to do what is right by the threatened species that call Canberra home, and by future generations of Canberrans who deserve to enjoy the ecological diversity of our territory as we have had the privilege of enjoying it. That should be part and parcel of the work of government. Before reaching this point I wrote to the planning minister and Indara asking them to meet with community members to discuss alternatives and pursue a better outcome here. Those calls, which were also made by community members themselves, were ignored.

Another concern in the story raised by Mr Cain is that government officials had provided advice to community members that the development would be reviewable by the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. It was not until the matter had been listed for an ACAT hearing that they sought independent legal advice and were told, in fact, that the development approval was not reviewable by ACAT due to a technicality.

This whole debacle has been such a failure of process, a failure of priorities, a failure of foresight and a failure of follow-through. For these reasons, I am supporting Mr Rattenbury's bill.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.19): I would like to thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing this bill today and I would like to thank the minister and the other members for speaking to it. I would really like to thank Amy Blaine and Mary-Ann and all of our community members who have been out caring for this site, for restoring it, for giving up their time and, in Amy's case, for making a pretty remarkable sacrifice to try to protect this restoration work. I am really sad that today this parliament is not going to recognise those efforts and that this parliament will not take the opportunity presented by this bill to protect and restore the Ainslie Volcanics.

Australia is in an extinction crisis. Over the last decade, more than 550 species have been uplisted as near extinction or have taken one step closer to it. There are now 2,200 animals, plants and ecological communities on our threatened list. Extinctions are not simply something that happen. They are not some kind of natural force that we have no control over. We are doing this. We are doing it through climate change and the heatwaves, floods and fires that are part of climate change. We are doing it by clearing our trees, our bush and our grasslands, and with endless sprawl. We are doing it by polluting our environment. There is a great example of this from the Tasmanian salmon industry. That industry is polluting the waterways so much that it keeps causing mass fish deaths, and it will likely push the prehistoric Maugean skate into extinction. The federal government is helping the salmon industry do that.

Our federal government spent their last days in parliament to change our nature protection laws, not to protect the skate—a creature that existed long before any human

being ever evolved—but to help the industry wreck that environment. The federal Labor government weakened our nature protection laws to protect a foreign-owned industry that, according to the Australia Institute, pays almost no tax. It sounds unbelievable, so I will set out the details. Between 2013-14 and 2021-22, the Tasmanian salmon industry paid 0.7 per cent of their total income in tax. That is what Australians get for that particular industry deal—an extinction for less than one per cent back in tax!

It is no wonder that so many people in our community are feeling outraged, because it is outrageous that our governments keep choosing corporations over people and planet. It is not just in Tasmania that we are seeing this. We are facing that right here. Right here, in the ACT, we are facing one of our own extinctions of the dragon. Our dragon is critically endangered, and the Canberra Airport Group is about to put a road through its habitat. No-one can explain to me why this road is so important. I have heard three different reasons. They have all been discredited. I am yet to hear why a road that has been planned for 25 years, and still is not built, is suddenly so essential that it is worth an extinction. One of our last dragons is about to be pushed off this planet altogether for a road to nowhere. This is the most toxic poem that you could write. Our planet is in its sixth mass extinction event, and we are the cause.

The Ainslie Volcanics development is another equally ludicrous environmental poem. This is not a choice between backing community efforts to restore the grassland versus giving people in our neighbourhood phone reception. We could have both. There are designs that give us both. I understand that those other designs cost a bit more to build, that they are not the developer's first choice and that we are not going ahead with those other designs. They are sticking with the one that wrecks the environment. This choice is whether we have a phone tower in a slightly different location at a slight inconvenience to the developer and whether we back community efforts at nature restoration.

I want to paraphrase something Amy Blain said recently: shouldn't we be choosing the least harmful option? Is that not the best thing for us to do with our environment? Shouldn't we look around and say, "Where is the least harmful place for us to put this thing that we need?" Each decision contributes to the whole and, at some point, we need to say that enough is enough? So far the balance of our decisions are taking us straight down that road to nowhere. It is not just the Greens saying this. The 2023 ACT *State of the environment* report laid it out pretty bluntly. I will quote directly from the first page, which said:

The findings detailed a continued, relentless degradation of our natural environment.

You should read the full report, or the summary. But I warn you, it does not get better from there.

Our community really cares about nature. Across our city there are many Canberrans who have put in countless hours of unpaid work to maintain our green spaces, our reserves and our grasslands so that the ACT remains the beautiful and diverse ecosystem for people, planets and animals. Last year, non-profit organisation Biodiversity Council commissioned a survey of 3,500 Australians. That is three times the size of Newspoll surveys. That survey found that 96 per cent of Australians care

about nature and almost two-thirds were moderately or extremely concerned about it. That echoes similar findings recently reported locally in Canberra.

Even during a housing crisis, cost-of-living pressure and global uncertainty, during so many concerns that we are dealing with, climate and the environment are always in our top three. We are worried. We are right to be worried. Our community are worried, and they are telling their leaders that they are worried. But our leaders are not listening.

I want to make a few comments about the independent planning system and the need for checks and balances. We are having this conversation in a few different ways at the moment. We have already heard in here a couple of examples where there were changes to decisions made by that independent planning system. We have had two examples made in the last term. Canberrans have been through a planning review, and they were asked really clearly about what was important to them about where they live. Canberrans told us they want homes, schools and shops and facilities that they need, and they also want to protect nature while doing this. Our planning system is meant to be delivering that for our community.

The system at the moment seeks community input once a development application has already been submitted. That is too late. The community would prefer to talk to developers early in the process. They would prefer to put in their views. They would prefer to negotiate good design and better outcomes that protect the environment whilst also meeting the needs of people. We have heard a lot about the consultation on this particular project and the misinformation that was given about appeal rights. I do not think anybody in here can possibly say consultation on this project was done well.

Our new planning system has removed pre-DA consultation. We have legislation tabled at the moment that might remove appeal rights. Today we have a piece of legislation that would in fact back the community, that would carry out the public commitment that was already made by Labor and the Greens to protect Ainslie Volcanics and that would allow parliament to act as one of the last checks and balances on a planning decision.

Despite previously agreeing that Ainslie Volcanics was worth protecting, despite agreeing before an election that they will protect it, today Labor are voting against protection and they are voting against the very simple compromise offered up of both protecting the restored grasslands and having a phone tower in a slightly different place. What message is that sending to our community?

