



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

16 September 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 **Wednesday, 1 October 2025**.

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Tuesday, 16 September 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.

Absence of Clerk

Mr Speaker informed the Assembly that, due to the absence of the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk would act as Clerk.

Government projects—business cases and benefit-cost analyses—order to table documents—update

Pursuant to standing order 213A, the resolution of the Assembly of 24 June 2025 and the determination of the Independent Legal Arbiter, the Clerk presented the following papers:

Copy of disputed returned documents—Decision of the Independent Legal Arbiter—

ACT Government projects—Business cases—Order to table—Assembly resolution of 24 June 2025—Redacted returned documents (10 folders).

Road projects—benefit-cost analyses—order to table documents—update

Pursuant to standing order 213A, the resolution of the Assembly of 24 June 2025 and the determination of the Independent Legal Arbiter, the Clerk presented the following papers:

Road infrastructure projects—Business cases—Order to table—Assembly resolution of 24 June 2025—Redacted returned documents (2 folders).

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Roads—safety—Charnwood—petitions 34-25 and 60-25

By Ms Clay, from 13 and 24 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly: Cartwright Street in Charnwood is a spine for many people in the community. It is a high pedestrian area connecting Charnwood-Dunlop School and Charnwood Preschool to Brindabella Christian College and Charnwood Shops. Many people use it as a more direct route to access the shops and Florey Drive. Currently the road is 50km/h with a school speed zone enforced at Cartwright Street and Bettington Circuit.

Everyone deserves to move around our streets safely. Current research from the University of Adelaide, presented to the ACT Government, recommends reducing speed limits in school zones to 30km/h to reduce the risk of injury or death in a collision with a pedestrian. We shouldn't have to wait for an accident to happen in this high pedestrian, residential, school area before safety measures are implemented.

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

- Lower the street zone on Cartwright Street and have measures in place to ensure slower speeds are adhered to make conditions safer and calmer for everyone whether they are walking, bike riding or driving.
- Permanently lowering the speed limit to 30km/h on Cartwright Street, Charnwood.
- Install traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, chicanes and/or other measures along Cartwright Street, Charnwood to help enforce the speed limit.

Ainslie—Wakefield Gardens proposed community hub—petition 33-25

By Mr Emerson, from 634 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the currently unoccupied property at 91A Wakefield Gardens in Ainslie.

Our community strongly supports revitalising this site to create a vibrant community hub. The site, which has been vacant for many years, is zoned for community use. Making it a great candidate for a sustainable living hub, incorporating features such as a community toolbox, lending libraries, repair cafes, and training spaces for practical skills like bread-making, urban farming, and seed saving.

Additionally, the site could be made available for hire to support a wide range of

artistic and creative activities, fostering local talent and cultural engagement. Located just behind the Ainslie shops, this site is perfectly situated to serve as a focal point for community engagement. It has already generated significant enthusiasm and support from local residents eager to see it revitalised. While our community values the site's heritage significance, our top priority is ensuring it is actively used by, and for, the community, given its prime location and potential to become a key community asset.

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

- Fund and plan a community hub at the 91A Wakefield Gardens site.
- Consult with local community members about the best use for the site.
- Set a commencement date for the reactivation of the site.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

By Ms Carrick, from 272 and 785 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly safety concerns about the entrance to Amberfield Village in Weston Creek, at the intersection of Cotter and Fryer Roads. Safety is paramount. Cotter Road is a busy 80 km/h arterial road. The closest safe pedestrian crossing to Fryer Road is an underpass 900 metres walk to the east. The closest bus stop is at Kirkpatrick Street, 1.3 km to the west.

Daily vehicle movements in and out of Amberfield Village are projected to rise rapidly as more residents move in and staff are engaged, bringing increasing danger to cyclists and turning vehicles. The installation of a traffic light with controlled pedestrian crossing at this intersection will provide increased safety for pedestrians and road users, as well as facilitating access to the bus network for Amberfield Village residents.

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

- install traffic lights at the Cotter Road intersection with Fryer Road
- install bus stops on both sides of Cotter Road near the Fryer Road.

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

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

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25

By **Ms Cheyne**, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 11 September 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Morris concerning Point Hut dog exercise area.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2025 about ePetition (027-25) titled *Keeping Point Hut dog exercise area open to the public as an approved off-leash facility*.

Pursuant to Standing Order 100, this response addresses the ePetition.

On 21 June 2025, I issued a Media Release to confirm that the popular off-leash dog exercise area at Point Hut will be retained, following extensive community consultation and ecological assessment. The Media Release addresses the matters raised in the ePetition.

The Media Release is available at:

https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/cheyne/2025/clarity-and-certainty-delivered-for-point-hut-dog-exercise-area

I trust this information is of assistance.

Motor vehicles—left-hand drive vehicles—petition 48-24

Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 11 September 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cain concerning registration of left-hand drive vehicles of any age.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2025 concerning petition E-PET 048-24 regarding the registration of left-hand drive vehicles of any age.

At this stage, the Government has no plans to amend the *Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Regulation 2000* and associated vehicle standards to provide for the registration of left-hand drive vehicles of any age as proposed by the petition.

Primary responsibility for determining what vehicles may be used on public roads resides with the Commonwealth Government. The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication, Sport and the Arts manages the import and provision of vehicles to the Australian market.

Within these arrangements, there are some vehicles that are not required to be in a right-hand drive configuration. This is limited to vehicles having features that limit the practicality or number of vehicles provided for use in transport in Australia. These circumstances include special purpose vehicles, evaluation vehicles, vehicles imported under Status of Forces Agreements, vehicles older than 25 years old, vehicles produced in low numbers and vehicles imported as personal effects.

The petition states that the Northern Territory permits registration of left-hand drive vehicles. A review of NT Government information bulletin 'V48 – Imported vehicles – low volume' indicates left-hand drive is only available for older vehicles, Special Purpose Vehicles, vehicles in Australia temporarily by arrangement with the Commonwealth and vehicles imported as personal effects. This represents a small component within the vehicle fleet. There is no general arrangement in place for registration of newer left-hand drive vehicles.

In reviewing arrangements for left-hand drive vehicles across Australia, all jurisdictions have an age minimum of at least 25 years for left-hand drive vehicles not covered by exceptional circumstances. Western Australia does have a provision for vehicles older than 15 years if the vehicle is exclusively for personal use. This age limit would still be affected by the Commonwealth 25-year age minimum importation requirement.

Although some other countries permit a mix of left hand-drive and right-hand drive vehicles, arrangements of this type are typically undertaken nationally.

In a road network set up for right-hand drive vehicles, left-hand drive vehicles represent a more challenging driving task, with some tasks made more difficult by a left-hand drive seating position such as overtaking and lane changing, lane keeping, line of sight at intersections and use of ticketing machines. International research indicates that 'off-handed' vehicles are overrepresented in vehicle accidents.

As with many vehicles imported through concessional arrangements by parties other than the vehicle manufacturer or their Australian agent, there is a risk that a left-hand drive vehicle would not be supported for repairs, warranty, spare parts or safety recalls by the manufacturer or their local agent and subsequently may also be more expensive to insure.

The petition states that there are greater numbers of left-hand drive vehicles produced than right-hand drive vehicles. The petition does not make it clear if there are any types or specific makes or models of vehicles that are not manufactured in right-hand drive that have particular benefits not covered by similar models currently available in Australia. It is unclear on what basis an economic, consumer or environmental benefit would come from permitting a larger number of left-hand drive vehicles to be used on roads in the ACT.

While I know this is not the outcome the petitioners were hoping for, I trust this information is useful.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Roads—safety—Charnwood—petitions 34-25 and 60-25

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.04): I would like to speak to the petition for safer streets in Charnwood. This petition came from one of our concerned community members. He is a long-term resident of Charnwood. He is a father and he is a former traffic controller, and he believes we need more traffic-calming measures to make our streets safer for everyone to use. That is a belief that is really strongly shared by the ACT Greens, and we are very supportive of this petition that I am tabling today.

His particular concern is Cartwright Street. It is a high-traffic pedestrian area connecting Charnwood-Dunlop School and Charnwood Preschool to Brindabella Christian College and Charnwood shops. A lot of people use this as a more direct route to access the shops and Florey Drive. Currently, that road is 50 kilometres per hour, and there is a school speed zone enforced at Cartwright Street and Bettington Circuit.

Everyone deserves to move around our streets safely. Research from the University of Adelaide presented to the ACT government has recommended reducing speed limits in school zones to 30 kilometres per hour. That really reduces the risks of injury or, heaven forbid, deaths in a collision with a pedestrian. But we should not have to wait for an accident to happen in any area, particularly areas like high-pedestrian residential school areas before we implement safety measures.

That is why the petitioner is asking for lower speed zones and for the installation of traffic-calming measures in the area. We all have a duty to elevate the voices of our community into decision-making processes, and to bring them into parliament to inform government policy and programs, and I am really pleased to be able to bring this petition to the parliament and to the attention of my colleagues today.

I am hoping that government thinks about this very carefully and that we get a great outcome for the community.

Ainslie—91A Wakefield Gardens—petition 33-25

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.06): I wanted to speak to the Wakefield Gardens petition and the real potential for this site behind Ainslie shops, which has been vacant for a long time. There is a huge amount of community interest in what could happen there, and a massive amount of potential as reflected not only in the signatures on this petition, but also in the work that has been already put into developing a vision for what can happen at Wakefield Gardens.

Since Canberra's inception as a garden city, shared green spaces have been key to creating healthy working and living environments across our nation's capital. Neighbourhood parks like Wakefield Gardens were always intended as the beating hearts of our suburbs where community members could come together and enjoy "further time at Wakefield Gardens, healthy fresh air, recreation and contact with nature".

As our city grows and densifies, we really need to remain proactive in cultivating these welcoming public spaces beyond home and work, where people can connect. Research

from across the country shows just how important these places are and how impactful things like community gardening can be for people's health. We are seeing greening projects emerge across the ACT, where communities reclaim their shared public spaces—and there is a strong sense within the inner north community especially that Wakefield Gardens can, and should be, part of this wider renewal.

There has been a working group that has come together around the potential three-stage revitalisation of Wakefield Gardens, including the building which is the subject of this petition—but not limited to that building.

There is a strong interest in a community garden and urban farm there in Wakefield Gardens, to make use of what has become probably an underutilised space. There is also interest in a community hub at the building at 91A Wakefield Gardens, which has been vacant since Winnunga was relocated 20 years ago. There is a lot of potential there and interest in Aboriginal service delivery out of that site for sharing of sustainable living skills, and also the provision of spaces for hire at low or no cost to community members. Third, there is an opportunity for nature play like what we have got now in Haig Park, which has been a fantastic addition there and would be welcome by many families, especially those with young children for whom the current playground in Wakefield Gardens is a bit too advanced.

I just wanted to quickly acknowledge some of the community members that I have been speaking with and working in pulling together a bit of a vision for this area. Mitch Porteous has been involved from the beginning; Fiona Buining from Ainslie Urban Farm; Charlie Blumer who works on the Ainslie Peace Garden on Foveaux Street; Amy Blain who brought this petition forward and has been an interested Ainslie local on this matter and many others; Matt Brown from the Yarning Time group of First Nations inner north community members; and Rob from Quest Architecture who has also worked on some ideas and proposals.

Just last week, on Friday, I hosted a community forum in Ainslie which was well attended—again, not just about the building that is the subject of this petition, but on the gardens more broadly. We had over 30 people there talking about what could happen here, and expressing an interest in being involved in that.

I wanted to thank Mr Rattenbury for attending, and Ms Stephen-Smith for having a representation from her office. It was a really collaborative conversation. It just showed, I think, huge potential for what can happen when community and governments work together. And hopefully that is what emerges here, such that what does happen with this building is on the back of the government's consultation which has been announced, which I really welcome—it is such fantastic news.

I already know that the minister had a strong interest in this site, not just as the responsible minister but also as the Member for Kurrajong. We are fortunate to have her in that position. This is a great opportunity for the precinct, and I look forward to participating in that consultation and seeing this project progress forward.

Ainslie—91A Wakefield Gardens—petition 33-25

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

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.10): I will speak very briefly on the petition that was sponsored by Mr Emerson and established by Amy Blain. I thank her and Mr Emerson for bringing the petition to this place.

I have long had an interest in the building at 91A Wakefield Gardens. Previous ministers would know that there has been a regular knocking on the door over the last few years to say, “What’s happening? Any decisions? What’s going on?” Unfortunately, members would be aware that, even prior to the fire that occurred there on 19 August, it had been identified that the building itself was unlikely to be able to be reused for a community purpose and would likely need to be demolished as a result of the state of the building and some hazardous materials in situ.

With respect to the building itself, there is an exclusion area following the fire, and it will need to be demolished. I welcome the community conversation about the future of this site and Wakefield Gardens more broadly. I think this is an opportune moment to have that conversation with the community. Public servants have done quite a lot of work on what the potential future of that site might look like, and it definitely comes down to wanting to have that conversation about community use for this space.

Some really great ideas have been brought forward in this petition. I am sure that there will be other great ideas captured by both Mr Emerson’s engagement with the community and the government engagement, which will open shortly. We will look forward to getting further ideas from the community. We will have more to say about that shortly, but we are really keen to work together collaboratively across the Assembly to deliver a good outcome for the people of Ainslie and the inner north.

Ainslie—91A Wakefield Gardens—petition 33-25

MS LEE(Kurrajong) (10.12): I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this petition to the Assembly. It is a petition that has been signed by over 630 Canberrans, led by local resident Amy Blain, who I have also had a chance to engage with. It calls on the government to fund and plan a community hub at the 91A Wakefield Gardens site, consult with local community members about the best use for the site, and set a commencement date for the reactivation of the site.

I note that the ACT government has finally committed to undertake community consultation on the future of Wakefield Gardens, and I note Ms Stephen-Smith’s comments just now as well. If I were a cynic, I would say that maybe they have been shamed into doing this. Regardless of that, it is a welcome development after all these years.

The local community have been very active for years in trying to get the government to breathe new life into the building. They could see its potential as a vibrant, multipurpose community hub that builds connections and supports the local community. Of course, sadly, we all saw the fire in the building a few weeks ago, which was incredibly disappointing.

I want to put on the record that I did put some questions to the minister on the plans for the property during the recent budget estimates, and I was very concerned by the minister’s response, which was:

The building structure at 91A Wakefield Gardens has been identified as not fit for occupation due to the hazardous materials contained within the building, including asbestos containing materials and lead paint that pose a significant safety risk.

My understanding is that, when authorities were questioned about the fire and the possible presence of dangerous materials, including asbestos, they confirmed publicly that it was not present. Media articles from 2019—going back several years now—detailed the government’s efforts to clear the property of asbestos and, in fact, confirmed that those works had been done.

Whilst I welcome the government finally moving on this issue, it is incredibly important, not just for the people of Ainslie but for people in the broader inner north and the ACT, that the minister is up-front and clear about why the property has been left vacant for 20 years and explain the inconsistent advice that has been provided to the public, on the one hand from the minister and on the other hand from fire officials, in relation to the presence or not of dangerous materials, which has been cited as the reason why the building had been left vacant for so long.

Once again, I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this petition to the Assembly, and for his office’s ongoing efforts in consulting with the community on Wakefield Gardens. Let us hope that we finally get what the community has been asking for, for many years.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.15): I rise to speak to the Amberfield petition, which is primarily about the safety of residents accessing the Cotter Road. I would like to recognise the strong advocacy of the Connecting Amberfield Task Force in collecting over 1,000 signatures for this petition and acknowledge that we have members of that group in the gallery this morning. Thank you for coming.

Amberfield village is a large seniors living complex, home to 560 residents and supported by over 400 staff. Access to Amberfield village is via Fryer Road, which comes off the busy, 80-kilometre-an-hour Cotter Road at an uncontrolled intersection. With up to 1,000 people onsite daily, not counting care workers, visitors, contractors and service deliveries, residents estimate that there will be up to 3,000 vehicle movements in and out of Fryer Road every day.

