



**DEBATES**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

26 June 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, 8 July 2025**.

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**Thursday, 26 June 2025**

**MR SPEAKER** (Mr Parton) (10.00): Members:

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

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

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

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

**Mr John Hindmarsh AM**  
**Motion of condolence**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.01): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Mr John Hindmarsh AM – a visionary builder, businessman and philanthropist; and offers its sincere condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

It is with considerable sadness that I rise today to speak on the condolence motion and pay tribute to John Hindmarsh AM. John was a passionate Canberran, visionary builder, businessman and one of Canberra's greatest philanthropists. A tribute to his leadership and involvement in our community already exists in the *Hansard* of this place when he retired from his role with the Cultural Facilities Corporation. Following his passing, it is appropriate for us to reflect further on his significant contribution to our city.

John and his wife Rosanna made Canberra their home in 1971. Together, they raised their family here and founded the Hindmarsh development company in 1979. Starting as a home office, with Rosanna as secretary, over 45 years Hindmarsh generated more than \$7 billion in completed projects and employed more than 350 staff. John oversaw dozens of iconic development projects that have become central to our city's identity. These include major facilities like Questacon; the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the ANU; some of the refurbishments at the Australian War Memorial; the St Christopher's Precinct in Manuka; and, of course, his beloved Playhouse in the Canberra Theatre Centre. John's contributions extended well beyond the building industry, though. He will be fondly remembered for his extensive involvement in the arts, community engagement and philanthropy.

John was appointed Chair of the Cultural Facilities Corporation in 2012. During six years in this role, he advocated tirelessly for the future of our city's arts and cultural facilities. His vision and energy were instrumental in the early thinking about the

expansion of the Canberra Theatre Centre, alongside the Playhouse. For John, it was critical for the arts to have a place at the centre of our city's cultural life. His passion for the arts and organisational leadership were matched by his generosity. During his term on the CFC Board, he donated his board remuneration back to the organisation for investment in and furthering of the arts in the ACT.

On his retirement from the board, he funded the establishment of the CMAG on the Square exhibition across from this Assembly. It was established for artists and makers from the Canberra region who are not currently engaged in formal study to create installations that are accessible for viewing 24 hours a day by anyone in City Square. This is a legacy that continues to this day.

Reflecting on John's contribution in his role as Chair of the CFC, the CEO, Gordon Ramsay, described him as "a strong and insightful leader who provided energy, insight and generosity and formed a powerful connection between the local and national arts scenes". John was a director of Hands Across Canberra, the ACT's community foundation, and in 2022 received the foundation's inaugural Canberra Philanthropy Award. In accepting this award, John said, "I've always wanted to help where I can be genuinely useful in bringing a network of people together who want to get things done."

John was tireless in his efforts and involvement in organisations, including the Boundless Playground charity. His leadership and insight were recognised by his appointment as Adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra. His community engagement extended to his roles as Chairman of the National Gallery of Australia Foundation and a member of the gallery's governing council. He was a generous patron of the arts as well and a dedicated and major supporter of the National Gallery, the Canberra Museum and Gallery, and the Canberra Theatre Centre.

In 2013, our city's centenary year, John was awarded an Order of Australia for his contribution and services to the Canberra community through construction and philanthropy. More than most, John leaves an incredible legacy of generosity, innovation and business excellence. The mark that he has left on Canberra's cultural and community life will continue to be enjoyed by generations to come. We owe him a great debt of thanks.

John and his wife Rosanna were long-term partners in not only life, family and business but also community and the arts, with the generous contributions they made to so many organisations.

I offer my sincere condolences to Rosanna, their children and grandchildren, and all friends and colleagues of John Hindmarsh on the loss of a wonderful partner, father, grandfather, friend and Canberran.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.07): I thank the Chief Minister for moving this motion. It is a motion that acknowledges the life and contributions of a man who has helped to shape the city, both physically and socially: John Hindmarsh AM. His contribution to Canberra stretches over more than five decades. As a developer, he helped to shape and deliver some of our most iconic buildings, including the new Anzac Hall at the Australian War Memorial; a significant

number of buildings at the ANU; the Canberra Theatre's Playhouse, which sits just a stone's throw from here; the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre; and One Canberra.

But his legacy extends beyond Canberra's built environment. It extends to our social environment as well, through his establishment of Hands Across Canberra, his chairmanship of the Cultural Facilities Corporation and the National Gallery, and by making CMAG into what we know it as today. It is because of his philanthropy as much as his architecture that he was made a member of the Order of Australia.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I pay tribute to the legacy of John Hindmarsh. We can only imagine the obstacles that he confronted and had to overcome in order to help build the city that Canberra has become, and we can only imagine the strength and perseverance that made his achievements possible. It is a valuable reminder to us in this place that the work of building this city is done by those with vision and determination. With patience and generosity, there is a generation of Canberrans who have made incredible and lasting contributions to this city—a generation that, unfortunately, is passing on. We ought to take a moment to reflect on the contribution that John and people like him, with a dream for a great city, made to our city. We ought to take a moment to remember and give thanks.

To the family, friends and colleagues of John Hindmarsh, we offer our deepest condolences. Their loss is shared by a city that is shaped by his life's work. May John's legacy continue to inspire those who build, lead and serve.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (10.09): On behalf of the ACT Greens, I rise today to pay tribute to John Hindmarsh AM, who died in late May at the age of 84. If there is one thing that everyone in this place has in common, beyond party politics, belief systems and personalities, it is that we love and believe in this city. John's life embodied the same passion and faith during more than half a century of living here, and Canberra is a better place because of him.

He chose to stay here when the success and demands of his business could have easily pulled him away. It was not just a feeling he held in his heart; it was something he turned into action, not only as a builder and developer but as a patron of the arts and a philanthropist. You cannot go to very many parts of Canberra without seeing a Hindmarsh building. From the development of the Canberra Playhouse, the John Curtin School of Medical Research, apartment complexes, commercial buildings and retirement villages to important government buildings like the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre and Aunty Agnes Shea High School. Just across from the Legislative Assembly, the Canberra Museum and Gallery owes its existence in large part to his financial support.

As is so often the case, John's wife, Rosanna, was a vital part of his success, his ethics and his integrity during a marriage of more than 60 years. I send to her, their children, Fiona, Stewart and Rowan, and their grandchildren, Chloe, Will, Lachlan, Margot, Phoebe, Angus, Ralph, Tabitha and Albert, as well as colleagues and friends my sincerest condolences.

Although I did not know John well, I did meet him at various public events over the years. It was always an engaging conversation, with John quick to launch into his

thoughts on what Canberra needed, how we could make the city a better place, and how we might achieve those objectives. I really enjoy those sorts of conversations—people with ideas, vision and energy but also the wherewithal on how to get it done.

This is Canberra and there are often not many degrees of separation. As it happens, I went to school with and for many years played in the same soccer team as John's son Stewart. As a teenager, I had no sense of who Stewart's dad was or what he did, but I take this opportunity to offer my particular condolences to Stewart.

While John is no longer with us, I hope and believe that his legacy will continue into the future through the company he founded. The new Bean Building and Central Energy Plant at the Australian War Memorial, for example, includes a geothermal energy system that will save more than \$1.3 million a year in heating and cooling costs at the memorial and is the largest of its type in the world. That is the sort of innovation we want to see in this city. We need more people in the world like John Hindmarsh, and I am glad, for our beloved city's sake, that he chose Canberra as the place where he wanted to leave his mark.

*Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.*

## **Petition**

### **Ministerial response**

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

#### **Community organisations—Fearless Women—funding—petition 12-25**

By **Dr Paterson**, Minister for Women, undated, in response to petition No 012-25, lodged by Ms Barry concerning funding for Fearless Women.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 19 March 2025, regarding petition PET-012-25. The petition requests the Assembly call on the Government to provide funding to community organisation Fearless Woman in the 2025-26 Budget as outlined in Fearless Women's 2025-26 Community Budget Submission.

Fearless Women provided the ACT Government with a 2025-26 Community Budget Submission seeking \$500,000 for the Fearless Women Empowerment Program (education, mentoring, individual and small group counselling) in 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28, with CPI applied in 2026-27 and 2027-28.

Pursuant to Standing Order 100, this letter constitutes my response.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of supporting the mental health of ACT women and girls. The ACT Government notes the evidence showing that girls and young women in the ACT feel overwhelmed, stressed, and uncertain about their future. The ACT Government acknowledges the importance of programs that enable young women and girls to better understand who they are, what they can be and how they can thrive. These include programs like those

offered by Fearless Women.

The 2024-25 Budget provided Fearless Women with \$158,000 to deliver a counselling service for young women aged 10 to 25 years for one year.

The 2025-26 Budget will continue ACT Government support for Fearless Women and will provide \$380,000 in 2025-26 and 2026-27, with indexation applied in 2026-27.

This commitment to fund Fearless Women further supports the intention of work to deliver *Third Action Plan 2023-2026* actions under the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026* to respond to women and girls' mental health needs.

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

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

That the response so lodged be noted.

### **Out-of-order petition**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.14), by leave: I table the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—AirBnB in residential areas—Regulatory reform—Mr Braddock (102 signatures).

This out-of-order petition, with 102 signatures, calls for stricter enforcement of regulations on Airbnb operations and better protection for residents and animals. From 28 December to 18 January this year, multiple, loud, trumpet-like noises, which ranged from 90 to 100 decibels, and a confirmed gas leak from a faulty gas system in a nearby Airbnb property, caused my constituent and their family, which included a young child and a dog, to abandon their family home and sleep in a caravan. The prolonged noise and gas leak posed serious safety risks and distress to the family and their dog.

Despite multiple complaints, the authorities were unable to resolve the issue due to limited enforcement powers. Finally, the Airbnb owners fixed the faulty system, and the family were able to move back into their home. But taking three weeks to fix a faulty system, which had such significant impacts on and posed a severe risk to neighbours, is not acceptable and should not have happened.

This is one of many situations which exhibit the local regulator's limited enforcement powers over short-stay operators. Therefore, to proactively avoid such situations in the future, this petition calls for strict enforcement of the planning regulations on Airbnb and other short-stay operators in residential zones, under which Airbnb properties in Canberra would be allowed to operate only in commercial and mixed-planning zones, and owners would be required to immediately undertake maintenance to prevent possible harm and distress to nearby residents and community members.

Additionally, I would like to add that Airbnb properties that are operating in



residential zones are also taking away long-term rental options for Canberrans, adding further pressure to the current rental market whilst we are in the middle of a housing crisis. It is crucial for us to actively enforce the planning regulations in residential zones in order to ensure that community members and their families have the right to live in a peaceful home and so that there are more long-term rental options in residential areas.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Benno Schmidhauser's work on this petition and thank him for bringing it to my attention.

### **Out-of-order petition**

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (10.16), by leave: I table the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Isabella Plains—  
Playground facilities at Yabtree Place—Improvement—Ms Tough (99 signatures).

This out-of-order petition, containing 99 signatures, relates to a bike track and better playground facilities for Yabtree Place, Isabella Plains. I want to acknowledge and praise the initiative of a remarkable young man named Archer Brown, who joins us in the gallery today, with Beau and Sasha. It is wonderful that Archie has been able to come here today. He is a 10-year-old boy from Isabella Plains, an active, social kid with a love of adventure. Together with his friends, tired of the play equipment at their local park, this group of young innovators took matters into their own hands and built a bike jump from scratch.

However, a year ago, the bike jump was removed and, with a swift reaction from Archie, an advocacy campaign demanding a revival of the playground, on behalf of all its users, was launched. In a letter that I received earlier this year, Archie laid out demands that he had collected from the broader community for a better playground. He called on the ACT government to build a bike track, improve the playground and install multipurpose courts.

Archie justified the proposal by pointing out the important youth public health outcomes—that, if there was more to do at the park, young kids would stay off social media, and it would encourage kids in Isabella Plains to get active and make more friends.

Archie represents a cohort of young people excited about making their communities a better place. Our kids are becoming active, informed and responsible citizens, working together to create strong communities that are tolerant and understanding of diverse perspectives. I want to thank Archie and Beau for all the work they have done in the community. Gathering 99 signatures from in and around a suburb calling for a new playground is no small feat. Well done.

Programs in our schools and our community are effective in bolstering civic engagement. I recall a letter written to me by a girl named Skyler from Namadgi School last year. Each year, an election for prime minister of the school is held. When I met Skyler after her long campaign, I was amazed by the level of attention and passion that our young citizens are directing towards government and their

communities. Yesterday I spoke about Audrey who, like Archer, has designed how to revitalise a playground in Theodore, and presented the design to scouts for her environment badge. Archie, Skyler and Audrey are all young citizens seeking to improve the lives of those around them. They are dedicated to creating meaningful change, not just for them but for everyone.

Ultimately, Archie petitioned across Tuggeranong, acquiring nearly 100 signatures through his efforts. Although the petition is technically not in conformity with our standing orders, I have formally written to Minister Cheyne, providing her with a copy of the petition and Archie's letter, and hope to receive a response for Archie soon.

I bring this story before the Assembly to remind us of the influence that strong leadership has on those who look up to us. Profound transformations of our communities do not happen in this room alone, but stem from the ideas and ambitions of even the youngest among us. Again, I praise Archie, Beau and Sasha for coming in and for your enterprise, motivation and vigour. I want to assure you that many of us here today will certainly be taking notes from your playbook.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Tough, I particularly like how weathered and battered the petition is. It is a real-life document. I particularly like the caption on the map that says, "Where the red blob is, is where we want the bike track to go." It is wonderful.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (10.20): I join my colleague Caitlin Tough in praise and recognition of the heartfelt petition brought forward by two of our youngest and most engaged constituents, Archer and his mate Beau, who I am delighted to see skipping school this morning to experience the thrill of a Thursday morning in the Legislative Assembly.

As has been noted, the petition has seen a lot of streets in Isabella. It was written and circulated by a young resident of the Isabella Plains suburb, who saw a need in their neighbourhood and took action. The petition draws attention to the playground at Yabtree Place, the now iconic "red blob", which is described as old and inadequate for the needs of local children and families.

The petitioners are asking for two meaningful improvements—a modernised playground and the addition of a bike track. These are not extravagant requests. They are practical, community-building investments that promote health, inclusion and outdoor activity. This petition demonstrates why it is so important that the ACT government continues its program of investment in recreational infrastructure.

The budget introduced this week allocated money for playground upgrades in Isabella Plains, Bonython, Conder, Gilmore, Kambah and Wanniasa. I am looking forward to the minister confirming which specific playgrounds will be involved and what improvements will be seen, in due course.

This petition is a reminder that civic engagement starts young, and that our public spaces matter deeply to the people who use them every day. It also reflects the pride and care that residents, young and old, have for their local community. Archer and Beau, thank you very much. Your initiative in gathering 99 signatures is absolutely

inspiring. Our community is lucky to have you in it.

### **Community organisations—Fearless Women—funding—petition 12-25**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (10.22): Fearless Women is a not-for-profit organisation that is very beloved in the ACT. It is an organisation that provides girls and young women in the ACT with a dedicated outreach and support service, much in the same way that Menslink, which is very well known to members in this place, does for boys and young men. Fearless Women provides a sense of belonging within a safe and inclusive community, boosting self-belief, inner strength, confidence and courage, allowing young Canberra women to find their voice and understand who they are and what they can be.

It is a vital service that visits schools throughout the ACT to talk to girls and young women about the importance of wellbeing, self-empowerment and self-value. It offers a mentoring program that focuses on personal, social and self-management skills. It is made up of a network of mentors and a lot of professional Canberra women, and most of them volunteer their time to support young girls in our community. Last year, Fearless Women delivered training sessions free of charge to 80 schools. We know that many girls and young women face a number of challenges in today's society that leave them feeling overwhelmed, stressed and uncertain about their future.

In the ACT, it is a sad statistic that a third of all young women feel lonely all or most of the time and only 36 per cent feel positive about their future. Nearly 60 per cent of young women are concerned about their mental health, with 66 per cent feeling that mental health is a barrier that is impacting their achievement of study, work and reaching their full potential.

Ms Barry and I had the chance to visit Fearless Women in their building in the city, which they are able to occupy as a result of the generosity of their landlords. We got to engage with some of the activities that the girls undertake. I have to say that we probably need to work on our artistic skills, but we still got to see some of the activities that the girls are able to undertake in a safe and inclusive space where they can not only talk to peers who are going through some similar challenges but also get some advice from the mentors and professionals there.

Ms Barry sponsored a petition that was tabled here in March and called for the certainty of ongoing funding, which of course built on the work that Ms Barry has continued to undertake, lobbying and advocating for the community sector in seeking confidence and certainty when it comes to funding for their important work. I have not read the response from the minister yet, but I note that, in the budget, Fearless Women received a commitment of \$772,000 over the next two years to continue offering the education, mentoring and counselling programs to empower and uplift young women and girls. That is a very welcome step and will go a long way to provide a little bit of relief for Fearless Women.

I acknowledge in particular Glenda Stevens, the CEO of Fearless Women, who has been a tireless advocate when it comes to not only young girls but also the continuation of the programs that she believes in and Fearless Women delivers. I thank Glenda for her ongoing advocacy, and I thank all the girls who have engaged

so passionately with Fearless Women and have undertaken the programs with gusto. And I thank the countless volunteers who donate their time and effort to being the mentors for Fearless Women. Once again, I acknowledge and thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this petition. I also acknowledge that Fearless Women has now received two years of funding. Let's make sure that these vital services can continue to provide what they need to for the young girls and women of Canberra.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **ACT public service—working from home**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.27): The ACT government is a leader in embracing modern ways of working, providing our employees with the flexibility to work where they are most productive and effective. The post-COVID-19 era has demonstrated that employees can and are willing to deliver outcomes without being tied to a particular office from 9 to 5, five days a week.

The government recognised this early and we committed to supporting greater flexibility in the ACT public service workforce shortly after the pandemic, enabling public servants to work from locations most convenient to them, including their homes. To support this shift, the government created Flexispaces, located across Canberra's town centres, that offer ACT public service employees the option to work closer to where they live or where they may have caring responsibilities. Creation of these spaces has reduced commute times and has supported a better balance between work and personal life.

As our society evolves, so must governments, and so must public sector service delivery. Flexible work is no longer a convenience but a critical enabler of workforce participation, inclusion and equity. It empowers women, in particular, to better manage a range of responsibilities without sacrificing career progression. Families, guardians and single parents can remain engaged in the workforce with reduced daily stress.

For many, remote and hybrid work also fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment that helps government to retain skilled employees and promotes gender equity. It enables people to stay connected to work during key life stages, whether that is managing health issues, caregiving or pursuing further education. In turn, this contributes to improved staff wellbeing, higher job satisfaction, productivity and a more diverse workforce.

The most recent ACT Public Service Employee Survey showed that 75 per cent of employees are accessing hybrid work arrangements. In saying this, we acknowledge that there are many frontline roles that cannot be performed remotely, but we remain committed to supporting flexibility wherever possible. The family-friendly workspace, located in the ACT government building across from here, is one example, offering any ACT public service employee a safe and equipped environment to work while also caring for a child or another dependent.

Earlier this year, the Productivity Commission released a research paper on productivity before and after the pandemic and it confirmed that hybrid work can be beneficial to productivity. Allowing employees to work from home part of the week improves satisfaction and reflects the evolving expectations of modern workers. This was evident when the federal coalition was forced to roll back their ‘five days in the office’ policy that began very broadly and then became quite a pernicious targeting of public servants in this city. Clearly, both the rollback and walking away from that policy, at least at the federal level, reflects how out of touch it was with the modern Australian workforce.

The role of the public service is to deliver services for the community and is not to fill office buildings. When working remotely, public servants contribute to our city’s vibrancy because they are spending locally in their suburbs, using co-working spaces and engaging in community life. Canberra was recently named the most livable city in the world, and this achievement is due to many factors, including the availability of stable, well-paid public service jobs.

Secure and flexible employment supports a resilient and inclusive society, increasing workforce participation among parents, families and people with disability. The government is committed to a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community that we serve. We maintain employment targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and for people with disability. We are proud of the strong representation of culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTQIA+ employees across all levels of the ACT public service.

We continue to lead the way in removing some of the traditional, shall I say, barriers to greater workforce diversity and participation through enhancing provisions such as gender-neutral parental leave, domestic and family violence leave, and gender-affirmation leave. I am proud of our government’s commitment to building a Canberra that gives people back their time and, through flexible working arrangements, prioritises wellbeing and livability. Our hybrid working model brings together the best of both worlds: flexibility and the opportunities for collaboration that our office spaces provide.

In closing and in the simplest possible terms, a 20th century notion of a 9 to 5, Monday to Friday model, where everyone goes into one office, is no longer the default for the ACT public service. We have moved beyond that. The community supports that move and it helps us attract and retain quality people across the ACT public sector.

I present the following paper:

Work from home—Ministerial statement, 26 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Margaret Timpson Park—update**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.34): Today I rise to respond to an Assembly resolution on 15 May 2025 in relation to the Margaret Timpson Park expansion and improvement, including to provide advice on the timelines for development of homes on block 45 section 54, Belconnen.

Margaret Timpson Park has played a role in the lives of Belconnen residents for nearly four decades. I am certainly conscious of community concerns in relation to any upgrade or realignment of the precinct. The ACT government recognises the essential role that green public spaces play in supporting healthy, connected and resilient urban communities. These spaces are vital to the wellbeing of our residents and are central to our vision for a livable and sustainable city. The Belconnen district strategy reflects this vision, identifying the ACT's blue-green network as a key driver in shaping our urban environment.

Located next to Margaret Timpson Park, block 45 section 54 in Belconnen is a proposed development site currently managed by the Suburban Land Agency. As part of the government's housing supply and land release program, the Suburban Land Agency will work to release the site over the next 12 months. The site, which can accommodate about 60 dwellings, will be considered for a targeted release to the community housing sector to help provide much needed affordable housing and contribute to the government's goal to deliver 5,000 additional public, community and affordable rental dwellings by the end of 2030.

Development on this site will be guided by the Belconnen district policy, which requires primary active frontages along the boundary with Margaret Timpson Park. This policy sets out a height limit of 13 metres for the building. This will ensure that the built form contributes positively to the park's activation and has a limited impact on neighbours. All development proposals will be subject to statutory assessments and approvals, and the community will have the opportunity to provide input through the development application process.

Health and wellbeing considerations are embedded within the ACT's planning system. The design guidelines, as part of this system, promote best practice design that delivers community benefit, including social outcomes that support quality of life and overall wellbeing.

Regarding Margaret Timpson Park upgrades and amenities, Transport Canberra and City Services—TCCS—is in the early planning stages of the Margaret Timpson Park project. A communications strategy is being prepared, which will consider and detail engagement with the community and consultation to ensure that the upgrades best meet community needs. The government will investigate options to improve access for people running events, and this will inform the planning work that is currently underway.

In addition, the ACT government welcomes the federal Labor election commitment to

invest in upgrades for Margaret Timpson Park. In anticipation of this funding, we have fast-tracked work to commence feasibility and concept design processes to support the timely delivery of this commitment once funding timelines are confirmed.

The ACT government remains committed to delivering inclusive, sustainable and community-focused urban development. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders, including the Belconnen Community Council and local residents, to ensure that both the development of block 45 section 54 and the upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park meet the needs and aspirations of the Belconnen community.

I present the following paper:

Margaret Timpson Park expansion and improvement—Assembly resolution of 15 May 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 26 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.37): I welcome the minister's statement and the update today. This was a really difficult one, when it came through the Assembly, and I thank Ms Barry for bringing the issue forward. I am pleased to hear about the progress. We are looking forward to the upgrades in Margaret Timpson Park, and I think that the community will definitely have some views on exactly how they are shaped. That is usually what we see in Belconnen; we welcome playgrounds and facilities, but we always want to have a say in exactly where that occurs and what it looks like. People who are living in the area and who are on the ground have really good views to offer.

I am pleased to hear about the progress that the SLA is making on this release and that we are still committed to community housing. I think this is an excellent result. This might be an excellent test case for a community housing territory priority project. It is something that the existing section 218 of the Planning Act clearly anticipates. That section clearly says that territory priority projects can be declared for community housing and, clearly, this will be a community housing development, if all of the pieces come together quickly.

Using that section to make that declaration would mean that there is community consultation on the issue before it goes to the DA stage. It would also mean that the Assembly has oversight of the process. It would mean that, assuming that all of those steps have come together, the project can be built very quickly, and we can get those homes on the ground as soon as possible. I recommend that the government should have a serious look at whether to use that process for this project.

I was also pleased to hear some of the updates in the minister's statement about event management being improved in Margaret Timpson Park. It is good to hear some progress on this issue.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Community Sector Food Program**

**Ministerial statement**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.40): I rise today to speak about an issue that touches the lives of far too many Canberrans, food insecurity, and the steps that the ACT government is taking to support those doing it tough, as well as the hardworking community organisations that stand alongside them.

For many in our community, the simple act of putting a meal on the table has become harder. Whether it is due to rising living costs, unexpected hardship or ongoing financial pressure, food insecurity is a growing reality, one we must face and one we are committed to improving.

Today I would like to update the Assembly on how the ACT government is working alongside the sector to build a more coordinated, strategic and sustainable system of food relief across the territory. This is core government work, ensuring that the basic needs of the people it represents are met.

Earlier this year, the Assembly passed a motion calling on the government to take further action to strengthen food relief coordination, to reduce food waste and to ensure services are well supported. The government is now progressing the development of a new ACT food plan. This will be a strategic road map that maps existing services, identifies gaps and sets the direction for a more connected and effective response to food relief across the ACT.

The plan will be delivered in two stages: establishment, then implementation with ongoing review. The first stage will deliver a high-level action plan that brings together existing initiatives across ACT government portfolios, including Health, Community Services, Education, Environment and Planning. It will also include new initiatives, such as the Food Bank Fund, and further work that we seek to explore in the Canberra Food Relief Community Action Plan 2024. The high-level action plan will be designed as a living document, one that will be updated and refined as it is delivered.

The second stage of the action plan will be informed by ongoing monitoring and feedback. This approach will allow the government to strengthen food relief coordination in an ongoing way, with flexibility to refine, review and respond to community needs over time.

Alongside the development of the action plan, the government is delivering significant new investment in food relief. As outlined in the budget, starting from 2025-26, we are establishing a \$1.5 million Food Bank Fund, providing \$500,000 per year over the next three years to support food banks and community organisations experiencing rising demand.

The Food Bank Fund will be implemented in line with the two-stage approach for the development of the action plan. In the first year of the fund, \$500,000 will be provided to maintain the uplift in food relief funding delivered in the 2024-25 financial year. This includes support for food supply, distribution and transportation.



This additional funding will help to meet the rising need, reinforcing the ACT government's longstanding support for the sector.

Funding for the remaining two years of the Food Bank Fund, totalling \$1 million across the 2026-27 and 2027-28 financial years, will be guided by the action plan as it is reviewed and updated. This makes sure that future allocations are informed by sector feedback and reflect the most pressing and emerging needs in our community at any point in time.

We will work closely with the Canberra Food Relief Network and the Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee to ensure that the plan is shaped by those on the ground who know the challenges, and who are already responding to them every day. This approach allows the government to provide immediate support now, while also aligning future funding with a more integrated, strategic and responsive food relief system.

Importantly, we recognise that food relief does not exist in isolation. It is closely tied to other forms of emergency assistance. When people face pressure from essential costs like rent, medications or transport, it is often their food budget that bears the brunt. We will be considering this context as we progress the Food Relief Action Plan, as well as wider reforms across the community services sector.

I would like to acknowledge Volunteering ACT for their important role in coordinating the Canberra Food Relief Network. We will continue to fund the network's coordination and secretariat role to maintain the existing and meaningful consultation and engagement mechanism. Given the compressed timeframe to develop the action plan, we will use this existing structure to ensure that there is meaningful input from the sector, rather than establishing an entirely new co-design process at this time.