I want to end on some positive notes. This bill is the first time ACT legislation has invoked the right to a healthy environment. The Greens put up a motion to recognise the right to a healthy environment last term. I was really pleased to see that carried into law and I am pleased to see it play a part here. Later in the week I will be putting up a motion to protect Blewitt's Block and the western edge and to set our urban growth boundary. We saw a very different development decision on Blewitt's Block last term. I am very hopeful that debate this week will lead to a different outcome than we got last term.

I want to again thank all of the volunteers who have put in so many hours of unpaid work restoring Ainslie Volcanics and all of our grasslands and reserves, so that our

residents, our visitors, our children and future generations to come can enjoy our bush capital. We will continue to push for the balance of the Ainslie Volcanics to be set aside as a nature reserve, and we will do everything that we can to have that declared as a nature reserve during this term of the Assembly.

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) (4.28): I rise today because I was going to make a ministerial statement, but I got told that it was actually to be in the debate. So I will make my ministerial statement and we will call it a debate speech.

I would like to discuss the construction of the telecommunications tower on block 3 section 60, Ainslie; otherwise known as Ainslie Volcanics. In discussing Ainslie Volcanics, I think it is important, as a number of people have already noted, that we recognise the efforts of the local community, particularly through the work of the Friends of the Ainslie Volcanics Grasslands group, a number of whom, I believe, are watching this debate today. This group has worked to manage the Ainslie Volcanics block through undertaking a variety of support functions, including weeding and planting. The government acknowledges the concern that the development has caused to members of the group, including about the impacts of the development.

I have been prompted to speak today because I would like to actually just put into the mix the ecological information around this site and address a lot of the concerns that are out there with the facts, allowing members to consider those as they come to the decisions that they will arrive at in this vote.

As part of the decision-making processes of the Territory Planning Authority, the development application in relation to this development was referred to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. The Conservator of Flora and Fauna is a statutory position established under the Nature Conservation Act 2014. Further, as part of this process, the development site was inspected by a senior ecologist and the Conservator.

For the benefit of everyone in the chamber and watching, natural temperate grassland, which for simplicity I will refer to as grasslands, are vegetation communities dominated by native grasses and forbs where the cover of shrubs and trees is less than 10 per cent. Grasslands are listed as an endangered ecological community under the Nature Conservation Act 2014 and a critically endangered community under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Importantly, grasslands provide habitat to some of the ACT's most threatened plant and animal species. These include the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon, the striped legless lizard, the pink-tailed worm-lizard, the golden sun moth and the Perunga grasshopper.

Much of the government's environmental conservation work is focused on protecting, conserving and enhancing the ACT's grasslands, some of which are the highest quality in Australia. This conservation work includes protection from overgrazing by kangaroos, protection from invasive plants, reductions in biomass through grazing and fire and restoration through improving soil health and seed banks.

On the block where the Ainslie Volcanics is located, the existing grasslands are well

understood and mapped. These grasslands do not extend into the small area proposed for development. Noting the proximity of the Ainslie Volcanics site to the urban interface, these delicate grasslands will continue to come under significant pressure and are at risk of further loss if not protected. The priority for the Ainslie Volcanics block must therefore be to protect and conserve the existing grasslands—the native temperate grasslands.

Restoring the grass in the area of the proposed development is actually unlikely to be achievable. The restoration of grasslands of a temperate nature, as opposed to exotic grasslands, is a highly complex, resource-intensive and lengthy process. It is very site specific in terms of being feasible. In the case of Ainslie Volcanics development site—this is the very small bit where the tower will be going—restoration is unlikely to be successful, noting the proximity of the area to the urban environment and the threat from weeds and human activity. There is also no buffer to protect the area. On this basis, the proposed development will have no impact on the existing grasslands, being the native temperate grasslands, and will not negatively impact on the actual or future conservation work that is occurring at the location.

Ainslie Volcanics is a block of considerable size, at just over 12,000 square metres. The block extends from Limestone Avenue along Quick Street. As previously mentioned, on some parts of the Ainslie Volcanics block grassland is present. The development site for the telecommunications infrastructure is 90 square metres or, put another way, less than one per cent of the entire Ainslie Volcanics block. The development site contains no ecological values and is far away from the grassland area.

The development site, which is on the corner of the block, contains exotic grasses and invasive weeds, including African Love Grass, Chilean Needle Grass, Couch Grass and Plantago, and the soil is compacted and degraded. The qualified advice of the Conservator and ecologists is that restoring the site of the proposed development is unlikely to be successful, noting the highly degraded nature of the landscape and the significant seed banks of invasive weeds that are located nearby. Due to the presence of the development site to urban areas, future weed incursions and pest animals are considered highly likely.

When compared to other locations across the ACT that are better suited to restoration and will support a more diverse range of threatened native species, the effort and cost to restore and maintain the degraded parts of Ainslie Volcanics, including the very small development site, to a high standard of a nature reserve would be considerable and is not necessarily feasible. It would come at the cost of other restoration priorities across the ACT that are of greater importance and value.

Beyond the points that I have raised about the environmental assessments that have occurred to guide the decision-making processes about the development, there are further controls that exist to protect the environment during the development. As per the Notice of Decision, which is published online by the Territory Planning Authority, there are a range of conditions that the proponent must comply with to protect the landscape and nearby environmental values. These include the preparation of a Construction Environment Management Plan and Landscape Plan, which ensures species suitability for the ecological condition of the site and surrounding areas.

The approved landscape plan incorporates a hedge of appropriate native species, including banksias, callistemons and grevilleas, to be planted around the perimeter of the compound. There is also a requirement under the landscape plan to have additional landscaping in the form of mature stock trees to screen the proposed mobile phone tower from view along Limestone Avenue, particularly near the Limestone Avenue and Quick Street intersection. These trees will have a height at maturity of greater than 12 metres, consistent with existing trees along or adjacent to site boundaries. All of these actions and their implementation must be achieved to the satisfaction of the conservator.

Before concluding, I would like to address a few points. During the debate the point was made that Labor undertook a commitment, as part of confidence and supply agreements, to protect the Ainslie Volcanics site. I think it is fair to say that Labor and other parties might have a different interpretation of how that commitment is met. Labor's understanding of what we signed up for was that we would protect areas of environmental value. The site of the tower, from all the advice that we have received, does not meet that definition of an area of environmental value. In having these discussions and working through these nuances, it is important to acknowledge the detail there, rather than high-level statements that perhaps do not quite hold true.

I also note that this development was approved prior to negotiations at the start of this term, and any expectation that would have seen a reversal of things that had already been approved perhaps should have been flagged a little bit earlier in the discussion, so that they could have been properly considered and built into those discussions.