Residents are regularly witnessing dangerous situations. There has been a collision with a safety barrier, cyclists have had near misses, and drivers have had to deal with poor sight lines compounded by blinding sun glare at either end of the day. One Amberfield resident told us:

I am 85 years old and have been driving since 1966. I am naturally cautious and obviously lucky I have never been involved in an accident. Now, as a resident of Amberfield, I am fearful every time I exit Fryer Road onto Cotter Road.

This intersection is a planning failure and a black spot in the making. There are also no safe pedestrian or public transport connections for residents. The closest pedestrian crossing is an underpass 900 metres to the east, but there is no path along the north side of Cotter Road to access it. The nearest bus stop is 1.3 kilometres from the village in

the other direction—again, with no path. Another Amberfield resident has described their experience as follows:

My husband and I arrived in Amberfield last October. When we arrived, we were prepared to put up with some inconvenience with regard to transport, but not the isolation we have experienced. My husband lost his licence soon after we moved in and I also do not have a licence because of medical issues. We did not expect to find a complete lack of public transport, especially as the local government has been aware for years that a large community for aged people was to be established.

This is not just about convenience; it is about safety, dignity and inclusion. I understand the importance of traffic flow. However, safety must always be the higher priority. If they are sequenced with other traffic lights on the Cotter Road, a set of traffic lights at the Fryer Road intersection should have minimal impact on traffic flow.

I would like to thank Mr Cocks for his support. I commend to the Assembly the request of more than 1,000 signatories to this petition, and I urge the government to take remedial action now to ensure the safety of residents and to install permanent traffic lights with a controlled pedestrian crossing and bus stops.

Ainslie—91A Wakefield Gardens—petition 33-25

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.10): I will speak very briefly on the petition that was sponsored by Mr Emerson and established by Amy Blain. I thank her and Mr Emerson for bringing the petition to this place.

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With respect to the building itself, there is an exclusion area following the fire, and it will need to be demolished. I welcome the community conversation about the future of this site and Wakefield Gardens more broadly. I think this is an opportune moment to have that conversation with the community. Public servants have done quite a lot of work on what the potential future of that site might look like, and it definitely comes down to wanting to have that conversation about community use for this space.

Some really great ideas have been brought forward in this petition. I am sure that there will be other great ideas captured by both Mr Emerson’s engagement with the community and the government engagement, which will open shortly. We will look forward to getting further ideas from the community. We will have more to say about that shortly, but we are really keen to work together collaboratively across the Assembly to deliver a good outcome for the people of Ainslie and the inner north.

Ainslie—91A Wakefield Gardens—petition 33-25

MS LEE(Kurrajong) (10.12): I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this petition to the Assembly. It is a petition that has been signed by over 630 Canberrans, led by local resident Amy Blain, who I have also had a chance to engage with. It calls on the government to fund and plan a community hub at the 91A Wakefield Gardens site, consult with local community members about the best use for the site, and set a commencement date for the reactivation of the site.

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I want to put on the record that I did put some questions to the minister on the plans for the property during the recent budget estimates, and I was very concerned by the minister's response, which was:

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Whilst I welcome the government finally moving on this issue, it is incredibly important, not just for the people of Ainslie but for people in the broader inner north and the ACT, that the minister is up-front and clear about why the property has been left vacant for 20 years and explain the inconsistent advice that has been provided to the public, on the one hand from the minister and on the other hand from fire officials, in relation to the presence or not of dangerous materials, which has been cited as the reason why the building had been left vacant for so long.

Once again, I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this petition to the Assembly, and for his office's ongoing efforts in consulting with the community on Wakefield Gardens. Let us hope that we finally get what the community has been asking for, for many years.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.15): I rise to speak to the Amberfield petition, which is primarily about the safety of residents accessing the Cotter Road. I would like to recognise the strong advocacy of the Connecting Amberfield Task Force in collecting

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Amberfield village is a large seniors living complex, home to 560 residents and supported by over 400 staff. Access to Amberfield village is via Fryer Road, which comes off the busy, 80-kilometre-an-hour Cotter Road at an uncontrolled intersection. With up to 1,000 people onsite daily, not counting care workers, visitors, contractors and service deliveries, residents estimate that there will be up to 3,000 vehicle movements in and out of Fryer Road every day.

Residents are regularly witnessing dangerous situations. There has been a collision with a safety barrier, cyclists have had near misses, and drivers have had to deal with poor sight lines compounded by blinding sun glare at either end of the day. One Amberfield resident told us:

I am 85 years old and have been driving since 1966. I am naturally cautious and obviously lucky I have never been involved in an accident. Now, as a resident of Amberfield, I am fearful every time I exit Fryer Road onto Cotter Road.

This intersection is a planning failure and a black spot in the making. There are also no safe pedestrian or public transport connections for residents. The closest pedestrian crossing is an underpass 900 metres to the east, but there is no path along the north side of Cotter Road to access it. The nearest bus stop is 1.3 kilometres from the village in the other direction—again, with no path. Another Amberfield resident has described their experience as follows:

My husband and I arrived in Amberfield last October. When we arrived, we were prepared to put up with some inconvenience with regard to transport, but not the isolation we have experienced. My husband lost his licence soon after we moved in and I also do not have a licence because of medical issues. We did not expect to find a complete lack of public transport, especially as the local government has been aware for years that a large community for aged people was to be established.

This is not just about convenience; it is about safety, dignity and inclusion. I understand the importance of traffic flow. However, safety must always be the higher priority. If they are sequenced with other traffic lights on the Cotter Road, a set of traffic lights at the Fryer Road intersection should have minimal impact on traffic flow.

I would like to thank Mr Cocks for his support. I commend to the Assembly the request of more than 1,000 signatories to this petition, and I urge the government to take remedial action now to ensure the safety of residents and to install permanent traffic lights with a controlled pedestrian crossing and bus stops.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

MR STEEL(Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.18): On 29 January 2025, I met with residents of Amberfield village on the Cotter Road to discuss a variety of matters, including the request for potential traffic lights at the Cotter Road entrance to Amberfield, and the provision of bus stops and other associated services.

It is great to hear from the residents about their needs. It is important to note, in the context of the petition that has been presented to the Assembly today, that this development occurred in a designated area; therefore it was the responsibility of the National Capital Authority, in terms of the planning approval for the project. As a result, the Transport Canberra and City Services input was not as thorough as it perhaps would have been if the development application had been made on territory land, which would usually be considered as part of a development application process. However, the Crown lease for blocks 1151 and 864 Weston Creek—as these do fall within the Weston Creek district—states:

That the Lessee shall pay to the Territory any and all reasonable costs associated with any upgrade to Cotter Road to enable adequate access to the land upon its redevelopment for use as commercial accommodation, community facility, scientific research establishment or tourist facility ... Such upgrade/s shall be carried out in accordance with a traffic study prepared by a suitably qualified person at the cost of the Lessee. All reasonable costs and expenses incurred by the Territory in carrying out the work on behalf of the Lessee shall be paid by the Lessee to the Territory on demand and from the date of such demand until paid shall for all purposes of this lease be a debt due and payable to the Territory by the Lessee ...

The Crown lease clause included within the planning report submitted as part of the works approval application has been confirmed by the City and Environment Directorate. Of course, we will be looking very closely at what the impacts would be for the broader Cotter Road corridor. I know that Minister Cheyne and the City and Environment Directorate are doing some work at the moment. They are undertaking some traffic modelling to look at what the impact would be if an intersection that signalised was added to the road network, particularly for traffic flow, which is, obviously, busy during peak times, coming out of the Molonglo Valley.

It is something that the government will consider, but it is important to note that, in any consideration, LDK will have to make a contribution to improvements to the corridor. That is something the government will further consider as part of the response to this petition. There may be benefits from providing a signalised intersection, but there are also broader considerations that we need to think about for the whole traffic network.

The designated area is the responsibility of the NCA. I think this goes to show the importance of the federal government working with the ACT government around planning matters, so that they can be well planned, particularly from a traffic perspective. It is important that a proper traffic analysis is undertaken. If that requires these sorts of improvements to be made, they should be made with the development, not after the development, at the cost of the broader community. There should be a contribution from the developer.

We will be looking further at this traffic corridor to understand what the impacts are, before having further conversations with LDK, and indeed the federal government, about what opportunities there might be to improve safety. I know that Minister Cheyne is looking at some of the earlier opportunities to improve safety that may not involve, in the short term, a signalisation of the intersection, to address some of the issues raised by the petitioners.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.23): I would also like to speak in support of the Amberfield petition and acknowledge the petitioners in the gallery today. I thank them very much for their very considered advocacy on this matter.

I have had multiple meetings with members of the community out at LDK and I have had lots of advocacy through emails around this issue. I definitely respect the fact that it is a challenging intersection and that Cotter Road, being an 80-kilometre-an-hour road, has fast-moving traffic. In particular, turning right out of the intersection is very tricky.

I would like to thank Minister Steel and Minister Cheyne for their work on this to date. I look forward to working on a solution to this issue. In particular, I hope there can be an intermediate-type solution that can be progressed to make the area a bit safer while more analysis is done around the traffic lights and bus stops.

I would like to welcome all the new residents at Amberfield. We have hundreds of new residents coming into the Murrumbidgee electorate, which is fantastic. It is a beautiful position and place. I look forward to working with the residents there over the coming years to support them.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

MR COCKS(Murrumbidgee) (10.24): I am very pleased to have worked with Ms Carrick in the early stages around this petition. It was very nice to walk in here this morning and see some of the friendly, familiar faces from Amberfield village. It was quite some months ago that I first sat down at Amberfield and heard about the types of issues that residents there are facing.

There is a really important point to note in this discussion. I was going to talk about some other things; but, after the minister's speech, it is very important to note that the residents of Amberfield have attempted to do the right thing at every turn. They have brought this petition only after extended advocacy, going out and doing their own modelling, their own designing, and trying to find a solution.

As Mr Steel attempts to buck-pass to the commonwealth government and the developers, it is very important to acknowledge that LDK have very clearly indicated that they are open to making financial contributions. The only reason that this petition has become necessary is that, at every turn, residents of Amberfield have not felt heard and the government has not shown any clear indication or commitment to getting the problem fixed.

Dr Paterson: That is not true.

MR COCKS: The sentiment you will hear, when you go out and talk to people at Amberfield, is that they do not feel heard. It is only when a government pays attention to the residents in the area that it can actually address the problems.

Labor ministers may not like the fact that it got to this point, especially when it is their electorate that we are talking about, but that does not change the path that it took to get here. This is, very clearly, a growing problem. The traffic problems on that road have been growing, and predictably so. It is a planning problem. It was very clear from the outset that there would be traffic problems on the Cotter Road. It was clear when the Molonglo Valley planning was first initiated. It was very clear when the planning and development around this particular development happened. But the government did not get ahead of the game, the same as it has not got ahead of the game in Woden, it has not got ahead of the game in Weston Creek, and it has not got ahead of the game in the Molonglo Valley. It has failed to do so.

People across Canberra count on the government to deliver changes and improvements ahead of problems emerging. Once again, Amberfield in this case is an example of where the government has failed to do that. People across Canberra, and people, clearly, in Amberfield, have a right to expect better.

Roads—safety—Cotter Road—petitions 43-25 and 59-25

MR BRADDOCK(Yerrabi) (10.28): I will talk very briefly, in the couple of minutes that are remaining in the debate on petitions. I, too, would like to support the Amberfield petition. I had the benefit of meeting with the lovely residents there, talking through the issues and walking up and down some of the areas affected.

What I would say is that these residents are just looking for an outcome. They want to see a safer intersection. They want to be able to access the active travel network that attaches to Curtin and other surrounding areas. They want to be able to move around their local neighbourhood. They do not want to see a passing of the responsibility between different levels of governments or attacks on governments. Let us work together to achieve an outcome for these lovely people.

Ainslie—91A Wakefield Gardens—petition 33-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.28): I want to speak briefly about the petition around Wakefield Gardens. I want to reflect on the community enthusiasm. I was grateful to be invited by Mr Emerson to the event that he held last Friday at Ainslie shops to bring the community together to canvass their ideas. It was terrific to see the level of community enthusiasm. Members of the community were very conscious of the changing climate and the need for climate adaptation. They were keen to build a sense of community and provide low-cost ways for members of the community to come together and participate in joint activities. People had different ideas. I am sure they will come through in the submissions that will be made to the government process.

I was intrigued to hear the minister reveal that the government consultation process had not actually started last week, which was surprising, given I heard the minister on radio last Wednesday or Thursday morning talking about the consultation process. I cannot recall the last time a consultation process was announced before it actually started. The timing probably had to do with the event that was taking place from Mr Emerson last Friday.

Overall, I look forward to the outcomes of this process. I want to acknowledge the community enthusiasm for it. I think it reflects very well on the Ainslie community and surrounding areas.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Proposed Amendment to the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026— Select Committee Report

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.30), by leave: I present the following report:

Proposed Amendment to the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026—Select Committee—
Report—Inquiry into the Proposed Amendment to the Appropriation Bill 2025-
2026, dated 12 September 2025, including additional comments (Ms Carrick),
together with a copy of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the first and final report of the Select Committee on the Proposed Amendment to the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026. The Assembly established the committee on 3 September 2025 and tasked it with tabling a report on the amendment to the appropriation bill that provides funding to finalise the Calvary Public Hospital acquisition settlement by 15 September 2025.

The committee held hearings with Rachel Stephen-Smith, the Minister for Health, as well as officials, on 8 September 2025. The report contains three findings and examines matters related to the timing and mechanism used to appropriate funds for the payment, as well as communicating this to the media and the public.

Considering that this inquiry took place over 12 days, I would like to thank everyone involved, particularly Minister Stephen-Smith and her officials, for their engagement at such short notice, and Hansard and broadcasting for their efforts during what is already a busy period. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the committee—Ms Carrick, Ms Tough and Mr Rattenbury. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I would like to make a few personal comments on both the report and the process, and on exactly where we find ourselves today, because this is not a great example of good planning or good process. The committee did its best with what it had to work with. We had an amendment to an appropriation bill that landed immediately after the conclusion of the estimates process, the re-establishment of the estimates committee, in effect, and consideration of an amendment to an appropriation when it seemed clear that the government did not know how it was even going to process the payments in the first place.

The committee was forced to contend with a lack of information throughout hearings. Clearly, officials had not yet had the opportunity to work out exactly how things were

going to work, because we were still receiving information that contradicted what we were hearing in the hearings after the report drafting had been commenced. Indeed, during the final meeting of this committee, we were still receiving information on how the actual financial transactions were going to be processed.

There was not the capacity for this committee appropriately to consider what the real impact on the budget is. It was not clear how, for example, the interest was going to work in this case. The minister said, absolutely clearly, that this would be funded by debt and it would have an impact on interest.

It seems that the pressure over the interest bill might have had an effect, because, at some point between that statement and the delivery of the final information we needed, the government changed the process. Suddenly, instead of accruing more debt, they were going to use cash that the government already had on hand, and reduce the amount of interest.

The impact on the bottom line is the same. But the fact that the government did not know what it was doing is, frankly, astounding. The whole process has just felt chaotic. Yes, things need to be sorted out with Calvary, and the process needs to be final. That is clear. But they have come into a process at the eleventh hour, dropped this in front of the Assembly and expected everyone to deal with complete unknowns. Again, Canberrans just deserve better.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.35): I would like to support Mr Cocks's comments. I was so concerned about the lack of transparency in this process that I included additional comments to the report to that effect.

I was concerned that the directorate did not provide the 2025-26 budget addendum until after the hearings. This removed the committee's ability to ask the right questions about the transaction in the addendum to the budget, leading to a lack of transparency. During the hearings, we were told that the \$65 million required for settlement of the Calvary hospital purchase would come from borrowings and attract interest payments.

When we received the budget addendum, we found that the \$65 million payment would come from deposits and reduce interest receipts. We asked questions in the hearings about the wrong transaction. There were other transactions—\$89.6 million from the central provision, which had a \$26.6 million asset component, neither of which I could find in the 2025-26 budget addendum.

The committee did not have the appropriate documents at the hearings, so it was unable to scrutinise the transactions thoroughly and ask the right questions. This is a concerning lack of transparency.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers—order to table—update

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.37): I seek leave to present, pursuant to the Assembly resolution of 4 September 2025, extracts of the ACT government's Project Business Case for a New Materials Recovery Facility, from

which I quoted during question time in the Assembly on 4 September 2025, and to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS CASTLEY: I present the following paper:

ACT Government—Project Business Case—New Material Recovery Facility.