We are working to make it easier, not harder, for organisations to do what they do best. We are committed to working out how we can improve processes and ensure that government support reaches people, without placing an extra administrative burden on the organisations that deliver it.

We are also exploring practical ways to reduce food waste and increase food donations from the retail and hospitality sectors. There is a real opportunity here to better connect surplus food with people who need it, and we are actively looking at how to make that happen. We will consider ways that transport and storage costs can best be managed. These costs have risen significantly during the recent cost-of-living crisis and inflationary economic environment.

We want the ACT government's additional funding resources to result in more food availability to Canberrans who need that support, and not just go towards inflated transport and storage costs.

In closing, food insecurity is not just about hunger; it is about dignity, stability and connection, and it is about ensuring that no-one in our community feels alone when times are tough. This government is committed to working alongside the community sector to build a stronger, more coordinated and more compassionate food and

emergency relief system. With the ACT Food and Emergency Relief Action Plan, the new Food Bank Fund, which is the result of an ACT Labor election commitment, and ongoing collaboration across government and community, we are laying the groundwork for a system that helps Canberrans who need it most, with ease, dignity and respect.

I present the following paper:

Community sector food program—Ministerial statement, 26 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.46): We welcome the minister's update on food relief. It is good to hear this information. We were pleased to see some funding for the Food Bank Fund in the budget. We noted that it appeared to be offset from existing resources, and we are looking forward to learning more about that during estimates—about exactly how that has been offset.

We were a little disappointed about some of the other things that are not in the budget that will impact people in this space. The Rent Relief Fund and the funding for ACT Shelter that it so sorely needs are the two that spring quickly to mind, but I am sure we will find many more over the coming days.

It came home to me recently at an event that we hosted over at the Pot Belly in Ginninderra. We had a speaker from one of our community services talk to us about what is happening on the ground for families at the moment. They work in the food relief sector. They give out food hampers, and they are seeing—as every community sector organisation tells us repeatedly—more and more people coming to them who have never had to access food relief. This is the message everybody is giving across the board.

This speaker was really good. He explained to us exactly how this is happening. People in Canberra will usually pay their rent or their mortgage first, and that will come straight out of their bank account. When they do not have access to things like the Rent Relief Fund that maybe they used to have, and when those expenses go up, due to rising interest rates or rent, they just cannot afford it. They will still meet those payments if they can. It is the last thing that Canberrans will cut; they will then have no money left, and that is why they are going to food banks, when they have never previously needed to go to those resources to feed their families.

It is part of an overall framework of support. We are conscious that the government, very clearly, understands the increasing costs and needs in the health sector, but the community sector is experiencing the same kinds of pressures.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (10.48): Very briefly, I want to thank the minister for her statement on this important matter. I was very pleased to see these commitments contained in the budget. I appreciated the minister's engagement, prior to bringing forward a motion earlier this year on this matter, in developing a motion that made

sense and would deliver positive outcomes.

As Ms Clay indicated, this is such a vital area. More and more people are seeking food relief who have never sought it before. One of the tragic stories that I heard, prior to moving the motion earlier this year, was in relation to someone who had volunteered for a long time at a food bank and was embarrassed to ask for help from that exact place. This is a common experience, and we are hearing more and more that that is being experienced by people who are in work.

Just last week, ACTOSS released their *2025 Cost of living report*, which indicated that people on income support in the ACT are 14 times more likely than the general population to skip one or more meals per day. That is pretty alarming, so it is good to hear, particularly, about the cross-portfolio, coordinated approach that the minister is committing to today. Again, I would like to thank her for her ongoing engagement on this matter and the updates and briefings that we have received from the minister and her office before today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People— report**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.49): I rise today on behalf of Minister Pettersson to reaffirm the ACT government's commitment to supporting children and young people in our community who are at risk of or engaged in harmful behaviours, and the families, kin and communities who care for and raise them, to address their unmet needs therapeutically and turn their lives around.

Today we demonstrate this commitment by addressing the matters raised in the inaugural *Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People: 2024 report*. By addressing the report, I fulfill the government's obligation under the Children and Young People Act 2008 to report back on actions taken or planned to address the matters raised.

In this context I want to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people, families and kin with connections to the land of the ACT and surrounding region. I recognise their continuing culture and contributions. I acknowledge the significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—children, young people and families—in the child protection and youth justice systems due to historical and ongoing systemic injustices. The ACT government is committed to addressing these disparities and supporting the wellbeing and rights of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT.

The ACT government remains dedicated to supporting children and young people in our community, especially those with unmet needs who are involved in or at risk of engaging in harmful behaviours. Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility is a key part of a broader reform agenda. The ACT government is transforming how children, youth and family services are delivered, moving towards a stronger, more

therapeutic service system that provides timely, effective support to improve life outcomes for children and young people, together with their families, kin and communities—to be healthier, to be stronger and to be connected.

In partnership with the community sector and through the Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People, we are committed to creating safer, healthier and more supportive environments for all. By building a therapeutic service system that addresses the root causes of harmful behaviour in ways that are culturally appropriate, holistic, trauma informed and that align with both local and international human rights standards, we can give Canberra's children and young people the best chance to stay out of the criminal justice system and lead healthier, safer lives.

In November 2023, the ACT government made the evidence-based decision to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14, implemented in two stages. This reform stands in stark contrast to the unhelpful politicisation of youth crime we have seen in some parts of the country in recent years. It also reflects our commitment to building a brighter future grounded in therapeutic—not punitive—responses to the harmful behaviour of some children and young people, and to meeting their needs.

Medical and developmental research clearly shows that children under 14 are more likely than not to lack the capacity to fully understand the consequences of their actions. Criminalising them increases the risk of complex trauma and long-term involvement in the justice system, which in turn exacerbates rather than reduces the risks to the wider community. That is why reforms to the Children and Young People Act now require the delivery of therapeutic responses to harmful behaviours, marking a significant shift in how we, as a government and community, support vulnerable children and young people.

At the heart of this reform was the establishment of the Therapeutic Support Panel, to bring together independent experts, including Aboriginal community representatives, to design individualised therapeutic responses to children and young people. The panel also plays a vital role in identifying systemic gaps and providing annual reports that inform ongoing reform and service improvement. In 2023 the ACT raised the age from 10 to 12 in the first stage of reform. From 1 July 2025, we will become the first jurisdiction in Australia to raise the age to 14, a milestone that affirms our leadership in human rights and evidence-based policy.

I note the first report from the chair of the panel refers to only the very early months of the reform work, between April and November 2024. However, even these early months show promising results, with children as young as 10 already being diverted onto therapeutic pathways and services working more collaboratively to provide holistic wraparound support.

As the research anticipated, the children and young people referred to the panel are presenting with complex, intersecting needs, highlighting the urgent need for a strong, holistic, therapeutic service system. Importantly, since raising the age, we have not seen an increase in youth crime or harmful behaviours, reinforcing that the reforms are working as intended.

Under stage 2 of the reforms, children aged 12 and 13 who commit exceptionally

serious and intentional violent offences may still be held criminally responsible, subject, as is currently the case, to the principle of *doli incapax*. Police will continue to have the authority to act in the interests of community safety, regardless of a child's age.

However, accountability will be developmentally appropriate and culturally safe. Children and young people will continue to participate in restorative practices, such as victim harm statements and restorative justice conferencing, helping them to understand the impact of their actions and reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Victims' rights are also protected, with opportunities to meet with the panel, share their experiences, and access support services like those available in the criminal justice system.

The ACT government remains firmly committed to implementing this nationally significant reform and resisting calls to revert to punitive so-called "tough on youth crime" approaches. By broadening the definition of therapeutic needs to include the drivers of harmful behaviour, we can intervene earlier, supporting more children, young people, families and kin before issues escalate. This reform is not just about changing laws; it is about transforming systems, shifting culture and bringing a more therapeutic, trauma-informed and human rights-based approach to child and youth wellbeing and community safety.

In March, Minister Pettersson tabled the panel's 2024 report in the Assembly. In his tabling statement, he mentioned that the report included initial observations of the panel, as I have said, in its first seven months of operations. The issues raised in the report are not new. They relate to the reasons we undertook the reform in the first place, and we are already addressing many of them through a range of established and pilot services, programs and initiatives. However, the report clearly identified a need to take a closer look at why these supports and services remain inaccessible to many of the children and young people with whom the panel is working.

It challenges us, as a government and as a community that values human rights, to understand these barriers and take meaningful action to ensure every child and young person can live a healthier, safer and more connected life. This includes addressing the systemic service and practice barriers that continue to prevent many children and young people from accessing the support they need.

Systemic inequalities impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are a critical area of focus. Tackling these disparities requires culturally informed reform across policy, practice and service delivery. Achieving lasting change depends on political will, cross-sector collaboration and a genuine commitment to better outcomes.

Partnering with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services, and integrating their expertise into service delivery, ensures more culturally informed and effective support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

I am pleased to note that initiatives like the ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund and the Yurwan Ghuda On Country Program are leading the way. I also acknowledge

the enduring work of ACCO partners like Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, who runs programs to support children, young people and families.

We know that there is more work to do to deliver timely and effective support for some children and young people. Those under 14 sometimes have difficulty accessing disability, mental health, and alcohol and other drug support, leaving them without the care and support they urgently need, particularly as the problem is starting to emerge.

Targeted outreach, early support, and culturally safe services for children and young people like Ted Noffs Foundation; Stepping Stones; Gugan Gulwan Drug and Alcohol Program; the Child Development Service; child and family centres; and Head to Health Kids are amongst the suite of programs that exist in the ACT. We are working to join up these programs and services so that the children, young people and families who need these supports do not get lost while trying to navigate complex and confusing systems. We will continue to focus on making this better.

Even when services are available, challenges in delivery remain. These include the readiness of children and young people to engage with existing service models, interagency collaboration and complex referral pathways. Addressing these practice-level issues is essential to making these services more accessible, inclusive, coordinated and responsive. Initiatives like the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team within Children, Youth and Families, along with the newly enacted Disability Inclusion Act 2024 and the Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2025 are helping to reshape how services and ACT Policing engage with and support vulnerable children and young people, particularly those under the age of 14.

These efforts will improve individual service delivery to be developmentally and culturally appropriate, trauma informed and rights respecting. However, improving individual services is only part of the solution. Holistic and effective support also relies on effective collaboration between services. Programs such as the Family Violence Safety Action Program, Functional Family Therapy Youth Justice and the Integrated Service Response Program are helping children, young people, families and kin to be safer, stronger and connected by breaking down information silos and enhancing multiservice collaboration.

In addition to collaboration, timely and effective referrals to the panel are critical for connecting children and young people with the right support early. Our agencies and services are working to streamline referral processes, increase community awareness of the panel's role, and continuously monitor and assess its impact to better support referring services.

The report also shows many children and young people have critical overlapping needs that must be met with the right therapeutic support to help to reduce and prevent harmful behaviour in the future. Many children and young people have basic primary needs that are not being met in areas such as education and housing. Without stable learning environments and safe homes, it can become much harder for them to access the therapeutic and support services they need, reinforcing cycles of trauma and vulnerability.

To address educational disengagement, often linked to traumatic and systemic

barriers, a new referral pathway to the Targeted Support Program has been established for compulsory-age students working with the panel. At the same time, recognising the importance of stable housing, the government has partnered with services like the Conflict Resolution Service to deliver integrated family supports through programs such as Safe and Connected Youth; Family Connections; and Family Support.

Unmet needs among children and young people referred to the panel are rarely isolated. Many face multiple intersecting issues such as complex trauma, family violence, child protection involvement and frequent police contact. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, these challenges also relate to a broad lack of understanding of cultural needs and, unfortunately, systemic racism. These overlapping vulnerabilities demand consistent, coordinated, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses across multiple systems.

It is important to acknowledge these challenges and look to address them, which is the benefit of receiving this annual report from the panel and considering how we will respond as the government. Initiatives like the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy for strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe; the *Our Booris Our Way* final report; the modernisation of the Children and Young People Act; and the Youth at Risk Project are answering this demand by shaping how we address these complex and compounding needs across multiple service systems. This is the key to breaking cycles of disadvantage and reducing future harm.

In some cases, the complexity and intensity of a child and young person's needs, combined with heightened safety risks, may require more specialised, intensive therapeutic responses. The report identifies the potential need for a therapeutic facility to support intensive therapy orders. However, any such facility must be approached with caution, sensitivity and a strong human rights focus, with the goal of holistic healing, not containment or confinement. Given the small number of children and young people likely to require this level of support, the ACT government will continue to gather evidence and assess the need for intensive therapeutic placements as part of a broader, rights-based service system.

Since receiving the panel's 2024 report in December last year, the ACT government has continued to improve its practices to better support children and young people. One key development in 2025 has been the development of a new targeted support referral pathway within the Education Directorate to better support children with issues identified in a school setting. We are seeing the evidence that the existing systems and processes are being used more as they become embedded.

In 2025 we have also seen an increase in police referrals to the panel, suggesting that referral pathways are improving. Younger children are being referred to the panel through channels outside police as well, enabling earlier intervention. Supporting children earlier in life helps to address harmful behaviours before they escalate and ensures timely support before systemic barriers take hold.

The panel continues to refine its meeting processes, making them more focused and impactful. This improves its ability to deliver better therapeutic outcomes for the most in-need children and young people. Work is already underway on the next annual panel report, which will consider a full year's worth of more local evidence and the

latest youth justice research to inform future directions in the ACT context.

The panel's next report will play a key role in demonstrating its impact and guiding future improvements. But while reshaping the system and measuring outcomes take time, the urgency is clear. Children and young people who have experienced trauma and disadvantage often lack equal access to power, resources and safety. We must continue to build a faster, more responsive system—one that meets their needs, prevents contact with the justice and child protection systems, and supports healthier, safer and more connected lives.

We owe it to our children and young people and the broader community to make these changes. Although it is too early to identify long-term trends, the issues raised so far align with our expectations and research, suggesting that the reforms are on the right track.

The ACT's leadership in raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and investing in therapeutic alternatives is a critical step towards reducing harmful behaviours and future youth offending. However, lasting change requires more than policy. It demands organisational and cultural transformation. "Tough on crime" approaches have failed. We must continue building a system that is trauma informed, developmentally appropriate and grounded in human rights, prevention and support.

I know Minister Pettersson looks forward to continuing this important work, in partnership with the panel, to deliver outcomes for children and young people in our community. On behalf of Minister Pettersson and the government, I commend the Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People, and particularly its chair, Justin Barker, for delivering its first report, and look forward to future reports that will strengthen the evidence base and help to build a more therapeutic service system.

I present the following paper:

Therapeutic Support Panel Children and Young People 2024 Report—  
Ministerial statement, 26 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Committees—standing Establishment—amendment**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (11.07): I move:

That:

- (1) the resolution of the Assembly of 3 December 2024, as amended, that established general purpose standing committees, be amended as follows:
  - (a) omit "and" at the end of clause (14)(b);



- (b) omit clause (14)(c) and substitute:
  - “(c) Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration; and
  - (d) Standing Committee on Transport and City Services;”;
- (c) omit clause (15) and substitute:
  - “(15) the Greens Member will chair the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning;”;
- (d) omit the text in the first column of the second row of the table and substitute “1. Environment and Planning”;
- (e) omit “Access and Connectivity” in the second column of the second row of the table;
- (f) omit “Transport” and “City Services” in the third column of the second row of the table; and
- (g) at the end of the table insert a new row as follows:

|                                |                         |                                |                                                                             |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7. Transport and City Services | Access and Connectivity | - Transport<br>- City Services | 3 Member committee<br>1 Labor Member<br>1 Liberal Member<br>1 Greens Member |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|

- (2) the inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street be transferred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services;
- (3) the following inquiries be retained and continued by the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning:
  - (a) inquiry into the role and future of the Woden Town Centre in the context of a compact city;
  - (b) inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment; and
  - (c) inquiry into the procurement and delivery of MyWay+; and
- (4) the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning and the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services have access to all evidence and records relevant to their inquiries and other business that were held by the former Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services.

I would like to start by thanking Dr Monk and the Office of the Legislative Assembly team in helping us draft this motion, both in pulling it together at the start of the week and then making some corrections to today’s notice paper. It looks a little arcane, but that is how it maps to the existing resolution of the Assembly that establishes the standing committees and makes sure we all get the necessary bases covered. My motion effectively splits the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services into two standing committees. The existing committee is retained on environmental planning and a new one is created on transport and city services.

At the start of the term, the Greens held and expressed serious concerns about the workload that the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services would be facing. Those concerns have borne out. As members will have noticed, the largest share of petitions and motions for inquiry referrals have been directed towards this committee, and I have a table of comparison for anyone who

would like to see it. This is unsurprising. This has been the committee for the work of what local governments would be if we had them and therefore has attracted substantial interest from members of the community. It has initiated twice as many inquiries as any other committee, it has been referred more bills and petitions than any other committee and, by my count, has received three of the five motions requesting an inquiry by the Assembly. The workload is unsustainable for one committee and it risks worthy inquiries on bills and petitions being rejected solely due to capacity concerns. That could include yesterday's new bill on planning reforms for the Molonglo town centre.

Under my motion, I ensure that the continuity of inquiries and records are managed. Notably, the newly opened inquiry into Fix My Street will be appropriately placed in the care of the new Standing Committee on Transport and City Services. By contrast, the inquiry into MyWay+ will remain with the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, despite being justifiably able to transfer, because of the significant work that has already been put into it by Ms Clay, Ms Carrick, Mr Cain and Ms Tough. It makes sense that they are enabled to see their well-advanced inquiry through to completion.

Relevant records will transfer between committees. The intent of point (4) of my motion is that each committee gets access to the records that they need to support their inquiries and other business. It is my understanding that, consistent with the original December motion, parties will have two hours to nominate their members to the new Standing Committee on Transport and City Services. Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick have advised me that they are not seeking membership of this new committee, which is why it is proposed as a three-member committee. It seems fair, based on the current distribution of chairs, that the next chair should go to the Canberra Liberals. It is probably also worth pointing out that, right now, only one committee chair is a woman out of nine chairs. I ask that parties consider gender diversity when appointing or reshuffling their committee members.

In the interest of time, I flag our support for the Liberal amendments to remove one Liberal member from committees where they currently have two. In committees, we appear to have done an excellent job between us of finding consensus and have not run up against the challenges of committees with an even number of members. Full credit to the non-executive members—represent—and, very importantly, credit to our committee secretariats for navigating that.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.10): I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing forward this motion. I am speaking in my capacity as a member, not as a chair of the committee. I am personally quite pleased to see these very sensible changes coming through.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (11.10): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

After paragraph (1)(f) insert new paragraphs:

“(1)(fa) omit “2 Liberal Members” in the fourth column of the third row and substitute “1 Liberal Member”;

(1)(fb) omit “2 Liberal Members” in the fourth column of the fourth row and substitute “1 Liberal Member”.”.

This is a very straightforward amendment to a very well-drafted motion from Miss Nuttall. I also acknowledge the work of Dr Monk in ensuring we got this amendment right. Miss Nuttall and I have had some discussions about the heroic work that Dr Monk has done across the Assembly this week.

The effect of this amendment is to, quite simply, reduce, as has been foreshadowed, the number of Liberal members from two to one on two committees. As Miss Nuttall acknowledged, that is because the committees have been working quite effectively at trying to find consensus on issues. The committee process in general seems to be working well and we are reasonably comfortable with proceeding in that fashion.

The other thing that I would like to acknowledge is the work that Ms Clay has been doing around this issue, somewhat behind the scenes and in a way that most of us here do not see. For some time, she has been engaging very productively across parties to make sure we could all see exactly the workload impact for the committee due to all of the inquiries that were being referred from the Assembly, the number of bills that were being referred from the Assembly and the number of petitions which were coming from the community in that space. We consider that it is quite appropriate to split these committees. I would also like to acknowledge Ms Clay’s advocacy for ensuring that we have an adequate gender balance across chairs of committees. When we sat down as a group of chairs, it was quite stark that it was not close to balance. I foreshadow that, at the conclusion of this debate, I will move a motion without notice, in line with standing orders, that will seek to address that concern from the perspective of the Canberra Liberals.

Amendment agreed to.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (11.13): Thanks everyone. That was fun.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Membership**

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

That:

Ms Morris and Mr Hanson be discharged from the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, and that Ms Lee be appointed to that committee;

Ms Morris be appointed to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services;

Mr Cain be discharged from the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs and Ms Barry be appointed in his place; and

Mr Hanson be discharged from the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

## **Standing order 16**

**Amendment**

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.15): Together with Ms Carrick, I move:

That standing order 16 be amended by omitting paragraphs (b) and (ba), and substituting the following:

“(b) the Committee shall consist of:

- (i) the Speaker;
- (ii) the Government whip;
- (iii) the Opposition whip;
- (iv) a representative of any other Party with multiple Members; and
- (v) if there are any independent Members, an independent Member nominated to the Speaker;

(ba) should a whip, Party representative, or the nominated independent Member be unable to attend a meeting, the Party nominated deputy whip, another Party representative or another independent Member may attend in their place;”.

It is a simple change to ensure Independent members are represented on the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. It is a modest reform that reflects the democratic values of our Assembly, respects the legitimacy of every elected member and ensures that decisions made about how this place is run are fair, transparent and inclusive.

I bring this motion because the current arrangements have not been working for the Independents. While we have benefited from the opportunity to witness the first part of committee meetings in relation to the ordering of sitting week business, Ms Carrick and I have not been consistently briefed nor represented in many of the decisions and discussions of the committee. That has had practical consequences on how decisions affecting the operations of this place have been made and on the ability of Independent members to contribute meaningfully to those decisions.

Every other Assembly with Independent members before this one has had at least one Independent on the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. This Assembly is the first in the history of self-government where we have elected Independent members but none have represented on the committee. The consequence of this is that, if we are lucky, Ms Carrick and I might hear murmurs of changes to standing orders being discussed by the committee from other members or even their staff, as has been the case recently. Sure, we can make representations to committee members about what we hope to see happen, but we have no vote on those preferences. Expecting the Greens whip, Miss Nuttall, to represent our interests seems an unreasonable impost when she has a party view to prosecute on the committee. Am I or Ms Carrick expected to pressure her to prioritise our perspectives instead? That does not seem fair on her or us.

I have variably been updated informally by committee members about bits and pieces of what is going on, and I have appreciated that, although it seems to have been done in a relatively ad hoc and unstructured way. Having one Independent member on the

committee would address this gap, ensuring that Ms Carrick and I are appropriately represented, as are the people we represent as elected members of this Assembly.

This motion amends standing order 16 to give effect to this change in this and future Assemblies by providing that, if there are Independent members in the Assembly, one of them, nominated by the Speaker, will be appointed to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. It will also ensure that, if that member is unable to attend a meeting, another Independent member can attend in their place. Again, this is a very simple and sensible change that ensures the composition of the committee reflects the composition of the Assembly. It is not about giving one group more power or influence than another or about any kind of political point-scoring; it is just about ensuring that every member and, by extension, every Canberran has a voice in relation to how this place is run and that no member of this Assembly elected by the people of the ACT is excluded from key discussions and decisions by virtue of not being a member of a party.

Ms Carrick and I have agreed to bring this motion forward today in good faith. We hope to see it supported by all of our colleagues. I reflect on Miss Nuttall's comments on the previous motion that committees have been operating well by consensus, and I would expect that to continue if this change were implemented.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (11.18): I support Mr Emerson's views about this committee. The administration and procedure committee is the key decision-making body for the Assembly. While Mr Emerson and I are invited to the ordering of Assembly and private members' business, we are not invited to considerations about other responsibilities of the committee. It has the responsibility to advise the Speaker on members' services and facilities; on the operation of Hansard; the availability to the public of Assembly documents, and the review of the standing orders—the rules that govern the conduct of business in this Assembly.

As such, it is critical that it is as representative of the Assembly as possible. The current composition of the committee reflects an Assembly made up of three parties. The Assembly is no longer made up solely of three parties, so the composition of the committee needs to be updated to reflect this new reality. Having a single crossbench representative is not fair nor an effective arrangement. The interests of the Greens, as a party with multiple members, are quite different to the interests of Independent members. It is not appropriate to expect the Greens to represent the interests of Independent members on this committee, and it is clearly not fair to Independent members to not be represented.

The addition of a single representative of the Independent members on the administrative and procedure committee is a simple change that will ensure the committee reflects the make-up of the current Assembly and ensure that the interests of all members are considered.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (11.20): I rise today to speak in support of Ms Carrick and Mr Emerson's motion to amend the standing orders, to allow one of the Independents to sit on the admin and procedure committee. We spoke in support of a similar intent last December and I speak in support of that intent again today.

We have trialled the version of admin and procedure where the Independents may visit for procedural matters. It has taken some crash testing and, inevitably, challenges presented themselves. For matters of administration that do not pertain directly to the running of sitting weeks, like office occupancy guidelines or work health and safety guidance notes, Independent members currently are not guaranteed an input unless someone goes into bat for them. They are not able to join us for deliberations unless we invite them, which seems, above all, a bit impractical.

I was looking through the *Hansard* to understand why the Labor and Liberal parties were opposed to a similar intent last time and quotes from the Chief Minister jumped out at me. It is a shame he is not here right now. The Chief Minister said:

Given the Greens whip will, I guess, in voting terms, represent the crossbench on that committee, I would ask the crossbench collectively, amongst yourselves, to look at ways of ensuring that, beyond attendance and participation, Independent members' views are conveyed through the Greens whip, or to potentially even to consider rotating the role over the course of the Assembly.

In practice, I stand on admin and procedure as a representative of the Greens party, not the whole crossbench. The Labor Chief Minister's desire to designate us as a single voting bloc, when we are in effect three separate entities, is inappropriate and misplaced. We have our own obligations to our constituencies, our own priorities, and frankly, I also think it is unfair on the Independents to ask them to rely on a different party to represent their interests. I do my best, but it is not my job.

In practice, I also do not think it would be problematic to have the Independents sit on the admin and procedure committee in terms of skewing voting numbers because, at the end of the day, the admin and procedure committee is answerable to the Assembly and therefore subject to its balance of power. I would advocate for an approach where if a resolution of the committee would not pass on the floor, it should not be passed by the committee, lest it be overturned by the Assembly.

So at the end of the day, the Greens are supportive of everyone having the opportunity to contribute on admin and procedures, including the Independents.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (11.22): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this proposal. I will speak briefly to the basic reasoning why, but I do want to start by saying be cautious when someone makes allegations without providing specifics. The suggestions from Mr Emerson that they are being locked out of important discussions—I would like to know which discussions he thinks he is being locked out of.

The admin and procedure committee has gone well out of its way to try to include Independents whenever possible in every possible discussion. Now a lot of that has happened in informal ways. You will not find papers necessarily that show that we have been engaging, but I certainly spend a reasonable amount of time with my crossbench colleagues discussing a range of matters relating to the administration of this Assembly. I know that my fellow whips do the same. I think it is entirely feasible to work as a team and continue to consult in the way that we have, albeit I am happy to consider improvements to that.