The other thing I would like to address is the emotive nature of the debate. In speaking in my capacity as minister for the environment and wanting to speak about the environmental factors, there is the expectation that a lot of this might get clipped out and put into social media videos that would not reflect nicely on me because I am not necessarily saying what everyone wants to hear.

Please do not think I am about to have a whinge about my lot; I actually quite like my job and I am very happy to have it. The point I want to go to is that if we sit here and make everything an evil decision, or one or the other, we leave no room for the nuancing or the grey, and we just will not have constructive or productive discussions about the environment—or anything, for that matter.

I can quite honestly say that I am a member of this place who has had more grasslands listed as nature reserves than anyone else who is currently here. I will digress, because no-one is making me stop, and I still have four minutes remaining.

When I was first elected, I went to the Friends of Grasslands and said, "Hey, what about this block here in Franklin; what's this doing?" They said, "We don't know. We think this is a future development site," because it was on Flemington Road. I said, "Okay, let's go and look into this." To cut a long story short, that site is now a nature reserve for a natural temperate grassland. Through the work that we have done, we have been able to get the community in and we have been able to get them to start to appreciate this really good, amazing little ecological community that we have here in the ACT.

I have also discovered some plants, which I do not think I am allowed to say publicly

on the record are there, which are very precious. It is one of the four sites in the ACT in which we have them—and we do not tell people where they are because we do not want them to get ruined—and there are lots of other wonderful things. On top of that, through that discussion, we have been able to get traction on turning grasslands in Kenny into nature reserves, and have brought attention to the matter.

When I started, the two things that come back to me when doing this work—I have just done it quietly and got on with it because I really like these things and I want to see them protected—is that the president of FOG at the time always says to me that it was amazing because, “Usually, you have to bang down a politician’s door to get any traction on anything, but this time the politician was banging on our door to do something.”

The other thing at the time was that people said to me, “No-one is going to care about grasslands; they just aren’t sexy.” Obviously, I did not agree with that position, and I went forward. What I have seen, in all of that time, is that the more they learn about these sites, people come to embrace them.

In saying all of that, I do acknowledge the people in the gallery, because they have done a lot of work, and I think they care about grasslands just as much as I do. In protecting the grassland, though, we also have to be honest about the fact that the site of the tower is not a native temperate grassland, and the potential for it to become a native temperate grassland is not high. If we invest in that particular site, all of the other native temperate grasslands that we need to restore and that already exist will be de-prioritised. It is not a game. It is actually counter to what it is that we want to achieve when protecting these sites.

I, for one, would love one day to see that whole site restored and become temperate grassland. Having a tower there will not prevent that in the future. We can still work around it. Once we have done all of the other stuff, we can look at it.

The point I am going to, and in conclusion, because my time is running out, is that we need to make sure that we are being as honest and as nuanced as possible in these discussions, so that we can work through the complexity and not put ourselves into binary positions that create winners or losers, because it is just not constructive and it does not achieve good outcomes.

The government supports, respects and is grateful for the independent advice provided by the conservator to the Territory Planning Authority that helps to inform decisions, including the decision to approve the development of the phone tower. The government also supports the efforts of the Friends of Ainslie Volcanics, and will continue to do so, to enhance the ecological values of other parts of the block.

This government, like the independent Territory Planning Authority and the conservator, adopts a factual and evidence-based decision-making process, which has clearly occurred in this process. The outcome is that, while a very small area can be developed to support critical infrastructure, the natural temperate grassland areas of the Ainslie Volcanics block will remain protected.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health,

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.43): As a local member, I want to make a few brief comments, as I know that my vote on this bill will be disappointing for some of my constituents. I feel it is appropriate that I explain where I stand on this, particularly as I am a Reid resident and I do engage regularly with the Reid Residents Association.

I appreciate and acknowledge, however, that this is not a matter into which I have previously dug particularly deeply, given the range of other issues across my portfolios and electorate. But I do thank Mr Rattenbury for our conversations about the situation and the bill last week. I recognise he has said that the bill was not his preferred option and that he had, in fact, sought to engage directly with Indara in relation to this matter.

I will speak quite briefly. I apologise to those in the gallery, as I will have to leave the chamber soon, so I will not hear the closing argument. I am not being rude; I just need to get to an interview.

I want to particularly acknowledge the work of community members who have been supporting the Ainslie Volcanics Grasslands. I recognise, as Ms Orr has outlined, that natural temperate grasslands are critical and endangered ecosystems. The work of volunteers to protect, conserve and enhance ACT grasslands is incredibly valuable.

The challenge here is that, as Ms Orr has outlined pretty thoroughly, the site we are talking about today is not natural temperate grassland. The advice from the conservator is clear. This site contains exotic grasses and invasive weeds. It is degraded and it is unlikely to ever be restored to become natural temperate grassland.

Of course, there are such grasslands on the Mount Ainslie foothills, but they do not extend to this site. The clear advice is that the area of these grasslands is known, that it will take ongoing effort to protect what is there, and this is where the effort should be focused. Again, I acknowledge the work of the Friends of Ainslie Volcanic Grasslands group in undertaking this work, as well as the work of government officials who do so much to protect our grasslands.

I also hold significant concerns about the planning process and the business and community confidence implications of this bill. I am aware that, as soon as I say “business confidence”, some will say that I care more about business than the community, but it is actually about community confidence. Many development applications do not come from corporations; they come from individuals who just want to do something, and they need to have confidence in the system. Minister Steel has laid out these issues and I will not repeat them. But the integrity of government process is something that is very important to me, and I am concerned about the precedent that this bill would set if it were to be passed by the Assembly today.

As a local member, I am also conscious that it would mean returning to the drawing board for a service that will benefit hundreds, if not thousands, of my constituents. Again, I want to recognise the advocacy and the hard work of people in my community and that Mr Rattenbury, in introducing this bill, has done so in good faith. We just disagree. We disagree that this is the right process and we disagree that it is for the right reasons.

Having said all of that, some fair points have been made about consultation and the accuracy of information that was provided to people. None of that will be addressed by this bill. Planning processes are, too often, complicated. I note Ms Clay's comments about the planning process. I also note that Ms Clay was intimately involved in the entire planning system review that delivered us the new Planning Act. There was a lot of conversation about consultation through that process, and a lot of consultation about decision-making and community engagement through that process. There is always more to learn. Every time we go through a process like this, where the community identifies that they have a concern, there is more to learn about that. I am very happy and keen to hear from the community and see what we can do to do better.