I want to briefly speak about what has occurred, in case members do not appreciate the absurdity of what has occurred here. I, as the Leader of the Opposition, have just tabled a government document, a document that was tabled in this place last sitting week as a result of a government motion. The government are so inept that they do not even know what they have tabled. They are so inept that they have ordered a member to table a document that the government themselves tabled just two days prior to the question time where this was raised. They are so inept that they need an order of the Assembly to access their own documents.

I repeatedly referenced the document, a business case the government drafted, considered in cabinet and tabled in my questions. If the government wanted to see it, why didn't they ask their officials for a copy? Why didn't they consult their own cabinet records? Why didn't they just check the tabled papers register. Why didn't they email the clerk? As I said, it is an absurdity, from a government that have lost control of the Assembly, lost control of the budget and, seemingly, lost control of themselves.

What compounds the absurdity are the lectures we have had to endure from the Chief Minister about how the Assembly's use of 213A is not what he intended when the standing order was introduced and the lectures about how we should use FOIs or questions on notice or some other tool that really just enables the government to avoid transparency and avoid accountability. But here we see the very same government using a 213 motion to access its own files.

So let me ask the Chief Minister: was that the intended use of the standing order? Was it created so the government could access its own documents from the opposition rather than its own agencies and officials? I would say probably not. Did the government try to get the document through other means—perhaps through FOI or questions on notice or even a walk down the hall? No, it did not. Did the government even try searching through their own files or the Assembly's share folders to see if they already had a copy? No, of course they did not.

This is a government that is addicted to using high-sounding principles to get what it wants—but to avoid proper scrutiny and accountability—and then abandoning those principles when they get in the way of what Labor wants. It is a government that thinks it can control and dominate everyone and everything and is merciless about eliminating whatever obstacles or people stand in the way.

It is a government that is happy to withhold information from the community during an election campaign about the potential collapse of a health system. It is a government that is slowly falling apart as the consequences of more than a decade of mismanagement, incompetence and spin hit home, including underfunded services—

including education, health care, community safety and community services; never-ending tax hikes; a budget deficit last year that was the largest in the territory's history, followed by one this year that was the fifth-largest in history; an interest bill that is already eating up one-fifth of the territory's tax revenue; and two credit rating downgrades in three years as our assessed budgetary performance falls from strong to very weak. Canberrans deserve so much more than what they are getting from this government.

So, Mr Speaker, I have now tabled the document that has already been tabled so the government can see a document they themselves created. I hope this is helpful.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of government Business, Attorney-General, minister for Human Rights, minister for City and government Services and minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.41), by leave: I appreciate Ms Castley's commentary that this is absurd. It is just unfortunate that she appears to have missed the media release that Minister Steel and I put out on the afternoon of 4 September, which was reported on in the *Canberra Times*. The headline was: "Canberra Liberals can't read a business case".

The reason that I sought, under standing order 213, for Ms Castley to table what she was quoting from is that anyone who was watching question time that day would have noted that there was an air of bewilderment—at least from me, if not from all ministers who were getting questioned, given that Ms Castley was referring to a \$230 million figure, about which, on the facts of it, I could not understand where on earth that was coming from. A closer review, once Ms Castley fully revealed the page number, showed us that the Canberra Liberals had actually cherrypicked figures to create a narrative that had no basis.

The business case actually shows that, once built, the MRF will generate significant revenue from recovered materials, with the actual cost difference over the project life cycle being closer to \$25 billion, not \$230 million. Further, this does not take into account that, by the end of the life cycle, the ACT will have effectively purchased its own facility that is contractually required to remain operational for at least another five years.

So, Mr Speaker, it was absurd—do not worry; I felt a little bit silly having to ask—but it revealed that, despite their desperation to access and release ACT government business cases via standing order 213A, once they get the business cases, the opposition cannot actually understand them.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.43), by leave: The minister has just raised a number of points and, sadly, in the main, she is incorrect. It is completely untrue the claims that Labor has made about errors in what we were discussing. It is dangerous to accept Labor's spin on this matter.

If you look at gate fees, which are basically the charge for using a recycling facility, they are higher with the ACT government facility than using interstate facilities. Think about that for a second. We will be paying more to use the facility that we are helping to build. That is borne out by some of the other numbers in the report. If we built the facility ourselves, we would pay interest at the government's bond rate, which the

business case puts at 5.2 per cent. But, by having another party bill it on our behalf, we have to cover their interest costs as well as a profit margin to make it viable for them. The business case, on page 67, says that this effectively means an interest rate of 16 per cent, which is captured through higher gate fees paid by the territory to the private entity. So 5.2 per cent versus 16 per cent; that is triple for the privilege of not carrying the debt on our books.

We can also consider the number of additional costs the ACT incurs from building the facility here: a capital contribution of \$16.5 million, not to mention an additional \$11 million from the commonwealth; the depreciation costs; the staffing costs; the operating costs; and the education costs. We know that this project is a dud because the economic evaluation says so. In very clear language, the benefit cost ratio is 0.37. That means the community is 63c worse off for every dollar that goes into a project. In the business case's own words, on page 73—just so the minister knows exactly where we are looking—the project does have some economic benefits, but they do not outweigh the costs of the project.

The Chief Minister has tried to spin this as meaning that the project failed to generate a profit. But that is not what economic evaluation is about. Lots of public projects stack up without a profit. Look at the Molonglo River Bridge, which has a ratio of 1.42, or the strategic walking and cycling connections. Neither of these are tolled facilities but they both deliver benefits to the community—the types of projects the government should be investing in.

I make these points just to point out that Labor are again resorting to spin and misdirection. They are so focused on trying to imply things about us that they are failing to understand their own documents, as Ms Castley pointed out. These economic evaluations are an important consideration for the government. They ought to be properly informing not just the government's thinking but also general debate in this place and in the community.

What we are seeing with a government that has to, for some reason, ask for tabling of their own documents—who cannot do their own homework and go and find the information themselves—is, again, a chaotic government who do not know where they are going. All we have got left is more spin.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Report 3

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.47): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 3—Inquiry into the Civil Law (Wrongs) (Organisational Child Abuse Liability) Amendment Bill 2025, dated 12 September 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the third report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. The Civil Law (Wrongs) (Organisational Child Abuse Liability) Amendment Bill was presented in the Assembly on 25 June 2025 and referred to the committee. The committee resolved to inquire into the bill on 1 July 2025. The bill proposes to expand vicarious liability in the ACT in direct response to the High Court's decision made last year in *Bird v DP* (a pseudonym). It expands the definition of "employee" to include an individual who is akin to an employee or who is associated with an organisation.

The committee received 20 submissions and made one recommendation: that the bill be passed by the Assembly. The committee also noted issues of uncertainty raised in submissions regarding the definitions in the bill, particularly the terms "akin to an employee" and "individuals associated with an organisation". Under the Assembly's standing orders, the government is required to respond to the committee's report within four months of tabling.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all those who made submissions to the committee. I thank the members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbings and Mr Rattenbury, and I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 9

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.50): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 9, dated 9 September 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings and corrigenda to reports 8 and 9—

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report No 9 contains the committee's comments on three bills, three proposed amendments to bills, 159 pieces of subordinate legislation and two government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Report 2

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.51): I present the following report:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—

Report 2—Inquiry into the effectiveness of transparency arrangements for Members of the Legislative Assembly – Interim Report, dated 9 September 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the second report of the Standing Committee of the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for the Eleventh Assembly. The Assembly requested the inquiry in its resolution of 9 April 2025, and the committee adopted an amended terms of reference on 21 May 2025. The committee received 13 submissions, including useful information from parliaments across Australia and New Zealand.

This interim report makes four recommendations and one finding. The committee will forward to the ACT Integrity Commission’s inquiry into lobbying activities in the ACT and will consider results of that inquiry as well as the topic of members’ staffing allocations when preparing its final report.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who took time to write submissions, in particular the Clerk of the Assembly and clerks of several Australian and New Zealand parliaments, for their significant contribution to this inquiry. The committee will issue a final report in due course. I thank the other members of the committee: Mr Andrew Braddock MLA and Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA. I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.52): I would like to make a few comments on this report. I begin by thanking my committee colleagues, the Chair, Mr Cocks, and Mr Braddock for their collegiate and serious approach to the reports tabled today. I also send my sincere thanks to the secretariat for their, as always, tireless work in supporting the committee in the production of this report.

The committee has made a finding that no compelling case has been made for the publication of non-executive members’ diaries, and that is a finding that I accept. But I also, for my own, say that, with equal conviction I am not persuaded that any compelling case has been made against such publication either. Transparency is not about spectacle; it is about substance. It is about ensuring that the decisions we make, the meetings we attend and the priorities we set are visible to those we serve. It is about demystifying the work of politics and making it accessible, understandable and accountable.

Accordingly, to promote the principles of transparency and accountability within the ACT Legislative Assembly, principles that undermine the trust our constituents place in us, I will commence publishing my diary on a quarterly basis, backdated to the first quarter of 2025, and respecting the specific exclusions that apply to ministerial diary declarations. I understand my Labor colleague Ms Caitlin Tough will be doing the same. I commend her for her commitment to openness and encourage all non-executive members who share these values to join us, because it is a signal that we are willing to be held to account, that we are proud of the work we do and that we believe the public has a right to see it. This is not a grand political gesture; it is a modest and meaningfully

democratic step. It is a point of light and one of many, I hope, that will shine on the work of this Assembly and illuminate the daily efforts we undertake on behalf of the people of Canberra.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Policy—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.55): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1 January 2025 to 30 June 2025, the Standing Committee on Social Policy considered a total of six appointments and reappointments to the following bodies: the Restricted Medical Treatment Assessment Board; the University of Canberra Council; and the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies. I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—
11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 30 June 2025.

Racism

Pursuant to standing order 128, Mr Pettersson fixed Wednesday, 17 September 2025 for the moving of the motion.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026]

Debate resumed from 26 June 2025, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR SPEAKER: I remind members that in debating order of the day No 1, executive business, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of the day No 2.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.56), in reply: The 2025-26 budget continues the government's track record of making investments that both balance the need to improve our fiscal position while recognising the need to deliver high-quality services and support initiatives that meet the most significant needs in our community. In this context, the record funding provided in the 2025-26 budget will support our worldclass health system in response to very extensive and unanticipated demand and cost pressures.

We are also investing in broader reforms and investments to support our growing city, which we now know will grow to 700,000 by 2050, according to the latest population projections from Treasury. That is why we are making investments in housing,

including community and social housing, and addressing housing affordability. We have taken additional steps to support the most vulnerable in our community, including further investments in community safety and support.

Our economy continues to perform well despite global uncertainty. Growth is expected to be broad based, with household consumption and private investment returning to long-run growth averages. Wages are still forecast to grow faster than inflation and, as real wages continue to grow, cost-of-living pressures are expected to ease, reducing pressure on ACT households. Over the last two years, employment has been growing faster than the population and remains above its long-run average. Our unemployment rate continues to be the lowest of all Australian jurisdictions, and employment is forecast to continue this strong trajectory over the forward estimates.

The budget continues our focus on the delivery of our strategic infrastructure pipeline of major projects that will transform our city, invest in our economy, boosting our economy through that investment, supporting job creation, supporting the growth of our population and the diversification of our economy.

I would like to thank the select committee of the Legislative Assembly for their scrutiny of the proposed expenditure in the 2025-26 budget and accompanying appropriation bills. I also want to acknowledge the assistance provided by the secretariat in preparation of the final report. I would like to also acknowledge my ministerial colleagues and government officials for their very active engagement in promptly responding to the committee's questions and recommendations.

The select committee's report contains 65 recommendations and eight findings relating to the budget or appropriation bill matters. I will not address each one of the recommendations and findings before you today, but the government's response, which I will table shortly, fulfils this purpose. In summary, the government has agreed to eight recommendations, agreed in principle to nine recommendations, identified that 22 recommendations relate to an existing government policy, noted 25 recommendations and does not agree with one recommendation. The government has also noted the eight findings and provided alternative views to two of the findings.

I consider that none of the matters raised in the select committee's report should prevent passage of the Appropriation Bill 2025-26 or the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-26. I present the government's response to the recommendations raised by the Select Committee on the Estimates 2025-26 report Inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-26. As per my letter to the chair of the estimates committee on 9 September, I also present amended budget statements to ensure transparency and accuracy in the budget as amended. The government believes, and is supported by findings of the estimates committee, that this is the most transparent mechanism to outline the financial impact of the acquisition of Calvary Hospital. I also table a corrigendum to the Health and Community Services Directorate Budget Statement C, correcting drafting errors in relation to the accountability indicators for Housing ACT.

I present the following papers:

Budget 2025-2026—Financial Management Act—Pursuant to section 10—
Addendum—Health and Community Services Directorate | Canberra Health
Services | ACT Health Directorate – Discontinued | Territory Banking Account
|GFS/GAAP Harmonised Financial Statements | Consolidated Financial
Statements.

Budget Statement C—Health and Community Services Directorate | ACT Local
Hospital Network | Canberra Health Services | Housing ACT | ACT Health
Directorate – Discontinued—Corrigendum to Health and Community Services
Directorate.

Estimates 2025-2026—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into the
Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative
Assembly) Bill 2025-2026—Government response.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

MR SPEAKER: Standing order 180 sets down the order in which this bill will be considered. That is, in the detail stage, any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made must be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedules will be considered by the proposed expenditure in the order shown. With the concurrence of this Assembly, I am proposing that the Assembly consider schedule 1 by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory. Is this the wish of the Assembly? That being so, schedule 1 will be considered by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory, then the clauses and the title.

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Education Directorate—Part 1.1

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.02): This year's budget has left Canberrans paying far more while getting far less, and that is no different for ACT education. Canberra families have been asked to pay more in rates and taxes but told that their schools do not have the money to deliver even the basics. After the news of secret reviews and cuts, Canberrans have no cause to believe what they are hearing from this government.

Their schools, suffering from years of chronic underfunding, had been forced to cut contract teachers, cut school excursions, cut down classes and combine them and cut learning support staff. Thanks to the work done by the opposition, in concert with the Education Union and with support from the crossbench, we now have more certainty from the government on the future of our schools, their staff and our students. But it should not have taken that.

The government also do not have the money to build the school infrastructure that they promised—short-changing Canberrans right after the election. We have seen the Majura Primary School expansion promise broken, the promise to build Lyneham High School's gym broken and a long list of delayed constructions of ACT schools. This

leaves students and teachers with smaller and older classrooms, with diminishing facilities to fit their needs and suffering the impact of overcrowding.

There are broader challenges that ACT education faces as well. We know that teachers love their jobs, but it is becoming more difficult for them by the day. We have all seen the reports and articles that have detailed the horrifying situation of school violence for our teachers, principals and students in ACT schools. The ACT branch of the Australian Education Union released their survey results from this year, showing that our educators do not feel supported and find their jobs increasingly difficult to do and to enjoy. Amid all of this, too, it impacts the education outcomes of our students. Following the release of the NAPLAN results for this year, we found that three in 10 students are behind in the literacy and numeracy skills that they need to succeed in life.

The issues that this government must address in ACT Education are clear, but this budget has instead served up cuts and measures that fail the test. I will touch on a few of the most important issues. Firstly, I will turn to school budgets. The most concerning revelation following the budget has been the news that 77 of 92 of our public schools, according to the government, were over budget. That meant that 80 per cent of public schools had either already or were projected to run out of money by the end of 2025.

This is because of the continual underfunding of public schools by this government. As the ACT Branch President of the AEU, Angela Burroughs, put it:

This represents a fundamental failure of the current funding and staffing model rather than isolated budget management issues.

The minister then had to announce a review of school resourcing a month after the budget was handed down. What is the point of the budget, if you need to do a review into education funding a month after handing down the budget? It brings into question the credibility of the budget.

To make matters worse, while schools were awaiting this review, they were asked to start cutting their staff, classes and excursions. It took the Canberra Liberals working with the AEU and the crossbench—thanks for your support—to apply pressure to get this government to make a commitment on school staff: that commitment being that there would be no redundancies for permanent staff, that schools will not be forced to cut staff for 2026 below 2025 levels and that all changes with temporary staff will be achieved through natural attrition and redeployment.