But the impact of this specific motion is not actually limited to how to consider minor matters. The impact of this specific motion is to provide a large balance of power to a very small number of members. The crossbench is a minority of this Assembly. The Independents are a smaller minority of this Assembly. The impact of adjusting the numbers in the way that has been proposed would be that should, in a future parliament, we have four independents and one Green, we would have an extraordinarily small number of people who could overrule the absolute majority of this Assembly. This is on matters that include complaints through the Standards Commissioner, reports on members conduct and the way this Assembly operates. In my opinion, it is not in the interests of this Assembly to make this change.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (11.25): I am standing to put on the record that we will not be supporting this motion today. I thank my crossbench colleagues for bringing this motion and Miss Nuttall for speaking, but I echo the sentiments of Mr Cocks on this motion.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (11.25): I take my role as the chief presiding officer of this place very, very seriously, and one of the great privileges of that role is to chair the admin and procedure committee. I am extremely proud of the output of the admin and procedure committee. It is an interesting term. This is the third term that I have been here and it is certainly a term during which the admin and procedure committee, I think, is going to leave its mark on this Assembly. I commend the members of that committee for the work that we have done thus far and the work that is ahead of us.

As Mr Cocks has outlined, the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this motion. I love having the Independents here. This motion assumes that the Independents are one homogeneous group, however many there are, because this motion calls for one member of the Independent grouping to be a member of the admin and procedure committee.

Playing devil's advocate, I just wonder, if we had an election where, dare I say it, six independents were elected, how would you figure out which one of this group of independents was actually going to represent you at this committee? I dare say that there would be a push for it to be more than one. Let us say we had a group of, I do not know, extremely varied independents. I cannot see how one could genuinely represent you on that committee. I think there would be the call then for each of them to be involved in the committee. So, at that point, the admin and procedure committee would be the Speaker, Labor whip, Liberal whip, Greens whip and six independents. So you would have 10 on that committee. You might as well just be done with the committee and use the whole chamber.

I think that, in reality, with the greatest of respect, the Independents are already over-represented in so many of the processes of this parliament, in many ways. I am not saying that in a disparaging way. I am just saying it in a—if you look at the mathematics of the make-up of the committees and you look at what goes on in this chamber, our two Independents are already massively over-represented. And I, as a consequence, will not be supporting this motion. But what I would say is that the Independents are well aware that my door is always open. Additionally, if a wandering member happens to drop by their office to have a chat, it is more than likely going to be me.

If there are matters that the Independent members wish to be raised in admin and procedure, they have a number of options. The Chief Minister highlighted that Miss Nuttall potentially is representing the crossbench. If, indeed, the Independent members want to reach out to me to discuss matters that potentially are before admin and procedure, I am always, always, open for a discussion with anyone because we want it to work. But we will not be supporting this motion.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.29), in reply: I am not sure if Ms Carrick will add something as well. It is disappointing to hear the positions of the major party members in this Assembly.

Mr Cocks challenged me to provide concrete examples, so I am happy to do that. I am not sure if I am breaching committee confidence by doing it; but I am not on the committee, so I do not think I am. When bringing this motion to the Chief Minister's office, I was informed of potential changes to question time and the structuring of a sitting day in quite a level of detail. Frankly, it was a little bit interesting to have staff members know a lot more about what is happening in that committee than the two Independent members. So that is the example that I was referring to in my remarks.

Mr Cocks indicated his concern that there could be a large bloc of independents on this committee if we pass this motion. But the motion says that if there are any independent members, an independent nominated to the speaker would be part of that committee, so it would be one independent. Mr Parton has kind of made the same argument, it is a slippery slope argument, but it does not hold here. We are just talking about having a single Independent member represent the two Independents on the committee.

There is a concern about whether a single independent member would be able to do that effectively under a hypothetical future composition of the Assembly where we have many, many more independents, which we can all hope for. We are in the same situation we are now, which is where we have a single representative of the crossbench who is a member of a party attempting to represent all of us. I still have not actually heard a really clear argument about why this change is important. I thought bringing this motion would be simple: five minutes, knock it over. It is a pretty simple procedural suggestion, and I am waiting to hear a really cogent argument about why we cannot do that today.

I hope that other members of the Assembly will consider revisiting this issue. If it is about the mathematics of the make-up of the committees, as Mr Parton has indicated, we have all just agreed to a motion to remove Liberal members from committees, which will pretty significantly change the mathematics of those committees in terms of fair representation. So we have just voted in a way that would be fantastic to vote now. I would love to have those conversations. If there is an argument that I am missing, that is clear, I will change my position. I am very happy to, but I have not heard one yet.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (11.32), in reply: I was not going to make a closing statement, but in light of the arguments used for why we cannot have an Independent on this committee, I feel I have to. It is interesting that the Liberals use the concept of



proportionality to establish their representation on the committees, yet in the previous motion they just reduced their representation on other committees for reasons of convenience, no longer having a proportional number of Liberals on those committees. Therefore, the reasons for not allowing an Independent on the administration and procedure committee is a logical fallacy.

Question resolved in the negative.

## **Veterinary Practice Amendment Bill 2025**

Debate resumed from 18 March 2025 motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.33): I arise today to speak on the Veterinary Practice Amendment Bill on behalf of our colleague the shadow minister for city services who, unfortunately, remains unable to attend the Assembly, and I certainly wish him a speedy recovery. I note the bill today is not a significant one and has not been subject to an inquiry. No specific concerns have been raised with us, but we are aware that this introduces an additional regulatory burden on vets; whether that is minor or significant, remains to be seen.

It is our hope, as the opposition, that the government is sensible in its approach and facilitates compliance in a way that does not impose any more than a minimal burden on affected businesses. We also note that the burden here falls on private sector vets but apparently not on public sector vets. We will be supporting the bill today, but if the burden proves to be excessive, we will certainly be revisiting the issue.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.34): The Greens are happy to support this bill today. We did look at this one with care. I thank the minister's office for providing us with a briefing and some additional information about this issue. We are quite comfortable with passing these changes.

I have had a number of concerns raised with me about Canberrans' access to vet care and to equine care in Canberra at the moment. There are a few factors going on. I think the same cost-of-living impacts that are affecting people's ability to buy food, pay rent and get access to medical care for their families are also making it increasingly difficult for them to get access to vet care. This is a concern.

There is also a lot of movement in vet practitioners in Canberra at the moment, particularly equine vets and large animal vets. I have spoken to a number of different people working in this field and to individuals who need access to farriers and large animal vets, and this is a concern.

I have had a chat to the minister's office about this issue. I have written to the Vet Practitioners Board. Our concerns are not with this bill but with Canberrans' ongoing access to affordable care for their animals and for animal welfare, but I do not think that is a matter that can be addressed by legislation right now. The Greens are very happy to support the bill in its current form.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (11.36): I am very pleased to stand here today in support of Minister Cheyne and the Veterinary Practice Amendment Bill 2025. As the minister already mentioned in her speech the other day, this bill helps deliver on the recommendations for legislative amendments that resulted from last year's statutory review of the Veterinary Practice Act 2018. I commend Minister Cheyne for acting so swiftly to action the recommendations from that review in this first tranche of legislative amendments, which seek to enhance the regulation of veterinary practices in the ACT.

Canberrans are deeply connected to their pets and will be pleased with the support this government extends to the veterinary industry. As a side note, I think the response to the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area shows just how much we do all love our pets here in Canberra.

The wellbeing of Canberrans, which is supported by their animal companions, will always be a priority of the ACT government. Assisting the ACT veterinary industry to continue to provide a high level of care, support and respect to our animal companions is an admirable task. I recognise that the ACT government worked closely with key stakeholders, including the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board, the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee and the RSPCA ACT, to review the Veterinary Practice Act 2018.

The amendments in this bill reflect the submissions received and improve the administration of the act and the Veterinary Practice Regulation 2018. The introduction of the amendments in this bill will ensure consistency of veterinary practice and will further support the valuable services provided by this worthy industry. I commend the bill 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) (11.37), in reply: I am pleased to close the debate on this simple but important bill. As you heard from Ms Tough, in accordance with the requirements of the Veterinary Practice Act 2018, the ACT government conducted a statutory review of the first five years of the act's operation. This was concluded in 2024, and a report was presented to the Legislative Assembly on 5 September.

I was pleased to table that report, which acknowledged that the act is meeting its objectives and has achieved positive outcomes in areas such as animal welfare and protection, registration control, efficient investigation and resolution of complaints, and in balancing caution and penalties, and collaboration and community representation. The report also identified areas where users, decision-makers and the broader veterinary sector face challenges. Recommendations from that report have been considered by the ACT government and this amendment bill seeks to legislate changes to enhance the regulation of veterinary practice in the ACT. This bill makes amendments to the act and the Veterinary Practice Regulation.

To protect the health and welfare of the public, the bill legislates for longstanding practice by introducing a new provision requiring a registered veterinary practitioner to hold a suitable third-party indemnity insurance policy that is appropriate for the nature of veterinary work carried out by the applicant. The government underscores

the critical role that the veterinary industry plays in public health, animal welfare and community safety, highlighting its commitment to maintaining high standards with the sector. The bill makes amendments to ensure that the objects of the act are aligned with the Australian Veterinary Association's recommended key principles of veterinary practice acts in Australia.

The bill also provides improvements to the administration and efficiency of the legislation by amending requirements relating to declaring new entities to be professional bodies. This is further achieved by removing the requirement to consult before making regulations, because it is not always necessary or relevant to consult with declared bodies.

In saying that, I put on the record that the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board values its ongoing relationship with the Australian Veterinary Association and acknowledges their important role. The considered advice and professional insights that the AVA provide contribute meaningfully to the board's decision-making processes. The board certainly confirms its commitment to continued consultation with the AVA on matters relating to regulatory changes and other significant issues affecting the veterinary profession.

Further, the bill progresses technical amendments, including clarification of meeting attendance and the reordering of the functions of the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board, which will enhance the effectiveness of this important body. Each of these amendments may appear minor and technical when viewed alone; however, when viewed together, they improve the operation and effective administration of the laws regulating veterinary practices in the territory and underpinning the essential services our government and non-government colleagues continue to provide to the community each day. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

I table a revised explanatory statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Standing order 16—amendment**

### **Personal explanation**

**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): Mr Assistant Speaker, I seek leave to make a personal explanation under standing order 46.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Werner-Gibbins): Leave is granted.

**MS CHEYNE**: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. This is unusual, and cut me off if

this is not allowed, but I just want to put on the record that I do believe that the government was misrepresented earlier in Mr Emerson's remarks. I appreciate he was giving a relevant example to respond to Mr Cocks's comments, but my staff member was in that meeting that he was referring to, as my adviser—the manager of government business adviser. Of course, it is pretty necessary that he and, I believe, all other staffers that were in that meeting have some knowledge of what the changes were that were being proposed and are being proposed. Mr Emerson, I believe, said that there would be a reordering of the sitting day, or how we sit. That is not being proposed as far as I am aware. Mr Emerson, I am advised, was told that this was about a potential standing order regarding ministers and answering questions, and the Speaker making a ruling, and 213As, which the Clerk had put forward. Neither of these are particularly relevant to the Independents. In fact, I would say they are pretty irrelevant, so I do not think they really have been missing out on anything.

Of course, we very much welcome hearing if there are other examples that can be put forward, but I do want to stress that this has not been about locking the Independents out, by any means. And, indeed, to go to Miss Nuttall's point, those are two standing order changes that, ultimately, have to be approved by the Assembly in this place in the chamber, and for that reason they would be exposed to everyone at an appropriate time once those discussions have concluded, which I expect will occur in September.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister Cheyne.

**MR EMERSON (Kurrajong):** I seek leave to make a brief statement in response to Ms Cheyne's statement.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Leave is granted.

**MR EMERSON:** I am just clarifying that Ms Cheyne did not have a staff member in the meeting that I was referring to, so it may have been another meeting, but I just wanted to make that clear. Otherwise, I appreciate the assurances regarding voting in September.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Emerson.

**Sitting suspended from 11.46 am to 2 pm.**

### **Questions without notice**

#### **Budget—cost-of-living support**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister. After years of refusing to support struggling families in the cost-of-living crisis your government's current approach seems to be that because interest rates have come down, Labor can tax away any breathing space that households might have enjoyed. Chief Minister, is this policy fair?

**MR BARR:** Obviously the pre-question time hilarity has moved on, which is appropriate. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I do not concur with the way she has mounted that case in the question.

I think it is important to note that across our community there are families and households in a number of different financial circumstances and the government, through the budget, has provided significant additional cost-of-living support for families in Canberra and households who are doing it tough.

We also recognise though that through a number of changes in the national economy, for example: real wage growth for the first time in quite some time; two interest rate cuts with more on the way given yesterday's further reduction in inflation; and a number of other factors that have eased cost-of-living pressures, that it was appropriate in this budget to look at the sustainability of the public services that many Canberrans rely on.

Canberrans have said very clearly that the government's number one priority should be investment in health. We agree. It is the biggest area of expenditure but it must be paid for. We are in an ongoing discussion with the commonwealth, like every state and territory is, but we also recognise that we too must contribute to ensuring we have sustainable public health services. Not just hospitals, but across the public health system. We welcome investment in primary health care and more access to bulk billing—*(Time expired.)*

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order. The Chief Minister is justifying his actions, but the question was actually whether it was fair. I would ask if he could respond.

**MR SPEAKER:** The time has expired, so the point of order is rather academic but thank you.

**Mr Hanson:** Okay. Fair enough. It was a good one though: an academic point of order!

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, when and why did you abolish the cost-of-living cabinet subcommittee?

**MR BARR:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. At the end of the last parliamentary term obviously there were a number of changes to the membership of the cabinet and the various cabinet sub committees. The Expenditure Review Committee has taken on the responsibility of assessing cost-of-living impacts as part of annual budget decisions.

**MS BARRY:** Chief Minister, is the cost-of-living crisis over?

**MR BARR:** For some, it is; for others, it is not. That reflects the different circumstances that people will face in our economy. From an objective, whole-of-community perspective, inflation is lower now than it was two years ago. The monthly data that came out yesterday for the year to May showed inflation at 2.1 per cent. That is much lower than the 7 per cent it was at several years ago. Real wages are increasing. On 1 July those on the minimum wage will receive a 3.5 per cent pay increase against a 2.1 per cent inflation rate: so a real wage increase. Those who are not on the minimum wage are experiencing wage increases in the order of three to four per cent, depending on which sector of the economy they are in. Again, real wage

increases. But not everyone is a wage earner and that is understood, and that is why there are concessions and a range of supports and rebates that are provided by both the territory government and the federal government to ease cost-of-living pressures that some households face.

### **Economy—credit rating**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Treasurer. Yesterday, the credit ratings agency S&P Global called your first budget an “unusually weak performance” that would “further erode the headroom” for maintaining our credit rating. Treasurer, was this budget unusually weak, or is the ratings agency wrong?

**MR STEEL:** I note the S&P bulletin that they put out yesterday. I will not be commenting on commentary by S&P, because the ACT government, as we do after every budget, will be engaging directly with the ratings agency in the coming months following the budget. We will be discussing the ACT government’s financial statements.

I note that the commentary by S&P is not a ratings action, and I also encourage the Assembly to make sure that their commentary on the budget is accurate and credible.

**MS CASTLEY:** Treasurer, is S&P correct when they say that fiscal controls are loosening, and this is leading to worse budget outcomes?

**MR STEEL:** Again, I am not going to comment on S&P’s commentary, because we will be engaging with them directly. What I would say is that the fiscal shock we saw in the budget review this financial year in relation to the growth in demand and cost on our healthcare system—at that level—was not anticipated.

So we could not respond to that immediately in budget review, but we have responded in the 2025-26 budget. We have made adjustments to our fiscal strategy to address that. That includes sustainable revenue measures and curbing expenditure growth in the public service.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, how can you be confident that your weak budget will not lead to a credit rating downgrade this year?

**MR STEEL:** We will, of course, have that discussion with S&P in due course. What we have set out are adjustments to our fiscal strategy to put the budget on a sustainable footing and to provide operating surpluses from the 2027 year. We will be outlining the measures that we have undertaken in the budget and will continue work over the coming years to make sure that the budget is on a sustainable footing.

### **Budget—commonwealth grants**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Treasurer. The budget papers assume a significant windfall for the ACT in terms of commonwealth grants, including an incredible \$500 million or 25 per cent more in GST proceeds over the forwards. Treasurer, what assumptions are underlying this forecast, and are you confident the forecast will be realised?

**MR STEEL:** I do not necessarily agree with the premise of the question. In fact, there has been quite a significant change in GST sharing relativities in relation to our largest non-own-source revenue line, which is the goods and services tax, and that has been partially offset, or fully offset, by changes in GST methodology that have simply recognised the undercount of part of our population, which has been an ongoing problem in-between censuses, so we are engaging heavily with the commonwealth in relation to addressing that undercount. The part of the population that they have counted, which has been factored into the budget, is the resident population around the Australian Defence Force Academy. That is welcome, but there are other people who are residing in the ACT who have migrated here from interstate that are still not being recognised, so that is a source and focus of discussions with the commonwealth that will continue.

Treasury has provided their best estimates of the forecast. I believe that is quite conservative in relation to GST, and it factors in the relativity changes that all states and territories have also had to factor in to their budgets that have recognised that Victoria is now a recipient jurisdiction as a result of the long and protracted lockdowns that it experienced in the pandemic, which in the latter part of the pandemic other states and territories did not face. There will be changes to relativities going forward, but Treasury's forecasts are conservative.

**MS CASTLEY:** Treasurer, is this forecast consistent with the forecasts of state Treasuries?

**MR STEEL:** I have already mentioned that the other states and territories have had to factor in changes to GST sharing relativities, so in that sense, yes, it will be similar. But there has been a change that has specifically affected the ACT, which is in relation to the undercount of our population. That has been partially addressed by the recognition of part of our existing population, which has offset that change to relativities.

We hope that the commonwealth will recognise the further part of our population that is undercounted. One of the reasons for that is that their methodology for net interstate migration has been based on where a person's Medicare address is. Over time, as people have been receiving electronic mail from Medicare instead of hard copy mail, people have not seen the need to update their Medicare addresses. I ask the question to all members of this Assembly: when was the last time you updated your Medicare address? I suspect it was a very long time ago. We are working with the commonwealth on that. It has been very productive over the last year, and it is great to see movement that we can now reflect in the budget, but there is more work to do, and we will continue that work.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, why did the government receive \$61 million or 85 per cent less than forecast in financial assistance grants from the commonwealth this financial

year?

**MR STEEL:** There is a range of federal government agreements and programs that do differ from year to year. I am happy to take that on notice and come back with some specific information, but I do refer the members to the Federal Financial Relations chapter of the budget that does provide some commentary in relation, particularly, to some of the large agreements, and in particular the National Health Reform Agreement.

### **Budget—ACT Shelter**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, organisations like ACT Shelter play a vital role in advocating for people experiencing homelessness who cannot advocate for themselves. By not appropriately funding organisations like this, you are effectively cutting off the ability for vulnerable people to be heard. Since June 2024, ACT Shelter have been resourced at a level below what is required to function as a viable and effective peak body, and they have indicated that they are now operating on reserves that will be exhausted in the coming financial year. Despite strong advocacy from ACT Shelter, there appears to be no additional funding announced in this budget and the organisation will likely have to commence scaling back their operations. Minister, why has the ACT government failed to provide sufficient funding to ACT Shelter through this budget?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I have always worked very closely with ACT Shelter. There has been a great partnership with them, working with the ACT government over a number of years. I look forward to continuing to do that.

In the 2026-27 budget, Shelter will get their baseline funding, including indexation. In previous years, they did get some project funding, which had not been used, and that is the reserve that they are talking about. So we know that they have some funding available to back themselves in, along with the base funding that we have already provided. But we are always happy to work with them on continued funding, and on the work that they do to support housing organisations in the ACT, and particularly around the research that they do.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister. how many other community sector peak bodies made representations to you through the budget process about their concerns that they would find themselves in the same position, with insufficient funding to perform their functions and provide systemic advocacy?

**MS BERRY:** I would have to take that on notice. Most of these organisations would have put in their budget requests through the normal processes, and through to the Treasurer. They will have been responded to by now; they will have attended the budget lock-up and provided feedback on all of the organisations. The only one that I have heard have raised some concerns is ACT Shelter, but I know that they have funding in reserve for a one-off project—an amount that the government had provided previously. They have been provided with their base-level funding, knowing that they do have those reserves which were unspent previously.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, do you have current plans for what the government will do if



ACT Shelter tell you that their reserves are running out and they will be forced to wind back?

**MS BERRY:** The reserves were supposed to be spent in previous years and they were not, for a variety of reasons. So they have already had funding provided previously for a particular project. I expect that they will be okay for some time, given that they already have existing funding, as well as their new base-level funding. What happens in the future is anyone's guess. As I said, I am committed to working with organisations like ACT Shelter, because I know that they are an important part of our housing groups in the ACT, and they provide really good advice and partnerships with the ACT government.

### **Housing—affordability**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is also to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. Minister, ACTCOSS's *2025 Cost of living report* cites statistics from Anglicare that found that, in the ACT, there were no affordable rentals for someone on JobSeeker payments and that a couple on full-time minimum wages could only afford one per cent of rentals. Given over 3,000 applicants are already on Housing ACT's waiting list, has the government modelled how much social housing is actually needed to provide housing security to all Canberrans who cannot afford the private housing market?

**MS BERRY:** The ACT government works with a range of organisations to understand the needs of people in our community across a range of areas of affordable housing, which is why the ACT government has made a commitment to a thousand more public housing properties and another 4,000 community and affordable properties, because we know that there is no silver bullet to resolve the housing challenges that our community is facing and the country is facing. We have seen the federal Labor government going in a positive direction. It has been willing to work with us to provide additional funds so that we can work in partnership with not just the Australian federal government but also community housing providers and other housing groups to make sure that housing is available to meet all our needs.

I know that the housing that we are building now is not enough to house 3,000 people. It would be ridiculous to suggest that the 163 houses that we will be building over the next year and completing in the 2026-27 year to meet the 400 increase in our houses does not add up to house 3,000 people. That is why we need to work across the spectrum of housing, with public housing providing for the most in need, but there are other opportunities for people who can afford a lower rent price, like that provided by community housing providers, including organisations like the YWCA, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander emerging housing providers too.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, has the government modelled how much discontinuing the Rent Relief Fund will further increase the need for social housing?

**MS BERRY:** As I said, the ACT government provided the Rent Relief Fund for a period, and it has made the decision, through the budget process, that, whilst I know it helped a lot of people in a particular period, there is a range of other concessions provided now to support people in our community who are facing financial

disadvantage.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, what are the other available measures that you just referenced that replace the Rent Relief Fund?

**MS BERRY:** They are not replacing it. I do not think I said that they are replacing it. If I did, I withdraw that. But there are a number of concessions available to people in the community who are facing financial disadvantage, including in my portfolios, such as the Education Equity Fund, where families who are experiencing financial disadvantage can access funds to support their children's education and sport. It includes music supplies and education needs. We provide free Chromebooks to families with children in senior secondary schools so that every student has the same Chromebook and families do not have to have that financial impost at the start of the year. We have Tenant Participation Grants, which have been doubled, so now more public housing tenants will have opportunities to access funds to support them in their everyday life. The Rent Relief Fund was for people who rent private residential properties. The funds that are available through some of the measures that I have described are targeted to people who need the support most.

### **Budget—health—commonwealth funding**

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, your Treasurer has claimed that the commonwealth has not funded ACT health enough, while the federal health minister has said, "I'm not sure there's ever been a bigger increase in commonwealth funding to the ACT hospital system than the one we will deliver this week". Can you please clarify for Canberrans who is correct?

**MR BARR:** Well, they both are. The commonwealth has provided an extra \$50 million, but the commonwealth is not at the point at the moment of being anywhere near the 45 per cent funding that is the aspiration that national cabinet agreed to in December 2023 to get there over a period of time. So that is why the next five-year commonwealth, state and territory health agreement is the most significant matter in the federation—and not just for us, but for every state and territory.

Those who have an interest in how our federation works and how federal financial relations operate, would have looked at each state budget that has now been delivered and seen very similar patterns. The jurisdiction closest in size to us, Tasmania, had to put in over \$1 billion extra into their health system over four years. And their budget projected no surpluses or balance for the rest of this decade. That forced a vote of no-confidence in the government and the snap election in Tasmania.

So, all states and territories are facing this challenge. The commonwealth will need to do more, but what that they have said to the states and territories is that we need to step up on foundational support as part of easing the rate of growth of the NDIS. That is a difficult conversation—one that commenced in December 2023 and is still ongoing. It is the most important factor. So, we welcome the extra funding the commonwealth has put in as part of that one-year agreement—but if they're to get to the 45 per cent funding they are going to need to put in a lot more over the next five years.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, why are you forcing Canberrans to pay an extra \$250 health tax to fund a health system that is already receiving record funding according to the Labor federal health minister?

**MR BARR:** Because demand is at record levels. The demand and the cost of providing those health services is exceeding the extra money the commonwealth has put in, such that we have had to put \$1.19 billion extra in, in this budget. And that has to be paid for. We are endeavouring to do that in a way that shares the burden, Mr Speaker. But what we are clear about is that we need to make the investment in health.

The opposition can pursue a different approach. They can say, “We’ll spend less on health”, or less on something else. That is perfectly legitimate, and that is the political debate that we will have. But we have been clear that we will invest in health. We will be calling on the commonwealth to do more as well. But we have also come to the table with a way of funding that extra health care investment.

I and my colleagues have interpreted from the federal election result that there is no appetite in Canberra for a reduction in the public service or a reduction in investment in health. But it is the community’s number 1 priority, and it must be funded.

**MS MORRIS:** Chief Minister, why has the federal health minister accused your Labor government of “breaching the principle of universal healthcare”?

**MR BARR:** He hasn’t. A journalist from the *Financial Review* has. He fundamentally disagreed with that in the press conference, and the transcript is very clear. So, whilst the *Australian Financial Review* political party will have a particular view, and good luck to them—in fact I think they should run. I think there are a lot of journalists who could contribute a lot more to politics, because they have got all the answers. There is a number of them who are certain they do. They should put their name on the ballot paper. Let’s have the AFR Party run next federal election, next territory election. It would be a fascinating political contest.

### **Budget—taxation**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Treasurer. It is about the increasing rates outlined in the *Canberra Times* yesterday. I believe in a progressive tax system. I would like to ask about the highest rates increase by suburb. There are a number of inner suburbs that will have their rates increased by nine and 10 per cent. Forrest, however, is an outlier, with a significant increase of 18 per cent. Forrest already has the highest median rates in Canberra, by a significant margin. The increase will bring their average median rates to around \$17,000. Why is the increase in both absolute and percentage terms in this one suburb so much higher than anywhere else in Canberra?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. Yes, we do have a progressive rates system in the ACT, where we ask lessees that own high value land to pay more than lessees with lower value land in the territory through the variable charge on rates. Yes, in the budget we have made the difficult decision to ask lessees with higher value land, over \$1 million average unimproved value, to pay more; at a rate of

0.5734 in 2025-26, which is a new bracket. That does mean that suburbs like Forrest will see a higher increase than they would have because we are asking those people to pay a larger share in the contribution to help pay for the critical healthcare services in the budget.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, why is it that properties in the Inner North that also have very high values—that have access to the economic areas of Canberra, higher education, jobs, access to the arts, to culture, to facilities—better access than anyone else—why is it that their rates are not, in absolute terms as high, or the percentage increase is nowhere near that, of many suburbs in the Inner South, particularly Forrest?

**MR STEEL:** I disagree with the premise of the question. We have—right across the ACT—great access to a range of different amenities, in all areas. I have heard many times in this place people describe people in the Inner North as having fantastic access to a range of different services because of their proximate location to the city and many of the centrally provided amenities and infrastructure delivered by the ACT government. Presumably, the reason why some of the rates will not be going up as high, on average, in some of those suburbs is because the value of their land is not as high as in perhaps other areas of Canberra. Of course, that is adjusted on a yearly basis based on average unimproved values and it is very block-specific, so it will depend on the exact specific block. We have put in place a range of measures over previous budgets to make sure any growth from year-to-year is averaged over a longer period of time to stop any great shocks in terms of rate increases.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, why are Canberrans, like those in my electorate, paying the highest rates in the country?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Rates is an own-source revenue line for the ACT government that supports not only local municipal services, but also supports the delivery of important state government functions, including the delivery of critical healthcare services. We have seen in other local government areas, where they do not deliver those critical healthcare services, very large increases to rates, in particular in New South Wales. I encourage the member to go onto the NSW government websites and have a look at the applications by a range of LGAs that have applied to increase their rates above the threshold set by the state government.