Obviously, I will be voting with the government and I will not be supporting this bill today. But I do want to recognise that it was brought by the community and supported by the community in good faith, and I want to recognise the work that the community does to support these important grasslands. I have no doubt that they will continue to undertake that work, and I thank them on behalf of the Kurrajong community.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.48), in reply: I rise to close the debate on this bill, the Planning (Ainslie Volcanics) Amendment Bill 2025. To start, I table a revised explanatory statement to reflect feedback provided by the Scrutiny of Bills Committee on Friday. I circulated this to members yesterday so that they were able to consider it ahead of today's debate.

I introduced this bill for a number of important reasons: firstly, to seek environmental protection for this site; secondly, to reflect the community effort that has gone into the restoration of this site and to ensure that that effort was not countered by this project; and, thirdly, to seek to reverse the degradation that has taken place on this site and across our landscape generally. We now live in an era where we have a couple of hundred years of environmental degradation that we now need to try to reverse, to protect species and our landscape. The fourth reason is that there is a better solution.

We have heard a lot of chatter in this debate about the need for better mobile phone reception. As someone who lives the dream of the mobile phone black spots just one kilometre from the CBD at times, I understand that. But there are better solutions here. At its most simple, that is why I introduced this bill. There has been a lot of commentary on it today, and let me turn to a few of those items. We have seen a significant set of commentary that says this legislation will undermine the planning system. But I have not heard anybody provide a single alternative solution focused on getting a better outcome. I have seen a lot of default to "It is the system's fault; it is not my fault." But nobody is working to find an alternative outcome.

In a climate crisis, lauding the independent planning system as the holy grail is not going to repair our environment. In a Labor Party that is often putting development before environmental protection, this response is not good enough. I accept—and it has been touched on in this debate—that this legislation is not the most elegant solution to this problem. To be honest, I think the best solution would have been getting the concerned parties together, probably providing some coffee, sitting over a map and identifying a preferable location for this mobile phone tower. In my happy world, this is how this would have worked out. But that solution has not been available. Through reliance on the process and intransigence by the developers, we have not been able to

get that outcome. So this is the outcome I have had to chase, because nothing else has been left to us.

Minister Steel noted that Indara has not been able to provide feedback on this bill. I can assure you that a range of people have sought to engage Indara. I wrote to them, and I got a pretty standard response. I then spent my own hard-earned money on a LinkedIn premium account so that I could reach out to the chair of the board of Indara and say, “Your people are not doing a very good job of this. But, as the local member, I would be happy to try to work with you to get a better outcome.” I got a polite response, but I got very little engagement. We have tried everything we can, and that is why we find ourselves in this situation of having to introduce legislation like this. The reality is that the planning system has failed to listen to the community in delivering the outcome that it has, and we are left with a less than optimal solution to a less than optimal situation.

It has been suggested that this bill lacks transparency. I think being here in this chamber, the ultimate decision-making body in the territory and which is here to represent our community, is a pretty transparent way of trying to solve a problem that we have not been able to solve through any other mechanism. Indara and the government could have prevented this entire bill from happening if they had just taken the community concern a little more seriously and engaged in genuine listening.

If the planning system is going to sell off land with potential ecological value this easily, then we need to be willing to look at ways to correct what I think are poor outcomes. Across the globe, we are seeing frustration and resentment directed towards incumbent governments because politicians are unwilling to actually critique systems that are not working and to find creative solutions.

I also noted that, in defending the independent planning system, the minister said, “It is subject to review through the courts.” I appreciate that comfortable faith in the system, but it fails to recognise that the community members did seek to undertake a third-party objector appeal process through the Civil and Administrative Tribunal. But it turns out that telecommunications facilities are exempt from review under the planning laws. So, again, the apparent safeguards here—the pathways I or the community should have pursued, rather than my slightly out-of-order approach—simply did not work. So, while the minister implores us to follow the process, he knows full well that the process is stacked against the community and the environment on this one.

On the practicalities, over the past couple of days, I have received three letters from lobby groups, front companies or peak organisations—whatever you want to call them—for the big three telco networks, Telstra, Optus and Vodafone, imploring me not to move this bill, out of supposed concern for its precedent, and expressing a range of other concerns. These letters are, frankly, a little insulting.

Before getting to the point of moving this bill, I did contact Indara, as outlined, to seek a practical solution for the community’s concerns, but it has been crickets. Outside of a couple of form responses, it has been crickets—until the last 24 hours, when suddenly all of their lobby groups paid attention and started sending me pleading letters, saying how terrible a precedent this was and that I really needed to think of the good citizens of Canberra and their mobile phone reception. I am on board for that. It is a shame that they were a little less engaged a couple of weeks ago or a couple of months ago when

we could have avoided getting to this point today.

It has been a disappointing outcome this afternoon. Mr Cain and his party weighed up the disadvantages and advantages and decided that they prefer the utility of the phone service. Then we got a whole outline of the various problems with the process, and the issues around it not being reviewable. We got a lot of handwringing but no action—“Sure, there are a lot of problems here, but we are not on board for any kind of actual solution.” What I hear is people saying, “Your solution is no good, but we do not have another one.” That is a pretty poor effort.

Minister Orr gave us a detailed environmental statement, appropriately in the debate today. She said that restoration is unachievable and made various comments to that effect. Well, it certainly will be if you put a phone tower in the middle of the site—and that is a shame. We live in an era where we are the generations that understand what we have done to the landscape of this country, and we have a duty to try to turn that around—firstly, to stop it getting worse. But we have done so much damage that we have to think about where we can restore. Yes, there are other places we can and should restore, but these are not either-or options. The environment situation in this country is so desperate that we need to be doing all the bits that we can.

I am disappointed that this bill will not receive support today. I appreciate the support from Mr Emerson and his efforts on this issue as well. But the bottom line is that we need to work hard to protect the environmental assets that we have left. As the Greens, we support the need for improved telecommunications capability in the area. We have been clear about that from the outset, as the community have. The base of Mount Ainslie is home to Ainslie Volcanics. It all connects into the nature reserve and down through these areas, and we are looking to make sure that we protect areas as well as we can.