But this should not have had to happen. If we had not had that motion, there would be temporary staff and support staff unemployed right now, because of this government. That was their plan—to cut swathes of staff from education. It was their plan. It should not have had to happen. School funding should be a fundamental part of the budget. But, as we have seen from the fact that there was a review a month after the budget was tabled and we have seen from the fact that this government planned to cut dozens, if not hundreds, of staff from education, this budget that we are debating today in terms of education is not worth the paper that it is written on. We will have to wait for this review to come back to find out what the real state is of school funding and school funds.

Sadly, we have also seen this government axe two school infrastructure promises. They promised an expansion of Majura Primary School and a new gym for Lyneham High School. Both of these promises are now broken. The government went to the election promising this. They said to the people of Canberra, “Vote for us and we will deliver you this.” It was not true. It is a broken promise. I assure you that we will be looking very closely, as we move forward in education, at where else they have broken promises.

The government claims that the schools no longer need them. But I do not remember them saying that in October last year. Do you? It is a bit like the health funding. They hid it from the people. They said one thing and, once we got through the election, we found out the true state of what was going on. So how can you trust this government? How can you trust this budget? How can you trust a budget that is full of broken promises and has to be rewritten and reviewed a month after it was tabled?

We have also seen infrastructure upgrades across Canberra schools being stretched out from June 2026 to June 2027. For example, the Ainslie North Primary School construction is yet to be allocated funding. What other school maintenance projects have been quietly put aside and delayed?

We know that the ACT budget is facing financial constraints. We know that they have run out of money and they have racked up the debt. But why is it that they are picking on schools? The Labor Party are always talking about the value of education. They talk a good talk and they promise a good promise, but the reality is that we find out behind the scenes that they are cutting infrastructure programs and, if it were not for the work of the opposition and the crossbench, they would be cutting staff as well.

Our teachers work incredibly hard and love what they do for our students. However, we know that their working conditions are taking a real toll on teacher wellbeing and student outcomes. The directorate’s 2023-24 annual report shows 7,328 occupational violence incidents were reported in that period. It is an extraordinary number, isn’t it? The Australian Catholic University’s Principals Wellbeing report states that seven in 10 ACT principals received violent threats in 2024. Those statistics are far too high. We have raised them before, and this government has not taken the necessary action.

Simon Vaughn of the ACT Principal’s Association put it like this:

I think that nobody would go to their workplaces if over half of them were going to be either threatened with violence or physically assaulted.

We also know there is persistent underfunding, with 92 per cent of educators saying in a staff survey from the AEU that “schools lack adequate resources to implement strategic initiatives”. These initiatives include Strong Foundations—the program, through the work of this Assembly, meant to lift our literacy and numeracy outcomes—and Set Up for Success, our early childhood strategy. Literacy and numeracy outcomes should be the highest priority for our students, particularly when we hear that three out of 10 students do not have the literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed in life.

Then there is the personal financial cost to teachers. The AEU’s budget submission for this year says that their research shows that “88 per cent of teachers pay for teaching

resources out of their own pocket, spending an average of \$744 per year”. It goes on to say:

When extrapolated across the teaching workforce, this represents approximately \$2.6 million annually that public servants are personally contributing to the delivery of government education policy.

They call themselves socialists, this mob over here, but they are demanding that teachers make up the shortfall in government policy and government funding—extraordinary!

This should have been a budget that focused on fixing the foundations of our ACT education system, on students’ literacy and numeracy, school violence, fully-funded schools, school upgrades being built and supporting our hardworking staff. Instead, what we saw were underhanded cuts, deceit and a review immediately after which showed just how much of a sham this budget is. This is the first budget of the term, and I must say that the outlook does not look good. For the sake of Canberra families, let’s fix this dire situation and get our education system back on track to being the best it can be.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.13): I rise today to speak on the vital work of the Education Directorate whose efforts continue to shape the future of our community through the provision of quality learning, support for our schools and investment in the success of students, teachers and families alike.

As a member of the estimates committee, I was privileged to have the opportunity in this budget process to engage in discussions with those in the directorate who are leading important programs, programs to support teachers, provide financial relief to families and ensure every child has access to an equitable and needs-based education.

The 2025-26 budget builds on and advances key initiatives that are dedicated to achieving excellence in education outcomes. At its core, it is guided by principles of equity, access and student agency, ensuring that every learner is supported to reach their full potential in a system that is fair and empowering.

Cost-of-living pressures place significant stress on families across the ACT, making programs like the free school camps at Birrigai, free meals in schools and the future of the Education Equity Fund more essential than ever. This year I have had the pleasure of meeting with a young girl from Tuggeranong who ran for her class elections last year on the basis that if she got elected she would write to me to ask for her school to be considered in the expansion of the free Meals in Schools program. She delivered on that promise to her class, and I can say I have delivered on my promise to her in making representations to Minister Berry on her behalf. Every child deserves not only access to education but also the resources, support and opportunities necessary to engage fully in their learning.

With programs like these, we provide equitable learning environments enabling children and young people to reach their full potential regardless of their background or circumstance. Boosting the equity fund by \$600,000 will enable support for an additional 1,000 students, helping families cover school-related costs like uniforms,

books, excursions and extracurricular activities. This investment embeds equity in our education system, ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities as their peers and removing obstacles that might prevent them from fully engaging in a rich and comprehensive educational experience.

In the year ahead, the disability inclusion strategy will continue to strengthen the inclusion of students with disability by ensuring that our public schools are equipped with the resources, expertise and frameworks necessary to meet the individual needs of every learner. This includes the continued work of a dedicated team of inclusion coaches supporting schools across Tuggeranong and the ACT, ongoing investments in professional learning to support inclusive teaching practices and the development of new resourcing models to better meet the needs of all students. Importantly, the voices of students remain central to this work with the Inclusive Education Student Voice Forums set to continue, ensuring that the strategy is guided by the lived experiences and perspectives of the students it seeks to empower.

During estimates last month, we also heard about the equally pressing priority of supporting our teaching workforce. Many of my extended family members, including my little brother, are teachers. Teachers do valuable work and deserve our utmost respect and support in everything they do.

Attention was drawn to the work of the Sustainable Workload Management Committee which consults with the Australian Education Union, principals, school leaders and importantly, teachers. The committee identifies practical strategies to support teachers, manage workloads and strengthen workforce retention. This work is vital, not only to ensure that teachers can perform to the best of their abilities, but also to maintain the quality and consistency of the education sector in the ACT. By investing in the wellbeing and sustainability of our teaching workforce we are ultimately investing in the success of our schools and the futures of the children they educate.

Strengthening the education workforce involves investing in ongoing professional learning, qualifications and skill development. It includes supporting a skilled and stable workforce capable of meeting the diverse needs of children, fostering meaningful collaboration and purposeful relationships between educators across different settings and acknowledging the critical role of a predominantly female workforce in advancing gender equity in the sector.

As everyone in this chamber knows, I have a keen interest in the early childhood education and care sector which has rightly received significant attention in the budget. Of particular note is the inclusion of universal access to 300 hours of free preschool for three-year-olds. It enables families to have real choice in how they raise and care for their children by recognising early education as a valid and accessible option, moving beyond the outdated view that the only place for young children is in their home with their mothers.

My family has benefited from three-year-old preschool inside an ECEC provider, and I can say first-hand the difference it makes to a child's life. We know that early education can have far-reaching benefits by supporting the children's social, cognitive and emotional development. However, this investment extends beyond this to empower families who might not otherwise have the means to afford or access ECEC services

and to promote greater gender equality by granting women the opportunity to return to work sooner.

Earlier this year I moved a private members' motion in this chamber about expanding outside-of-school-hours care for preschool students to help parents juggle the hours of preschool with the benefits we know it provides the students. This budget measure on ECEC signals a broader recognition that investing in early education is not only an investment in children and families, but also the prosperity and inclusivity of our whole community.

The continued funding of the ACT's early childhood education and care regulator, CECA, also means the ongoing assurance that our educators and providers are meeting rigorous standards and that our children receive safe, inclusive and developmentally appropriate care. CECA's quality engagement program supports providers by guiding self-improvement, to apply best practice tools and develop long-term plans, to ensure that families are confident in the quality of services available.

By maintaining this funding and working with CECA, we are not only investing in ECEC regulation but in the long-term learning and wellbeing of children in our early childhood settings. The ACT has a high level of reporting of serious incidents. I know that is discussed in this chamber a bit, but the high level of reporting is not something families should be concerned about. In fact, it is the opposite. Our high level of reporting is testament to the strong reporting culture we have here in the ACT—something we do not want to lose, particularly with the allegations that have been coming out across the country in the ECEC sector.

In the past 12 months, we have seen what happened to Genius Childcare, the ramifications of which are still being felt by educators and families. I have even heard from educators just this week around the ongoing effects of what is happening with these centres. Educators are wondering whether they still have jobs with new providers, wondering how those jobs will be transferred, and then there are the ongoing impacts of people who were not paid super, who were not paid on time, for months and months, and that has an impact on the individual and their families. When people go to work they should be paid. No ifs or buts about it. People should be paid. The fact Genius got away with it for so long reflects the nature of a workforce that is low paid, female-dominated and not widely respected.

We saw reporting by *Four Corners* on how ECEC has turned into a profit-making machine for large companies and the culture of these companies. Ultimately, we saw the worst possible outcome of this in Victoria with an educator accused of heinous crimes against children, working in dozens of centres where record keeping was so poor it took parents recognising the educator in photos to know that that educator was working in particular centres on particular days. We have seen cases across a number of jurisdictions this year around educators abusing children as well, and so it is really important that our regulator has the powers to continue investigating and holding centres to account. I acknowledge the work that is underway across the country to make sure ECEC is safe for all children, that adequate processes are in place to minimise risk so that what happened in Victoria does not happen again.

The work that the ACT government is doing in this space is critical for the future of the

ECEC sector, for our children, for families, for educators, and having a well-resourced CECA is part of that work. Education remains one of the most powerful investments we can make in the future of our community. It is the foundation upon which opportunities are created and inequality is tackled, and in line with the core values guiding this budget's approach to education, equity is strengthened.

Just last sitting week, I moved a private members' motion, which I am glad was supported by the whole chamber, around creating inclusive food curriculum resources. No longer does the food curriculum talk about good foods and bad foods. We treat food as food and acknowledge everyone has different food needs depending on their circumstances, whether that be medical conditions like diabetes, coeliac disease, food allergies or neurodiversity or cultural practices. Everyone deserves to feel included in school around their food choices. I thank the Education Directorate in advance for the work they are doing in ensuring the material being used to teach the food curriculum in schools is up to date and fit for purpose with the updated curriculum.

Overall, these budget initiatives reflect an understanding that education should not be viewed in isolation, but rather it is connected to health, economic participation and social cohesion. By embedding equity into every level of our education system we give every child across the ACT the chance to thrive regardless of their starting point in life.

This education budget is a statement of values reflecting this government's belief in the transformative power of education, our commitment to fairness and our determination to give every family and every student the opportunity for success. I thank Minister Berry and the Education Directorate for continuing to invest in students, supporting teachers and strengthening early learning.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.23): I rise today in my capacity as the ACT Greens spokesperson for education to speak to the Education Directorate budget output. The current Labor government's vision for education speaks to a business as usual approach to a sector experiencing pressure. More importantly, it lacks funding. I know that, yes, funding for education has increased. I absolutely acknowledge that.

However, funding for public education in this city is not stretching to meet the need in front of us. We are in a situation, as Mr Hanson rightly put, where public schools around Canberra are facing increasing pressure from the government to save money. Our conversations with the community and the sector have highlighted that casual staff in particular have been deeply worried about their job security and families are concerned that their children will not have the support that they need in the classroom.

As much as this Labor government tells us that schools are fully funded in the ACT, I think we need to really take a moment to think about what it means to have fully funded schools. To the federal government, a school fully funded to the School Resource Standard only has 80 per cent of their kids meeting the minimum NAPLAN benchmarking. The minimum, right? That is based on the standard that was last updated probably back in 2018. Our understandings of students' needs and our expectations of educators have both grown in leaps and bounds since then. If our definition of fully funded involves meeting students and educators needs, then I think the jury might still be out on whether our funding is going as far as we need it to.

Funding for education is not simply an area where we can afford to just pay the bare minimum. Money not spent on essential education costs harms an entire generation of Canberrans. I want to acknowledge that it is pretty challenging to justify talking about specific projects in education right now if they do not directly relate to the budget pressures that schools are facing. I think, perhaps rightly, everyone is concerned about the fact that the vast majority of public schools are being told to cut costs. This sector and this Assembly have had to go all hands on deck to make sure this process is managed well and in a way that meets the community's needs.

I completely agree, we are an exceptional city with a brilliant education system and the most committed and talented educators in the country. We cannot afford to lose all that we have created in the ACT by being non-committal to the essential funding of that public education. So I do just want to emphasise that while it is really worth going through the projects other than the school budgets, I do not want to overshadow the fact that our strict number one priority through this budget process should be ensuring that schools are fully funded to meet the needs of every student, every staff member and every leader.

All that being said, I want to give credit where credit is due. The need for additional schools in Canberra is pretty clear, especially with the predicted increase in population. The ACT Greens have been calling for both a new primary and a new high school in the Belconnen centre for several years now. We brought it to the last election. I hope that as exploration of school need is undertaken it will become clear to the government and to the community that both are absolutely necessary. While we welcome Labor's commitment to scoping out a primary school in the centre of Belconnen, these kids are going to grow up and they are going to need a high school too.

It is good to see the government exploring new projects and continuing projects that are helping students. Things like expanding free meals, more nurses in schools, more scholarships for teaching students and expanding the Future of Education Equity Fund. We support all of these. The ACT Greens are certainly advocating for such projects. We hope that these projects continue to help young Canberrans and their families.

We are also glad to hear that the Strong Foundations program will begin to roll out and I sincerely hope that it will be able to aid both educators and students. The ACT Greens are committed to providing ACT public schools with the best resources and tools available and we believe the Strong Foundations will be a step towards that. The modernised approach to multi-tiered systems of support that will come from Strong Foundations will be a huge improvement for Canberra's students. In particular, we are really interested in ensuring small group instruction is available and implemented in all schools, because we know it is going to help all students receive the support they need, when they need it.

Now, school infrastructure is a major issue that needs more attention. We are really glad to see that our push for improvements towards heating and cooling in schools has been heeded and that a significant investment of \$15 million has been committed to heating and cooling over the next two years. Certainly, I hope that some of that funding goes towards fixing the heating and cooling at Canberra High given the advocacy of students and of staff in the school community. However, it is increasingly clear that there is a gap between what the government and the directorate believe should happen in schools

and what school staff and families actually want to see.

I urge the government to ensure a strong, consistent culture of consultation is integrated into all school infrastructure projects going forward. We are in a space in the budget where we cannot afford to miss the core ask of a school community when schools need every cent spent to go as far as humanly possible right now. In particular, I do, and I think Mr Hanson mentioned this too, want to point to the upgrades to Majura Primary and Lyneham High. Both of these schools have communities that are being frustrated by inconsistent messaging and the government essentially backtracking on previous agreements. We get it, priorities shift, but the government's communication with both of these school communities has been poor. I think the outcome overall has been a poor one for the community and we should expect it to be done better.

I was pleased to hear that this government is now undertaking a review for a proper analysis of current demand and provision gaps for flexible education. We have heard from a number of families whose students are experiencing School Can't who are desperate for more offerings that meet their needs. We have heard that Muliyan needs more places and more room, and that it has been a really important place for students who have had interactions with the justice system. We look forward to the findings of this review into flexible education. We sincerely hope that they are going to be made public and widely communicated, and we are looking forward to seeing how future budgets implement those findings.

Look, it was not canvased much in estimates this year, but I am still optimistic that we will see a phase-out of the SCAN model when it comes to providing support for students with a disability. We all know that the SCAN model is deficit-oriented. It can be traumatic for students and for families and educators. As both education and disability spokesperson for the Greens, hand on heart, this will be a proud moment for Canberra when it finally happens. I am eager to hear more details about what exactly will replace the SCAN model, and when and how this will intersect with both the school budget pressures that we are seeing and with the changes to the NDIS.