### **Budget—health**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, how does the 2025-26 budget invest in high-quality services for all Canberrans?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The 2025-26 budget continues to invest in more high-quality services for all Canberrans and supports our city's growth into the future.

This includes a significant investment of \$138 million to support public education and training in the ACT. This will support the delivery of the new CIT campus in Woden that will open over the next month; the expansion of the School Youth Health Nurse Program from January next year; and the doubling of the Try-a-Trade program in

ACT schools, which expands to 10.

We are also investing in better public transport services, buying 30 more battery electric buses, which will support the replacement of old diesel and gas buses and also help us to grow the services that we deliver to Canberra. We are also investing in more services on Sundays, from term 3 of this year. We are making public transport safer, with investments in Bus Network Officers and Transit Enforcement Officers, as well as better physical protection for bus operators.

The budget also includes a record investment of \$1.196 billion into our healthcare system—not just to support growth in demand and cost in the system but to deliver better healthcare services.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, how is the government investing to help more Canberrans get access to quality health care closer to home?

**MR STEEL:** As part of the \$1.196 billion we are investing in our healthcare system, the government will deliver on our commitment to support more surgeries, bring care closer to home and expand mental health healthcare services.

This includes funding 70,000 elective surgeries over the next four years, delivering on our commitment that we took the election. We will invest in funding to construct the Inner South Health Centre, deliver new imaging and x-ray services at the Belconnen Community Health Centre and deliver on important commitments that we have made to the community. We are supporting further funding for community-led mental health services and perinatal mental health services, recognising the importance of mental health as part of the broader health system. We will also deliver more funding to support primary care, through more bulk-billing incentives, placements for junior medical officers and professional development and wellbeing support for GPs.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, why is it so important the government continues to invest in these services?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her supplementary question. That was the choice that we had in this budget. Of course, it is critically important that we continue to invest in these services. Canberrans enjoy a very high level of services in our city, which is emblematic of the fact that our city has a very high quality of life that has been recognised globally—something that was highlighted in the chamber yesterday by the Chief Minister.

Our government's commitment is to continue to deliver this high level of services in every part of our city. We know what the alternative is; it is the approach that was offered to the community last month by the Liberal Party: deep cuts to the public service and deep cuts to the public services that they deliver. That was soundly rejected by the Canberra community, as it should have been.

Continuing to invest in services and building upon them is critically important for the future of our growing city. As our population grows, our government will continue to support more services for Canberrans—in health, education, training, public transport, community services and so many other areas of government service delivery.

**Budget—utilities concession**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, in question time yesterday you said that your government has increased the utilities concession for electricity, gas and water. Treasurer, this year the utilities concession has been set permanently at \$800; however, people who get the benefit received \$800 for each of the 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25 budgets, as well as this year's budget. Although you have described it as being made permanent, isn't it really gilding the lily to describe it as an increase?

**MR STEEL:** No; in the absence of any decision, it would have dropped back, but we have made it permanent. But we have also built on the extended eligibility. A recent decision was made in the prior budget to make sure that more Canberrans could access this concession, which is now supporting over 40,000 eligible households and those, particularly, with a healthcare card with Services Australia. It is an important cost-of-living measure that we have made in the budget, but it is not the only one.

I refer the member to the cost-of-living chapter in the budget, where we outline a range of other supports focussing on cohorts that are in need: supporting apprentices, who we know have lower wages, with a payment up to \$500, particularly for first year apprentices; supporting stamp duty concessions for homebuyers by furthering tax reform in the budget; and the \$145 million investment that we have made in housing, in particular for more affordable social housing and public housing, noting that housing is a major part of the costs in a household budget. We can turn the levers around housing supply; that is where we are focused in the budget, and that will certainly support cost of living as well.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Treasurer, will you continue to fund the Utilities Hardship Fund, and how much will be available for Canberrans to access?

**MR STEEL:** Yes, it will still be available for Canberrans to access, and I encourage them to talk with their retailer if they are facing hardship, to talk through the options, but also to make sure that the concession is being applied to their account. Of course, the federal government will also be chipping in \$150, which will be paid in the last two quarters of this calendar year.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, how much will actually be available under the Utilities Hardship Fund compared with last year?

**MR STEEL:** In terms of the overall amount for the fund, I will take that on notice and come back.

**Budget—health—commonwealth funding**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Treasurer. It was reported yesterday that the Labor federal health minister, Mark Butler, said that next week the commonwealth would increase its funding to the ACT hospital system by 16 per cent, blowing away your claims that the commonwealth is not funding ACT Health properly. Treasurer, have you misled Canberrans on the reality of health funding?

**MR STEEL:** No. I point out to Ms Castley page 195 of the budget papers, which provides the actual funding from the commonwealth under the National Health Reform Agreement. As the Chief Minister has already said—clearly, the opposition leader has not pivoted in her line of questioning—the level of growth in demand and cost in our healthcare system is growing well beyond that. That has seen the rate of contribution by the commonwealth—not the actuals; the rate of contribution—going backwards over time, unless it is addressed.

That is shown in the graph presented on page 192 of the chapter on federal financial relations in the budget papers. Unless there is action in a new five-year agreement, the CCR level contribution from the commonwealth would drop, in terms of the proportion funded to our hospital system, compared to what the national cabinet agreed target was, which was to go to 45 per cent over the next 10 years and 42½ per cent by 2030.

We are keen to get negotiations underway again on a five-year agreement, so that we can address the extraordinary pressures that states and territories are facing in our health and hospital systems. An important point to make is this: with respect to the current NHR agreement, including the one-year addendum, which the opposition leader is referring to, the original NHR agreement was signed years ago under a coalition government during the pandemic. Clearly, it did not take into account the fact that we were going to have this extraordinary step-up in demand and cost in healthcare services around the country. So, yes, that will be a focus of the next NHR agreement. This has been seen in every state and territory budget—*(Time expired.)*

**MS CASTLEY:** Treasurer, was the federal health minister lying when he said yesterday, “I’m not sure there’s ever been a bigger increase in commonwealth funding to the ACT hospital system than the one we will deliver next week”?

**MR STEEL:** I think we have clearly addressed that. There is a difference between the actuals and the \$50 million; the additional funding from the commonwealth was very welcome and will help to contribute to the cost of delivering services. But those costs and the demand in the system are growing at a higher rate. We will see a decline in the commonwealth contribution rate over time, if they do not put more into the system in future years. That is the focus of negotiations on a new national health reform agreement, which is intended to last for five years, in order to try and reach a glide path to 42½ per cent by 2030.

**MS BARRY:** Treasurer, has your decision to slug Canberrans with a new \$250 health tax violated the principles of universal health care?

**MR STEEL:** No, it has not.

### **Budget—environment**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's *Close to the edge* report found that "government spending on the environment at all jurisdictional levels is meagre and demonstrably inadequate". That is a direct quote from the report. The report also found that a lack of reform is "tacit acceptance of and contribution to the biodiversity crisis". Environment is one of our 12 wellbeing priorities, yet this budget again does not prioritise the environment, with only two per cent being spent on climate, environment and sustainable development—a smaller fraction of total spending than we had last year and still less than one per cent being dedicated to nature. Minister, do you accept that this year's budget funding will see a continued degradation of our environment?

**MS ORR:** No; I do not.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, why is funding for the earless dragon in the budget \$4 million when you earlier announced \$4.5 million?

**MS ORR:** I will take the detail of this on notice. My understanding is that components of that funding continued from previous years, so it is effectively offset against funding that was already provided, as well as new additional funding. I will take it on notice to double-check that I am correct.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, will you commit to the Landscape Plan, which has been funded in this budget, preventing the degradation and removal of habitat for development?

**MS ORR:** I will not be pre-empting in question time any policy decisions that are still to go before cabinet, but certainly the point that Miss Nuttall has raised in her question is included in all things that are open to consideration. Cabinet will consider it in due course, once we have appointed a government landscape architect and they have had a chance to develop and provide a briefing to cabinet on what the Landscape Plan should look like.

### **Budget—lakes and waterways**

**MISS NUTTALL:** Thank you. My question is also to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, I was pleased to see \$177,000 announced for continuing the Healthy Waterways projects for Lake Tuggeranong and Office of Water staff in this budget this week. The Healthy Waterways website indicates that there are seven projects underway to support the health of Lake Tuggeranong, and one proposed. Minister, will this funding be used to start the final prospective project listed on the website, which is reconnecting the old creek line at Tuggeranong Homestead?

**MS ORR:** There are a number of projects, as the member has pointed out, in the broader Healthy Waterways program. Those projects are all quite technical, and require a fair bit of planning and technical work to proceed before than can go. That is what we are working through. So, I can take the detail of Ms Nuttall's question on notice, but I would say that we will continue to work through that program as we can,



in developing up the technical aspects that need to be done.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, will all waterway projects for Lake Tuggeranong currently underway be completed before the next budget, given that the new funding is only for this year?

**MS ORR:** Mr Speaker, I think it is fair to say that we always set out with good intentions on these exploratory works but then we can not always anticipate everything. We do see delays for them. So I am a little bit hesitant to give a blanket answer to Ms Nuttall's question. However, I would say that we are certainly going with the best understanding and assumptions we have, and set the timelines in accordance with that. We continue to work through to the best of our knowledge and abilities in getting these learnings, which are actually quite nation-leading in a lot of the water work that we are doing in restoring those waterways. My only hesitation, as I said, in providing a more concrete answer—concrete doesn't feel like quite the right word when you're talking about water—but providing a blanket statement to Ms Nuttall's question is that there are always things that you can't anticipate, and we do need to leave a bit of room for that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, is this \$177,000 the only funding allocated to Healthy Waterways projects this year, and how does that compare to previous years?

**MS ORR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I refer the member to my first answer.

### **Budget—cost-of-living support**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, how does the 2025-26 budget continue to support more vulnerable Canberrans?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. The 2025-26 budget continues to support vulnerable Canberrans as we invest in targeted cost-of-living relief, more frontline services and community support and social inclusion. The budget delivers on the government's core cost-of-living relief commitments. This includes delivering the permanent increase of \$50 to the electricity, gas and water rebate, now \$800, which will support over 40,000 households which are low income households.

We are also supporting a \$250 payment for apprentices and trainees and an extra \$250 for apprentices in their first year, particularly to support buying tools and equipment that they need to start their apprenticeship. We will provide \$150 off light caravan and trailer registration and support more stamp duty concessions for first home buyers, pensioners and people with a disability, by increasing the price thresholds to over \$1 million which is now well above the median house price. As part of our package, the government will also support vulnerable new parents by providing baby bundles in partnership with Roundabout Canberra, an important community sector partner.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, how will the government partner with the community sector to deliver this support?

**MR STEEL:** We will continue to support our community sector partners through the budget in delivering programs and initiatives, and through a \$10 million funding boost

for those community sector organisations that have a funding agreement with the ACT government. This funding boost will be provided while the government continues important work to undertake funding reform to support a sustainable and diverse community sector. This is on top of the annual Community Sector Indexation which has provided further funding through this budget. Through the budget, the government will provide \$30 million for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services, partnering with a range of important community sector organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled and led Organisations to deliver these services. We recognise the important role that the sector plays in supporting a wide range of programs for vulnerable Canberrans across so many parts of our city and for many different members of our community.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, what other investments will help Canberrans in need?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The budget also provided for the funding for homelessness sector support, with a \$16 million investment to extend funding for specialist homelessness service providers. Having a home is an important foundation for so much. The government is continuing to invest in the social, community and affordable housing that our city needs through this budget as part of our commitment of 30,000 homes by 2030.

The budget provides \$1.5 million for the Food Bank Fund that will support food banks and community organisations who provide Canberrans access to food relief and essential grocery items. It also provides \$2.7 million in funding to a variety of programs to enable community organisations to support vulnerable members of the community, including funding for Fearless Women, Kulture Break and Scouts ACT. The budget also provides more funding to continue humanitarian grants programs as we continue to support individuals and families arriving in Canberra after fleeing global crises, particularly in supporting their access to housing and basic living costs.

### **Budget—ACT public service**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Treasurer. The budget papers show \$282 million in savings from the so-called whole-of-government expenditure reform. The government denies these are cuts, but Canberrans see services under pressure and budgets going backwards across several agencies. Treasurer, which agencies are impacted by the \$282 million from whole-of-government expenditure reform?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Again, I refer him to the budget papers. In the initiative description on page 89 of the budget outlook it says:

Non-employee expenses will grow at 1.25 per cent rather than 2.5 per cent, while employee expenses outside of CHS and school-based staff will grow over the forward estimates on average by 0.86 per cent, rather than 1.41 per cent in the absence of any rebasing of expenditure.

**MR COCKS:** How is a reduction compared to a previous budget not a cut?

**MR STEEL:** It is a reduction in growth. The public service will continue to grow and

our population will continue to grow, and we will continue to deliver services to the community. What we will be doing, as the public service grows year-on-year, is make sure that the funding we have provided, which is still growing, is prioritised to the areas of government priority and community priority.

We will also be engaging in genuine workload reduction. Ministers will be working very closely with their directorates and agencies on this task. It will be a multi-year task where we will be looking very closely at employee expenses in particular but also making sure that we are curbing the growth in non-employee expenses to achieve these savings.

This is an example of how we are taking responsible action on the expenditure side of the budget, as part of an adjustment to our fiscal strategy to continue to deliver the critical healthcare services that Canberrans need.

**MR HANSON:** Treasurer, can you explain your understanding of the difference between a savings measure, a cut, an offset and an adjustment?

**MR STEEL:** I am not going to engage in semantics. There is still growth—that is the difference. There is still growth in the public service. There is still growth in employee expenses, but it will be at a lower rate. So the public service will grow year-on-year.

**MR SPEAKER:** Can we stop the clock.

**Mr Cocks:** The point of order is on relevance. What the Treasurer has just said is that he will not engage in a discussion on the subject that the question asks about.

**MR SPEAKER:** Well, he then set about engaging with the question. Mr Steel, you have about one minute and 35 seconds remaining, if you want to engage further.

**MR STEEL:** I will address the point of order—why not!—in relation to an opinion. He is asking me for an opinion on what I think in relation to the definition of different words, when I have clearly used words around growth and continued growth in the public service.

### **Budget—ACT public service**

**MR COCKS:** My question is for the Treasurer, and it is in regard to the impact of the budget on the public service. Treasurer, can you guarantee that there will be no redundancies as a result of this budget?

**MR STEEL:** The intention is not to undertake deep cuts to the public service. We have been very clear about that. But agencies and their responsible ministers will need to make sure that they keep within the growth that we have set out in the budget for employee expenses, and we will be engaging with a multi-year expenditure reform to make sure we achieve that level of growth over the forward estimates and achieve the savings that have been identified, prioritising our existing resources within government to support areas. We have already been talking with some of the employee representatives about what that could mean, but there is obviously a lot of

further work to do over the coming months and years on this matter. We have identified, for example, that we would like to talk about labour mobility within the public service to be able to have people reprioritised into those areas of need—existing staff being better utilised in areas where it is a priority for the government and the community, which can change over time. We are having those discussions. I know the unions are up to having those discussions, and we will work with them to achieve the target that we have set out.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, why did the budget papers not fully detail the movement of FTEs between agencies that result from the budget, and are there any redundancies hidden in those numbers?

**MR STEEL:** There is very extensive reporting on FTE in the budget, particularly around the machinery of government changes that will come in from 1 July and have been represented in the budget papers, which is yet another example of a responsible action our government is taking to deliver government services more efficiently. That is outlined in the budget papers around FTE but also in the change in expenditure across different agencies as we bring parts of government together and other parts move to other directorates and agencies.

**MR HANSON:** Treasurer, will you table a document by the end of the day detailing all transfers by FTE between directorates, including the original directorate and the destination directorate?

**MR STEEL:** I tabled the budget; that outlines the FTE and that outlines changes in expenses between agencies.

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

## Paper

**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) (2.55): I rise to table a revised ministerial statement due to a version control error and a minor inaccuracy. The statement I read was accurate, but the one I tabled was an earlier version. For completeness, I table this new one.

I table:

Community sector food program—Revised ministerial statement, undated.

## Supplementary answer to a question without notice Budget—public housing

**MS BERRY:** Yesterday I was asked by Mr Rattenbury about public housing and how much will be built through this budget. Whilst I have already mentioned this in speeches so far, 163 public housing homes are forecast for delivery in 2025-26 as part of Growing and Renewing Public Housing. On top of the construction pipeline, the government has a further 161 public housing homes in the planning and design stages.

These include 41 dwellings funded by the Social Housing Accelerator and 44 dwellings through the Housing Australia Future Fund Round Two.

This budget also includes a provision to plan how the ACT government will deliver the additional 1,000 public housing dwellings by 2030, which ACT Labor has committed to, and will bring the public housing portfolio to 13,200 homes.

He also asked a question about how many public housing homes will be run by the CHPs. Eighty-five dwellings through the Housing Australia Future Fund will be head-leased to CHPs to operate as social housing. Of the dwellings being built for the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program and Social Housing Accelerator Program, it is possible that some of these may also be head-leased to CHPs, but these are decisions that will be made in the future.

As to whether these homes will be rented at 25 per cent of a person's income. Social housing provided is typically rented out at 25 per cent of a person's income, and that is the information that I have.

## **Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Membership**

**MR SPEAKER:** I have been notified in writing of the following nominations for membership of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services: Mr Braddock, Ms Morris and Mr Werner-Gibbings.

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

That the members so nominated be appointed as members of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

## **Papers**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following paper:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General's Report No 4/2025—Gaming machine licensee regulation, dated 25 June 2025.

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

ACT Housing Strategy—Year 6 Report Card, dated June 2025.

ACT Road Safety Report Card 2024—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, undated.

ACT Small Business Strategy—

2023-2026 progress update 2025, undated.

Progress Update 2025—Ministerial statement, undated.

ACT Youth Assembly 2025—Tabling statement, dated June 2025.

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre—Bimberi Headline Indicators Report—June 2025.

Education and Care Services National Law as applied by the law of the States

and Territories—Education and Care Services National Amendment Regulations 2025 (2025 No 273) dated 12 June 2025, together with an explanatory statement.

Freedom of Information Act—

Pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Community Services Directorate—FOI-HOU-25/8, dated 27 May 2025.

Pursuant to section 95—Freedom of Information (Accessibility of Government Information) Statement 2025 (No 1)—Notifiable Instrument NI2025-268, dated 20 May 2025.

Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as applied by the law of the States and Territories—National Law Amendment (Professional Indemnity Insurance) Regulation 2025 (No 26/2025), dated 1 May 2025.

Heavy Vehicle National Law as applied by the Heavy Vehicle National Law Act (Qld)—Annual report—2023-24—undated.

Integrity Commission Act—Investigation Report—Operation Juno—Concerning certain conduct of Mr Walter Sofronoff KC—Government response, dated June 2025.

Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator—Annual report 2023-2024, undated.

Our Booris, Our Way Review—Implementation Update—January-December 2024, dated May 2025, together with a tabling statement, dated June 2025.

Territory-owned Corporations Act, pursuant to subsection 19(3)—Icon Water—Business Strategy 2025-2035—Our Statement of Corporate Intent 2025-26, undated.

University of Canberra Act, pursuant to section 36—University of Canberra—Annual Report 2024, dated April 2025.

**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 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-71 (LR, 29 May 2025).

Cultural Facilities Corporation Act and Financial Management Act—

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-76 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-77 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-78 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-79 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 5)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-80 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Cultural Facilities Corporation (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 6)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-81 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Gaming Machine Act—Gaming Machine (Determination of Surrender Obligations) Guidelines Revocation 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-70 (LR, 29 May 2025).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Amendment Regulation 2025 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2025-7 (LR, 16 June 2025).

Public Place Names Act—

Public Place Names (Dickson) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-82 (LR, 13 June 2025).

Public Place Names (Macnamara) Determination 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-73 (LR, 10 June 2025).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (Offences) Amendment Regulation 2025 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2025-6 (LR, 5 June 2025).

Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act—Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Maximum Fares for Taxi Services Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-72 (LR, 10 June 2025).

Unit Titles (Management) Act—

Unit Titles (Management) Rental Certificate Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-74 (LR, 12 June 2025).

Unit Titles (Management) Sale Certificate Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-75 (LR, 12 June 2025).

## **Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (2.58): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

In presenting this bill, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. I pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us in the chamber today.

How fortunate we are to meet here and to live here on such beautiful lands, on country that has served as a meeting place for generations. For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have cared for this country, guided by a profound understanding of land, law and community. Today we recognise not only their enduring right to self-determination but also the wisdom, resilience and service local Aboriginal people continue to offer in preserving this land, strengthening culture and caring for community. There is so much that non-Aboriginal Australia must learn and unlearn from the leadership, knowledge systems and ways of being that have sustained this continent for millennia. May we listen more deeply, walk more humbly

and strive to be better allies in the shared future built on justice, truth-telling and respect.

This bill affirms a truth that is long overdue. Closing the gap is everyone's job, not just that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who continue to bear the heaviest burdens of injustice. It is, instead, a shared responsibility across government, across systems and across this Assembly. This bill is about embedding that shared responsibility into law, the way our public service works and the way our institutions are held accountable.

In 2020, the ACT government made a commitment by signing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. They made a commitment in a historic agreement between all Australian governments and the coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations. The nature of that commitment is simple but profound: to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people such that their life outcomes are equal to those of all Australians.

But the reality five years on is sobering. The Productivity Commission, in its independent review released in February 2024, found that governments are not prioritising the structural reforms at the heart of the agreement. It concluded: "Transformation of government organisations has barely begun", accountability is "lacking", and progress remains "weak" because of "business-as-usual approaches". Just last week, the first Aboriginal and Torres Islander-led review of the agreement echoed this sentiment. It found:

Despite the language of genuine partnership, Government departments continue to operate in traditional ways, setting the agenda, controlling and extremely short timelines, and expecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations to respond on their terms—

That is, the government's terms. The Aboriginal-led review urges governments to step up and embed systemic change into employment contracts and leadership KPIs as a way of driving transformation from within. It is incumbent on us in this place to respond to that call, not with lip service and inertia but with action. This bill can mark the beginning of that action.

The first part of the bill amends the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004. It will require the directors-general to report annually on the tangible actions their areas, their directorates, are taking and the outcomes of those actions when implementing the priority reforms of the national agreement—the reforms that are critical to transforming the way the government works with Aboriginal people and communities. They require government to work in genuine formal partnerships and share decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; strengthen the capacity of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector and transition service delivery to ACCOs; commit to systemic and structural transformation of government agencies to better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and prioritise Indigenous data sovereignty so that Aboriginal people can make data-informed decisions that benefit their communities.

This bill will also require that, in their annual reports, government agencies detail how



each directorate has responded to recommendations from both the Productivity Commission review and the Aboriginal-led review. Importantly, the reporting format must be agreed upon by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, ensuring transparency is shaped in partnership with those to whom we owe accountability. This part of the bill gives legislative effect to essential action 4.3 of last year's Productivity Commission review, which made clear that, without public reporting, we cannot measure or maintain progress.

The second part of the bill amends the Public Sector Management Act 1994 to establish a new statutory duty: the closing the gap principle. It will require every ACT public servant to perform their job in accordance with this principle. That means demonstrating personal cultural capability; contributing to the cultural capability of their workplace; upholding the national agreement's principles; promoting cultural safety; and working to eliminate institutional racism in their workplace. This is about changing the "how" of public service delivery. It is about recognising that outcomes will not change until attitudes, structures and behaviours change. If this bill passes, these expectations will not just sit in policy binders or HR memos or be discussed in this place; they will be reflected in employment contracts and performance frameworks. Government leaders, from the Head of Service to directors-general and senior executives, will be required to lead by example, to not only manage change but also model it; to not only support reform but also embody it.

This part of the bill gives effect to essential action 3.5 of the Productivity Commission review, as well as reflecting recommendation 2 of the Aboriginal-led review, which found "racism continues to be a defining issue preventing progress", "governments are yet to begin to address the identification and elimination of racism in any substantive way" and that "cultural safety initiatives were overwhelmingly described as transactional, compliance based exercises that fail to lead to meaningful or sustained change".

We need to be honest about the situation here in the ACT. The most recent Closing the Gap dashboard update tells a deeply troubling story. Nationally, we are on track to meet just four of 19 Closing the Gap targets. Eleven are off track and four are getting worse. Locally, the ACT is improving in some areas, and so we should be—we promised to—but we are also going backwards in other areas. The proportion of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in the ACT has increased since we signed the agreement. An Aboriginal child is 12.5 times more likely to be in out-of-home care in the ACT than a non-Indigenous child. An Aboriginal young person in the ACT is 14 times more likely to be in youth detention than a non-Indigenous young person. Aboriginal adults are 22.7 times more likely to be incarcerated in the ACT than non-Indigenous adults—the largest Indigenous incarceration gap in the country.

Persistent homelessness affects nearly half of the Aboriginal people seeking help in the ACT—again the worst rate nationally—and 41.5 per cent of Aboriginal households in public housing here live in a dwelling that is not of an acceptable standard. An acceptable standard is defined as having at least four working facilities: facilities to wash people, clothes or bedding; to store and prepare food; a working sewage system; and no more than two major structural defects. We need to ask ourselves why that figure of 41.5 per cent drops to 24 per cent among non-Aboriginal households in our city's public housing dwellings—a 17.5 per cent gap. Perhaps

worse, to our eternal shame, 76 per cent of Aboriginal adults in the ACT reported experiencing racial prejudice in the past six months, which is the highest rate in the country. These are abstract figures; they are indicators that our systems continue to fail Aboriginal people. Systemic failure requires systemic reform, which is what this bill will bring about. Nor are these just statistics. We need to remember the people for whom these experiences are a daily reality.

I have spoken previously in this place about my conversations with a local Aboriginal woman who was pregnant and running for her life, as she said. She reported being turned away from a service provider because she did not meet the criteria. Other women have told me about their fears that seeking help would result in their children being removed. For one Aboriginal woman I spoke with, that is exactly what happened.

We also know that Aboriginal people are often forced to rely on one another when our institutions fail. One public housing tenant contacted government officials seeking support for an Aboriginal couple who were squatting in a neighbouring flat and would otherwise have been homeless. The government's response was to cut the power off. How out of touch can our government be, not just with our community's needs but also with its own commitments if that is the response to people in crisis? It was the neighbour and a local community service that he volunteered for that stepped up to help, not the government.

We know cultural safety remains a live issue at the AMC, where an Aboriginal detainee was recently moved into the very cell where his cousin had just died, having been first temporarily located in the cell where his uncle had died, despite his pleas to be placed elsewhere. This is the context for the reforms in this bill. It is why legislation matters, because the status quo is failing many Aboriginal people in our city every day. The national agreement is not going to implement itself.

The leadership demonstrated by our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through advocacy, service and deep cultural wisdom is nothing short of inspiring. There was also cause for introspection. We must ask: why are those who have been harmed most by systemic injustice expected to lead the efforts to fix it? How can it be that those who have been wronged are most committed to reconciliation?