At the end of the day, it looks like this project will go ahead. The question now is: will the companies actually come back to the table and think about whether they can come up with a better solution? We know they are available. It is not the most convenient option for them and probably not the cheapest option. But their duty is not just to put up mobile phone towers; it is also to be good neighbours. The approach they have taken so far is not one of good neighbours. I implore them to come back and have a chat with me. It turns out we are connected on LinkedIn now; so make my investment a little bit worth it. Come back and chat to me. I have indicated to the company that I am very happy to work with them to facilitate meetings with the community. We can do a better job on this. Let’s all lean into it and not be passive. What frustrates me the most about this is that we have to leave it to the planning system. The community gets so frustrated by the passivity of the people who are elected to be leaders in this community. Sometimes it takes a bit of creativity, a bit of leaning in, to get it done.

I thank members who spoke in support of the bill. I particularly thank the community members who have worked so tirelessly on both restoring the site and seeking to get a better outcome around this telecommunications tower. I will not start naming them because there are many of them. A couple of them are well known to us. We thank them for their continued efforts. I know they will continue to work on the balance of this block.

We have seen the passion in this project with the recent arrest of one of the members

of the group while trying to prevent works going ahead on the site. I think that tells us that this is just not some group of people who just do not want to see a tower. They have worked so hard on this block to protect it, to restore it and to conserve it for future generations. This is not self-interest; this is pure community interest, and I really respect that.

I implore members to vote for this bill, and I thank those that are going to. Let's keep on working to protect Canberra's beautiful natural landscapes.

Question put:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Andrew Braddock
Fiona Carrick
Jo Clay
Thomas Emerson
Laura Nuttall
Shane Rattenbury

Noes 17

Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr
Chiaka Barry	Mark Parton
Peter Cain	Marisa Paterson
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Jeremy Hanson	Caitlin Tough
James Milligan	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Deborah Morris	

Question resolved in the negative.

Bill negatived.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Employment—portable long service leave schemes

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.05): I want to speak on an item in the subordinate legislation: disallowable instrument No 31 in the portable long service leave scheme, the limitation to coverage declaration in 2025. This is an extremely disappointing instrument to read. It delays the introduction of the portable long service leave scheme by 15 months for accommodation, food, beverage and hospitality workers, and for hairdressing and beauty service workers. I should stress that it is after the government and Canberra's business community had 24 months to prepare for the scheme. This decision cannot be just about having sympathy for the current business trading environment, which we should still acknowledge. It would be a shock to businesses only if they were not seeing it coming. Therefore, something has clearly gone wrong in

either the office of the responsible Labor minister or with the Long Service Leave Authority, or perhaps both.

The scheme is important because it recognises that these are industries that employ the young and disadvantaged in workplaces that experience higher-than-average staff turnover and lower-than-average wages. While we hate to see it, businesses can fail due to no fault of the workers concerned, leaving those workers in the lurch. The consequences are that people employed in these industries very rarely get access to long service leave entitlements that other types of workers enjoy. It is part of our two-speed economy.

From the scheme, there are also benefits for businesses. With only a 1.07 per cent levy on employee wages, businesses should actually be setting aside less money for future long service leave entitlements than they otherwise would be. This rate was determined based on the expected uptake of the entitlements and spreads the burden over time so that it should not create shock spikes in a business's cashflow. If the uptake of long service leave is less than expected, the government will not be pocketing the benefit, contrary to what has been reported in the media. Rather, the government will reduce the required contribution rate to balance the needs of the leave fund.

This scheme effectively pools the financial risk across all employers and removes an incentive for treating staff poorly. The structural retrenchment tactics to avoid long service leave payouts become obsolete. As the Labor political party often says, "Rights delayed are rights denied."

Due to the timing in which this instrument was notified, it was not actually feasible for it to be disallowed to restore workers' rights. Minister Pettersson's office has advised me that the United Workers Union seems to be in begrudging agreement, although they have not replied to my own office's inquiry so far—maybe because they are a union politically affiliated with the Labor Party. However, I have had feedback from the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union, who have some limited coverage of the affected workers here in Canberra, mostly at fast food venues. The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union had not been advised of delays to the scheme's implementation and were disappointed to hear of it. In fact, they argued that this first-of-its-kind scheme should be extended to retail workers more broadly and highlighted its value in a franchise setting, where employees can move between franchisees under a franchisor and therefore technically move between employers. Such movement can currently break long service leave accruals, even if it looks and feels like the same workplace.

I want to make it clear today that the Greens support workers. We are disappointed with the minister's decision and do not think it is a wise decision. If a future instrument is tabled that continues to deny workers' rights, the Greens would move to disallow it.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.09): I want to acknowledge Mr Braddock's comments. I appreciate that this is within Minister Pettersson's responsibilities and I appreciate that some of the businesses that are affected by this expansion, and indeed the pause in the expansion, relate to my responsibilities within the night-time economy. I note that there seemed to be some inference that there was no notification of this delay,

but I recognise that it was actually the subject of a media release at 9 am on 20 March, which was a sitting day, and Minister Pettersson made very clear the reasons why.

To be clear, portable long service leave is an important initiative for employers and employees. It is something that ACT Labor and this government have been proud to back. It simplifies business processes. Liability for long service leave will no longer be held by individual businesses, and by guaranteeing access to the benefits of long service leave across their industry, it ensures that our workers are not unfairly impacted by the casual and insecure nature of their employment. That is why we have backed these reforms and it is why we brought them forward. In saying that, I recognise Minister Gentleman's efforts as well.

However, in the same vein, we have been listening to industry. First of all, local businesses have made clear that a 1 April start date is not ideal and that a beginning of the financial year commencement would make it much easier to transition to a business-ready position. Most critically, hospitality and other businesses have been making very clear that they are still suffering the long, long tail end of COVID and that consumers' behaviours have changed quite dramatically—especially consumers of the hospitality sector—and the sector as a whole is still working through those changes and what they mean for their business models.

A new report showed that, nationally, 9.3 per cent of hospitality businesses closed in the 12 months to February 2025. I think we can all name a much loved Canberra hospitality business that has closed its doors in that same 12-month period. I know that Mr Emerson and others, together with Minister Pettersson, have received representations saying that taking a bit of the pressure off this industry at the moment, to ensure that it remains vibrant, survives and then thrives, is important. In making this decision, I commend Minister Pettersson. I know it would have been a difficult decision to make, but it reflects having listened to the community and it reflects a government that is still sticking by this. Also, it will support thousands of businesses to continue current processes in a challenging time and to obtain some further support over the next 15 months so that they can register for and transition through to the portable long service leave scheme.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Racism

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.13): I want to speak briefly about the racist flyer that was distributed in Florey recently. A lot of constituents contacted me about this. It is awful that someone living in our community thinks it is okay to distribute a message of hate like that, and I am so sorry that people in Florey saw it. I am particularly worried about kids and people of colour who got that in their mailbox.