Right now, no matter what age a Canberran student is, they are in a sector that is experiencing crisis. The early childhood education and care sector is facing staff shortages and is navigating the impact of low pay and high turnover on children in their care. Universities are plagued by poor management and frantic cost-cutting measures. We know primary and secondary education can be improved and staff can absolutely be given a guarantee of job security. However, this kind of improvement requires that education be considered a top priority by this government and I am seriously concerned if it really is.

For education, I do appreciate there are projects with serious merit outlined in the budget. These are not babies we want to throw out with the bathwater. However, we must back up these initiatives with the resolve to fund schools to meet the need in front of them. We will be watching with an eagle eye to make sure this government makes good on its commitment to see all our educators retain their jobs and we are going to continue to fight for a system that works for each and every student.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.31): I rise to speak about the future of education in the ACT, a matter of deep importance to our community. Education is the foundation

upon which we build opportunity, equity and prosperity, yet the data paints a concerning picture.

The 2024 Australian Early Development Census revealed that only 43.8 per cent of ACT kindergarten students are on track across all development domains, placing us behind every other state and territory, except the Northern Territory. This is a signal that our youngest learners are not receiving the support they need in their most formative years. At the other end of the schooling journey, the Productivity Commission's *Report on government services* shows that the ACT's year 12 attainment rate is 73.7 per cent, below the national average of 76.3 per cent. This is a sobering reminder that our education system is not delivering the outcomes our students deserve.

Our schools should not be burdened with administrative complexity or left to navigate systemic challenges alone. They need clear direction, robust support and a shared vision for excellence. We need to build the college in Molonglo, so it needs to be on the pipeline of projects. We need maintenance, and we need evidence-based analysis based on the current population forecasts. I hope the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review highlights the challenges so meaningful steps can be taken to keep our casual staff and the fantastic programs they run, and to improve outcomes for young Canberrans.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.33): I rise to contribute to this debate as someone who benefited from very good public education in a seemingly third-world country. I would like to begin my speech by quoting Nelson Mandela, that poverty is not an accident, and like slavery and apartheid:

It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.

And this cannot be realised without education.

It is important that our education system here in the ACT provides high-quality education options to ensure that the trajectory of a child's life is not dependent on their parents capacity to pay. Sadly, there are signs that, despite listing the promotion of "greater equity in learning outcomes in and across ACT public schools" as Strategic Objective 1, this government is not delivering on its promises.

Now, I am not going to go into all the statistics. I think that was clearly well articulated by Mr Hanson and Miss Nuttall, the Greens member. But it is important to mention here that this is reflected in enrolments in public schools which indicates that enrolments are declining. According to the Education Directorate's annual census of ACT schools the percentage of students enrolled in ACT public schools have declined each year for the past five years.

There are many reasons for this. One of which is, no doubt, the extremely high quality of private education providers. However, we need to acknowledge that our public school system is being badly let down by a government that is not properly funding it and imposing systems and structural procedures that limit the freedom of educators to

provide quality outcomes.

Sadly, I have heard that new parents and families moving to Canberra are being advised to enrol their children in private schools as soon as possible because the perception about the quality of public education and the extent of bullying and harassment in these facilities are quite concerning.

Sadly, it is only a few years ago when families moved to Canberra that they were encouraged to register their children in public schools. As a parent who strictly adhered to those comments, I did send my children to a public school. It was only when I would have conversations with them that I realised that the quality of education that they are getting is nothing compared to the quality of education that I got as a person who had to study in a third-world country. Sometimes my son, who is now in year 11, did not have a grasp of basic things, a basic understanding. This is a child who I had supported through various means, including private tutors. I did all I could, when I found out that there was a gap, to fill that gap. But unfortunately the foundations were not there, so we were working backwards.

The failure to set up our public schools so their standards are broadly comparable to the private sector is a problem as the people most affected are those who do not have the capacity to pay. We risk creating a cycle of poverty and disadvantage when the quality of public education falls significantly below that of the private institutions.

I strongly support the estimates committee recommendation 38:

...that the ACT Government ensure the announced review of ACT school budget management is undertaken with publicly available terms of reference, includes consideration of resourcing, maintenance and facilities for individual schools and the school system, forward planning processes, and demographic pressures; and that the results of the review are published as soon as practicable after its completion.

I also support recommendation 64:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a plan to improve the relative performance of ACT schools...

Now we know that education does not just start from when a child goes to preschool at four-years-old. It starts from early learning. So I will not be speaking out of turn by also including the importance of early learning centres as a pillar of this debate. I am deeply concerned about the poor decision-making processes of this Labor government in relation to early learning centres. These centres are important to ensure equitable access to preparatory education. The closures of SDN Bluebell childcare centre and the Bruce Early Childhood Centre were made with minimal consultation with parents and staff, often only weeks before planned closure dates.

We do not need to be reminded of the challenges with the Genius Childcare centre. If the government genuinely recognises, as stated in Strategic Objective 1, “that not all children are able to access the same educational advantages when starting their education,” we should expect that it would have a strong focus on planning to ensure that the effects of decisions do not result in worse outcomes for the most vulnerable

families. I call on the government to do better in its planning, especially for existing educational service providers who may be affected. Consultation with affected families is an important consideration in the timing of closures and the reasonableness of alternative options should be considered before the closure.

Similarly, it would not be out of turn to also reflect on disability education in schools. While I acknowledge the challenges of providing disability education in public schools, and I acknowledge the outstanding efforts of our teachers and staff working to deliver the supports, I do have concerns about the amount of work we are expecting our teachers to do to comply with the administrative requirements of supporting the creation, implementation and modification of individual learning plans and the consultation, documentation and reporting obligations this imposes.

I note that the expectation of some parents and their experience is at odds with the government's commitments, with some reports indicating that it is difficult to engage with schools on supporting learning disabilities. The communication from the school is poor and the outcomes of individual cases have been disappointing.

If we are going to have these policies, it is important that we provide structure, system and procedures that support the implementation of quality outcomes. I am concerned about the additional responsibilities and workload we are imposing on our public-school teachers and fear further significant obligation with the Thriving Kids program reform may make things even worse. I would encourage the government to pay attention to the implementation of its promises.

I would also like to touch on education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in our schools. The result achieved by the ACT for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, as reflected in the Closing the Gap outcomes, has been extremely disappointing. The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in year 10 who proceeded to year 12 was only 67 per cent, and the percentage of year 12 students who received an ACT school secondary certificate was only 71 per cent.

This points to a serious systemic issue in ACT public education. Measures to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in school and engaged in learning needs to be the focus of our 2025-2026 plan. I know these issues are addressed in the Jumbunna report, which the government has committed to addressing in the 2025-26 financial year. I will be watching closely to see what initiatives the Labor government puts in place.

We need clarity on the government's plans for significant structural reforms in schools in implementing the Thriving Kids announcement. We need an urgent and serious response to the Jumbunna report and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children education outcome. This budget sadly provides no assurance that we will see those outcomes. I fear all we see from Labor are more lofty aspirational statements, and as Miss Nuttall evidenced, it is business as usual.

As Nelson Mandela said, disadvantage is not an accident. The ACT government has made a choice and that choice is to invest in expensive infrastructure projects, many of which have no justifiable business case, at the expense of maintaining the standard of public education. We will be watching to make sure that this situation does not go from

bad to terribly worse.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.43): I rise to speak, as others already have, on the impact of this budget on Majura Primary School. I also note the remarks already made about the Lyneham high gym and look forward to the committee inquiry on that matter.

In 2022 the ACT budget included \$39 million to modernise and expand Majura Primary School, with a completion date of 2025—an expansion expected to accommodate an extra 300 students. Last year’s budget then provided an additional top-up that pushed the total funding for this project to over \$50 million, with an adjusted completion date of 2026, which is next year.

The project would have provided a new hall, hard courts and green spaces, new and refurbished learning areas, specialist learning environments and renewed playgrounds. But to the disappointment of the school community, this year’s budget saw the project downscaled to modernisation only, not an expansion, with approximately \$30 million in funding apparently stripped from this initiative.

With funding re-profiled into Infrastructure Canberra’s budget paper, all that was offered to the community by way of reassurance regarding a completion date was “to be determined”, with the full modernisation scope and a timeline now only to be announced in 2026. This is despite significant persistent concerns from community members, not just that the school’s infrastructure is out of date, but that it is already over capacity and bursting at the seams.

I have heard directly from families who have pulled their children out of the school because of these issues. We have also heard of children receiving health checks in the principal’s office, students having to do their schoolwork in the principal’s office and, above all, a whole lot of confusion about how and why the government came to the decision to de-scope this project.

The downgrading of the promised upgrades at Majura primary was justified by changes to enrolment projections. While the population of the inner north is forecast to continue growing rapidly, and non-government school enrolments across the ACT are steadily increasing, government school enrolments are decreasing. New projections for Majura primary now anticipate an increase of just 72 students over the next 10 years, bringing the student population to 773 by 2035. This is despite previous predictions which expected the school to grow to as many as 1,000 students. This is a massive gap. The government has stated that this change in enrolment projections is due to several factors, including declining birth rates.

However, I want to reiterate the concerns of our community that the school, in its current size and with its current enrolment levels, is not fit for purpose. It is not big enough now, let alone with an extra 72 students or, if the original projections turn out to be accurate, another 225. Regardless, while the de-scoping of this project might save \$30 million in this budget, I am convinced that we will be back here in five to 10 years time, talking about the urgent need to expand this school, having just modernised it—hopefully—and spending many millions more to meet the Majura Primary School community’s needs. That is unless enrolments decline further.

Alongside other factors that the government has spoken to in relation to this matter, we need to be willing to have frank conversations in this place and ask ourselves whether the state of the public education system, particularly the quality of public school infrastructure, is influencing enrolment trends. ANU academic and demographer Dr Liz Allen noted the shift to non-government schools in the ACT was “quite a significant social trend”, and “parents are buying into a particular education experience, avoiding what is a deteriorating government sector of education”.

Are government school enrolments dropping, in part, because our community sees the lack of investment in public education and public school infrastructure and, despite their firm belief in the value of the public system, they are voting with their feet? Are they concerned that enrolling their children in their local public school could result in a subpar experience and, in their children’s best interests, they are choosing to move them to non-government schools?

We need to be willing to ask these questions. This is not hypothetical. It is the direct, reported experience of many parents with children at Majura primary who have found themselves in this exact situation. Unfortunately, they felt they had no choice but to move their children out of that public school and into a nearby non-government school, having waited since the 2022 budget announcement for promised upgrades to the school that still have not commenced.

These decisions have an impact. This is just one example. Examples like this point to how stripping funding because of flatlining or declining enrolments risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. We need to acknowledge the “why” of these enrolment trends and avoid perpetuating a logic of continued underinvestment in public school infrastructure in particular.

The dedicated Canberrans who work in these schools deserve our credit, our respect and investment to support the critical work they do every day. It is our job in this place to provide teachers with an environment where they can flourish, so that all children can flourish, too. Adequate investment and following through on promised investment are a key part of that.

I genuinely hope to see the government acknowledge and act on the concerns being raised by families, and experts like Dr Allen. Unless something changes, though, I am not sure that they will, having voted against an amendment in the last sitting week calling for investment to arrest the decline in public school enrolments in the territory.

I hope it goes without saying—and the remarks we have heard so far indicate as much—that we in this place all believe in the immense value of our public education system. It is incumbent on the government to ensure that that belief is not just stated repeatedly and passionately but is also matched with appropriate, forward-looking, strategic investment that sets up all public school teachers, principals, support staff and students for success.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.49): Education is something that matters deeply to me and, obviously, to so many families across the ACT, and to so many people in this room. I would like to start my short contribution by celebrating the incredible work of our teachers, support staff and families, who put in so much effort

to make our education system strong. Having all but lost my tiny little mind trying and failing to educate my own kids during the COVID time, I understand how valuable ACT educators are to our community, and how difficult and important their work is.

Educators are the backbone of our society. They are the people who greet our kids every morning, who stay late marking work, and who care deeply about every child's future. I see this every day, as a father with a child at a Tuggeranong ACT government primary school. That is a primary school for which I am not paying the \$3,300 to \$4,100 per year it would cost for her to attend a Catholic primary school. I say that as a father of two boys at an ACT government high school for which I am not paying the \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year it would cost for them to attend a non-secular Catholic high school. That is the Catholic system, which is cheaper than the independent system.

By way of context, Fadden Primary School held a fete on Sunday. It was a roaring success. I think they made nearly \$15,000, about the same amount that a Catholic primary school makes in fees from four students. I wonder: is there anything stopping parents who are sending their children away from public schools paying \$20,000 into a foundation that the school do, into the library fund? I do not think there is.

I see teachers who go the extra mile—the school staff who know every child's name, and the parents who pitch in to make sure that no-one misses out. That is what makes our education system special. To every educator and every staff member, I say: thank you for what you do.

Late last year, the ACT government signed the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. This is a big deal. It means every ACT public school will stay fully funded, and it did not happen by accident. It took hard work and collaboration between the minister and the federal government, and we will be much better off for Minister Berry's work in this space.

This agreement means more resources where they are needed most, so that our schools remain great places for kids to learn and great places to work, because a good education starts and ends with good teachers.

The ACT government teacher scholarship fund will help more people join the profession and support those already in it to grow and thrive. That is 30 scholarships a year, with three new programs for students starting between 2026 and 2029. Because education is about opportunity, not stereotypes, the ACT Labor government is putting \$1.4 million into expanding the Women in Construction—Try-a-Trade program in our high schools. This gives more students hands-on experience and real pathways into skilled careers, where they can see a future where they belong.

For families in Tuggeranong, this budget delivers real improvements that you can see—accessibility upgrades of schools in Calwell, Gilmore, Richardson and Lanyon, and new outdoor learning spaces at Theodore Primary School.

Finally, this budget continues our commitment to educational equity. Education is about experiences, and some of the best lessons happen outside the classroom. This budget invests \$3.3 million so that each and every year every child in an ACT public primary school from years 3 to 6 can go on a school camp at Birrigai. Birrigai itself will also get

upgrades so that more kids can experience outdoor learning. No child should miss out because of cost on getting told by their teacher that the tiny piece of yellow rock they have shaken out in their pan from Birrigai Creek is definitely not gold, and it might not even be quartz.

I am also proud that every child will be given the best start in life by funding free three-year-old preschool, as my colleague Ms Tough mentioned. Families can access up to 300 hours of free play-based learning for their three-year-olds from more than 140 early childhood education and care services across Canberra. This is helping kids to build the social, language and physical skills that set them up for life. This is about fairness and opportunity, and making sure cost is never a barrier to quality early education.

The ACT Labor government is boosting the Future of Education Equity Fund because every child deserves the chance to take part in the full school experience—not just in the classroom but outside and around the school, with everything that makes school life rich and rewarding. This fund supports an extra 1,000 students with one-off payments for essentials like uniforms—which will be kept for at least three days—books, excursions and extracurricular activities. This is practical help for families doing it tough. Again, it means children do not miss out on opportunities because of cost.

These investments, made possible by the 2025-26 ACT budget, are about fairness, opportunity and respect for students, teachers and families. They are about making sure every child in the ACT, no matter their background or their postcode, has the best start in life. It is what I will keep standing for, and it is what this government is delivering.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.55): Budgets are about priorities, and I think it is fitting that the first line we are considering in this budget is the education line, a line that ought to be about the future of our kids, because the story of this budget in many ways is about the future generations of Canberra and the burden that they are going to inherit from this government—whether it is the burden of an increased interest bill, the burden of decaying infrastructure or the burden that they will inherit because schools in the ACT are not keeping up.

The media coverage of the budget crisis for Canberra schools was absolutely astounding to those of us paying attention—the idea that schools were under pressure to desperately rein in spending that clearly was not supposed to be discretionary spending but spending that was supposed to be for the good of our kids, at the same time as teachers are doing their utmost to deliver for our kids, to make sure that they have the education that they deserve.