The Aboriginal-led review just released found that "there are stark imbalances in responsibilities, commitments and resourcing between parties to the national agreement". Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies are carrying a heavier load, with significantly less resourcing compared to government. Government institutions need to carry a heavier load and must now lead the repair. The Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 provides a pathway to do just that—a pathway towards shared responsibility, genuine accountability, structural change and true reconciliation. As one local Aboriginal leader put it, "We just want government officials to come to the table, to do their fair share of the work, to walk forward with us." That is what this bill requires. It is a good first step. It is not symbolic; it is structural. It changes the rules of the game. It embeds responsibility, transparency and leadership where it belongs: in the public institutions that exist to serve all of us.

My Assembly colleagues, please support the bill. We have an opportunity in the ACT to not just say yes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but also mean it. We can show the rest of the country how to fundamentally change the way we engage with members of our First Nations community. I truly believe reconciliation is possible here in the ACT. It is a journey, but it is also an objective that can and must be achieved. We need to move forward together, and we can, but only if we are all involved and fully committed. That needs to be reflected not just in supportive words like these in this chamber—which, thankfully, we hear frequently in our Assembly—but also in law, policy and the culture of government institutions.

I believe that we can close the gap in life outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and that it is ethically inexcusable to sign an agreement committing to do exactly that without following through. Colleagues, by voting in support of this bill when it is brought on for debate later this year, you can make clear to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in the gallery here today and across the ACT that you share these beliefs and that you agree that closing the gap is everyone's job.

I commend the Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.14): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

In December last year, I asked the following question on notice:

What is the current average waiting time for a person who requests the release of cabinet documents found on the Canberra Day lists, from the date of request to the date they receive the requested documents.

The answer was 321 days, or approximately 11 months. I should stress that this is an average, so some people will have been waiting for longer than this. Mr Barr's answer to this question also emphasised that there is no legislative timeframe for the release of executive documents. Officials also made the same point repeatedly during the last annual reports hearing on this matter. As we will be seeing, I took this as an invitation to act.

It is worth us considering the reasons for such lengthy timeframes for the ACT government to consider and respond to requests. This is information that Canberrans are legally allowed to access. Mr Barr has pointed to requests for the release of all documents on the list since 2022 as the reason for the delays, which, as far as I am

concerned, may be an explanation but is not necessarily an excuse. The system, as it is currently structured, directly disadvantages the average person who wishes to research accessible executive records in a timely manner. A researcher effectively has to lodge any requests a year in advance. Given this timeframe, the logical conclusion is to lodge a request for everything, because the last thing you would want is to find out after 321 days of waiting after submitting your original request that you need additional information from another document, because people know they would need to wait an additional 321 days to obtain the information they had sought 11 months earlier.

My understanding is that the practice of media outlets requesting all documents is a symptom of the delays and not itself the cause, so the volume of requests currently received is unlikely to be the sole reason for lengthy processing times. I suspect that outlets would be likely to make more specific rather than voluminous requests, if they had the confidence that they would be responded to in a timely manner. Timeliness is undermined by the current system, which has implications for government transparency in the course of moving public debates. This is the principal reason I am proposing these reforms today.

My bill legislates a statutory timeframe for the processing of requests for accessible executive records and sets a new mechanism for appealing decisions concerning access to executive records under the Territory Records Act 2002. Accessible executive records are executive records, also commonly referred to as cabinet documents, that are more than 10 years old and are identified as having become accessible on a list published each Canberra Day, the second Monday in March.

My bill sets a 30 working-day limit on the time permitted for the principal office to grant access to a document, which includes the time to consider whether a release restraint determination should be made. This 30 working-day time reflects the time limit already contained in the Freedom of Information Act 2016. This Assembly has already come to the view that 30 working days is an appropriate period that balances the time required for the ACT government to consider a request by a member of the public for access to the information with the need for a timely response to community requests for access to this information. Setting the time limit at 30 working days also ensures consistency of statutory time limits for requests by members of the public under separate pieces of legislation.

As per the Freedom of Information Act, the time period may be extended when agreed to by the requester or by the ACT Ombudsman, if the ACT Ombudsman agrees that the extension is reasonable in the circumstances or when Christmas shutdown days occur. It allows for a reasonable delay in large requests that would constitute an unreasonable and substantial diversion of resources, without consequently impacting the timeliness of requests by other requesters being met. These extension provisions allow for flexibility in resource management and therefore support compatibility with section 65 of the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988.

If a decision is not made by the principal officer within the time limit, including any agreed extensions, the applicable records are deemed to have been fully restrained under a release restraint determination. This allows for the deemed decision to be appealed by the requester without prejudicing any information that should genuinely

require redaction under the act—for example, due to it containing personal or private information or information with genuine national security implications. Any full or partial release restraint decisions made by the principal officer that the requester is not satisfied with can also be appealed.

This leads me to the second important element of this bill. It creates an appeal mechanism that is similar to that contained in the Freedom of Information Act. Current practice allows for internal review only by alternative officers within the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate. This current practice creates actual and perceived issues where decisions are reviewed by colleagues of the original decision-maker who is subject to the same cultural operating environment and political pressures.

Under my bill, appeals will instead go to the ACT Ombudsman. Having an appeal mechanism outside of the ACT government is preferable as it will help ensure public confidence in the decisions being made. It provides the Canberra community with greater reassurance that the reviews have been undertaken by an independent and mutual adjudicator. Appeals of the ACT Ombudsman's reviews can still be made to ACAT. Consequential amendments are made to the Ombudsman Act 1989 for consistency with the new functions under the Territory Records Act 2002.

Members may recall the exposure draft of this bill that I tabled in April this year. I received specific and useful feedback from the Human Rights Commission and the ACT Ombudsman. The Human Rights Commission feedback helped shape the human rights compatibility statement that I have just tabled. Specifically, it highlighted how the pattern of deemed restraint decisions could limit the right to freedom of expression by limiting the freedom to receive information.

The ACT Ombudsman's feedback was of a similar nature, highlighting the need for adequate timelines at their end to ensure that any reviews they conduct are able to be completed within their resourcing envelope. For this reason, the ACT Ombudsman's timelines have been extended compared to the exposure draft.

I am now confident that it would take deliberate under-resourcing by the government of its release program below even current levels for us to see a pattern of deemed restraint decisions that would, in turn, risk overwhelming the Ombudsman's resources. I have also taken on board further feedback from the ACT Ombudsman that the parties to any later ACAT appeals should be the applicant and the principal officer who made the original decision, not the ACT Ombudsman. This is now reflected in the bill.

I am hopeful that members will appreciate what I am trying to achieve here. I want to see a timely and pro transparency culture in the release of executive records. I want to make it easier for Canberrans to research historical events with the benefit of hindsight. A lot of the problems we face today in areas such as housing, public transport and gambling policy are ones Canberra has faced before. We will make better decisions if we are better informed on the past. This will be easier if accessible executive records are, in fact, accessible.

I look forward to members' engagement with this bill. My office is happy and keen to

offer a briefing to anyone who may like one. The bill envisages a commencement date of 9 March 2026, which is Canberra Day next year. Accordingly, I hope to see this bill being debated before the end of the year. For now, I commend my bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Tuggeranong—ice sports facility**

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (3.23): On behalf, also, of Mr Milligan, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) during the 2016 ACT Election, ACT Labor announced \$23.3 million as part of a four-year plan to upgrade ACT sport facilities; this included a new national ice sports centre in South Canberra to be built in the next term of government;
- (b) during the 2020 ACT Election, an ACT Labor Policy Position Statement confirmed it would continue “the construction of an Olympic class, twin-sheet ice sports facility in Tuggeranong”;
- (c) on 7 November 2022, a Heads of Agreement was signed between the ACT Government and Cruachan Investments and Pelligra Holdings to build, operate, own and maintain the proposed facility which was confirmed to be in Greenway;
- (d) in the 2023-2024 Budget Outlook, the ACT Government committed \$16.2 million to an ice rink in Tuggeranong;
- (e) during the 2024 ACT Election, the ACT Government advertised on the Built for CBR website that a Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility would be delivered in 2025;
- (f) after an ACT Opposition question without notice on 15 May 2025, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Yvette Berry MLA, said it would not be completed in 2025, and the website would need to be updated; and
- (g) on 16 June 2025, Region Canberra reported the final contract paperwork between the Government and developer would be drawn up by mid-July; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) finalise the contract with the developer by July 2025;
- (b) release the land valuation for the allocated site on Rowland Crescent in Greenway; and
- (c) provide quarterly reports on the progress on the development of an ice sports facility in Tuggeranong.

If this was a government that delivered on their word and did what they said they would do, there would be no need for me to stand here today and move this motion with my colleague Mr Milligan, the shadow minister for sport and recreation. Instead,

Canberrans and the people of Tuggeranong have become used to a government that takes sparkly, grand promises to every election and then fails to deliver.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I accept that that is a pretty strong depiction, but when you look at Labor's record, you can forgive me for the characterisation when it comes to delivering election commitments. That is why Mr Milligan and I are moving this motion today. Almost 10 years and three elections after first promising to deliver a new ice sports facility, the people of Tuggeranong and, in fact, all Canberrans, are still waiting.

Labor's announcement in 2016 that they would build a brand-new ice rink was met with a warm reception by the Canberra winter sports community. The public were then informed that the venue would be built in Tuggeranong, which was very welcome for south-side locals. For a community that has so often been duded by a lack of infrastructure in the Tuggeranong Valley, this news was exciting, and a sign that maybe the south side would finally get its share of meaningful infrastructure investment.

That was in 2016; then it was in 2020; and then it was in 2024. Today, it has been almost 10 years since the initial announcement and all that the government have to show for it is an escalating blame game and a deteriorating relationship with their construction partners. Tuggeranong is no closer to having the ice rink that we were promised, and it should have been completed years ago.

Instead, what we have seen in recent weeks is mixed messaging and a war of words between the sports minister, the Chief Minister and the government's construction partners. According to media reports, the partners were clearly under the impression, whether rightly or wrongly, that the sports minister was open to developing the facility outside Tuggeranong, in an entirely different location. After all this time, almost 10 years, it concerns me that the construction partners are even considering that as an option.

The sports minister quickly issued a statement to deny that the government was considering alternative locations, and I thank her for doing that. But when asked, the Chief Minister said Tuggeranong was the government's preference. In a separate media conference, Mr Barr said that the backers of the development needed to "just get on with it". It seems that the Tuggeranong community and the Canberra ice sports community are at another crossroads, unsure whether this ice rink will ever go ahead.

We note some of the proponents' concerns about the land set aside for the development, with some of the delays being put down to vehicle access, the slope of the land, the number of trees on the site that would need to be removed—around 200—and the bureaucratic difficulties with getting the approvals to remove those trees. Trees in Canberra are protected. In fact, even many dead trees are protected for wildlife habitation. You cannot just cut down trees without government approval.

I am sure all of us, as local members in our own right, know that any of our constituents who have tried to remove a tree from their property, or even get it pruned, tell us how difficult it is to do that. Some constituents that I have been working with

have been trying for years to get a tree removed from their property or near their property.

How can the government's construction partners "just get on with it" when the government has not even offered them a contract? Almost 10 years since promising the ice rink and over two years since bringing the construction partners on board with a heads of agreement, negotiations on a draft contract have not even started, because there is no contract. Now the government is working very hard to make Tuggeranong residents and the broader Canberra community believe that a contract has not been signed yet because the construction partners are dragging the chain. But earlier this week, when I asked the sports minister, in questions without notice, whether the government were responsible for drafting the contract, she said yes, that the government were responsible for preparing the draft contract, and it was still with them.

While the government are publicly shaming others for delaying the project, they have not even finished drafting the contract. Again, I ask: how on earth can the construction partners "just get on with it" when there is no agreed contract between the parties? You can expect that, once a draft contract has been offered, there will still be months and months of negotiations to follow, which is likely to push this out until next year.

There is then the mixed messaging that we are hearing about the status of the land. Media reports suggest that the land has been gifted to the construction partners. However, my understanding—and I would be grateful to have clarity on this—is that the land, in fact, needs to be purchased by the developer. Is it a gift or does it need to be purchased? If it is a land sale, how much will the land cost? Surely, the community and the construction partners have a right to know. Surely, that is critical information in determining build costs and project viability.

As far as I am aware, there has not been any valuation of the land, let alone a transfer of ownership. It really astounds me that the government is not willing to take any responsibility for its role in getting this project off the ground. I would love to know what the penalties and repercussions would be if a private developer were to begin construction on public land—land that they do not own—and if they started legally cutting down 200-odd trees and started building a major infrastructure project, just so that they could, as the Chief Minister says, "get on with it". I can just see the media headlines if that were to happen.

The government do have a responsibility to keep this project moving and to make this project viable. Why? Because that is exactly what they promised the people of Tuggeranong and the broader Canberra ice and winter sports community that they would do, at three elections in a row.

We understand that significant projects like this are complicated, and we acknowledge that they take time to deliver. No-one is disputing that. What we contend is that, after nearly 10 years, those opposite have very little to show for this major project. What we contend is that, rather than rolling up their sleeves and doing everything they can to make this project viable and deliver it for the community, the government seems more interested in launching grenades at their own construction partners and publicly



blaming them for all of the delays. I think that the community deserves a whole lot more than that, when they have waited for so long.

The ice-skating centre at Phillip was a beloved location where Canberrans, young and old, found community and recreation. But it is clear to everyone that it is well past its golden era of being useful to the community. That is why the announcement of a brand-new ice rink was very well received, because it was the perfect venue to continue the Phillip centre's legacy for the next generation of professional and amateur ice skaters.

As well as being open for widespread community use, the Canberra Brave ice hockey team, of course, would be a major tenant of a new ice rink in Greenway. Because of the delays that we have had, the Brave have been forced to use a temporary location at the AIS Arena. With the increased capacity there, it has proven that there is a strong demand for an ice facility in Canberra and that people will travel to Tuggeranong to use it.

Stakeholders are becoming fed up with the inaction. Sandi Logan, from the ACT Ice Sports Federation, said:

I'm horrified nearly three years later that not only do we not have a development application, we're not even close to a design. We haven't turned sod ... It's unacceptable, it's untenable and I would encourage the Chief Minister and the Sports Minister to put their foot down and get this project rolling.

Australian Winter Olympian Dean Hewitt is an international curler. He was excited about the government's announcement almost a decade ago that Canberra would have Australia's first dedicated curling sheet of ice. But as the delays stretched out, he is now hopeful that the venue will "be there before I retire".

The people of Canberra, the Tuggeranong community, and professional and amateur ice athletes deserve clarity from this government on the future of an ice rink in Tuggeranong.

I want to thank my colleague Mr Milligan for the work that he has done on securing an ice rink for Canberrans and for co-sponsoring this very important motion with me. I regret that he cannot be here today, because I know how important this is to him, and I wish him the speediest of recoveries.

This motion that Mr Milligan and I have brought forward is a simple one. It endeavours to help put the government back on track. We are calling on the government to get back to work, finalise the draft contract and hand it over to the construction partners by July, so that we can all move on to the next stage. It also calls on the government to complete a land valuation as soon as possible to give the developers some budget and planning certainty, so that we can, again, move on to the next stage.

Finally, this motion calls on the government to provide quarterly reports on the progress of the project. After nearly 10 years and three elections, with mixed messaging and a publicised blame game, the community deserves clarity and

transparency, and the quarterly reports will provide an important accountability measure for both the government and the construction partners so that the community can finally get what they have been promised.

The Canberra Liberals want this project to succeed. We want the government to succeed in delivering this project. The people of Tuggeranong want this project to succeed. Canberra's ice sports community desperately want this project to succeed. The Canberra Liberals are willing to work closely with the government to help deliver this important piece of infrastructure for the community. I understand that an amendment will be moved by the government, and I welcome this, because we really want to get this done. That is exactly what the community are looking for every one of us to do today. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.36): I thank Ms Morris and Mr Milligan for bringing forward this motion, which I support. The ACT ice sports community has waited too long for new facilities. Across three elections, ACT Labor has made promises that remain unfulfilled, and it seems less certain now than ever that the Tuggeranong ice rink project will ever happen. Meanwhile, the Phillip ice rink continues to provide the only facility in the ACT and wider region.

The recent move of the Canberra Brave's home games to a temporary rink at the AIS shows that there is a strong interest in ice hockey in Canberra, which is great to see. This move, however, adds to the uncertainty about the viability of the Tuggeranong ice rink project and potentially undermines the viability of the Phillip ice rink business.

The current owner of the Phillip pool and ice rink site, Geocon, is seeking to redevelop that site to replace both the pool and the ice rink with residential towers. While the fate of a replacement ice facility remains in doubt, there should be no progress on the redevelopment of the Phillip pool and ice rink site, to ensure that the option for the government to invest \$16 million to increase the size and upgrade the existing ice rink remains available. Did the government consider the option of investing \$16 million in the existing facility?

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.38): I move:

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

“(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) offer a contract to the developer by July 2025;
- (b) release the land valuation for the allocated site on Rowland Crescent in Greenway once the Government has approved the direct sale application; and
- (c) provide quarterly reports on the progress on the development of an ice sports facility in Tuggeranong.”.

I thank Mr Milligan and Ms Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I can only assume from Ms Morris's comments that the Tuggeranong Liberal MLAs support the development of a twin-sheet Olympic-size ice facility in Tuggeranong.

That is excellent news because that is the promise that the government made. That was the expectation of the Ice Sports Federation, all of the relevant ice user groups and, of course, the Tuggeranong community. Their expectation was that this facility would be built in Tuggeranong, to bring not only an ice sports facility but also the economic benefits for the shopping centre precinct in the Tuggeranong town centre.

I thought, as I was reflecting on this motion, that some people had been hearing this story only in more recent times. Actually, it goes back quite a bit further than when the initial commitments were made by ACT Labor in 2016, at the 2016 election. Mr Rattenbury will remember, because he was the sports minister at the time, that the ice sports community campaigned very loudly to have a new ice rink built.

When I met with the Ice Sports Federation, as well as the Brave, Pirates and every other ice user group at the Phillip ice rink, it was in early 2016. Of course, at that time, the Brave were pulling a pretty good crowd, but it did not compare to the crowds they are seeing today. The Brave are one of the ice rink users at the Phillip ice rink. I did not know very much about ice hockey until I was appointed as sports minister. I then went out and watched a game.

What I understood more about was the story of all of the different ice rink user groups—the Brave; the figure skaters; the potential speed skaters; those who participate in curling, broomball and ice dance; and the women's ice hockey team, the Pirates—who have campaigned loudly for a twin-sheet facility so that everybody could get time on the ice rink.

Well before I knew the Brave, they had actually folded. They were previously known as the Knights. In 2014, the community came together and raised money to get the licence back, so that there could be an ACT ice hockey team competing in the Australian Ice Hockey League. In 2014—I think it was in March—the Brave were formed; they became a new team, and they were initially owned and organised by a consortium of individuals from the community who cared about them a lot.

Over the years since 2014, the ownership has changed quite a bit, but in those early days, when I met with the Brave, there was such a strong, grassroots community support for this team that, indeed, they were the ones who actually raised the \$27,000 to get the team back in Canberra. There was a lot of passion involved in giving the Brave a chance to play on an Olympic-size sports ice rink here in the ACT—somewhere they could call home and where they could bring in bigger crowds. So there is quite a story that goes back much further than the 2016 election commitment. Nobody wanted to build an ice rink facility, because it is complicated and hard; it is a complex piece of work. There are not many people who do it.

When I committed to making an ice rink facility in Tuggeranong, we knew that it was going to be difficult to find the right people to do the job. I know that the ice community is frustrated, and I am frustrated as well. When I made that commitment, first off in 2016, and then when we went through the expressions of interest process in September 2019, I thought that, surely, with the connections that I knew the Ice Sports Federation had, and with the new owners of the Brave, we would get somewhere, and that it would happen relatively quickly, because the community were so passionate about it and they were behind the whole project—from public ice rink users, all the

way through to the Brave, who have had incredible success, despite having an inappropriate, undersized facility here in the ACT.

We are still committed to developing that project in Tuggeranong. Unfortunately, these kinds of complex projects do take some time. While it might appear that nothing has been happening, a lot of work has actually been occurring in the background. Early on, a site investigation report was completed, along with the execution of a non-binding agreement. There have since been two environmental significance opinions by the conservator, plus a detailed tree survey, to help all parties to understand the environmental considerations for the site. More recently, work has been focused on preparing a draft project agreement, contract of sale and Crown lease terms that set out a range of requirements for the site.

The amendment that I have moved simply updates the motion to reflect the situation a little bit more accurately. I am absolutely happy to provide quarterly reports on areas on which I am able to, and more frequently if I can. In terms of finalising the contract, I can confirm that the final touches are now being put on the draft agreement, and this will be issued to the proponents in the coming weeks. I can certainly make that public when it happens. Of course, once that occurs, there will be very little that I can say about the contract and the negotiations as they go forward. But it is a milestone that I know the broader community, and particularly the ice sports community, will be looking forward to.

There is still some critical information that has been outstanding for some time from the development partners, Cruachan, who are the owners of the Brave, and Pelligra, their construction partners. That information will be critical to the contract, and it has been taking some time for the joint venture partners to provide it. However, we will provide the contract arrangements now and, hopefully, we can get on with finalising those details, getting on with the nitty-gritty of a complex project, and the joint venture partners can get that vital information to us as part of that process.

Obviously, I cannot commit to finalising the contract in July, because I cannot control what the developers will do or whether they will sign the contract that has been presented. But as soon as that occurs, and when we reach agreement, that is certainly something we will be celebrating loudly and proudly.

My amendment calls on the government to release the land valuation as well, because the land will be valued at the point of the direct sale, which will not happen until the project agreement has been executed. I will happily provide that information about the valuation as part of a future update to the Assembly.

Finally, I want to thank the ice sports community for their fierce advocacy, over many years, to me and to other members in this place to build what seemed like an impossible dream. They are a strong community, they are passionate about their sports and they have been extraordinarily pragmatic in their approach.

While the ACT government does not have complete control over this project, my commitment to ice sports and the Tuggeranong community is to continue to do everything I can to get this project on track. We still have a way to go, and I know that will be annoying as well. It is annoying for me, too; trust me. But I look forward to

the day when we can all stand together in celebration and open a twin-sheet ice facility in Tuggeranong.

I would like to see us get our skates on and have a crack at ice skating on the ice rink. I am sure there will be plenty of people who will give us the opportunity and take the time to teach us to stand up, without horribly ruining our knees. I do not know that there is much more I can say. I do not want to be having a “he said, she said” kind of argument in public. That has been unfortunate.

We are at a point now where there will not be much more I can say, in any event, because the negotiations between the ACT government and the joint venture partners will be real and occurring. I am hopeful that those conversations will occur and will be resolved in as short a period of time as possible, so that we can absolutely get on with getting that project started, and so that we can be out there enjoying all of the ice sports, games and activities—not just the Brave, but the women’s ice hockey team and all of the other user groups.

I cannot wait to see broomball and curling on a twin ice-sheet facility in the ACT. I really look forward to it. Anybody that has been to the Phillip ice rink over the years will know that it has not changed much since it was built. In fact, it still smells the same, in my memory, from when I used to go there during high school. We have seen that people will drive to the AIS and watch a Brave game. We have seen that the crowds have grown and built, which is fantastic. We absolutely support that. We know that they would all wrap their arms around and celebrate a new facility, and perhaps bring more attention to all of the other ice rink user groups as well, who have worked hard on this. They have worked just as hard to get this new facility built in Tuggeranong.

I will leave it there. I look forward to hearing the contributions of other members. I hope that my amendment can be supported as well.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (3.50): Are we supporting? I think we are. No? Yes, I think we are! I want to thank Mr Milligan—James will be watching. He will be watching, do not worry; maybe—and Ms Morris for putting this motion together because it gives us an opportunity to talk about our favourite place in Canberra, that being the Tuggeranong Valley.

I think it is key to point out the disdain that generally comes from this Labor government when it comes to Tuggeranong. I think this is a classic example. I find it fascinating that Ms Berry has stood here in the chamber and said, “Oh, look, I do not think I can commit—I do not think I can commit to a timeline on this.” It begs the question: why were you able to commit in 2016? Nine years ago. Nine years ago, the minister stood and committed. That was before even I was a member of this place! So, Ms Berry and the Chief Minister flagged a new ice skating facility for Canberra, nearly five years since the government announced that it would be built in Tuggeranong.

I guess we should not be surprised because this is the government that put out an *Our Canberra* newsletter in Tuggeranong that said, “Light rail is coming to Tuggeranong.” I kind of hope that the ice facility ends up there before light rail. I had a twin-sheet ice

facility in my backyard this morning, actually. The dogs were not skating on it. I had a chat with Ms Tough about the fact that we had some success with the dog exercise area in Gordon. I was wondering if maybe we could combine the two and get dogs on skates. Off-leash, because if you had them on-leash it would be crazy, they would—but anyway, that is a whole other story.

I understand that at the time that all these announcements were made, the Chief Minister said the timeline for the ice skating facility was premature. It may be a plausible excuse if this government had a genuine track record for delivering major infrastructure projects on time and under budget, but they do not. I think it is becoming clear to Canberrans that this government has very little intention of sticking to any project timeline that they promise. You can think light rail to Woden; you can think MyWay+, the Molonglo Bridge and others.

The people of Tuggeranong are sick to death of Labor promises being broken and this is another one of them. In closing, I cannot help but wonder if the government is secretly hoping that we will all forget about the new ice sports facility and they can just reannounce it in 2028. Do not laugh at that concept because I think it is a major policy. They can just reannounce it. “Hey, Tuggeranong, look what we have got for you.” To paraphrase Mr Steel, this government should just be getting on with the job.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (3.53): Thank you Ms Morris for bringing this motion forward, and also to the minister for her contribution. I disagree, basically 100 per cent, with the tone of how Ms Morris phrased the motion and what it required. I wrote down some very terse—I am going to call it terse—points. However, after the lines at the end where Ms Morris said, “We want this to succeed, like you, and we will work with the government to ensure that it does”—we want this to succeed, you want it to succeed, Tuggeranong wants it to succeed, as does the ice sports community—I have crossed them all out. Gone. I will use them another time, perhaps.

I am going to briefly highlight what a twin-sheet ice sports arena would mean for Tuggeranong, as well as the importance of this facility to Canberra’s ice sports community. I think this is more than a sporting facility for Tuggeranong. It will be a significant piece of regional infrastructure. It is economic development. It will be a destination for the rest of the ACT and a key anchor for food and entertainment businesses in Tuggeranong. It is both a physical and symbolic manifestation of the interest and investment our community needs and deserves. That is because a facility of this scale in Tuggeranong will deliver significant social and economic benefits, including job creation, increased visitation and new opportunities for local businesses; not just during construction, but in the ongoing operations.

It would give Tuggeranong a destination venue, which is something we have been crying out for as development reshapes and revitalises our town centre. However, it is important to remind members and the community, as the minister did, that this is a public-private partnership. The ACT government has committed \$16.2 million towards the facility, which will be the largest investment in a facility of this type by any government in Australia.

As a local member for Brindabella, I am very aware of the work that has gone into getting this project to this point within the government and within the ACT ice sports

community, but I also share the frustration of ice sports users and the people of Tuggeranong. I was a bit surprised that this motion did not look to reaffirm the commitment that the facility be delivered in Tuggeranong—like, make it specific. If I was proposing, it would be calling for all parties to deliver on their commitment to build a state-of-the-art venue, including two Olympic-sized ice rinks, curling lanes and a rock climbing centre in Tuggeranong.

**Mr Cocks:** Is there some doubt about it?

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** It could be more specific.

If this does not come along, Canberra's ice sports community is going to remain in the cooler, where it has been for a very long time. Imagine our city with only one three-quarter size oval, having to divide between footy, rugby league, football, cricket and general public use. Now imagine trying to run junior and senior competitions, training sessions and elite programs all on that one oval. That is the reality for ice sports in Canberra.