From me, from all of the people here and from the vast majority of our community, I want Florey to know, and I want all Canberrans to know, that you are welcome here and that you belong. The words and the messages on that flyer are not acceptable. They do not reflect how most of our community feel. We cannot and will not accept this kind of behaviour in our community.

My colleague Andrew Braddock wrote to the Attorney-General to explore whether that material goes against our current hate speech laws and what we can do to stop that from happening anywhere else in Canberra ever again. I am very much hoping that it does not happen again; but, for anyone who would like to report an incident like this, you can report hate crimes to the AFP and there is information online to help.

I have done a letterbox drop in Florey to make it clear that everyone is welcome here, and I am hosting a community catch-up at Cesar's Café this Friday, 11 April, from 10 am to midday. I would love for anyone to attend and talk to me about this or anything else that is on their mind.

Cook—parking

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.14): I rise to speak about an issue that has been brought to my attention affecting the residents and visitors of Ellis Place in Cook. Ellis Place residents have recently been unfairly fined for parking in the turning circle of their cul-de-sac. For over 50 years, since the suburb's development in 1968, this space has been used for parking. However, recent fines have been issued due to its classification as a dividing strip.

This sudden enforcement fails to consider the realities of Ellis Place—limited kerbside parking, an aged-care complex with no visitor parking, and the necessity for carers, tradespeople and visitors to park in this space. Garbage collection is also a challenge, with insufficient space for bin placement, forcing collection drivers to manually retrieve and return bins. Residents have pointed out that similar cul-de-sacs in the ACT allow parking, setting a clear precedent for a resolution.

I call on the minister to clarify the legality of parking in the Ellis Place turning circle, to amend regulations to allow this longstanding practice to continue, and to suspend fines in the area until the matter is resolved.

Weston Creek Community Council

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.16): The Weston Creek Community Council held a wonderful community event on Saturday in the eastern courtyard at Cooleman Court, with an open mike and stalls from local artists, Lids4Kids and a barbie run by Rotary. Several beautiful voices singing country music and accompanying instrumentation rang out through the area, inviting people to stop by and enjoy the vibe.

I spoke with many community members and discussed local matters. I would like to thank the Weston Creek Community Council, especially Simone Hunter, for putting on this wonderful event. I look forward to enjoying more social community events in Weston Creek in the future.

Gadi supercomputer

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.17): Last week, I had the exciting opportunity to visit the National Computational Infrastructure, or NCI, at the ANU. NCI forms a crucial component of Australia's research scene through its supercomputer Gadi, the most

powerful of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. Appropriately named after the Ngunnawal word meaning “to search for”, Gadi supports research in climate monitoring, satellite imagery, geophysics, astronomy and genomics, allowing for the development of larger than ever databases. It has 930 terabytes of memory and over 250,000 CPU cores, constituting the 24th most powerful supercomputer in the world. Gadi’s scale becomes even more impressive when put in perspective, as its data systems support geophysical and genomics monitoring of an incredible 46 per cent of the Earth’s surface, including the entirety of the Australasian and Oceania region.

The NCI team deserves credit for creating an in-depth and accessible database which allows researchers to access this data to reference in their own projects anywhere. It has often been used by aggregators and journalists, and it is used by governments across Australia and, I think, the world now. This service is being used by our government agencies, industry leaders, the ANU and other academic institutions, domestic and abroad, making both Australia and Canberra an international leader in scientific innovation.

The tour began by seeing Gadi and Nirin, the cloud service named after the Wiradjuri word for “edge”. I thank Andrew, a constituent of mine from Brindabella, who gave us the tour. He is an incredible man who is doing incredible work.

Canberra Skateboarding Association

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.18): At the beginning of the last month, the Canberra Skateboarding Association hosted a free learn to skate event at Tuggeranong Skatepark. Woody, Tony and the crew put on an amazing event for anyone of any age who wanted to learn how to skate. They arrange these events at skateparks all over Canberra—at Woden, Googong, Tuggeranong and Belco, where they also host the fiendishly popular Belco Bowl Jam. They provide the skateboards and safety gear, which I definitely needed when I joined the session last year.

This time around, I was able to set up a community barbeque for hungry athletes. Taking advantage of the last few warm days of summer, my team and I provided drinks and watermelon slices and cooked up some snags from the Calwell deli. We saw the Tuggeranong parkrun finishing that morning, so I will aim to have some fruit and drinks out earlier next time for the speed demons. In fact, I hope to organise another Tuggeranong community barbeque this weekend for any skaters or park runners who need fuel after an early start. To anyone else in the community who would like to stop by to say “Hi” and grab a snag, please come along. I am very eager to be a voice for the community and be as available as I can to those who voted for me, my constituents of Tuggeranong.

Health—endometriosis

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.19): Endometriosis Awareness Month has just ended, but for those living with the condition, which is an estimated one in seven women, awareness is year round. There is heavy bleeding, pain, fatigue, infertility and painful intercourse; and, in severe cases, endometriosis tissue can be present in other organs. All of these things make this condition a significant challenge.

Women often struggle to obtain a diagnosis, struggle to be taken seriously, and struggle to learn about, afford and access support. As the ACT Greens spokesperson for health, I was privileged to attend an event organised by QENDO a few weeks ago, which increased my own understanding about this disease. Community members who attended this event provided powerful insights into their experiences and what is needed to improve support for those with endometriosis. I particularly acknowledge Ms Tough, who, as a result of her significant advocacy on this issue, was a panellist at the event.

Since 1988, QENDO has been doing fantastic work to raise awareness, develop resources and help people find support. But there is a role for government as well in recognising the need for better and cheaper access to GPs and other medical services, providing funds for research and support, and understanding the ways in which the consequences of endometriosis ripple out from those directly affected and encompass the whole community. I thank QENDO for inviting me to this event and for everything they do to help women with endometriosis and related conditions.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Congolese community—rally for peace

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.21): I had the privilege of enjoying the Congolese community's rally for peace at Australian Parliament House this past week. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, the DRC, is facing one of the world's largest displacement and humanitarian crises. Ongoing violence and instability have forced millions to flee their homes, with at least 7,000 people killed in recent months and many more injured.

The DRC is home to one of the largest populations of displaced people around the world. Seven million people remain internally displaced, and millions more are at risk of unlawful killings, sexual and gender-based violence, unlawful detention, and torture. According to the UN Refugee Agency, since 1 January this year, more than 100,000 refugees have crossed into neighbouring countries, with 69,000 seeking refuge in Burundi, 29,000 in Uganda, and about 1,000 in Rwanda and Tanzania.