Indeed, some years ago, while I was chair of a school board, I saw the work that teachers put in, the money that they put in out of their own pockets to keep up the education standards for our kids. Teachers go miles beyond what is technically required in order to make sure that our kids who attend public schools have some hope for the future.

But as we have already heard today, increasingly, across Canberra people are losing faith in our public education system. People are increasingly moving across to other systems. They are choosing to pay out of their own pockets and move across, whether it be to a Catholic school, an independent school or an Anglican school. People are choosing, with their wallets, something different. Mr Assistant Speaker, I think it

speaks a lot to the priorities of this government that you have seen the level of pressure on schools and teachers that we have suddenly been hearing about over the last couple of months.

I think that there needs to be a different approach. Frankly, it is about time we had some ambition for our kids. We need to move on from the story of this education budget, which is all about broken budgets, broken promises, delayed promises, downgraded promises and decaying infrastructure, and move to some ambition. It is time that we had some aspiration for our kids as the guiding principle, not just making sure we do not fall lower, and not just making sure that we barely scrape by. Our kids deserve more than that.

Our kids cannot afford to become the victims of an ideological approach to education or the constant pressure that teachers and schools find themselves under to penny-pinch at the expense of the big picture. They cannot afford to come second to pet projects.

As I said before, budgets are about priorities. The clear message that we have seen in this budget is that our kids do not seem to have the same priority as some of the government's other spending initiatives. Our kids deserve better than what they are getting under this government. I hope that, although the government clearly has not delivered this time, over the coming years we can make a bit of a difference and shift that, because our kids deserve it.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Cheyne**) adjourned to a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.00 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without Notice

Economy—credit rating

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. In 2024, S&P Global rated the ACT's budgetary performance as "average". What changed in the last year that has led S&P to downgrade the credit rating and to conclude that the territory's budgetary performance is now "very weak"?

MR BARR: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. This is commentary from Standard and Poor's that was consistent across, pretty well, every state and territory except Western Australia. They have been clear that some elements of cost pressures that the ACT, Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland have experienced have put pressure on state and territory budgets. Principally, as the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, that includes health expenditure. But it does also include other areas of expenditure growth, and, frankly, a reality that revenue at a state and territory level—unless you have a significant mining industry to tax royalties from—is challenged at the moment.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, did the Treasurer fail in his stated goal of avoiding a ratings downgrade this year?

MR BARR: No. The objectives of the budget are more than just about a credit rating. The budget has to do many different things. Of course, it is always open to a party

seeking to form government to say that their only criteria is the credit rating, but I think we all know that the obligations and responsibilities of government go beyond just that question. And, as we are already one hour into many, many days of debate on the budget, already the tone of that first hour is that more needs to be spent on education. I look forward, I am sure, to hearing from colleagues that more money needs to be spent in every single area of government expenditure—perhaps with a couple of notable areas where we will be debating amendments to spend less money.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why should the community have faith in the Treasurer, when the independent ratings agencies do not?

MR BARR: The independent ratings agencies have not expressed a lack of faith in the Treasurer. They have identified that there are challenges for state and territory governments. There will be other ratings downgrades, for other states and territories; that is very clear. There already have been. And there are a number of state and territory budgets that are challenged at the moment. Undoubtedly the vertical fiscal imbalance that is a feature of the Australian federation is only growing as a problem, not shrinking.

Housing—affordability

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. The latest Domain property report shows that median house prices in the ACT are the second highest in Australia, and median unit prices are the third highest. Minister, is housing affordability a genuine concern for this government?

MS BERRY: Of course, it is important for this government, as it is for governments across the country, including the commonwealth. That is why we are partnering together to provide more opportunities for people to get into housing. Our own commitment of 30,000 homes after 2030 is an extraordinary commitment, and the federal government's commitment of 100,000 new homes for new home owners is something on which we are all working hard. We know it is a challenging time, but we are all working together. By working together, we will be able to achieve some really good outcomes for people in our community.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is it the success of your housing policies that is driving so many local families to move to cheaper homes in Googong, Queanbeyan, Yass and Bungendore?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with the premise of Ms Castley's question. I would say that people make choices about where they live for a range of reasons. Price may be one of them; location is another reason why people will live in different areas.

Mr Cocks: Yass is so much more convenient!

MS BERRY: Well, move there; do us a favour! Those kinds of decisions are made, as I said, for a range of reasons, and every community across the country is working hard to meet the needs of all people.

MS BARRY: Minister, when will young people on median incomes have a real chance

to own a house here in Canberra?

MS BERRY: I think that question is a bit of a hypothetical, but I will refer Ms Barry to my first answer. We are all working together, across the country—each state and territory, and including the commonwealth—to meet the needs of every community member across the country, with a range of different options, because we are all experiencing a housing crisis. Nobody is denying that. We are all working very hard to make sure that every person gets a chance to have a home of their own that meets their needs, whether that is in home ownership or whether that involves people who are most in need, in public, social or affordable housing.

Legislative Assembly—member conduct

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, last week on 666, ABC Radio Breakfast, host Ross Solly read out an anonymous text message from a sitting Labor member of the Assembly. The text made a series of reflections on another member of this place, including about that member taking personal leave from the Assembly. Chief Minister, do you consider it to be an acceptable standard of conduct for sitting members to send anonymous texts to the media with these sorts of reflections about another member taking personal leave?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. No; I do not. I asked the member concerned to issue a direct apology to Ms Lee. That has occurred and has been accepted.

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, will you inform the Assembly who in the Labor Party sent this anonymous text message?

MR BARR: Yes; I can. Ms Cheyne sent the text message.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, why did you not require the member to make a public apology, or was it your preferred strategy to try to sweep it under the carpet?

MR BARR: I think that is a very pejorative question from Mr Braddock. I received an approach from Ms Lee, asking for the identification of the member and for an apology. I undertook to find out and asked for that apology to be given. It was, within a matter of hours. I subsequently contacted Ms Lee to be assured that the apology was received, and it was.

Early childhood education and care—Early Childhood Strategy

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. One of the actions in the ACT's Early Childhood Strategy is:

Through cross-government and sector collaboration explore enhancing multi-agency support services through a model built on strong partnerships and relationships, to ensure children and families are supported through their learning, health, safety and wellbeing, when they need it.

This is the only mention of “safety” in the whole document. Minister, given the nationwide concerns about children’s safety in early childhood settings, do you accept

that the strategy needs updating with more of a focus on children's safety?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Emerson for his interest in early childhood education and the safety of young people in those services. That strategy was brought together with strong consultation with the sector, with unions and with the ACT government to make sure that it did cover and was fulsome. It is the first strategy of its kind in the country, and I think it still remains the only one. We are proud of the work that we have done as a government, working with the early childhood education and care sector, to ensure that we can recognise the expertise within the sector and work together towards making changes that support early childhood educators and ensure that our children are safe.

We will continue to update and work on the strategy and work on regular updates as far as things change within the early childhood sector across the country—of course, we will; things change all the time across a range of sectors—and we do that in close collaboration with the early childhood sector.

MR EMERSON: Minister, how many actions from the Early Childhood Strategy have been completed, noting that we are five years in and, as of a month ago, 24 actions from the first phase and 19 actions from the second phase were due to have been completed?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: Minister, of the actions from the third phase of the strategy, which were due to commence last month and which, if any, are underway?

MS BERRY: Sorry; I did not catch the last bit.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Carrick, what was the last bit of the question?

MS CARRICK: Of the actions from the third phase of the strategy, which were due to commence last month, which, if any, are underway?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice.

Economy—credit rating

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Last week, the estimates committee was told that cash payments to Calvary Health Care would not be funded through new debt but through existing cash reserves. However, S&P Global have noted that the territory's cash reserves is one of the few things holding up the ACT's credit rating. Can the minister confirm if this is a one-off drawdown or if there will be further reductions in liquidity to avoid new borrowings?

MR STEEL: I am happy to take the question, Mr Speaker. In the short term, as S&P has noted, we will be returning to surplus in 2027, based on their metrics. S&P looks not only the general government sector but also at the PTE sector as well. They are focused on that. We show a return to operating surpluses one year earlier than that in our budget papers. Of course, we will be managing the totality of the government's spending, not just through borrowings but through the revenue that we receive from the community, from businesses and from a range of different revenue lines, so it will not

just be from borrowings. There is also revenue from across the government that we use to fund the delivery of services and infrastructure.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what policies or rules does the government have about drawing down the territory's liquid assets?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: What policies or rules does the government have about reducing contributions to the Superannuation Provision Account?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice. But as we have set out in the fiscal strategy, we are moving to a position of wanting to pay down the outstanding superannuation liability over the next ten years, and so we will be consistent with that strategy in our approach to managing the superannuation liability that was inherited, on self-government, from the commonwealth.

Labor Party—donations

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. It is well known that TikTok has been aggressively lobbying politicians around Australia, including “drinks, canapes, private meetings and tickets to exclusive events”. They are represented by a firm called Anacta Strategies, which has made substantial financial contributions to ACT Labor.

Chief Minister, have you ever been contacted by TikTok or its representatives to meet or discuss any policy or other issues?

MR BARR: No. I do not use TikTok. I have not been approached. I have no regulatory function in relation to TikTok. I do not use it personally. In fact, I think I am looking at the most prolific user of TikTok in this place!

I have heeded the advice of Australian security agencies in relation to that application.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, were Anacta's contributions made on behalf of TikTok, and did it facilitate greater access to Labor ministers?

MR BARR: I do not believe so, because we have no regulatory role in relation to social media. It is not within the purview of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, have any ministers had private meetings, tickets to exclusive events or other benefits from Anacta or TikTok?

MR BARR: In relation to Anacta, quite possibly. With TikTok, I would be surprised, but I will check the record on that. Any declarations are made through the appropriate ministerial diary declarations or, indeed, through a minister's register of interests or through their gift register. They are provided annually. We believe in that transparency.

We will report who we meet with, unlike some opposite who seem to think that one standard applies to one political party but not to them.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, can I just get a clarification based on the start of your answer? Are you taking that on notice?

MR BARR: In relation to meetings with Anacta, yes, I will take that part on notice—

Ms Castley: And TikTok?

MR BARR: And TikTok. I do not believe there will be any with TikTok.

I am pointing to the fact that they are all published, in time, anyway, under all the reporting requirements that sit on eight members of this chamber. And there is the voluntary contribution that two members are now making to report their diaries.

Drugs—policy

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a YourSay panel survey has been issued on the ACT government's recent drug law reforms, informing an evaluation by the University of New South Wales. We have been informed that this survey is not publicly available, has only been sent to a select group, and is presented in a way that encourages endorsement of the reforms. Minister, who exactly has been invited to participate in this survey, and why isn't it publicly available?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you to Mr Hanson for the question. This is part of the legislative review of the changes to the Drugs of Dependence Act, and, as Mr Hanson has indicated, that review is being undertaken by a third party—I think Mr Hanson said University of New South Wales. I will take the detail of the question on notice in relation to who has been invited to participate. But the questions that are in this particular survey are not the types of questions that the public would be able to respond to. They are quite specific questions that require a level of knowledge and engagement with the drug law reform process and the sector. So that is why there has been, for this part of the process, a targeted engagement. But I will take on notice to provide the Assembly with who, specifically, that has gone to.

MR HANSON: Is this survey being used to inform the New South Wales review, or is New South Wales actually conducting the review? Who is the reviewer?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If Mr Hanson and I are talking about the same thing, this is the review that we are required to have for the drug law reform in the ACT, so it would be an ACT government review. I might have misheard the question that Mr Hanson first asked. I thought he said that it was the University of New South Wales, but I could be wrong about that. I will take the whole question on notice.

Mr Hanson: That is who is doing the survey—are they informing the review, or is New South Wales doing the review?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: They are the University of New South Wales. They are not the New South Wales government. It is a completely different organisation. I think we are now talking about the same thing—that it is an ACT government commissioned review that is part of our responsibilities.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you commit to making the full results of this survey publicly available, including the questions and how they were answered?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, we will make information available in relation to the review. I will take on notice Mr Cocks's question as well, in terms of making available how the questions were answered. I have no issue in making the questions publicly available. My recollection is that they were provided to me in a brief, but I did not make any comments or changes to those questions—again, if we are talking about the same thing that I am recalling from my briefing. But individual answers are generally not provided. Generally, there is a summary. The independent consultant who is undertaking the survey summarises what the responses were and provides that summary. I have no problem at all with making that publicly available.

Roads—Molonglo Valley

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is directed to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you please provide the Assembly with an update on the construction of the Molonglo River bridge?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. I certainly can. The Molonglo River bridge, a major Labor government investment delivering for a growing Canberra, is progressing on time and on budget. Current works include protection over the interception sewer, concreting and steelworks for the pedestrian underpass, stormwater drainage and utility conduits, and topsoil placement on batters.

Five-tonne pre-cast bridge deck panels are being craned into place, which is a significant milestone. Road closures are required at the end of this month and the beginning of next month to safely enable the placement of the deck panels on the northern side. The times for closures have been chosen to coincide with the school holidays as much as possible. Between November and March, crews will complete the concrete deck pours, safety barriers and throw-screens, ensuring a safe crossing for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

This is one of the largest infrastructure projects in Canberra's history and it is being funded and delivered by Labor governments. This bridge is on track to open in late 2026, better connecting Molonglo to the rest of Canberra and future-proofing the network.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will this bridge support the continued growth of the Molonglo Valley?

MS CHEYNE: This bridge has been designed with Molonglo's future firmly in mind. Its raised profile, above the one-in-100-year flood level of the Molonglo River, means flooding will no longer cut access, ending the days of traffic being diverted to Cotter Road and causing incredible, city-wide congestion when that happens, while ensuring long-term resilience and reliability. It provides safe, separated active travel paths so that walking and cycling become real options—something that those opposite rarely prioritise.

Most importantly, Labor has reserved space for a future light rail span between the

bridges, because we believe in a connected, sustainable Canberra that moves beyond car dependency. This is what forward planning looks like.

This bridge will keep Molonglo connected, improve network performance across the ACT, and support the government's plan to deliver housing, jobs and infrastructure together for a well-serviced, thriving community.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you please explain the environmental innovations and sustainability improvements incorporated into the project?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary, and I appreciate Ms Carrick's interest. Labor is committed to delivering infrastructure that is not only functional but sustainable. We have used Envirocrete, a low-carbon concrete with 30 per cent lower embodied carbon, and we have optimised the design to save materials and cut waste. We have shortened the bridge to 200 metres, which has reduced the number of girders and bearings, and eliminated the need for rock anchors, all of which lowered costs, improved constructability and reduced emissions. We have sourced rock protection from the site, balanced earthworks by raising the road alignment, and incorporated safe access features for long-term maintenance.

These are tangible, measurable environmental benefits, and this is the difference that Labor governments make: we build infrastructure that serves today's needs, protects the environment and creates a legacy. Mr Speaker, we are proving that you can deliver major projects while cutting carbon and delivering value for money.

Light rail—federal funding

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Infrastructure Australia is the Australian government's adviser on infrastructure. Their role is to evaluate infrastructure proposals that are seeking investment from the Australian government of \$250 million or more. In response to a question taken on notice during the estimates hearing on 28 July 2025, you stated that Infrastructure Canberra has been working with Infrastructure Australia on the format of the light rail stage 2A submission since 2024 and that the final submission was provided to Infrastructure Australia on 30 July 2025, which was two days after the estimates hearing.

Why was the final submission of the light rail stage 2A submission sent to Infrastructure Australia only two days after I asked you about it? And is the submission publicly available?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I will seek some advice from Infrastructure Canberra in relation to the timing of their submission. It would then be a matter of Infrastructure Australia publishing that on their website. I note, going back about six or seven years ago, that there was an Infrastructure Australia sponsored assessment of future transport needs for Central Canberra. I think that is available via a Google search, if that helps Ms Carrick.

MS CARRICK: When will the light rail stage 2B business case be submitted to Infrastructure Australia to ensure a significant contribution is received from the Australian government, given the state of the budget?

MR STEEL: I will take the question, Mr Speaker. The answer is: when it has been developed.

Last sitting week, I tabled the indicative timeframe for the development of the stage 2B of light rail from Commonwealth Park to Woden, and that included the timeline for the development of a business case, which of course will take a period of years. That would be the appropriate time, once it has been developed, to go through the appropriate Infrastructure Australia submission process.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the business case for stage 2B include details of connections to all public transport services across Canberra's South, given these were not addressed in the environmental impact statement?