I had an interesting chat with representatives from the ACT Ice Sports Federation recently. They spoke of how they have been desperately juggling limited ice time, training late into the night, even into the early morning, trying to grow their sports in a facility that does not meet their needs. Fixing their problems with the Phillip ice rink is exactly why the government is committed to delivering this facility.

I have heard some comments saying, "It is all good, there is now an ice-sheet at the AIS." That is quite good for the Canberra Brave no doubt, but it is a temporary facility and other ice sports are not being allowed access. Ice sports in Canberra needs and deserves a twin-sheet facility. Not just for convenience, but for safety, for the growth of their sports and for the future of sport in this city. So let's get this done, carefully, transparently and with the urgency the community deserves and make it succeed.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.58): I want to make a few remarks because it has been a very long time since I have pulled on the No 2 jersey for the Silver Streaks to play ice hockey at the Woden facility. All those years ago, we used to share a change room with the Canberra Knights. I have to say that even then, many years ago, it was very clear that Canberra would need something better than we had. We had such a strong community in the ice hockey community—I can only speak to ice hockey; I am terrible at broomball and no good at curling. There was such a strong spirit in the Canberra ice hockey community. You could see the growth and the passion for this sport. Even back then, you could see that we were going to need it.

There was such excitement in 2016 when the government promised that they were going to do it. They did not promise that they were going to spend a decade working out whether they were going to do it, where they were going to put it and who was going to be the partner. They promised they would deliver a twin-sheet, world-class, ice sports facility and they were going to put it in Tuggeranong. That is what they promised. Years and years following that, during all those years, the ice hockey community's hopes have been frustrated at every turn. In the intervening time, every time people have tried to find out what is going on with this facility, things have been

delayed, deferred or excuses have been made.

It was only a few years after the government made its promise to build the facility in Tuggeranong that I sat at a Woden Community Council meeting—Ms Carrick would probably remember this—and we asked Mr Steel, who was then a local member and not yet Treasurer, he did not have responsibility for the area, and we asked him, “Is that facility still going to end up in Tuggeranong or are you maybe considering upgrading Woden?” His only response at that stage was, “We have not made any decisions.”

At that time we were being told the government had made up their mind about where it was going to be, and then today we have Mr Werner-Gibbings once again implying that there has been some doubt about the location for this facility. The doubt, the shifting, the manoeuvrings have been going on for far too long, and it is time to get on, as Mr Parton pointed out, and get the job done.

I cannot help but reflect on a member of the Canberra Pirates—Minister, that is the women’s ice hockey team that you were looking to remember. The Canberra Pirates are a fantastic, highly—

**Ms Berry:** I said the Canberra Pirates. I said the Pirates.

**MR COCKS:** I may have misheard you, but it seemed you were struggling to remember. The Canberra Pirates are an extremely skilled team and have extremely skilled players, but they have been incredibly frustrated. A member of the Canberra Pirates came up to me and to Mr Hanson at the shops during the election campaign last year to explain just how frustrating this delay has been, and to ask if someone could please find out whether Labor were ever going to get around to delivering this facility.

I am glad, I am very happy to hear the commitments that we are hearing today. I am astounded that there has not been a contract out for this already. We all thought that something was out there and there were negotiations going on; but I am very happy that there will be a contract apparently issued in the coming weeks because it is well, well, past time for Labor to finally get around to delivering on its promise.

**MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.02):** I thank Ms Morris, and Mr Milligan in his absence, for bringing forward this motion today. I am loving all the Brindabella love this week; the next motion is also about Brindabella. There is not much else for me to add. Minister Berry and my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings have covered quite a lot about the ice sports facility in Tuggeranong.

As Mr Werner-Gibbings said, the motion could have specifically stated that the facility would be built in Tuggeranong. We all agree that it will be built in Tuggeranong, so let us say that. It should be in Tuggeranong. There is no doubt that it will be in Tuggeranong; it is just that, if we had written a motion about it, we would have referred, in big, bold letters, to the “Tuggeranong ice sports facility”.

I want to thank Minister Berry for her amendment and for her ongoing work to get this ice sports centre built in Tuggeranong. I want to see the ice rink built in



Tuggeranong. I know everyone else here wants to see it built in Tuggeranong, and they want to see it built soon. I am asked about it all the time, and I know that the government and Minister Berry are committed to making it happen.

I know that the minister has been meeting with the developers and is working with them. From the amendment, it looks like there will be a contract issued next month. I look forward to the updates on how things are going. But do those opposite really want the government to be out there telling a private business how they should be operating and how they should be working? We want to work in partnership, not dictating what they should be doing.

I have seen some great feedback on how the AIS Arena is operating for the Brave. Somehow in my Facebook feed a national ice hockey sports fan page popped up, with pictures of the AIS, and with people from across the country commenting on how great it looked. That is really positive feedback showing that the AIS temporary arena changes are working for the Brave. It shows that, once we have the facility built in Tuggeranong, it will probably be the best in Australia, and it will be world class. It will be a great facility, and teams from around the country will be excited to come to Tuggeranong. It will be wonderful for Tuggeranong; it will bring all those people there.

The downside of the AIS at the moment is that it is being used only for the Brave. It is not being used for the wider ice sports community. I am looking forward to the time when the wider ice sports community of Canberra have access to a world-class facility in Tuggeranong that can be used by everyone. I share the frustration of the minister that it has not happened yet.

I want to also address something that Mr Parton said, and I am very disappointed that he has already left the chamber this afternoon. After he came to see me on, I think, Monday or Tuesday this week to talk about the dog park and how we could combine the dog park and the ice rink, I have not been able to get the picture out of my mind. I am proposing to Mr Parton that, when this ice rink opens, he and I should jointly go to the owners and see whether we can have a dog day at the ice rink. I do not know whether it will be possible; there are probably terrible workplace safety issues. Who knows? I know my dog would hate it, but the idea has been stuck in my head.

I commend Ms Berry's amendment. I am looking forward to seeing the ice rink open in Tuggeranong, and I am glad that everyone here is supporting the ice rink to be built.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.05): The ACT Greens will be supporting this motion and the Labor amendment. Canberra arena is an issue that is very close to my heart, as a bit of an ice sports enjoyer and as a south sider.

The Canberra arena has been greatly anticipated by so many Canberrans since its announcement. It will be an opportunity to bring professional sporting experiences to Tuggeranong, to start with, and to support our ice sports athletes, from grassroots through to the elite level. More than that, it will be a sign to Canberrans who love ice sports that the government is listening to them and is investing in the infrastructure that is essential to expand the support.

Unfortunately, we are now 10 years on from when the arena was first introduced as a Labor election promise, and we appear to be going nowhere fast. The decision to choose a company with no successful projects under their belt does concern me a little. Deadline after deadline, and milestone after milestone, have been missed. The buck has been passed more times than I can keep track of.

In all honesty, I am sceptical that this motion will manage to pin down the government or Cruachan and Pelligra. However, I agree with its sentiment, and I choose to be hopeful that this will push the government to take some concrete action. Maybe we were born to make history.

What frustrates me is for how long the ice sports community has had to be patient—and they have been patient. I have a friend skating at elite level who has been waiting for a new facility for years. She competes nationally and internationally, but if the facilities in Canberra are limited, that is what she has to use in the meantime.

I have had staffers in the Greens team who are keen hockey players, and they are ever so polite when they ask whether we have heard any updates during estimates. I have had people come up to me at the shops; I reckon it is one of the top five most frequent issues when we ask constituents what local issues are on their mind. We have had ice sports losing members and coaches alike in the meantime.

We need more infrastructure in Tuggeranong. I think there is a real need for it. We talk a lot here about schools and transport, but places in which to spend time for fun, our third spaces, are just as essential. As a previous Greens spokesperson for tourism events, I have thought a bit about Tuggeranong from a tourist perspective. When someone comes to Canberra, what is actually bringing them south of the parliamentary triangle? Maybe they will stop by on their way to Tidbinbilla; they might have a particular cafe or store that they want to visit, or a couple of historic skating sites, but there is no real, big draw.

The Canberra monopoly board, with its rampant Tuggeranong erasure, does not help with that sentiment. Instead, we have residents in Tuggeranong, especially the younger residents, leaving the area whenever they have leisure time, as the area has few sources of self-contained entertainment. Canberra really could change that. We could actually bring events to the south, and ideally give residents something they could participate in. There are so many opportunities for an ice sports facility, and I do look forward to crushing some plastic there, too.

Something that has been raised with me is how much this would appeal to young people doing their visits to parliament from around Australia. For so many young people, Canberra is the coldest climate they have ever experienced, anyway. Something like an opportunity to participate in an introduction to ice-skating lessons would be a great way to round out a trip to the city.

Expanding the horizons of young people should always be a priority of the Assembly. I think Canberra arena would do that. I got my first queer relationship in college because I ran into a cosplay meet-up at the Phillip ice rink. *Yuri on Ice* was at the peak of its fame. The relationship lasted for four days. My fault; they were delightful, and an incredibly gifted cosplayer, and I was a silly goose who did not know what was

good for me. But the principle still stands: ice sports and the love of skating bring people together.

It has been disappointing to see how slow this process has been. I absolutely understand where this motion is coming from. As I said, the Greens will be supporting this motion and we hope that, in doing so, the government will understand just how frustrated Canberrans, especially south siders, are. Constant delays to such important infrastructure risks whole communities feeling that politics is not working in the way it is supposed to.

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (4.10): In closing, I thank all members who have contributed to this debate today. It is a very important debate. I am not sure what motion Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough were looking at, as the one that is circulated in our names, and which is on the notice paper, does reference an ice rink in Tuggeranong on several occasions. In fact, there are at least four references to an ice sports facility in Tuggeranong. I am not sure which motion you guys were referring to, when you implied that there was no reference to an ice rink in Tuggeranong. Certainly, the one that is on the notice paper, and which has been circulated today, does refer to it. Nonetheless, thank you very much for your contributions.

I thank Minister Berry for her contribution to the debate and for engaging in this debate today. We are happy to support her amendment. In fact, it is actually rather good, because it stays true to the spirit of the motion that we have moved, and it provides a bit more clarity. For example, the reference to finalising a contract, in paragraph (2)(a), puts firmly on the record that that has been sitting with the government for some time. Here we are, almost 10 years later, and the government has not yet offered a contract to the construction partners.

We welcome this amendment, and we think it is good to have that clarified and put on the record. We are very happy to support it. I thank all members, including the Greens, for their support. Hopefully, with the quarterly reports that we now expect to have in this place, we will get this project moving.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Tuggeranong—roads**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (4.12): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of a fit-for-purpose and well-maintained road network for Canberra, particularly for residents in regions such as Tuggeranong, who rely on the road network for employment, education, access to public health services, caring responsibilities and recreational activities;
- (b) that future population growth in regions such as Tuggeranong is contingent on an effective and resilient road network;

- (c) that the 2025-2026 ACT Budget has—in partnership with the Commonwealth Government—committed more than \$650 million over the forward estimates to deliver new and improved roads across the Territory, including the duplication of Athllon Drive between Sulwood Drive and Drakeford Drive, as well as future upgrades to the Monaro Highway;
  - (d) that the Commonwealth Government is a joint funding provider for several road projects across the Territory;
  - (e) that investment in road infrastructure is critical to Canberra’s economic development and regional connectivity; and
  - (f) that investment in new and upgraded roads is vital for connecting new communities with the rest of the city, including supporting access to road-dependent public transport; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue to work with the Commonwealth Government to invest in the ACT’s road network;
  - (b) prioritise infrastructure planning that supports regional growth and efficient transport movement; and
  - (c) ensure that the ACT has adequate infrastructure to provide safe, efficient and environmentally friendly transport by private and public means.

Canberra is a city of neighbourhoods with families, workers, carers and communities, all connected by the roads we drive on, the public transport we catch and the busy lives we lead. In my humble opinion, nowhere is that connection more vital than in Tuggeranong. Today, I am moving a motion that recognises something fundamental: that a fit-for-purpose and well-maintained road network is not a luxury in this city; it is a necessity. It is the quiet enabler of our daily lives. It is the infrastructure of opportunity that connects our city.

Roads are critical for Tuggeranong residents, as well as our neighbours across the southern regions and in the ACT’s outer urban areas. Instead of being a “nice to have” for those of us who live in Inner Canberra, they are a “must have” for those of us who live outside the centre. They are for getting to work on time, getting the kids to school safely, getting to a medical appointment or getting to a friend’s place for a barbecue. As our city is growing as new suburbs rise and new families move in, the pressure on our network only increases, and that is why this motion matters. We need to make sure that our transport network is not just efficient but also safe; not just fast but also sustainable—that we are investing in roads that support public transport, reduce emissions and connect new communities with the rest of the city.

My motion notes the major investments in our road network being made in the 2025-26 ACT budget, including the long-awaited duplication of Athllon Drive between Sulwood Drive and Drakeford Drive in my electorate of Brindabella. I have knocked on thousands of doors in Wanniasa and Kambah in Tuggeranong. I have heard the frustration with daily delays and near misses. This project is long overdue. I am proud to see it moving forward, because it is not just another road project.

Brindabella is the only electorate in the ACT without a multilane, east-west arterial

road. The duplication of Athllon Drive goes some way towards this and will be a safety upgrade, as well as a productivity booster. It will go a long way to easing long-term congestion in the area. Upgrades to the Monaro Highway, which is a key stretch of my daily commute and that of many Tuggeranong residents and is an important freight and community corridor that links our city to the broader region and the nation beyond, are also included in the budget.

I am pleased that the ACT government is not doing this work alone. My motion recognises the role of the commonwealth government as a joint funding partner. I acknowledge the constructive engagement we have seen on a number of large infrastructure projects. From my discussions with constituents and my own personal experience, there are several key roads across the south that warrant further attention and future investment.

Sulwood Drive and Isabella Drive are critical east-west corridors where capacity and safety upgrades would bring immediate benefits—in particular for the latter, Isabella Drive, for residents of Central Tuggeranong and Lanyon Valley. Dunns Creek Road connects the growing New South Wales communities of Googong and Tralee to the Monaro Highway. It is another strategic link that will become increasingly important as cross-border development accelerates. And we must not overlook regional connectors like Smiths Road, a much relied upon route in the southern-most part of my electorate, which has gained attention in recent months.

While active travel will hopefully play an increasingly important role in our transport future—and I wholeheartedly support measures taken by the government to include active travel in the design of infrastructure upgrades—we also need to be realistic and pragmatic. When I speak to people in Tuggeranong, there are concerns. Not everyone can ride a bike from Banks to Belconnen or participate in active travel—not when you are a tradie with a ute full of tools, you are juggling school drop-offs, you are doing shift work or you have caring responsibilities. Roads then are not optional; they are essential. This is about building a Canberra that works for everyone. It is about ensuring that infrastructure planning supports regional growth, not just in Gungahlin or Molonglo but also in Tuggeranong where, due to growth in other districts, people have waited for their share of interest and investment.

Today I am calling on the Assembly to support this motion and back a vision of Canberra that is connected, resilient and ready for the future. We must continue to work with the commonwealth for large infrastructure projects. We must prioritise infrastructure that supports growth and movement, and we must ensure that every Canberran, no matter where they live or what their transport requirements are, has access to safe, efficient and environmentally responsible transport options, because, when we invest in roads, we invest in people, in their time, their safety and their future, and that investment is always worth the journey.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.18): I spent some time recently in the Victorian parliament and I was specifically looking at things that they do differently in their chambers. They have two different things: an upper house and a lower house. I can tell you, Madam Assistant Speaker, that one of the things that they do differently is that they got rid of dorothy dixers at question time. They do not do them. It is not a move that we are considering here. Maybe we should. I can tell you that, if we got rid

of dorothy dixer motions, I reckon this one would be gone. What is this? When I first read this motion, I took a step back and I said—I cannot say what I said!

When we are assessing a motion, we tend to go straight to “calls-ons”. Typically speaking, when you are drafting a motion, the key point of the motion is included in the first “calls-on” because it absolutely tells the world what the motion is about. It waves a flag and says, “This is what I want to do.” The first “calls-on” is for the ACT government to “continue to work with the commonwealth government to invest in the ACT’s road network”. Does Mr Werner-Gibbings know something that we do not know? Has there been a falling out—I do not know—between Mr Barr and Mr Albanese? Have they had a bit of a stoush, during which Mr Albanese has threatened to cease working with the ACT when it comes to road infrastructure? I dare say they have not.

I want to know: if there is no actual potential for the ACT government to cease working with the commonwealth, why would we call for it in a motion? Why would you call for something in a motion that you know is going to happen anyway and make it the centrepiece of the motion? For example, let’s talk about our fine attendants in the chamber. I always look for an excuse to put Panduka in the *Hansard*. Attendants are very good at making sure that we have water to drink, aren’t they? They are great. They are straight there. This is like me moving a motion calling upon the attendants of the ACT Legislative Assembly to continue to refill our water glasses here in the chamber. Why would you move that motion? Look at Panduka; he is raring to go! I want to see his step count at the end of a sitting week.

The motion calls on the government to “prioritise infrastructure planning that supports regional growth and efficient transport movement”—that is cool—and then to “ensure that the ACT has adequate infrastructure to provide safe, efficient and environmentally friendly transport by private and public means”. At that point, it dawned on me what the motion is actually about. I am sorry—I am an old man and sometimes it takes me a little while to get with the program. I view this motion through a Liberal Party prism, but it is not about us, is it? It is about them; it is about the Greens. This motion is a red rag to a green bull, because, although the sensible people in this chamber can see that everything in the motion is abundantly sound, the Greens would likely be incensed by this motion.

As I have stated in here on a number of occasions, the Greens do not want you to just transition from a petrol-powered vehicle to an EV; the Greens do not want you driving a car. What a glorious day it was yesterday. It was eight degrees and there was sleet. The guys from Kiribati were loving it! On a day like that, the Greens want you riding a bike or walking or catching public transport, because they do not subscribe to any expenditure that augments the road network. They do not want to do it.

Athllon Drive has been mentioned. The Greens have openly opposed the duplication of Athllon Drive. They do not want us to add more lanes to any road, anywhere. They basically want people living in apartments. They do not want people living in standalone houses in the outer suburbs and driving around in their own car. They just do not. They want you living in an apartment in a town centre—and I think that, in their vision, the apartment would be owned by Housing ACT—and they want you to walk to work in the sleet.

This seemingly bland and ridiculously sensible motion from the very sensible Mr Werner-Gibbings is designed to flush out the people who are not sensible—to see whether we have people here who potentially are not as sensible as Mr Werner-Gibbings and me.

I have seen the amendments. They are rubbish. We will not be supporting them. The Canberra Liberals support the provision of sensible infrastructure right across this town, particularly infrastructure that is available for everyone to use.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.23): I am sorry Mr Parton describes my amendments as “rubbish”. I find that particularly rude coming from such a mad-keen cyclist as himself who makes full use of the active transport infrastructure that we have across Canberra, which I am sure he fully supports to ensure that cyclists such as himself remain safe as they move around Canberra.

Before I forget, by leave, I move the following amendments together:

1. After paragraph (1)(f), insert:

“(1)(g) the ACT Government’s Transport Strategy 2020 recognises the ‘urgent imperative’ to have a future-focused investment framework involving a ‘continued rebalancing of investment towards public transport, cycling and walking’; and

(1)(h) the Tuggeranong District Strategy 2023 identifies reduced car dependence as one of its 10 target.”.

2. After paragraph (2)(c), add:

“(2)(d) rebalance transport investment in Tuggeranong towards public transport, cycling and walking as per a future-focused investment framework.”.

It is true that most of the residents in Tuggeranong rely on roads to get to the places they need to be, but it is important for policy on planning and investment to be based on not just where we are right now but also where we want to be in our future. The Greens believe there needs to be a genuine transport choice, beyond costly private vehicle ownership, for the residents of all regions in Canberra.

The amendments I am moving today acknowledge the commitments that the ACT government has made to look beyond roads—roads and yet more roads—when looking at transport investment for Canberra. The ACT Transport Strategy 2020 sets out the government’s approach for planning and investment until 2040. It highlights the “urgent imperative” to focus investment towards public transport, cycling and walking and away from purely roads-based projects.

This is where I need to ask the question of the other parties here. They talk about being realistic and pragmatic or eminently sensible. Are they describing the ACT government’s own transport strategy as not being realistic and pragmatic? Are they describing their own transport strategy as not being eminently sensible? That is the question I am asking today. The 2023 district strategy for Tuggeranong identifies reduced car dependence as one of its 10 targets for the region. Is that pragmatic and

reasonable and realistic or eminently sensible as a strategy or is there an issue, in which case I call on the parties here to come out clearly stating where they believe that is not being realistic or pragmatic.

I also draw the Assembly's attention to the motion brought on by another Labor representative of the Tuggeranong region in a recent sitting period. It talked about transit-oriented redevelopment. As that motion acknowledges, road-dependent public transport or buses form part of the mix of transport modes for Tuggeranong residents. Until they receive light rail, the main mode of public transport for Tuggeranong residents will be buses. Athllon Drive, for example, serves as a corridor for bus services such as the R4 and R5, connecting Belconnen, Civic, Woden and Tuggeranong, as well as the 73 local bus, connecting the northern Tuggeranong suburbs of Wanniasa and Monash with Woden town centre. The mass benefit of the multimillion-dollar road projects can be best rectified by integrating public transport prioritisation measures, like dedicated bus lanes, from the get-go. Public transport is the most efficient way to move more people, with lower emissions, at lower cost and using less overall space to where they need to go. Is this not realistic and pragmatic, utilising the limited government resources we have in order to find the way we can best move the population around Canberra?

Additionally, investment in active travel infrastructure is also important in order to provide Tuggeranong residents with genuine transport choice. This will allow people to walk or cycle the shorter distances to shops or schools rather than get in their cars for every journey. For the benefit of the Tuggeranong residents to not be stuck forking out thousands of dollars in car expenses for decades to come, I call on the ACT government to reflect a prioritisation of investment in public and active travel infrastructure.

I hope my factual and straightforward amendments, literally cut and pasted from ACT government documents and which align the notes and calls of this motion with existing government policy, will be supported; but I am realistic and pragmatic enough to know that the numbers in the chamber do not support this idea. That brings into question what is going on with the government's Transport Strategy and its district strategies. These are purely factual amendments, literally copied from those documents. We are taking one of the four main avenues identified within the government's own Transport Strategy. This avenue is even included in the Minister's Foreword, signed off by Minister Steel.

The question now is: what is the future of that Transport Strategy if the government turn to vote against it—if they vote against one of the four avenues listed in that strategy, knocking it out of the equation? It would mean the strategy will look like a three-legged stool. It might look pretty but will be of no practical use.

**Mr Hanson:** Three-legged stools are the ones you want, though. It's the two-legged ones you don't want! Isn't that right?

**MR BRADDOCK:** If you want to end up on your arse, Mr Hanson, you can go for it!

Is this Labor government no longer committed to a future-focused investment strategy as articulated in the Transport Strategy? Does this mean the Labor government no



longer seeks long-term sustainable benefits as articulated in that strategy? Instead, is the Labor government committed to short-term thinking framed in the political now without any regard to sustainability in the future? If the Labor government votes against its own Transport Strategy and district strategies, that is what it is doing. It is also voting against its own Infrastructure Plan, which states:

Walking, cycling and public transport will take priority in the ACT's future transport planning and investment.

I will wait to see how the government goes.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (4.29): I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing forward this motion. Public transport, primarily buses, means we need great road infrastructure. Arterial roads are critical arteries that allow our city to function and support both private and public transport and enable the delivery of goods and a range of services, including, of course, emergency services.

The residents of the rapidly growing Molonglo Valley are currently experiencing what happens when arterial roads are over capacity. They are suffering long peak-hour delays on a daily basis. This congestion affects those people who choose to drive and those relying on bus services. We need to continue investing in our arterial road network.

As our city continues to grow and densify, it is essential that Canberrans are able to choose from a range of transport options. The development of our arterial roads therefore needs to support public transport, cycling and walking as standard design features, not as expensive afterthoughts. This means including off-road shared paths and cycleways on all major routes and full-length bus priority lanes on major transport corridors. With a range of transport options, Canberrans will be able to choose what works best for them—a private car, public transport or active transport—and enables a more sustainable transport network.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (4.31): I rise to support my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings's motion. He is a really good man. It is really fun sitting over here with him. I think we have got a great seat over here! And I also want to thank Mr Braddock for his amendment, but we will not be supporting it.

I fully support investment in public transport in Tuggeranong, and I have long advocated for better public transport from Lanyon to the Tuggeranong Interchange into the city and across all of Tuggeranong, which is why I am pleased that our plan for Tuggeranong includes a new rapid bus route from Lanyon to the city—because we do need better public transport and better public transport connections in Tuggeranong, particularly from down in Lanyon. That is why, only last month, I did bring a motion to the chamber, calling for a transit-oriented development plan for Tuggeranong, as Mr Braddock pointed out, where we should be focusing our future development on transit corridors and around our local shops, to make it easier to get around and to make it easier to use public transport to get around.

I do want to see less car dependence in Tuggeranong. But let's look at Tuggeranong. Let's look at the geographical spread of Tuggeranong—it's quite big—and let's look

at the occupations of the people living in Tuggeranong, and how car reliant they might be and how that then compares to the rest of Canberra.

It does not just feel like there are a lot of tradies in Tuggeranong; there actually are a lot of tradies in Tuggeranong. In Tuggeranong, tradies make up about 12.7 per cent of all employed people. Machine operators and drivers are 3.7 per cent, which at the last census my husband would have been included in, and 5.6 per cent are labourers. In total, that is about 22 per cent of our workforce that we would lump-in as tradies, construction workers and people we probably expect are driving around a lot for work. In comparison, in the ACT, that total is only 17 per cent of the total workforce. These occupations often work non-standard hours all across Canberra and its surrounding regions, where public transport connections often are not workable. Sometimes they work in new suburbs or developments where there is no public transport, because there are no residents living there yet. Often these people have tools to carry, sometimes quite big and heavy ones. Sometimes it takes up the entire back of a ute and trailers to get these tools around, and they cannot be carried on a bus or a bike, unfortunately.

Anecdotally, there is a Pilates studio near my house in Lanyon, and five days a week it has classes at 5 am. Many people I talk to think that is ridiculous. Who wants to be down there at 5 am? And trust me, having done 5 am classes there in winter, it is cold in the car park! Your car is frozen when you get out 45 minutes later. But last year I was a fairly frequent user of a 5 am class, one day a week, although now I do prefer a much later class, as I can. When I talked to the owner, I thanked her for having 5 am classes available, because it meant that I could attend. With a husband working in construction at the time—he left for work at 6 am—I had to be home for our child by 6 am. Sarah said part of the reason they had the 5 am classes was so that people could attend and be home before their partners had to leave for work, because in Lanyon, it is pretty common that people are tradies or in construction and are leaving work at that time of the morning. And I know, driving home from classes at 5.50 am, I would pass ute, after ute, after ute heading in the opposite direction.

**Mr Parton:** Isn't there a climate emergency, though!

**MS TOUGH:** Are you with me or against me here, Mr Parton! These workers often can be found on the road throughout the day, not just when they leave home at 6 am but all day. You can drive around any time of day in Canberra, and you are going to pass tradies in their utes going from site to site across Canberra.

But in saying that, there is another occupation that is often missed in the discussion about who is on the roads throughout the day who are working non-standard hours, leaving home quite early in the morning or going places where they cannot actually use public transport to get to, and that is our community and personal service workers, which make up 11 per cent of employees in Tuggeranong, which is slightly higher than the number across the ACT as a whole. These workers keep our community going. These are our health workers, our hospitality workers, our protective service workers, people that work in sport and fitness and our personal service workers. While many do work standard hours in our town city centres, in our hospitals, in our major health facilities and in our schools, many do not. Many are in the car all day, every day, going from client to client in people's houses, providing care and support.