I call on all parties to prioritise the protection and safety of civilian communities. I also call on all international states and actors to focus on providing aid and support to civilian communities throughout the DRC, and not to support the armed groups in further escalating violence. Peace and justice must always be the goal, particularly for the people of the DRC, who have endured decades of violence and war. All states should recommit to and work towards this goal.

The Congolese community here in Canberra are also suffering, through the precarious trauma of watching events unfold on the other side of the world and being helpless and unable to change things. They worry about the safety of their loved ones, family and

friends. The lack of information or news can sometimes be the most difficult of all the things to deal with.

Many are also suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other challenges to their mental health, which is only natural when presented with such extreme stress, so the Congolese community of Canberra are seeking the ACT government's help for those who are experiencing mental health challenges during such a challenging and difficult time.

I have provided the community with details of supports and services available here in the ACT, and I have also written to the Minister for Mental Health, seeking further support for the Congolese community here in Canberra. Ultimately, what happens on the other side of the world echoes through our Canberra community. We are a common humanity and we should respond as such. I, too, call for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Australia should provide humanitarian aid to help with this humanitarian catastrophe. I, too, stand with our local Congolese community.

Aranda Primary School grounds—access

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.24): I rise today to address an issue that is of great importance to the residents of Aranda and the broader community—a change that has had a significant impact on local residents.

As many members may know, the Aranda Residents Group has been an active and committed community organisation for over 30 years. Their focus has always been on advocating for initiatives that improve the quality of life in Aranda, and this particular issue is no different.

Back in 2024, Aranda Primary School installed a new fence for the school, with the promise of providing the local community with access to the school grounds during non-school hours. This promise was an important step in enhancing the public spaces available to residents, allowing them to enjoy and utilise the school's facilities for activities like walking, recreation and socialising after school hours. However, despite these promises, the community has seen a significant reduction in the agreed-upon access time. In fact, the community now faces a 45 per cent reduction in access to the school grounds compared to what was originally planned and promised.

This change has been driven by two primary decisions. One is related to the YWCA aftercare program and the other is related to the school's cleaning schedule. These decisions have effectively eliminated community access during key hours when the grounds were previously accessible, leading to considerable disappointment within the local community.

The Aranda Residents Group have raised valid concerns about these changes, and they are not alone in this. Many community members feel that the original agreements, which were made with the understanding of how valuable these spaces are for local residents, have been undermined without sufficient explanation or consultation.

It is important that we do not lose sight of the values that make the community strong—access to public spaces, the ability to link with neighbours and the opportunity to engage

in healthy outdoor activities. The school grounds at Aranda are not just a resource for students; they are a vital part of community infrastructure and a shared space that should be available for everyone in the neighbourhood.

The residents of Aranda deserve to have their concerns heard. They deserve to know why these changes have been made and whether alternatives were considered before access was restricted. That is why I am calling on the minister for education to review these decisions and to engage in open and transparent communication with the community, so that the needs of the YWCA aftercare program and the school's cleaning schedule can be met without causing the community to lose important access. If there are valid security concerns, alternative measures should be explored—measures that do not come at the expense of community access to a vital public space. I believe there is a solution to this that will meet the needs not only of those facilities but also the needs, as promised, of the community in Aranda.

I stand here in support of the Aranda Residents Group and the local community by raising this matter in this Assembly to ensure that it receives the attention it deserves. I urge the minister to work with the community to review the decisions that have been made and to take action that restores, or increases significantly, the access that was promised.

Roads—Canberra Avenue—safety

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.28): I rise to address a recent event of which we are all aware and which has been incredibly difficult for our community. On 28 March, a shocking accident occurred where two students from St Edmund's College, Aaron Way and Aiden Stuart, were struck on the way to school by a speeding car that was allegedly stolen. As an Eddy's old boy myself and as a parent, I felt this tragedy on a personal level. I know from firsthand experience that Eddy's boys pride themselves on their compassion and communal wellbeing. In the wake of this accident, we have witnessed those values as our community comes together.

There has been an outpouring of solidarity. I commend the remarkable support that has been offered by other schools in stepping up, including by making their own counsellors available for traumatised students, families and teachers. This spirit of cooperation across our educational institutions highlights an important truth: our schools take seriously their part in upholding our shared responsibility to ensure our young people feel safe and supported. We must do what is necessary so that every child feels safe, whether they are stepping off a bus or are walking or riding to school. Kids should have the freedom to travel to school with their mates. This terrible incident reminds us of the need for vigilance and proactive measures to protect our kids.

While we may not be able to prevent every tragic event, we do have a duty as parliamentarians to create environments in which accidents are minimised through careful planning that makes our streets as safe as possible. With that in mind, I am encouraged by remarks earlier today by the Minister for City and Government Services, indicating an openness to establishing new safety measures on Canberra Avenue. We have 40-kilometre-an-hour zones on Northbourne Avenue; we have a signalised pedestrian crossing on Commonwealth Avenue. There is a clear precedent to do one, the other or both on Canberra Avenue. I implore the minister to follow through on this

and support her in doing so. Sure, safety measures will inconvenience some, but it will make Canberra Avenue, which is currently the fifth most dangerous road in the country, significantly safer for kids going to and from school. While safety measures might not have prevented this recent tragedy, their establishment can create something positive out of the terrible incident that has rocked our community.

My heart goes out to the injured boys, their families and the Eddy's community. I am sure the road ahead—the journey of physical and emotional recovery—will be challenging and long, and potentially lifelong. I hope Aaron and Aiden are able to tap into the Eddy's spirit and embrace the challenge. Let's back them in any way we can, as I know the school community will be steadfast in providing the support needed to fuel their comeback.

Homelessness

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.30): There is a new series, *Alone Australia*, currently screening on SBS. In it, the intrepid participants must construct their own shelter before they even think about finding food. That is because you can survive being hungry for longer than you can survive without shelter in an inhospitable environment like south-west Tasmania in wintertime. There is an element of voyeurism in watching the contestants struggle when you have a comfortable couch, a roof over your head, a mug of something hot in your hand and a full stomach, but we—the fortunate we—do not have to watch *Alone Australia* to recognise how crucial shelter is to human survival and wellbeing and to contrast our own secure and comfortable housing with the dangers of exposure to the elements.