MR STEEL: I do not agree with the premise of the member's question, and it is pre-empting debate on the motion that we are about to have. But I have been very consistent in the answers that I have provided to questions on notice through the estimates committee process: one, there will still continue to be direct bus services from the south side to the city once light rail stage 2B commences; and, two, there will be great opportunities for the integration of bus services with new light rail stops that are being built. I particularly highlighted the new light rail stop that is being planned at Kent Street, with the opportunity to potentially connect in with buses—particularly R7 and R10 services coming from Weston Creek and Molonglo—in the future. Of course, these connections are not possible right now. That will enable people coming from those areas to be able to access the employment hubs in Barton and Parkes, which employ 40,000 people and are not accessible under the current bus system, because the infrastructure is not there. That is what light rail will deliver.

Unused land—lease squatting

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Canberrans are tired of lease squatting and poor enforcement. Schedule 4 of the Planning Act makes it an offence to fail to use land for a continuous period of at least one year for the purpose for which the land is granted, with a penalty up to \$48,600.

Big Splash was last open to the public in March 2024, but Access Canberra has not commenced enforcement action and has no timeframe for when it will. The Hawker Tennis Centre has been closed since 2010, and Access Canberra has not stated a timeframe for redevelopment or enforcement action. The lease for SDN Bluebell requires operation of a childcare centre but, at the moment, it looks like that might shut and the site may have no childcare centre at all. Why hasn't Access Canberra commenced enforcement action against Big Splash?

MR STEEL: It depends on what you call enforcement action. Both I and Access Canberra are very much aware of those provisions in the Planning Act, which commenced with the new planning system. Of course, it is up to Access Canberra, as an independent regulator, to make decisions about the compliance action under either the Planning Act or, indeed, other acts that they have responsibility for enforcing.

In relation to Big Splash, they have been engaging with the owner about safety on the

site, particularly around the fencing in the first instance and making sure that they fully fence the property. While a date of completion for the fence is unknown, the matter is being monitored by Access Canberra inspectors. They have options available to them under the Planning Act if they need. That is a decision for them to make as part of their ongoing review.

The same would also apply in relation to, I think it is, 44 College Street in Belconnen, which the member also referred to. Of course, if that matter was drawn to the attention of Access Canberra—which I believe it has been—then they will certainly look into compliance with the lease conditions. I understand that there are a range of uses that are available under the lease for that site. So they would be, of course, looking at whether they are complying with the range of uses that are available.

Ms Clay: I have a point of clarification.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, do you have a point of order here or not?

Ms Clay: I have a point of order on a point of clarification. I believe the minister said Access Canberra were an independent regulator, and I am not sure that they are. We have already raised the matter with the minister, and the minister has said that enforcement action has not taken place.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, what is your point of order? Is your point of order on relevance or is it—

Ms Clay: Relevance, given that we are told that Access Canberra is an independent regulator and given that we are being given different information than we have previously been given.

MR SPEAKER: I do not believe there is a point of order. I think the minister has made every attempt to answer your question, which was specifically: why hasn't Access Canberra commenced enforcement against Big Splash. He has answered that in some detail. Irrespective of whether Access Canberra is independent or not, I am not sure that that really comes into whether he has answered the question relevantly. I reckon you have a supplementary, Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: I do indeed.

Why hasn't Access Canberra commenced enforcement action at the Hawker Tennis Centre?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice and ask. I do not want to speak for them on that issue without having full advice before me. So I will come back to the Assembly in relation to that particular site.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, has Access Canberra advised the leaseholders for the SDN Bluebell early child learning centre in Belconnen that leaving the site unoccupied for 12 months may be an offence?

MR STEEL: That is the law. It is set out in the Planning Act. So I think everyone

should be aware of that—and, of course, ignorance of the law is no excuse. But I am sure that members of the community have brought that to the attention of the lessee. I appreciate what the question is aimed at doing, and I want to express my sympathy with the families and, indeed, the operators of SDN Bluebell in relation to the closure and application for the demolition of that site. That has to be independently assessed by the Planning Authority in relation to any development on the site, and that of course will be assessed in accordance with the lease conditions and the Territory Plan.

Miss Nuttall: Mr Speaker, with apologies for interrupting, a point of order on relevance. The question was specifically about whether Access Canberra had advised the proponents of the development, about their obligations—

MR STEEL: I will take it on notice to find out whether they have. But the broader point still applies, which is that it is, of course, an option available to Access Canberra to enforce those provisions under the Planning Act if they are not undertaking those uses within 12 months—noting, as I have already said, that there are a range of uses that are permitted on the site that, I understand, extend beyond just childcare provision on the site. It would be up to Access Canberra as to whether they wish to undertake any activity around potential enforcement in relation to activity there. But, obviously, a development application may also be made by the lessee about what they want to do on the site, and that would have to be assessed according to the Planning Act.

Business—Better Regulation Agenda

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries. The government released its Better Regulation Agenda in 2022. The agenda was meant to help improve regulation in the ACT through a two-year program. However, in March this year a Canberra Business Chamber survey found 47 per cent of businesses still find red tape and compliance are issues preventing them from reaching their full potential. Minister, has the government implemented all of the changes announced in the Better Regulation Agenda?

MS CHEYNE: I will take this question, Mr Speaker. I appreciate that while it is in the business area it is also about regulation and government services, which is me. The structure of that report, if I recall correctly, is that there were clear areas of focus for this government, as well as longer term areas that we hope to be able to progress. Those major areas of reform have been completed. One of those, of course, was the night-time economy. That work will remain ongoing but the issues that were identified in that report have been undertaken. There has also been the work regarding mutual recognition, which has been a huge undertaking for governments across Australia.

Going forward, there certainly are elements of the report that were anticipated for future consideration that are being worked through as we speak, including some areas where we can streamline some processes, especially when it comes to transactions and transactions with Access Canberra. There have been a whole host of areas that have been identified where I have engaged with my colleagues about some reforms that we can undertake to give effect to those suggested changes. I expect that work to remain ongoing.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why has this agenda failed to reduce the red tape burden

on local businesses?

MS CHEYNE: I do not think it has failed at all. I think it has been about better regulation not no regulation, as we have said repeatedly. I would note that regulation comes in many different forms and from different levels of government as well. What we have really aimed to do, and I think the night-time economy is a terrific example of this, is to find ways to make it easier for businesses to access programs that the ACT government has. We have seen a really sharp uptick already in the night-time economy venues that can receive liquor licence discounts. We have made it easier for musicians to park in loading zones by giving them free permits to be able to do that. These are all things that we have heard from the community and that we have implemented and have been received well.

I appreciate that there are always going to be some areas of business that are feeling like there is some extra hurdles to go through and I would note, in particular, in the public unleased land space and in the Urban Forest Act space, that is what has come through from a good portion of the business sector. We have discussed it a few times in this place. Minister Steel and I have been working closely together on implementing a program of reform, including reviews of both of those acts, so that it is easier for other government objectives, including doing business in the ACT, to be met.

MR COCKS: Minister, when can local businesses expect the government to finally start actively working with them to reduce red tape and get the ACT economy moving again?

MS CHEYNE: I reject any assertion that we have not been working with businesses. We have. We have had multiple ministerial roundtables with a collection of ministers as well as on specific issues that have fallen within our portfolios. Minister Steel meets regularly with PACICERG—great acronym; always makes me laugh. I have met with the construction sector, the real estate sector and several others, planning what we can do to ensure that conducting business in the ACT and meeting some of those other objectives for us, doing business, more housing, housing that is developed in a way that gives the community confidence, is achieved. Those conversations will continue. In fact, I think Minister Steel and I have a roundtable forthcoming in the coming weeks, I think. So we look forward to continuing those conversations, hearing from businesses, testing the changes that we are looking to make with businesses to make sure that we are not adding to any burden of doing business in the ACT.

Climate change—National Climate Risk Assessment

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, the National Climate Risk Assessment was released yesterday and makes for sobering reading. We can expect extreme heat events and a longer bushfire season in south-eastern Australia.

Has the ACT government done any modelling or assessment on the climate risks to the ACT specifically?

MS ORR: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. Yes, the Commonwealth government did release their risk assessment yesterday. It is quite a significant read and—as many

people have commented—quite a sobering read as well. It outlines quite a lot of the impacts we could see from a warming climate, particularly if we do not take mitigation action and do not respond to the adaptation needs that are already baked in due to our lack of action to date globally.

In regard to Mr Braddock's specific question about how this may apply to the ACT, or whether the ACT has done any modelling on the risks, a 2022 ACT whole-of-government climate change risk assessment process was undertaken. A lot of the risks identified in that, from my preliminary reading of the very large risk assessment from the commonwealth government, do actually align. But, certainly, there will be a little bit of work to go through and identify where the work we have done to date aligns with the commonwealth's: what gaps there may be or what new learnings there may be that we need to look further into.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will the government develop a specific ACT climate adaptation plan, similar to the national one?

MS ORR: I certainly would not want to be announcing policy decisions in question time! To answer what I can of Mr Braddock's question, I believe there is an ongoing discussion between the commonwealth and the states and territories around the adaptation plan and how that will work: who will have responsibility for what and what kinds of plans or strategies might have to come out of that.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what work is the government doing in adaptation policy to ensure Canberran lives and livelihoods are protected from climate risks over the coming years?

MS ORR: There has been ongoing work on adaptation. We continue to look at the ways that we need to adapt. Obviously, there was the hope for and the focus on mitigation globally, so that we would not have to do as much adaptation. We have not seen the mitigation impacts that we would have liked to see, so we will have to address a certain amount of warming in our climate.

The things the ACT government has been specifically looking at to date include: living infrastructure; the way we can cool our city; restoration and adaptability of landscapes; and where we can build opportunities into our buildings to make them more flexible to climate change, such as improving air circulation, heating, cooling and so forth. I could go on. I dare say Mr Rattenbury probably knows quite a few of these programs, so I will leave it there.

ACT public service—staff health and safety

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. There were 114 work health and safety incidents of sexual harassment and assault as of April 2025, across the ACT public service, for last financial year. Minister, how many of those complaints were arising from internal workplace conduct versus those occurring in customer-facing interactions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice.

MR COCKS: Minister, how many of these 114 incidents have been referred to police, and how many resulted in other disciplinary action?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, I will have to take the detail of that question on notice. But I would say that any incident of sexual harassment, sexual assault or abuse is completely unacceptable in the ACT public service, as it is in any other workplace or any other part of our community. And, of course, under work health and safety legislation, it is a mandatorily reportable incident—a sexual assault or sexual harassment—if I have got the terminology correct. That is through our own RiskMan reporting, and there are regular reminders to staff across the ACT public service that these are matters that also need to be reported to WorkSafe.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you provide—either on notice or table it—a directorate-level breakdown with trend data of these incidents for the past five years, please?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, I will take that question on notice, Mr Speaker. I think this has been a complete waste of the opposition's questions-without-notice time. I was clearly never going to be able to provide this level of detail and, particularly, to table trend data over five years that I had no idea I was going to be asked for.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So if the opposition want to waste their time in this way, that is open to them, and I will take the questions on notice!

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

Out-of-home care—foster and kinship carers

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, this week marks the nationally recognised foster carers week. What is the government doing to acknowledge and support the important role of the ACT's foster and kinship carers?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question and for the opportunity to mark national foster carers week. This week is a chance to raise awareness of the incredible work of foster and kinship carers. These carers love, care for and support children who are in out-of-home care. In short, we would not have a care system without them. They are truly the unsung heroes of our community.

I have had the immense pleasure, in my time as Minister for Children, Youth and Families, to meet with many carers, and I am always struck by how dedicated they are to supporting children through some of their hardest times and offering them safety and security when they need it most.

I met with several carers just last week for a carers appreciation event, and was again grateful for the commitment they make to the lives of children. I want to acknowledge to my fellow Assembly members that this is not easy work. It is tireless and demanding.

I want to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the government, that we are extremely appreciative of what they do each and every day.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you provide specific examples of the way the ACT government is supporting carers to do the important role that you have referenced?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Ms Tough, for the supplementary. We have several ways in which we support, listen to and care for our carers. You will see tangible evidence of how we listened to carers as part of the development of the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy, and sought to value their voice as people with lived experience. Next Steps helps to place carers at the centre of decision-making and to ensure that their expertise in the lives of the children and young people in their care is always respected and their needs are prioritised.

Next Steps has also given more control to carers around the type of service they want to receive, and more choice around providers through the establishment of the preferred provider panel. We are also working closely with the Our Booris, Our Way committee to see how best we can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers, including those in more informal arrangements, so that no-one misses out.

I look forward to continuing to see the outcomes from Next Steps and how it makes a difference in the lives of children and their carers. I want to thank the passionate carers who stand up and advocate for the needs of carers, to help shape the government's policy and decision-making.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what are the ways carers can access advocacy?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Mr Werner-Gibbings, for the supplementary. There are several ways carers can access advocacy support, either on an individual level or to raise more systemic concerns. The ACT government funds Carers ACT to offer a range of advocacy services to carers. In July this year, in partnership with government, they launched a new foster and kinship carers resource hub. This is an online resource whereby carers can access information about the system that will help them to advocate for themselves and others by understanding how things work and what they can expect from Children, Youth and Families. It includes information about caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and trauma-informed responses for children who might display very challenging behaviour.

We also have the Carer Wellbeing Joint Committee, which is a group of committed carers that meet with Children, Youth and Families and providers to share their experiences and provide their advice on areas for improvement. I am looking forward to seeing how we can continue to use their insights to make a difference in this very important space.

Public transport—Floriade shuttle bus

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Transport. I have been contacted by an older constituent who is really concerned that the free shuttle busses to Floriade on weekdays are quite inaccessible. If people are living on the south side, from the website it looks like they are encouraged to catch a bus to Albert Hall, walk seven

minutes to the National Library and then catch the free shuttle bus to Floriade. So, if they are not living on a rapid bus route in Tuggeranong or Woden, that is three buses one way, plus a fair walk. I am sure you can appreciate that it is a huge challenge for older Canberrans and people with a disability. My constituent genuinely does not believe that she can comfortably make that trip. Was thought given to having the free shuttle bus running past Albert Hall?

MR BARR: I will take this question as Floriade sits within my portfolios. There was extensive work undertaken in partnership with the event organisers and with Transport Canberra. I have also received correspondence to the same effect as Miss Nuttall. We will look to see whether there are possibilities. Obviously, construction activity is impacting the previous bus stop, with its immediate proximity to that entrance to Floriade. There are, of course, other entrances to Floriade that are accessible. We will look at where the shuttle bus stops at a number of locations.

MISS NUTTALL: Was any thought given to extending the free Floriade weekend express—which goes directly from Tuggeranong, through Woden, to Floriade—to a couple of times a day on weekdays?

MR BARR: The event organisers needed to manage within an available budget, of course. I will have to check with them as to whether they considered weekdays. Obviously, the bulk of demand locally for access to Floriade occurs on weekends and public holidays.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, would you agree that current arrangements are creating inconvenience for those approaching Floriade by bus from South Canberra?

MR BARR: That is seeking an expression of opinion, but, yes, there are challenges whilst construction is underway. I would point out to Mr Braddock that ultimately, within a few years, there will a light rail stop at the entrance to Floriade, at the entrance to the new Canberra aquatic centre, the access point to the new Acton waterfront development, and a public park—

Mr Hanson: When is it coming?

MR BARR: Construction is expected to be complete on light rail stage 2A in late 2027, if my memory serves me correct—

Mr Hanson: Eight years late.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: We all may as well sit down and let Mr Hanson continue to amplify his voice in this place, because he so desperately wants to be heard!

I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Drugs—policy

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am responding to the questions that Mr Hanson asked in relation to the survey on the implementation of the Drugs of Dependence Amendment Bill that introduced a simple drug offence notice for a range of illicit drugs in the ACT and the review of that. I can confirm that, in February 2025, following an open procurement process, the then ACT Health Directorate engaged the drug policy modelling program at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales to undertake the independent evaluation of the ACT's 2023 drug possession law reforms, as is required under that legislation.