And they need to make sure they are on good road networks that can get them from A to B quickly and safely so they can work with as many people as they need to in that day.

These are people who work in our restaurants and bars. They finish in the early hours of the morning and need a safe way to get home, often when there is no other way to get home but private vehicle. These are people who work in places where public transport does not naturally flow. Public transport gets us from our suburb to a group or town centre, or the city centre. It does not often easily get us from small suburb over here to small suburb over there in an easy way, because that is not the way of mass transit; that is not an efficient way of moving people necessarily, and that is why having a good road network is important.

At different times of our lives, we use different forms of transport, as well. Before I became a mum, I used a mix of car and public transport to get to work. Back when I first moved to Canberra and I lived in the inner north, I used to catch the bus into the city for work. When I moved to Tuggeranong and I was in Calwell, I mostly used the bus to get to work. I would occasionally drive when it was freezing cold, but the bus worked really well. I lived very close to the bus stop. Then we moved down to Lanyon. I used the bus to get to work, and I would sometimes drive. Then when I became a mum, I could not get the bus to work. It did not work for me. I could not get the bus easily to the childcare centre and then back up to the city for work. It was not a workable solution. I know for some families it does work, because often care arrangements are on a major route or on their way to work, but, the way that Lanyon Valley is, I could not go that way. That is one of the other reasons: for parents to be able to arrange their caring responsibilities, as well, it is good to have a good road network that is useable.

Active transport is important, safe cycleways are important, and a good road network goes hand in hand with good active transport and cycleway networks. With a good road network, we get good public transport that can easily move people from A to B, without being stuck in traffic with private cars as well. Reducing car reliance is important. And I know many avid cyclists across Tuggeranong—including Mr Parton, who likes to tell me about how he used to enjoy riding up the Monaro Highway, but with the roadworks at the moment he is putting a hold on things. The investment in the Monaro Highway is going to make it safer and more efficient, and it will make it safer for cyclists as well, so this all goes hand in hand together.

My own dad was an avid cyclist for a period of my childhood. I have seen firsthand the dangers of cycling, when my dad was hit by a car door opening while he was riding his bike home from work one day. He was going down the main street and a car just swung open their door without looking and hit him in the leg; they did not think much of it. What happened afterwards—he could have died. He had a higher chance of dying that night than surviving, because we grew up in a place that did not have good active travel networks. So I know the importance of them, and part of the government's plan is good active travel networks. It goes hand in hand with good road networks.

I have spoken to many cyclists who say part of the reason they do not necessarily like cycling out of Tuggeranong is because of Athllon Drive. They look forward to the

duplication of Athllon Drive because it will change how some of those intersections work, which will make it safer for cyclists to use. And, as I just mentioned, it is the same with the Monaro Highway. With the upgrades to the Monaro Highway, in the future it will be safer for cyclists.

I commend this motion of Mr Werner-Gibblings, because good road networks lead to better public transport getting to our city, and they work well with active travel.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.41): I rise to speak in support of Tuggeranong and in response to a bit of an odd phenomenon that seems to be happening right now. It seems like the ACT Labor government is geared towards voting down an amendment that makes reference to their own transport policy from 2020 and the Tuggeranong district strategy from as recently as 2023.

I can see why Mr Braddock is moving these amendments to include reference to the ACT government's own transport policy, as it pertains to public transport, which is a core part of any transport network. So I am a little confused on Labor's opposition to it, especially after one of their caucus colleagues called for transit-oriented development recently in the Assembly, which was awesome. We loved it!

Why am I very comfortable adding in Mr Braddock's amendments and urging a rebalancing towards public transport as—to reiterate—the government's own transport strategy does? I am comfortable because I live with people who rely on the bus and active travel, and I talk with constituents who rely on the bus and active travel. Maybe, like me, they had to buy a car only when they moved back down to Tuggeranong because they could no longer rely on the buses to get them where they needed to go, like they could up in Gungahlin.

I would stake my claim on the fact that the vast majority of Tuggeranong residents know just how important a good public and active transport system is because you certainly notice when it is not meeting its mark. Look, I am fully aware that, where we are currently, private cars are the solution most Tuggeranong residents have for their transport needs. But the value that Mr Braddock's amendment brings is that it acknowledges that that is not the track we need to stay on in the future.

We are in a climate emergency. Within the transport system, private transport is the highest emitter. There are a lot of people who know this, and the only thing stopping them from, in their words, "Doing the right thing" and taking up public transport, is the lack of focus on access to public transport in Tuggeranong.

I have spoken to a constituent who relies on the 182 bus, for example, a bus that runs only around limited peak hours. They suggested that expanding the times this bus ran would reinforce the arterial route to get people working in Barton and the city, where they needed to go, without the nightmare of parking. Based on their concerns, I wrote to the minister earlier this month calling for a review and consideration of expanding the 182 service, and I do look forward to that response.

And, goodness, heaven forbid you cannot afford a car, like many in my generation if they want to be able to pay their rent—now that the Rent Relief Fund is apparently being cut. Or what if you cannot drive? Let's not forget about the systems that many

Tuggeranong residents use every day and have to rely on.

If we want to empower people to reduce emissions and to stay connected in their community, whether or not they can afford a car or drive, we need to honour these commitments made by this very government to prioritise public transport, cycling and walking.

At this point, I would like to point out that in the budget there are, I think, \$1.3 billion over four years for roads, accounting for about 60 per cent of our transport infrastructure, so I think we are doing all right on the roads front! And, to be clear, I do not think Mr Braddock is seeking to diminish Mr Werner-Gibblings's hard work; I think that is what is missing in this whole debate. He is not calling for a single word of Mr Werner-Gibblings's motion to be omitted.

These amendments are purely additive, and they get on the record that we should do what the ACT government's own transport strategy and Tuggeranong district strategy already tell us we should do, which is to make sure our public transport and active travel systems are a core part of transit infrastructure upgrades and that they are not forgotten about! I do thank Mr Werner-Gibblings for bringing this motion forward. I urge him and everyone else in the chamber to support Mr Braddock's amendments.

**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) (4.45): God help us! I would say, Mr Speaker, that I welcome Mr Werner-Gibblings's motion, and I really do think that the Greens have missed the point. Embarrassingly, I am about to expose their selective quoting and demonstrate exactly why we cannot support their amendments.

Investment to deliver and sustain a fit for purpose and a well-maintained road network to support ACT's growing population is vitally important for Canberra and the broader region, and for the associated infrastructure and investment that we make, including in things like public transport, especially where there are buses.

I know, Mr Speaker, that you queried the first "call-on" in the motion about working with the commonwealth, and you asked if something has changed. Well, actually, yes, something has changed in the last little while, in that we now have a genuine funding partner for major transformational road projects in this city. There is a reason that suddenly we are able to get a lot done and, as you would note, being in Tuggeranong yourself, there is plenty going on.

And I would say, if we want to talk about relevant calls-on, calling on the government to work with the commonwealth government on road investment is a lot more relevant than asking the ACT government to work with the NCA to co-design lighting around Lake Burley Griffin, which is still clearly irking me.

The Albanese Labor government has been engaging with the ACT government with funding that does reflect a genuine partnership. We simply would not be able to do some of the major road investments across our city, easing congestion, improving road safety, expanding access, and opening up new land for housing, without this very partnership model.

It is worth reflecting on the maturity of the Federation Funding Agreement Schedule for land transport infrastructure projects, with the ACT government committing to provide an annually updated infrastructure plan to assist with funding requests and to ensure, as we have seen in the last few years, a continuation of enormous support from the commonwealth government in each of their budgets. This collaboration is ensuring that Canberrans are benefiting from coordinated long-term investment in the infrastructure that supports the city is growth, safety and connectivity.

You just need to look at the key infrastructure projects, such as those in the south, like Athllon Drive—and, yes, it is starting—Molonglo River Bridge and the Monaro Highway upgrades, all being funded fifty-fifty. They are projects which speak for themselves about why they are needed and how transformational they will be.

As part of our budget, the ACT government, again, in partnership with the commonwealth government, has committed a forward outlook of over \$650 million to deliver new and improved roads across the territory. As announced in 2022, we have also significantly increased our road maintenance funding. The strategic road maintenance program is repairing and preserving Canberra's roads for future generations. This is a long-term program, Mr Speaker. One that will see smoother, more resilient roads that result in safer travel and better drivability, meaning Canberra drivers will save on fuel and vehicle maintenance, and cyclists such as yourself will save on having to repair or deal with a flat tyre on places like the Monaro Highway. We will continue to get the job done and support regional growth, road safety, and ensure our road system is fit for purpose.

To go to the Greens amendment, what the Transport Strategy from 2020 actually says is:

In recent years, the ACT Government has recognised the urgent imperative to rebalance investment towards public transport, cycling and walking, taking a future focused approach to building Canberra's transport network and mitigating potential congestion. As the following graphic demonstrates, transport investment is increasing significantly, and we are starting to see a more holistic approach to investing in all modes.

And if you look at the graph on the very next page, you will see that there is investment demonstrating the rebalancing that has occurred that the Transport Strategy is referring to, having been recognised and in place, which does note increased investments in our cycle route network, of course the future stages of light rail, and orbital safety and efficiency upgrades—that is, upgrades in our roads, including the Monaro Highway.

I think the Greens have tried to be a bit too clever by half here, Mr Speaker. We have already got a rebalanced budget when it comes to our investment in road transport. It is a very cute amendment to put, but we will not be supporting it because, ultimately, we have already done it and, secondly, this motion is about roads.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Andrew Braddock  
Jo Clay  
Thomas Emerson  
Laura Nuttall  
Shane Rattenbury

Noes 16

|                |                         |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| Andrew Barr    | Suzanne Orr             |
| Chiaka Barry   | Mark Parton             |
| Peter Cain     | Marisa Paterson         |
| Fiona Carrick  | Chris Steel             |
| Leanne Castley | Rachel Stephen-Smith    |
| Tara Cheyne    | Caitlin Tough           |
| Ed Cocks       | Taimus Werner-Gibblings |
| Jeremy Hanson  |                         |
| Deborah Morris |                         |

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (4.57): In closing, I want to thank all members who have contributed to this debate today, particularly my colleagues Ms Tough and Minister Cheyne, and my colleagues in Brindabella, and Miss Nuttall, and yourself as well, Mr Speaker, for your dissertation on what you have fighting in the Victorian Parliament. It has been, I think, an interesting week. The Greens and the Liberals have found themselves voting side by side quite regularly, but today it seems there still remains an issue or two that does divide them.

Regarding the amendments from the Greens—the motion is about fundamentals and keeping focused on recognising that a fit for purpose and well-maintained road work is not a luxury; it is a necessity for Canberra. It is not about walking away from active travel or goals of reduced dependency on cars. It is not about watering down our commitment to safe, efficient and environmentally responsible transport, whether by foot, bike, bus, light rail, car or any other means.

The government's record speaks for itself. Just look at the new four-kilometre path next to Sulwood Drive, or the upgrades to Athllon Drive and Monaro Highway, both of which will include serious improvements for active travel. What this motion does, as is, is it calls for balance about finding the sensible middle ground, because here in Canberra, no matter your political stripe, the reality is that our people rely on our roads every day.

They are the nurses and hospital staff working night shifts or on-call—like the best partner in the ACT: that is Libby. They are the parents and carers juggling school drop-offs, appointments and work, often on the inefficient windy routes that public transport cannot service efficiently. They are the tradies. They are the construction workers. They are the people who are building our city who need to move tools, materials and equipment to get the job done. The motion is for them. It is for all of us who understand that a strong, inclusive transport system does not pit one mode against another; it brings them together.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

## Papers

### Motion to take note of papers

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

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

## Visitor

**MR SPEAKER:** I acknowledge the presence in the chamber of former MLA and former Leader of the Opposition Bill Stefaniak.

## Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

Debate resumed from 24 June 2025, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR SPEAKER:** I understand it is the wish of the Assembly to debate this bill cognately with executive business order of the day No 3—Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026. I remind members that, in debating executive business order of the day No 2, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of the day No 3.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.00): It is an incredible honour and privilege to address the Assembly this evening to offer a budget-in-reply speech as Leader of the Opposition. I am not your typical politician. I did not go to ANU. I did not spend my 20s as a political staffer working for a politician, and I have not lived my life with my eye on the big political prize, so I actually never expected to be in this position and doing this today.

I am here for one simple reason: the streetlights where I lived were not working. Nobody was bothering to fix them. My local members were not working hard to make sure that the lights were on in my streets, and I thought, “Do you know what? I reckon I could have a crack at this job.” I joined the Liberal Party, and I thought I might be able to do things a little bit differently. As I say, I joined the Liberal Party, I got myself elected, and those streetlights are still working.

As a member, I have come to see that it is not just my streetlights that are not working; this government is not working. It is not delivering for Canberrans, and it is not delivering for our communities. I believe we can do better and that Canberrans deserve better. Just like I got myself elected to the Assembly to get the lights fixed, I plan on getting the Liberals elected to government so that we can get Canberra fixed. Tonight I will offer you my vision for how we do that.

Before we talk about where we need to go, it is important to know where we have come from and how we ended up here. The policies and vision that Labor have today did not spring from a vacuum. They were a response to the challenges we faced when



Andrew Barr became Treasurer and then Chief Minister. Many of us have forgotten how the years after the global financial crisis were years of stagnation. They were years of slow economic and wage growth, after many years of sustained, robust growth.

After five years of this, the community was frustrated and hungry for something better. At that time Andrew Barr seemed to have the answers. He told us that he had an agenda for growth to get us back on track, an agenda based on tax reform, economic diversification and infrastructure investment. I will admit that there was boldness and ambition when he talked about it. But 12 years into this agenda, we should ask ourselves whether the Barr agenda has delivered for the community or just for Labor.

The delivery of this agenda has been underwhelming at best. Labor's plans for economic diversification were never underpinned by a solid plan. Today, its strategy is defined by vague, undeliverable promises about giving back time. That is why they have failed to achieve their goals and why the private sector is a smaller part of the ACT economy than ever before. The exodus of small businesses from Canberra means that the public sector will soon account for 60 per cent of the local economy, leaving us more dependent than ever on commonwealth spending.

Labor's plans for infrastructure investment remain more of a fantasy than a reality, with light rail years behind schedule and other promises more likely to inspire derision than awe. As shown by the business cases that I have forced the government to release, it is clear that these projects have never stacked up, and they never could. Rather than driving economic and productivity growth, they are taking us backwards.

Labor's plans for tax reform have had to be abandoned because of the fiscal pressures borne of years of reckless spending. This agenda only delivered the most mild tax relief, and even that was offset by the scale of tax hikes, with higher rates, fees and charges, and the proliferation of new levies, all of which undermine Labor's goals of improving efficiency and equity.

The delivery of Labor's agenda was underwhelming, and so were the economic results. We were promised faster economic and wage growth but have performed no better than other jurisdictions where governments had no ambitious, big-spending reform agenda. Labor has spent more and more to deliver less and less—the very antithesis of productivity growth that it claimed to be pursuing. The ACT is now worse off than if we never had Labor's reform agenda, and that is all before we consider the consequences for our local community.

The inability to control spending means taxes are higher than they need to be, and that government debt continues to surge, despite those high taxes. The size of the debt means interest payments will consume \$1 in every \$4 that you pay in local taxes next year.

**Mr Hanson:** Shame.

**MS CASTLEY:** It is a shame. This means there is not enough money to properly fund our schools, hospitals and police. The inability to deliver transport infrastructure means congestion is worse than it has ever been.

The burden of local taxes and regulations imposed by Labor means it is increasingly difficult to start and grow a business, meaning empty shopfronts and deserted local shopping districts. The unaffordability of housing means young people and private sector workers are increasingly leaving Canberra, which means it is more difficult and more expensive to find retail workers, hospitality staff and local tradies for home maintenance.

We have become a city where many in our community feel permanently stressed that they cannot have a comfortable standard of living unless they are a public service executive. More and more local families are making the decision to leave, either just across the border to Queanbeyan, Googong, Bungendore and Braidwood, or even further, to Sydney, Perth and Brisbane. We cannot let Canberra be a town where you have to be an executive just to get by or own a home.

These are consequences of Andrew Barr's reform agenda. That agenda might have been justified given the challenges we faced in 2012, if Labor was up to the challenge of delivery. But it was an irresponsible agenda to maintain once COVID hit, and we had the inflationary pressures and the spiralling cost of government debt over the last few years. It is an agenda that fails to recognise, let alone address, the challenges that our community faces today.

Mr Speaker, Labor have failed to deliver, and they have failed to adapt. Worse than that, they have no ability to adapt. There is no Labor leader in waiting—someone in tune with the needs and challenges faced by the community, someone who can provide that large vision and agenda for change. We know there must be ministers vying behind the scenes to be the next Chief Minister, but when was the last time you heard anyone in Labor offer their big vision for Canberra? When was the last time you saw them offer passion for this city and for the work that they do? When have you seen them even admit to the challenges that the territory and our local community are facing?

A vision for a city of half-a-million people is not something that you can conjure up on the walk from party room to the press gallery. It is something that you have to think about and refine for years—something that you have to test with a variety of local people until you are sure you are doing the things that matter, the things that will make the biggest difference for local people and local communities.

None of those opposite have a vision for the future, and none of them have the ability to deliver something different or something better, which means under Labor we are on track for three more years of the same—three more years of waste, three more years of taxes, three more years of neglect, three more years of incompetence and three more years of spin. Three more years where the needs of the community are ignored, if they are even recognised: it is a grim picture.

Mr Speaker, you can see that in the budget that has been handed down this week. It is a budget that did not just fail to deal with the challenges facing Canberra today; it actually made people's cost-of-living struggles so much worse. It failed to deal with the long-term challenges of our city—the structural deficit, the rapidly growing debt burden, the superannuation liability and the ageing population—and it failed to offer

us a vision for a future, a vision for how things could be different or how they could be better. That means this budget and the government have failed on all counts. Canberrans deserve better.

My job as opposition leader is to deliver a Canberra which starts with a clear vision—a vision for where we want to go and what we want to achieve. That vision is a product of many conversations with Canberrans, both over the course of my life here in the ACT and in the last eight months of my listening tour. As part of that tour, I have spoken to hundreds of local people, including visits to Barton, Belconnen, Calwell, Casey, Charnwood, Chisholm, Civic, Crace, Evatt, Farrer, Fraser, Florey, Garran, Gold Creek, Griffith, Gungahlin, Hall, Holder, Hughes, Kaleen, Kippax, Lanyon, Lyneham, Manuka, Mawson, Nicholls, Ngunnawal, Palmerston, Parkes, Rivett, Tharwa, Tuggeranong, Weetangera, Weston, and more.

At those events, I heard about the things that people love about Canberra, the things that worry and frustrate them and the things that they hope for. I heard their raw thoughts on the Liberal Party, and their hunger for an effective opposition and a genuine alternative government.

I understand the challenges and opportunities of Canberra more deeply now than I ever did before. I saw that most Canberrans, believe it or not, are not ideologues or political tragics; they are not looking for radical, transformational change. For most people, a better Canberra means a more affordable city, where public services are accessible and reliable. It is a Canberra with safe streets, clean parks, good schools and fast help when it is needed. This is not just their vision; it is mine, too. It is what I wanted before I got into politics, when I was a single mum raising two kids in Ngunnawal, and it is what I have been working towards since I was first elected. It is not an impossible dream. It is a vision that we can realise if we choose to make different choices.

Labor has an agenda for Canberra, one of grand plans and city-shaping projects, and we see the results of that agenda all around us, particularly in this week's budget. But we can make different choices. We can have different priorities, and we can deliver different results for the community.

My plan is to focus on three things that will make the biggest difference for local people and local families. First, we need to focus on making housing affordable and accessible. I hear about housing more than any other issue. Young people are losing hope that they will ever own a home. Families cannot afford homes that are right for their needs. Parents are worried their children will have to move out of the territory and they will not get to spend quality time with their grandchildren. Many are worried that they are one rent hike away from homelessness. There are choices that need to be changed. Every year I have been here, I have heard Labor promise change on housing, but I have never seen them deliver.

Second, we need to focus on reducing the cost of living. Anyone who spends time in Canberra, different parts of Canberra, will have seen the number of vacant, graffitied shopfronts, from Civic to the town centres and our local shops. It is a clear sign that businesses do struggle in Canberra.

This is not a new story. The private sector has been shrinking in Canberra for three decades, and it is only getting worse, as Labor add to the burden of regulation and taxation on businesses and scare off investors. I do not expect anyone to shed tears for the private sector, but the decline in business investment and competition means less choice and higher prices for families—higher prices when you go to the supermarket, higher prices when you go out for a coffee, a haircut, a medical appointment or new shoes for the kids. This is also a result of choices that Labor has made—choices that need to be changed.

Third, we must focus on improving the quality of public services and making sure Canberrans are getting value for the money from their tax dollars. This is not about cutting jobs or cutting spending; it is about delivering better outcomes for Canberrans. Every one of us in this place knows that our frontline workers—our teachers, the doctors, nurses, ambos, bus drivers and police officers, and so many others—are all doing their best. They are great people caught up in a bad system—systems where frontline staff are stripped of the ability to make decisions, where their input is not sought or valued by ministers and executives, and where they are left feeling disrespected and undervalued.

The number one message I heard from public service workers, particularly those at the front line of service delivery, is about bad culture and poor morale. We cannot fix these systems or improve outcomes until people who make up those systems feel respected, empowered and valued.

Those unhealthy cultures and workplaces are also the choices Labor has made—choices that need to be changed. Whether it is about making housing affordable, reducing the cost of living or delivering better public services, we do have our work cut out for us. There are no silver bullets to fix these problems, and they cannot be solved overnight. But our team is developing reforms that will put us on a pathway to delivering our vision for a better Canberra. Over the next three years, we will progressively release components of this agenda so that Canberrans can see more than just aspirations and election commitments—a true foundation for government and a foundation for change.

It is easy to promise change, but it is harder to show that you are able to deliver it. I accept that there is an obligation on me and on our local Liberal team to prove that we are up to the job of making change and can be trusted to see it through. Trust is everything in politics, and I admit that we have work to do. I do not intend to shy away from that work. I intend to make it the focus of everything I do as opposition leader and, if given the opportunity, Chief Minister.

Here is my plan—the three things that I will do to rebuild trust with the community and earn their consent to form government. The first step is genuinely to listen to the community and respond to their concerns and their priorities. In my first speech as opposition leader in October last year, I committed to travelling around the ACT and to listen to as many Canberrans as I could, and that is exactly what I did.

I want the community to guide us, and to be a genuine partner in our work here. Our whole team is listening to the community and letting them shape the work that we have prioritised this term. Whether it is local issues like phone towers and dog parks,

policy issues like coercive control or stamp duty clawbacks, or matters of principle like integrity and transparency, we are listening to and acting on the community's concerns.

The second step is to be honest and up-front with the community. We will articulate our vision and our reform plans so that Canberrans can have a clear understanding of the changes that we are working towards, how we will deliver them and why they matter. That work begins with this speech, but it will continue for months and years ahead, as we flesh out our vision for Canberra into a reform agenda that will provide meaningful change for every Canberran and every local family.

The third step is delivery. The community expects us to do more than just listen, and to make plans for the next three years. They want us to do the work of achieving real outcomes and to show what we are capable of. I am proud to say that our team is already delivering. This term, we have forced Labor to commit to criminalising coercive control, even though they voted against it last year. We have forced Labor to backflip on the Lanyon dog park. We have forced Labor to wind back their illegitimate policy on retrospectively denying stamp duty exemptions.

We have forced Labor to accept that the Fix My Street app is defective and to have an inquiry to drive improvements, just as we have already done with MyWay+. We have forced Labor to agree to and fund an inquiry by the Integrity Commissioner into lobbying. We have forced Labor to commission an independent inquiry to help thousands of Canberrans stuck waiting for necessary and long overdue surgeries. We have forced transparency on Labor time and time again, with a series of Assembly orders that have led to the publication of hundreds of previously secret documents—documents that Labor actively withheld from the community. We have done this by staying focused on the issues that matter most to Canberrans, and by working with the Assembly to build consensus and to ensure outcomes.

The Canberra Liberals are already delivering outcomes that are improving the lives of Canberrans, even from opposition. In the last eight months, we have delivered more for the community than we have in any term since we were in government. There is a huge amount still to be done, and a huge amount we can only do from government. But we are making a start.

We are doing what we can with what we have, where we are, and that is our plan. We will listen to the community, be honest about our plans and deliver on those plans. This will be my approach in opposition, and it will be my approach in government. It is how we will rebuild trust with the community, so that we can serve them this term and into the future.

As members may be aware, I recently became a grandmother. I find myself thinking more about the future—not just about my future or the future of my kids, but the future of my grandkids, and what Canberra will look like for them. What are the challenges that they are going to face? And what can I do today to help ensure that they are ready to face those challenges? I worry that we are so caught up with issues and challenges of the moment that we are failing to think about those long-term challenges. I worry that we are not doing enough to ensure that Canberrans are ready to face them. As a territory, we cannot go on like this. We must change.

All those years ago, when Andrew Barr took office, the community was frustrated. The government was not responding to the challenges of our community, and they were hungry for change. Once again, the community are frustrated that the government is not responding to the challenges our community are facing, and they are hungry for change. While the opportunity for that change, the next ACT election, is still more than three years away, we must use every minute we can between now and then to build the plans and policies for that future. We have no time to waste.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (5.23): This ACT budget misses the mark. It has missed the mark on where money is being spent and where money is being generated from. This is ACT Labor's first solo budget in more than a decade and it gives us a pretty clear insight into what their real priorities look like.

On expenditure, there are vital areas in this budget like public housing, climate and environment and the community sector that have simply not received the investment that current and future generations so desperately need. On revenue, we see this government seeking to solve its budget shortfalls by increasing costs on everyday Canberrans, rather than generating revenue from those who can, and should, pay their fair share.

A good budget invests in our people, community and the things we need to live well in Canberra. Crucially, it should raise revenue from those who can afford it, like big corporations, before passing on the bill to everyday people. The Greens recognise that we need to raise enough revenue to deliver the services that our community needs. That is why earlier this month we announced a proposal for a big corporations tax, additional payroll tax on the largest organisations in our city, the likes of the big supermarkets, banks and airlines, to raise \$107 million annually to pay for the services Canberrans need. This is a practical, sensible measure, which would help us raise revenue in a progressive way and which more than 99 per cent of businesses would not pay.

Yet, what the government is proposing is the worst of all worlds. Under the euphemism of broadening the base, ACT Labor is proposing a reduction in the payroll tax threshold to \$1.75 million, meaning more small local businesses will pay. Meanwhile, the largest businesses, who reap much higher profits, will enjoy a lower effective payroll tax rate than what was anticipated prior to this budget. This approach will only raise half of the revenue that the ACT Greens' proposal would.

Why would you choose to make small local businesses, who are real engines of growth and who keep their profits local, pay more payroll tax when you could be generating the revenue from the likes of Coles, Woolworths and the big banks. Who in the Expenditure Review Committee thought this was a good choice?

Meanwhile, Labor continues to fund the horseracing industry to the tune of \$8 million annually. At a time when we are being told the government is making hard choices, cutting this subsidy should be an easy one.

This brings me to health funding, which the government has identified is the centrepiece of their budget. Canberrans want, and deserve, high quality health care but

the reality is, getting it is harder and harder. Our health system is clearly under pressure with rapidly growing demand and wait times for specialists well beyond clinically recommended time frames or entirely inaccessible.

We know many hospital presentations may have been avoided by better and more preventative community care, earlier access to specialists and more affordable visits to the GP. We know that patients without access to a dentist are more likely to present at emergency with dental issues or live with chronic pain. We encourage ACT Labor to join Greens calls to bring dental into Medicare, because this would hugely assist bridging this gap in health outcomes.