We have homeless people in this city who face equal challenges in finding shelter, but they do not have the luxury of being able to make a phone call, saying, "I'm done. Come and get me." They do not have a chance of a \$250,000 prize, and they do not have viewers hanging on their success or failure. Housing—shelter—should be a human right. It must be. How cruel are we, as a species, that this is even a question. We condemn our fellow human beings to less agency than a wombat or a magpie has. Animals can dig burrows, build nests and find caves in crevices. How do we treat the human beings who try to set up their own rough shelter in the middle of a city or on a piece of land that is not theirs?

Recently, I put out a call for people to email me with their experiences of homelessness and insecure housing. Every story was unique, but there were commonalities too. I read story after story of people's security being derailed by a couple of bits of bad luck and bad timing: the end of a relationship, chronic illness, losing a job, needing to help another family member or having an abusive or struggling partner. I also read tribute after tribute: "Thank goodness for my kids;" "If it had not been for my parents;" "I'm so grateful to my friends." And I read disclaimer after disclaimer: "I've been very lucky, but so many others haven't;" "I'm fortunate to have received a timely inheritance;" "I'm fortunate to have a good job;" "I'm fortunate that I bought my house back in the 70s." As moving as I found the stories of those who are struggling with insecure housing themselves, the stories from people who have not struggled but still care deeply about this issue were also extremely moving.

As a general rule, Australians do not want our country to be like this. We know we are

a wealthy nation and we could afford to house everyone. We know wrong turns have been taken over many years by many governments—at federal, state and local levels—that have led us to this point, and we want those wrong turns urgently corrected. We know that developments in the private sector, such as Airbnb, have led to unforeseen consequences in the housing sector which laws and regulations have been slow to recognise.

I want to quote directly from some of the responses I received. That is going to take more time than I have today. Accordingly, there is going to be a part 2 to this speech, which you will hear tomorrow in adjournment speeches. I hope you will find the respondents' words as compelling as I did.

Scouts ACT

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.34): I rise today to acknowledge the incredible work that Scouts ACT do in our community. Recently, I visited the Fadden Pines scout hall to have a chat with leaders of the scouting community in Tuggeranong. We had a tremendous discussion about what they do in Tuggeranong, where they do it, and how the ACT government can support them.

Mr Speaker, scouting in the ACT is more extensive and more popular than you might realise. Thirty local scout groups and approximately 2,500 members are actively participating in this vibrant community. On any given weeknight in Canberra, 22 scout meetings are taking place. Each one is a hive of activity, of hustle and bustle, and learning.

During weekends, scouts are out and about in nature, engaging in activities like hiking, camping, sailing, caving or abseiling. These experiences are not just about adventure; they are about building resilience, confidence, teamwork and leadership skills in our young people. That is because scouting provides a unique environment where young individuals can challenge themselves, learn new skills and develop a sense of responsibility and community. It is through these activities that Scouts ACT are nurturing the next generation of Canberra's leaders, equipping them with the tools that they need to take on future leadership roles within our community.

Scouting activities are held year-round. There is no off-season; and, when not in use by Scouts ACT, scout halls are used by over 150 other community organisations. In Tuggeranong there are four scout groups: Fadden Pines, Lake Tuggeranong Sea Scouts, Wanniasa, and Mulga, in Richardson.

I am proud and delighted to say that the ACT government has recently supported the four Scouts ACT groups in Tuggeranong by providing a \$4,000 donation to support their efforts. For the Fadden Pines Scout Group, this funding will allow them to purchase new badges, flags, hall signage and outdoor equipment. For the Wanniasa Scout Group and the Mulga Scout Group in Richardson, this funding means that they can purchase new camping equipment. For the Lake Tuggeranong Sea Scouts, they will now be able to upgrade equipment and safety gear, install air-conditioning timers to save energy, purchase a chest freezer and replace life jackets.

I am proud of the ACT government's support for our community groups in

Tuggeranong. I look forward to continuing to work with and support Scouts ACT and the other community organisations in Brindabella.

ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.37): Today I would like to speak about the wonderful work being done by ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability, who took the time to meet with my office a couple of weeks ago.

The name “ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability” in some ways only scratches the surface of the work that this organisation does, as the work they do includes, but is far wider than, advocacy and support for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities. They provide advocacy for the disability community on both an individual and systemic basis, advice to government, and a range of services for people with disabilities at all stages of life.

The services that they provide are even more necessary during the NDIS transition that is currently occurring and the lack of certainty afforded to NDIS recipients. I am sure members here will have heard from people in their community who have had their plans cut without notice or watched the services that they have relied on for a number of years suddenly removed from eligibility.

What really comes through from ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability is the importance they place on lived experience. They engage closely with their members and work hard to make sure that disability services and services more broadly are genuinely co-designed with people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities.

They have done brilliant work on the various disability strategies that the ACT government relies on and that the community puts a lot of stock into. I note that, with the new disability inclusion act coming to fruition, and more disability inclusion plans required across government, the demand for the services that ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability provide will only grow.

In chatting to ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability, I was particularly outraged to hear about the treatment of visa holders who give birth to children with Down syndrome. I had not realised until this point that the federal government will often deny visas to children with Down syndrome due to the “expense” of supporting them. This is part of a broader Australian government immigration policy whereby the government is able to reject visas if an applicant has a health issue or a disability that is deemed too costly to Australian taxpayers. I would say that this is a deplorable and inhumane way to treat anyone, let alone an infant.

This policy has knock-on effects, in that the mothers are often forced to leave Australia or to send their newborn back home without them. This is impacting people across Australia, including Canberra. I sincerely hope that the ACT government has made, or will make, advocacy to their federal counterparts to end this absolutely inexcusable policy. These are people in our community. These are our friends and neighbours who are being denied visas on account of their disability. I am grateful that ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability and Down Syndrome Australia are continuing to advocate and shed light on this issue.

The disability advocacy sector is one that is entirely powered by the passion and the hard work of the community. I continue to be amazed at what they can achieve with just that. But that is not all that they should be provided with. There is a desperate need for the ACT government to provide more support to the disability advocacy sector. We know that the ACT government is reliant on disability advocacy groups for consultation, community support and the implementation, necessarily, of time, energy and spoon-intensive disability strategies. They should be given significantly more funding to do this.

We need to ensure that these organisations are positioned to provide advocacy at the territory level and are not just forced to focus on federal issues, where funding for advocacy is more forthcoming. At the end of the day, we have passionate people doing extremely good work that our community cannot do without. If we do not fund them adequately, we will eventually lose them. I am sure that the entire chamber would be very eager to see the great work of ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability continue well into the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.40 pm.