We regularly hear the health minister reference the failure over a decade of the federal Liberal government to invest in primary health care. That is true. But after a full term of an Albanese Labor government, has there been much change? The ACT Treasurer is pointing to a lack of federal funding for health and the federal health minister has publicly responded, denying the claim. With a federal Labor government and a minority Labor government here in the ACT, there needs to be a stronger negotiation between the two levels to ensure the ACT gets its fair share. It is about time the two Labor parties work together to sort this out.

The ACT Greens also remain concerned that Labor is relying too heavily on shiny buildings without equal efforts in primary care, effective systems and investment in a positive workplace culture for ACT Health. Labor's ongoing failure at both the territory and federal level to invest in preventative health is costing all of us. ACT Labor needs to advocate to federal Labor colleagues to ensure that promises to increase bulk billing actually deliver for Canberrans.

This budget has proposed a \$250 health levy on all Canberrans through their rates bills, a regressive levy which does not take account of people's ability to pay. Not only is this levy unfair, but it passes on the failures of both territory and federal Labor to create a truly universal health care system. Today, I am announcing that the ACT Greens will oppose this unfair health levy in its current form. We simply cannot vote for it as it is in the appropriation bill.

It is regressive and it is unfair and a folly on which the Treasurer needs to reflect and change. This levy does not reflect the kind of city we want to build and so we call on the government to go back to the drawing board and come up with something more progressive. The ACT Greens' solution of the big corporation tax, which only the top one per cent of businesses would pay and would raise double the amount generated by this levy, is the solution we would call on the government to adopt.

If we want to call ourselves a truly progressive city, we need to ensure everyone has access to safe, affordable and comfortable housing. This is why the Greens have introduced a bill to make housing a human right. Increasing numbers of Canberrans are being priced out of the housing market and our public housing waiting list is sitting at over 3,000 people.

It is a backwards step to see the Rent Relief Fund, a program which I introduced as minister in a Greens/Labor government, now being cut out by a Labor minority government. A program which has helped more than 1,400 vulnerable households

maintain their tenancy and would likely prevent many from ending up on the 3,000 long public housing waitlist. The ACT Greens' role in holding the balance of power is to push back against the government when we think they are making the wrong call. With 17 organisations sharing their fears about what will happen if the Rent Relief Fund is cut, this is precisely the time we need to push back.

It is baffling that the government appears to have only committed to build 85 new public homes and 55 social homes in this budget. While they are small steps towards increasing affordable housing for rent and purchase, we know this simply will not meet urgent need. We took a call of 10,000 public homes over the next decade to the election precisely because we know that the need for adequate housing is great and this requires a transformative approach.

Even Labor finally adopted a policy to deliver 5,000 additional public, community and affordable rental properties by 2030. Yet in this 2025-26 budget we see a commitment of just 140 additional properties and just under \$5 million set aside for a plan. So it lacks credibility that Labor is even serious about meeting their own target. Instead, the budget provides incremental solutions which look like they will never meet demand. You just need to look around the city to see that many people are homeless and many more are less visible, living in precarious or unsafe housing situations.

When it comes to climate and environment, there has been no significant uplift in funding for our decarbonisation agenda or to protect our natural environment in this budget. Yes, the ACT is a leader in decarbonisation but there is plenty more work to be done and we cannot rest on our laurels. Our health is intrinsically linked to the quality of the environment in our region, from the air that we breathe to the water we drink and the diversity of nature. All of this requires investment.

Last year spending on the environment, climate change and sustainable development represented only three per cent of the budget. This year, proportional funding for environment, climate and sustainable development has dropped to only two per cent. Funding for actual biodiversity protection and habitat restoration represents even less, at a fraction of one per cent. How long must we hear that we are in a biodiversity crisis? How many species will go extinct before we accept that what we are doing is simply not enough?

And while we are talking about crises, the next climate change strategy should begin in 2026 and is nowhere to be seen with no preparations visible. I would have liked to have seen more in the budget to indicate where Labor intends to go on climate action and mitigation without Greens in the cabinet. The former ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment wrote in her foreword to her *Close to the edge* report tabled in the Assembly on 15 May this year:

Maintaining the same approach and rejecting reform is – without doubt – tacit acceptance of and contribution to the biodiversity crisis.

She went on to say:

... government spending on the environment at all jurisdictional levels is meagre



and demonstrably inadequate.

Sadly, these words are now even more true than when they were written. If Labor wants to show they value biodiversity and if they want to stop species going extinct and restore ecosystems, this cannot happen without a fundamental shift in our policy and our environmental funding landscape.

We welcome the desperately needed funding to save the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon from extinction, which came after extensive pressure from environment groups and the Greens. Now, call me cynical, but after watching former Environment Minister Rebecca Vassarotti struggle to get environmental business cases through cabinet, it was fascinating to see money readily made available for the earless dragon breeding to facilitate the Canberra Airport being able to develop a road through dragon habitat.

It is hard not to worry that this funding will merely ensure we have a few earless dragons behind glass at the Melbourne Zoo so our great-grandchildren can still marvel at this incredible species long after they are extinct in the wild. As the commissioner said, maintaining the same approach is a tacit acceptance of, and contribution to, the biodiversity crisis and I see no change in the approach in this budget.

There is a long list of environmental projects that a Greens budget would have prioritised. They include proper funding for strategic long-term land use planning, habitat restoration and weed management, an overhaul of our offset policy, stewardship payments for farmers' conservation efforts, funding to actually deliver a plan to phase out wood heaters and an uplift in funding for the environmental organisations and volunteers who do all the hard conservation work for government.

I note that revenue from the Water Abstraction Charge has increased to \$42 million this year, its highest level ever. Yet we see a collapse in expenditure compared to recent years in spending on: Healthy Waterways projects; the funding for catchment management; re-naturalisation of our storm water drains; and the creation of urban wetlands.

When it comes to bold strides, we would have liked this budget to include a bigger emphasis on public and active transport. With transport producing 65 per cent of all ACT greenhouse gas emissions, the government must concentrate more of its energy on improving the public and active transport system to make it a more viable and convenient option for more Canberrans.

Light rail is the big public transport success story of the past few years. It delivered a step change in ridership, bringing 40 per cent more people to public transport compared to buses. To make a serious dent in climate change and wellbeing, ACT Labor need to work with the commonwealth to make light rail a funding priority and roll out the benefits to Woden, Belconnen and beyond, sooner. We have said many times, and will continue to say, that the current timeline is just not fast enough. The government can, and should, be planning future stages while they are building current stages.

Sadly, the bungled roll out of MyWay+ is the big story of Labor and public transport

this term. I wish I could be more optimistic, but I do not see much ambition on public transport this term. This is frustrating and it is disappointing for Canberrans. We need greater focus and investment in our public transport system if we want it to be a genuine, convenient and viable option for more people across our city.

Many cities globally have made great strides in getting people to use active transport, but we lack the cycle network to have seen that big shift here. The ACT has a full cycle network planned, we just need to invest and build it. Labor's investment is simply insufficient to make the step change that we need.

When it comes to the community sector, the Treasurer and the budget have made some limited commitments to the community sector. These will provide a little breathing space for some, but the sector provides essential services for many vulnerable Canberrans and has suffered significant underinvestment.

Back in 2009-10, the ACT government invested \$130 million in the community sector representing 3.6 per cent of the territory's total budget, which at that time stood at \$3.7 billion. By 2022-23, despite the ACT's population growing by 29 per cent over that period, the share of funding allocated to the community sector had fallen to just 2.5 per cent of an \$8.28 billion budget. That shift represented a 30 per cent reduction in real terms.

To maintain the same level of support as in 2009-2010, an addition \$62 million would have been required in that year alone. Instead, this budget offers just under \$10 million over two years, spread across 150 organisations. We will continue to make the case to ACT Labor that an investment in the community sector is crucial for wellbeing across the city, as well as reducing pressure on the health system.

There are also many individual Canberrans who make invaluable contributions to our city and our people. Volunteers provide countless hours of free labour, often providing vital services which would otherwise have to be paid for. So thanking them with an \$11 charge for a Working With Vulnerable People card seems callous and short-sighted. If the problem is that more people are applying for the card than need it, why not revisit the application process to help filter out those that do not. That would help stem the demand and the cost of processing applications for government.

Canberra is a great city to live in. A great city that is home to many federal public servants who do really important work on behalf of our entire country. It is with that in mind that ACT Labor must also ensure that Canberra gets its fair share of national funding.

The Treasurer has recognised that over 40 per cent of the workforce in the ACT is exempt from payroll tax because they are employed as public servants. This is far above the national average. Given the constitutional hurdles preventing us from changing this exemption, the ACT should be getting a better deal from the federal government in recognition of the significant proportion of the APS workforce that calls Canberra home.

These people are, after all, working on behalf of the whole country and we need to see advocacy from the Treasurer and the Chief Minister to ensure that Canberra gets a

fairer share. The conditions could not be better. As I touched on earlier, a majority Labor government on the hill, a minority Labor government here in the ACT with Greens in the balance of power, Greens who will support this push and who always want a better deal for Canberrans.

We Greens have been pushing ACT Labor to work harder on their federal colleagues. Harder because getting the ACT's fair share of the national pie is a much better option than a regressive \$250 health levy, a tax on small businesses rather than big corporations, or an \$11 blanket charge for volunteers who need Working With Vulnerable People cards.

The benefit of a small government such as the ACTs is that lessons from one part of government should be quickly applicable to another. The nearly \$80 million write-down on the ACT government's HR system is a failure of government that lessons should have been learnt from. But with \$378 million expected to be spent on the Digital Health Record against the originally budgeted \$213 million, and the ACT Auditor-General finding that services were being paid for that had not been received, one wonders whether any learning is happening.

As of March 2025, Transport Canberra and City Services overspent \$8.5 million on its digital projects and look at the results we are getting from those digital projects. MyWay+ was rolled out with a litany of bugs and errors with scant regard for protecting the data of its users, and still is not working as it should, particularly to the detriment of patrons with a disability and other challenges. If you hear people say that all ICT projects overrun, a landmark 2025 study by Oxford University shows out of more than 5,000 government projects it studied, ICT projects overran 41 per cent of the time, lower than almost all other infrastructure projects. That means most run to budget, which rarely seems to be the case in the ACT.

As a jurisdiction we could instead be allocating these funds to building public housing, to mitigating and adapting to climate change and to the environment. The heart of this problem is that a complacent ACT Labor do not seem to be learning from their mistakes. Together with my ACT Greens colleagues Jo Clay, Andrew Braddock and Laura Nuttall, we will keep seeking to hold Labor to account, so that they do so.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, Canberrans deserve better than a budget that lets the biggest corporations off the hook while asking everyday Canberrans to pay more; volunteers to fork out; renters to go without; and the community sector to do more with less. They deserve climate leadership backed by action, not the quiet dismantling of successful schemes. They deserve clean transport options that are convenient and reliable; the right to a home that is comfortable and affordable; and a healthy environment that sustains us all.

The ACT Greens have put forward clear, costed alternatives: a big corporations tax that would raise more, hurt fewer and fund what matters. A commitment to real housing solutions, not just modest targets. A focus on health prevention, not just buildings that you can have a sod-turning at. And serious investment in our natural environment because there is no wellbeing without care for the climate and nature.

We do not accept that this budget is the best we can do and as the balance of power party in this Assembly, it is our job to push the government to do better. So, we will keep pushing for more, keep pushing for better, more fairness, more ambition. That is what Canberrans elected us Greens to do, and that is what we ACT Greens will keep doing, for the city and future we can all believe in.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Statements by members**

### **Youth homelessness**

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (5.45): This 90-second statement has been prepared for me by an amazing work experience student from Brindabella Christian College, Abhinav, who we have been lucky to have join our team during this very busy week. Encouraged to focus on whatever he felt strongly about, this is what he prepared.

Youth homelessness in the ACT is a prevalent issue within society. Currently, 400 young people aged 12 to 24 in our community are experiencing homelessness—a 13.7 per cent increase since 2016. While the ACT's youth homelessness rate of 52.3 per 10,000 remains comparatively low nation-wide, the number is rising. This reflects systemic issues that drive housing and security in our territory.

The government's \$18 million investment in expanding specialist homelessness services will not address this. We must embed early intervention programs within schools, healthcare networks and community services. At the same time we should also aim to empower frontline organisations with the necessary resources. This will ultimately shift the focus from crisis response to structural change.

Youth homelessness in the ACT is not an inevitability, but a policy failure we have the power to correct. Let us ensure that every young person in our territory has access to a safe, stable and supportive home.

Thank you to Abhinav for that speech.

### **Asylum seeker programs**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (5.46): My speech has also been written by a work experience student in my office, Saima, and I thank her for another sterling speech.

Australia has a proud history of providing resettlement for refugees. Since the end of World War II, we have successfully settled almost a million asylum seekers into our country. People seeking asylum require information and support on a wide range of topics, including food, emergency relief, financial assistance and more. We are fortunate to have programs that address these very issues, yet we cannot guarantee the effectiveness of these programs without additional funding for this essential service.

In the 2025-26 ACT budget, the government continued some support for asylum seekers, but it did not meet the funding requested from the Acute Rental Support Coordinating Committee. This group of frontline organisations provides essential services, such as emergency housing and case management. Without adequate

funding, these programs cannot operate at full capacity, leaving gaps in support for people facing significant hardship.

Without these programs, we leave thousands of asylum seekers in our country without any aid. These people will no longer have support to overcome physical, mental, social and economic challenges. We must fund these programs. Without them, Australia, and Canberra, risks losing its identity as a compassionate and welcoming nation.

*Discussion concluded.*

## **Ms Celeste Italiano—retirement Statement by Speaker**

**MR SPEAKER:** I want to make a few brief remarks—and I know she would rather that we did not—to mark the impending retirement of the amazing Celeste Italiano.

Celeste joined the office of the Legislative Assembly in 2004. I have not known the Assembly without Celeste here. She had previously worked at the commonwealth House of Reps for 14 years, and she has been working with us for 21 years, although she did undertake a brief secondment for six months to work in a commonwealth minister's office.

For those who are not sure what Celeste does, she does everything, but among her many tasks is to edit the questions on notice that members lodge, as well as your notices of motions. During her time here, she has produced 697 notice papers and edited—count them—10,516 questions to make them: (a) intelligible; (b) more hard hitting; and (c) importantly, comply with the Assembly standing orders.

Celeste has achieved much during her career. Her contributions to the effective and efficient operations of the office of the Assembly and to support MLAs and their offices cannot be overstated.

I will mention three other significant achievements in Celeste's time here. In 2015 and 2016, she was the linchpin of the project to refurbish this building in order to accommodate the expansion of the Assembly from 17 to 25 members. Her contribution to that project, which was delivered on time and within budget, was a tremendous achievement, and we have all benefited from the way that this building and the OLA offices in the North Building are configured and structured.

Celeste was pivotal to both the first and second editions of the Assembly's *Companion to the Standing Orders*. For the second edition, she was assistant editor, and those publications are also a legacy of her time here.

I think her greatest achievement has been in guiding everyone—guiding successive Speaker's offices. My chief of staff is adamant that she would have resigned by now if Celeste was not here. She has kept the office's executive management committee in line, as well as keeping track of the Clerk of the Assembly—which is tough—who she has worked with on and off since 1988.

This week Celeste became a grandmother again, and I know she is looking forward to seeing more of her three grandchildren in the future. I also hope, with all of my heart, that although this is the end of a chapter, it is not the last that we see of her in this building.

On behalf of all members, I would like to thank Celeste Italiano for her significant contribution to this place and extend our best wishes for the future.

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Ms Celeste Italiano—tribute**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.51): There is one benefit to this MGB role, and it is this one. I was not aware that Ms Italiano was retiring, and I wish to put on the record the government's appreciation of the extraordinary job she has done. She is always calm and always has an answer, even when curly questions are put forward. She has been such a mainstay and a comfort, and so reliable.

Mr Speaker, I do not think that your chief of staff is the only one who might have quit, if it was not for what Ms Italiano has done to make us all feel so welcome and so supported, and to have accommodated us. I appreciate that the changes to the ministry in 2018 made it even more difficult. I am enormously grateful, on behalf of the government, to Celeste Italiano. We will seriously miss you, and please feel free to come back whenever you like.

## **Australian Red Cross Lifeblood—donations policy**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.53): I rise to welcome the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood's announcement of significant and much-campaigned-for changes to blood and plasma donation rules which will make the donation process more inclusive and accessible for members of our LGBTQIA+ community.

Current donor rules in Australia have prevented gay and bisexual men and transgender women who have sex with men from giving blood or plasma if they have had sex in what is known as the deferral period. In 2017, I raised the need for blood donation reform in the Legislative Assembly, advocating for an individual risk-based approach that would reduce the deferral period, noting that gay men in long-term monogamous relationships are at lower risk of HIV transmission, so consideration should be given to treating them differently from people who are engaging in more risky behaviour.

In April 2018, I moved a motion which was supported by the Assembly calling for the

elimination of all deferral periods for plasma-only donations, in line with the policy in France, and considering a greater role for individual risk-based assessments in the blood donation process.

In 2021, we saw some change, with the deferral period reducing from 12 months to three months. I am now pleased to say that this month Lifeblood has announced that, from Monday, 14 July this year, Lifeblood will remove most sexual activity wait times for plasma donations. In further good news, the Therapeutic Goods Administration has also approved a move to gender-neutral sexual activity assessments for blood donations—a shift expected to be implemented next year.

As the Chief Minister has often remarked, sometimes reform to achieve equality does not happen overnight, but persistence gets it done. This announcement is the result of years of hard work by researchers, health professionals and LGBTQIA+ advocates who have pushed for donation policies grounded in evidence and fairness.

I want particularly to acknowledge current health minister Rachel Stephen-Smith and former minister Meegan Fitzharris for their persistent advocacy, supported by the Victorian health ministers. Chief Minister Andrew Barr was also a key advocate, notably moving platform changes in 2018 at Labor's national conference.

I want to acknowledge local community advocates, including Ky Ruprecht and Connor Lynch, who have petitioned for blood donation reform. Lifeblood should also be applauded for making blood and plasma donation more inclusive and accessible to as many people as possible, whilst maintaining the safety of the blood supply. I also commend the Therapeutic Goods Administration officials for working with and approving Lifeblood's proposed reforms.

Management of donated blood to ensure the integrity and safety of the supply is more complex than people realise, but improved technology and Lifeblood's extensive work on safeguards have made this pathway possible. These commonsense changes are world leading and will enable tens of thousands of Australians to make a contribution to Australia's blood supply, which Lifeblood says is at a critical time, with rising demand for plasma in Australia's hospitals.

I will be jumping in the chair following 14 July, and I encourage all Canberrans to consider donating blood or plasma. To book a donation, go to [lifeblood.com.au](https://lifeblood.com.au) or call 131495.

## **Education—civics**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (5.56): I would like to read a speech to the Assembly prepared by a young woman doing work experience who spent some time in my office this week. She has been such a delight, and I thank her for choosing my office.

Ms Neeliya Gunawardana has prepared a speech around civics education, and Neeliya asked me to read it. When the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority assessed proficiency in civics earlier this year, it found that students in year 6 showed 43 per cent awareness in civics education, while students in year 10 showed around 28 per cent awareness. This is an abysmal decline. The evidence

showed that older students were less proficient, yet they are the ones getting closer to voting age. It is the lowest level since testing began two decades ago. Ms Gunawardana is calling for Australian civics education, which dates back to 1994, to be reincorporated into the Australian and Canberra curriculum.

Ms Gunawardana speaks from experience when she notes that Canberra public schools had slight mention of civics in primary school and little to no opportunity from then on. Other states give more opportunity than the ACT and, as the home of the federal parliament, the ACT must do better.

Neeliya urges us not to have this just as an elective. She has asked that we do not have it vary across the levels of curriculum. She says that the curriculum should be unbiased and informative. Its purpose is to lay out the facts for students and let their values, morals, personality and individual intersectional identity take over from there.

In this mandatory class, its sole purpose should be to serve the young people and help them to navigate and understand government law, the social contract and what it means to uphold it. What it means, though, for a seemingly complex system of ideas is a crucial life skill. I refer also to voting, financial literacy, saving, and investing in jobs and skills, to help navigate interviews.

Implementing mandatory civics education is increasingly urgent in this contemporary society, so that people can quickly think about and decipher the silent but heightened challenges of artificial intelligence, myths and disinformation. Civics education should also help in sustaining our democracy. With society only getting further and further polarised, children are seen as passive participants, which is the wrong mentality, and we must act to mediate that.

Future generations are quite literally being raised by social media. Youth are trapped within echo chambers of political messaging, feuding incels and furthering harmful rhetoric. In schools, our young are concerned about racist, homophobic, sexist jokes which become normalised, prevalent and dangerous, and they do not fully understand what kind of inadvertent mindset this perpetrates.

The facts must be taught in order to have respectful conversations and challenge our opinions. We need to learn how to hear concerns from minorities. After all, Ms Gunawardana says, that is what democracy is about. This is an example and a standard that we must set here. It is high time to set that standard also in our schools.

## **Budget**

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (6.00): This will be my last speech that I give in this Assembly before, god willing, my family welcomes its newest member, who should arrive any day now, unless she is anything like her brother and prefers to come fashionably late. Clearly the excitement of budget week was not enough to entice her to come into the world sooner!

I did want to take this opportunity to acknowledge all the working mums and dads in our community. One of my biggest motivators for putting up my hand to represent the people of Brindabella at the last election was because I wanted to help working



families get ahead. I wanted to do my small part to make the lives of Tuggeranong families better, to advocate for their right to be safe, prosperous and free. There are many ways to do that. But in our current cost-of-living crisis, that means reducing financial pressures on families struggling to make ends meet, improving housing affordability and delivering local services and infrastructure that families rely on. I believe this is worth fighting for because I believe that families are the bedrock of society. When families prosper, society is better off.

What I did not know in those final days of the campaign was that I would soon be growing my own family. The weekend after I was elected, I learned I was pregnant, and you can just imagine the range of emotions that came with that: excitement, disbelief, joy and, if I am a little bit honest, a bit of apprehension too.

As a working mum, and for my husband—a very hands-on working dad—every day is full. Some mornings you feel like you have lived a whole day before you even get to work: washing, folding, feeding children, tears, cuddles, kisses, outfit changes, cleaning up messes, wrestling your child into their car seat. Other mornings, you feel like you have achieved a lot just to get out of the door, and you reassure yourself that the breakfast dishes and the washing can wait until another time. It is beautiful madness, and I would not exchange it for anything else, but it does strengthen my belief that in the busyness of life, the government should be reducing pressures on families, not piling it on. That is one of the reasons why I am concerned about the budget that the government handed down this week, because I fear it is a budget that will drive many Tuggeranong families into deeper financial hardship and stress.

This budget hits Canberrans with a billion-dollar tax bill, and in answering questions about the budget in question time today, the Chief Minister said he believed the cost-of-living crisis for many Canberrans was over. I would encourage the Chief Minister to come to Tuggeranong and speak with the families and local businesses in our community there, because I can tell you that most of them will say the cost-of-living crisis is far from over.

Most Tuggeranong families cannot afford a \$5½ thousand tax bill, which this budget promises to impose. Families that I have spoken to, many of them on two incomes, simply cannot afford such steep increases. Some have told me that, after they have paid the bills and they have paid the mortgage, they have to eat two-minute noodles because that is all they can afford. This budget will hurt too many families and drive more people into financial hardship. Families should not be lumped with eye-watering bills to cover this government's financial mismanagement.

My family is very excited to meet our little girl, and we do not have much longer until that moment comes. In this precious, sacred moment that we are about to enter into, I am reminded of why I am here and what I am fighting for: for a community that I want my children to grow up in, where working families can get ahead and where they do not have to struggle through every waking moment just to make ends meet; and for a community where families can be safe, where they can be prosperous and where they can be free.

### **Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (6.05): Recently I had the honour of meeting with members of the Armenian and Greek communities who reside here in Canberra. They spoke of a deep history of trauma passed down through generations of their families and of how they are seeking recognition that the events that afflicted their ancestors did happen.

Let me start in this place by speaking some of the truth about what happened 110 years ago to these people. In the early 20th century, the Ottoman Empire executed a deliberate plan to ethnically cleanse the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek peoples. The Ottoman Empire was fearful of an enemy within and potential threats from neighbouring countries like Russia.

Over a million Armenians were sent on death marches, leaving a place they had called home for more than three millennia, Anatolia. They left for the last time. On these death marches, the Armenians were deprived of food and water, and subject to robbery, rape and massacres.

At the time, it was common to see mass graves of victims alongside the road they were forced to march on. This ethnic cleansing of the Anatolia region continued against the Assyrian people, and Greek people as well, paving the way for an ethno-nationalist Turkish state.

Between 1915 and 1923, approximately 2.5 million people were killed in the course of this genocide. This story is horrific and painful beyond imagination. Pain is not something that is just felt in the moment, or even in the immediate aftermath. It lives through survivors and those who come after them. It changes history forever. Yet governments around the world have not recognised that these atrocities did happen. The ACT government is among them.

Today I am calling on the government to do the right thing by Armenian, Assyrian and Greek communities here in Canberra and across the world. I am calling on the ACT government to recognise the genocide perpetrated against these people and the enduring legacies to this day.

The legacy of this genocide is not just limited to descendants of those who were persecuted by it. As historian Stephan Ehrig identified, this genocide informed those to come. The Nazi regime viewed post-1923 Türkiye as a post-genocidal paradise. They studied its methodology and incorporated it into the horrors of the Holocaust.

If we remember these atrocities, name them for what we know them to be, genocide, and contemplate their legacies, we are less likely to see them happen again. In silence, genocide finds a friend. Without recognising the atrocities faced by the Armenian and Greek communities, we are forcing them into a perpetual state of unrecognised mourning.

Human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson, AO KC, identified in his book, *An Inconvenient Genocide*, that in fact and in law, this was a genocide. I hope this Assembly will, in this term, recognise the genocide against the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek peoples.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.08 pm until 2 September 2025 at 10 am.**

**Questions without notice taken on notice****Environment—wood heaters and wood stoves**

**Ms Orr** (*in reply to a question by Miss Nuttall on Wednesday, 25 June 2025*):

The Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) is a body of work to be progressed in this term of government. Consultation with the community and industry will be a necessary and important part of this process. In preparing for the RIS, the Government engaged a consultant who completed an Air Quality Assessment for the ACT in October 2024.

**Budget—environment**

**Ms Orr** (*in reply to a question by Ms Clay on Thursday, 26 June 2025*):

\$4.5 million in new funding was announced pre-budget for the conservation of the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon.

\$0.488 million is comprised of previous unspent ACT Government and Commonwealth Government funding. \$178,000 is from the unspent and non-ongoing FTE funding. The remaining \$310,000 comes from unspent and non-ongoing Commonwealth funding.

I note Question No. 451 asked about the funding amount announced in May 2025 for this budget initiative and that the response to that question may be considered inconsistent with the information as outlined in this question.

Regarding any inconsistency, the first question was framed in the context of differentiating “new” and “existing” funding. For clarity all new budget initiatives are considered as “new” funding.

The Member asking both questions may choose to classify the funding components as outlined in this question and “new” or “existing”, however, as noted above, this budget measure is a new budget initiative the funding associated with it is “new” funding.

**Budget—lakes and waterways**

**Ms Orr** (*in reply to a question by Miss Nuttall on Thursday, 26 June 2025*):

The \$177,000 in the budget announced for continuing the Healthy Waterways projects for Lake Tuggeranong and Office of Water staff, will not be used for capital works for the ‘Reconnect old creek line’ project at Tuggeranong Homestead.