The Health and Community Services Directorate and UNSW SPRC have engaged with the research and insights team and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate to facilitate a community survey via the YourSay panel. I will come to my confusion about the two different engagements in a moment. The Chief Minister of Treasury and Economic Development Directorate executives agreed to this proposal in late 2024.

The University of New South Wales SPRC, the Health and Community Services Directorate and the research and insights team collaborated to develop community survey questions. Those questions have been designed to align with key outcomes being considered by the evaluation, including perceptions of illicit drug use, community awareness and acceptance of reforms, perceptions of community safety, and satisfaction with police response to drug-related crime.

This survey has gone out to the YourSay panel, that has approximately 6,500 active members. When I took on notice to provide the names of the people to whom this has been provided, clearly I am not going to be able to provide 6,500 names, and there would be issues with doing that. The YourSay panel provides the ACT government with a platform to test policy ideas, evaluate government services and initiatives, and gather insights from the Canberra community. Eligible Canberrans will need to join the YourSay panel to take part in the survey. I can inform Mr Hanson that, while neither he nor I can join the panel, ACT Legislative Assembly members are the only Canberrans aged 16 or older who are not allowed to join the YourSay community panel. So if anybody else is interested, including staff, they can join the panel, but they will not be able to accept any prizes for completing the surveys if they work for the ACT government or the Legislative Assembly.

I can also advise Mr Hanson that YourSay panel survey reports are routinely published—and Mr Cocks, I think, asked about this—on the Open Government information website. That is a routine part of undertaking YourSay community panel surveys. I have asked my office to provide me with a copy of the final survey questions, which I will table in the Assembly today.

Mr Hanson made some assertions that the survey was skewed in some way. I can advise that the survey, as well as collecting demographic details, asks about awareness and interest in drug law reform, which is an important thing to understand, because people's awareness and interest in the topic might affect the responses that they give to the subsequent questions. It asks about people's views on drug use—some of which reflect questions that were asked in the YourSay panel survey in 2021. So we will be able to compare whether those views of the community on appropriate responses to people who are found in possession of small quantities of illicit drugs for personal use have changed

over the last four years and then ask about what people think the impact of drug law reforms have been. Those questions are posed both in the positive and in the negative with answers around strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree or I am not sure to both positive statements about the impact of the drug law reforms and also some negative statements about the potential impacts of the drug law reform. So I am not quite sure what Mr Hanson was getting at.

Finally, I can advise him in relation to the Your Say panel that there has been some criticism previously that the YourSay panel is not entirely representative of the community and, particularly, the panel's youth representation can be low. To address this, CMTEDD and the Health and Community Services Directorate have agreed that an external survey company, called Octopus, has been engaged to recruit additional participants aged 18 to 35 to ensure that the survey is as representative as possible. I have talked for long enough that I can now table the copy of the survey. I thank Mr Hanson, for his questions.

Just to clarify why I was confused earlier, I have also had a conversation with Mr Walsh about the inquiry that he is conducting—Mr Michael Walsh is conducting the inquiry into health data processes et cetera—and he has determined that he will not be undertaking a community-wide survey, because of the specific nature of the issues that he is looking at. He will engage with a wide range of stakeholders, but he will not be undertaking a community survey. That was what was in my head when I said that there were some things where engaging with experts and stakeholders was more important.

I present the following document:

Drug Law Reforms Survey 2025, undated.

Public transport—Floriade shuttle bus

MR BARR: In relation to Miss Nuttall's question, the final one, I have just had a look at the Floriade shuttle route and pick-up points, and there are two options if you are catching a bus from the south. You can exit that bus at the Albert Hall stop and use the underpass under Commonwealth Avenue to walk across to the National Library, where there is a shuttle stop. Alternatively, if that walk is too far, you can continue on the bus and get off at the city interchange and go to platform 9 at the city interchange where the shuttle bus can pick you up and take you direct to Floriade.

Early childhood education and care—access

MS BERRY: I can provide answers to two questions taken on notice today and provide an update more generally to members of the Assembly with regard to the Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT.

All phase 1 Set up for Success initiatives have been successfully delivered or continue to be implemented throughout phase 2. As of August 2025, of the 19 phase 2 initiatives, 10 are complete and nine are underway. All phase 2 actions are on track for delivery by December 2025.

Increasing access to free and quality early childhood education for three-year-olds is

being delivered through phase 2, including:

- providing access to 300 hours of free three-year-old preschool for eligible children since 1 January 2024. As of quarter three 2025, 3,132 children are accessing the program. Approximately 75 children, 2.4 per cent, identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- continuing delivery of the targeted three-year-old initiative for children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, which provides two days per week 48 weeks per year of free quality early learning. Three hundred priority children are currently accessing the targeted three-year-old initiative, including 32 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, 10.7 per cent of the children accessing; and
- providing an additional 66 places at Koori Preschool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three-year-olds from the start of the 2024 year.

On 12 October 2023, the Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession 2023-25 was launched, which is an initiative under phase 2 of Set up for Success. The ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy has 14 actions, of which nine are complete and five are under way. Completed actions include establishment of a sector-wide workforce development program in inclusive educational practices, including delivery of a range of free professional learnings for educators and early childhood teachers; development of a peer support coaching and mentoring framework to enable the implementation of these approaches in early childhood settings; development of educator professional standards for the sector as a tool for personal reflection and to support coaching and mentoring; delivery of the Early Childhood Degree Scholarships program; establishment of the Aunty Agnes Shae Early Childhood Scholarships program in partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang; delivery of the Early Learning Connection program, providing wraparound supports for up to 260 individuals to undertake certificate 3, diploma or degree in early childhood education; establishment of registrations for those in early childhood settings holding an approved ECT qualification with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute since 1 April 2024; amendment of the Education Act to recognise the importance of early childhood education and enshrining the right for children to access two years of free preschool—the ACT was the first jurisdiction to do this; delivery of an early childhood communications campaign plan to promote the benefits of early learning; and promoting free three-year-old preschool and enhanced community perceptions of educators and the value of early learning.

The Valuing Educators, Values Children Reference Group supports the implementation of the ACT ECEC workforce strategy and is comprised of representatives from across the ACT early childhood sector. Information on the early childhood strategy Set up for Success, for future reference, can be found on the Education Directorate's website.

Economy—credit rating

MR STEEL: Earlier in question time, I think it was the finance minister that was asked about the use of superannuation funds. I can confirm that the Territory Superannuation

Provision Protection Act 2000 prevents the use of SPA funds for anything but superannuation liabilities. Pages 224 to 228 of the budget outline the government's policy in relation to funding the unfunded superannuation liability.

Unused land—lease squatting

MR STEEL: In response to questions that I took on notice from Ms Clay in relation to the SDN Bluebell site on 44 College Street, Belconnen, I understand that, no, Access Canberra have not provided advice to SDN Bluebell in relation to provisions under the act. Access Canberra has also not engaged with the owners of the SDN Bluebell site in relation to their obligations under their lease.

Also, Access Canberra is aware of the site in relation to the Hawker Tennis Centre that was subsequently asked about in a supplementary question. Access Canberra reopened an investigation in August of this year in relation to the issues raised. This is an active investigation and, therefore, no further information can be provided.

The member was also asking about the independence of Access Canberra. My understanding is that they have delegated authority from the Chief Planner in relation to compliance matters under the Planning Act in a disallowable instrument that is available on the legislation register. The one I am looking at at the moment is the Planning (Territory Planning Authority) Delegation 2023 (No1).

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General's Report No 5/2025—Specialist assessment services for dementia and cognitive decline, dated 10 September 2025.

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

Bills—Inquiry—Payroll Tax Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, dated 8 September 2025

Bills—Not inquired into—

Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 9 September 2025.

Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, dated 12 September 2025.

Estimates 2025-2026—Select Committee—Public hearing of 30 July 2025—Correction of record—Copy of letter to the Senior Director, Committee Support from the Chief Police Officer for the ACT, dated 12 September 2025.

Standing order—

99B—Petitions—Referral advice—Correspondence—Not inquired into—

e-Petition 003-25—Woden Town Centre—Improving sustainability and liveability of—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee

on Environment and Planning, dated 11 September 2025.

e-Petition 013-25 and Petition 025-25—Canberra High School—Provision of air conditioning—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 9 September 2025.

Petition 023-25—Ainslie Football and Social Club’s DPA-2 rezoning proposal—Proposed referral for inquiry—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, dated 11 September 2025.

191—Amendments to the Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2), dated 9 and 10 September 2025.

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

Big Splash—Assembly resolution of 13 May 2025—Government response, dated September 2025.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 2—Inquiry into the Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025—Government response, dated September 2025

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Gambling and Racing Control Act and Financial Management Act—

Gambling and Racing Control (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-233 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Gambling and Racing Control (Governing Board) Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-234 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act—

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) ACT Shelter Employer Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-240 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT Employer Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-239 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Families ACT Employer Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-237 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Mental Health Community Coalition ACT Employer Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-241 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Volunteering Australia Employer Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-238 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Corrections Management) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-236 (LR, 21 August 2025).

Professional Engineers Act—Professional Engineers (Fees) Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-235 (LR, 19 August 2025).

Property Developers Act—Property Developers (Fees) Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-243 (LR, 28 August 2025).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Numberplate Fees

Determination 2025 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-242 (LR, 29 August 2025).

Utilities Act—Utilities (Water and Sewerage Capital Contribution Code) Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-244 (LR, 1 September 2025).

Leave of absence

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.08): I move

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Hanson from 18 to 25 September 2025 due to personal reasons.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and Legal Aid ACT—funding

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) on 18 June 2025, the Director of Public Prosecutions stated its most recent funding “falls short of the necessary long-term funding to meet the increased demand of the work of the ACT DPP”;
- (b) the Director of Public Prosecutions also stated “If the ACT DPP is not adequately funded, community safety is compromised”;
- (c) in the opening statement submission to the 2025-2026 Estimates hearings, the Director of Public Prosecutions stated they have seen a 50 percent increase in prosecution numbers in family violence and a 170 percent increase for sexual violence over four years;
- (d) the Director of Public Prosecutions further stated “we are asked to deliver the impossible, with a budget that has fallen significantly behind and has left us out of step with the service prosecuting agencies are able to deliver in other states and territories”; and
- (e) in the 2025-2026 Estimates hearings on 28 July 2025, the Chief Executive Officer of Legal Aid ACT outlined flatlining funding in the face of increasing costs and demand; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) provide the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions with adequate resources to deliver its service to Canberrans to ensure that community safety is not compromised; and
- (b) provide commensurate resources to Legal Aid ACT.

This motion is about two very important areas of ACT administration that play vital roles in the ACT criminal justice system. The role of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the DPP, is the final link in the prosecution chain. After a crime is reported, an investigation is conducted, the evidence gathered and briefs prepared, they

are the ones who take the matter to trial. Without them, justice is simply not served. Legal Aid is the office that provides resources to the other side—often the most disadvantaged in our city. Without them, rights are lost. We need both to maintain our system of fairness and justice. But we have recently found that neither have the resources that they need.

As the motion notes, on 18 June this year, the Director of Public Prosecutions stated about its most recent funding:

It falls short of the necessary long-term funding to meet the increased demand of the work of the ACT DPP.

It also stated—and this is the important thing, I think:

If the ACT DPP is not adequately funded, community safety is compromised.

It is pretty powerful stuff and an extraordinary statement: that community safety is compromised.

What is more concerning is that the strain was noted even before the current budget process—it goes back years. On 27 April this year, when it was reported that the DPP would no longer be able to handle regulatory matters, a statement from the DPP said:

The decision has been made considering the resourcing strain my office faces, which has been the subject of ongoing public comment by my predecessors and which I have been raising with government since my appointment. We have never been properly funded for this work, and as a result, cannot continue to absorb it.

You would think that that is a development that would have given the government pause and perhaps offered additional assistance—but not this government. Ms Cheyne responded, saying that she:

... wouldn't describe the ACT DPP as having "a lack of resources". What I would describe it as is everyone has limited resources; that's reality.

That sounded like a bit of a fob-off. It sounds similar to what we are hearing on education and on health et cetera. What we are hearing everywhere is that nobody has enough to get on with their job of delivering frontline services.

We heard in more detail from the DPP during estimates—and it is here that we really get to the point. We have known for some time that the DPP has been struggling for resources. Since then we, as an Assembly and as a community, have significantly increased the work we are asking the DPP to do. Mr Engels noted this issue during the hearings:

In 2017 the two recommendations made of that report, which was tabled in parliament, were that the office needed immediate funding and long-term significant funding. It recognised that the office was only coping, in 2017, because of the limited capacity of the courts to list matters. At that point, the Supreme Court only had four Supreme Court judges; there are now six, together with a number of acting Supreme Court judges. The number of magistrates has also

increased significantly. Since then, I have received very limited funding. There has been no meaningful increase to my budget since 2017.

The other aspect that report recognised was the need for whole-of-system funding and that it is shortsighted—and I do not say that disrespectfully—to fund one aspect of the system without consideration of the downstream effect.

Indeed, that downstream effect is that, as they resourced the courts more, it has affected the DPP, and that is why we are also calling for additional funding for Legal Aid. To continue with his quote:

The last two ACT budgets have resulted in increased funding for ACT Policing, and whilst that was needed, and I do not suggest otherwise, when you put additional police on the street, it results in increased charges which come into my office, and there has been no commensurate increase to my funding.

In fact, the opening statement submission to the 2025-26 hearings, the DPP stated that they have seen a 50 per cent increase in prosecution numbers in family violence and a 170 per cent increase for sexual violence over four years.

In hearings it was stated:

Last financial year, my office prosecuted 5,231 matters across ACT courts, including completing more than 800 family violence files and commencing more than 200 sexual assault files.

This is not just a theoretical exercise. As the DPP said:

The real-life effect, going back to your question, is that my staff simply do not have time to prepare the matters properly.

Expecting my staff to carry huge workloads, to work unpaid overtime hours and to have no real ability to prepare matters in a way the community would expect, really compromises community safety. It also compromises the trust police have in my agency. They put a lot of effort into investigating matters and charging, and then they hand the files over to us. If we are not funded to be able to prosecute those matters properly, it really impacts on their trust and confidence in our agency.

The DPP went on:

We are asked to deliver the impossible, with a budget that has fallen significantly behind and has left us out of step with the service prosecuting agencies are able to deliver in other states and territories.

Turning to Legal Aid, in estimates the Chief Executive Officer of Legal Aid ACT also outlined flatlining funding from the ACT government in the face of increasing costs and demand. It was stated in estimates that:

Whilst we saw a lot of fanfare around the increase in the NLAP, ACT Legal Aid actually went backwards.

The commission's annual report noted that there is:

... an urgent and enduring need for legal assistance of all kinds in order to provide access to justice for vulnerable and disadvantaged community members around Australia. Despite these findings, the stability of funding for legal assistance services remains fraught... and the level of unmet demand, will only increase.

Indeed, a report from private practitioners doing legal aid work claimed:

By 2030, we will be looking at a failed legal aid system.

This is another case where we have asked these agencies to provide many more services with little or no extra resources. Something has to change.

Before I conclude, I note that the estimates committee made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake a comprehensive review of the funding and functions of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions—

and look at:

- the adequacy of funding ...
- the range and volume of tasks ...
- the extent of unpaid overtime ...
- whether the Witness Assistance Service is meeting identified needs.

and so on.

This is an issue, as I outlined, that has been going on since at least 2017. We are hearing it in estimates reports continually and we have successive DPPs saying they do not have enough. With due respect to the estimates report, on the recommendation to conduct another review—and to again hear the same things that have already been articulated numerous times by countless people—I think we have run out of time, to be frank. I think it is time for the minister and this government to sit down with Legal Aid and sit down with the DPP, understand exactly what that shortfall is and meet that shortfall—lest Legal Aid not be able to do its task and support some of the most disadvantaged in our community or, conversely, the DPP not be able to do its job, which is to prosecute, particularly, some of these newer offences that are coming forward.

I commend my motion to the Assembly. I note that there are a couple of amendments from the Greens—I guess, based on the same point that I am making: that if you have an increase in funding in one part of the legal system, it flows through and, if you do not do that, you have an imbalance in the scales of justice. If you were to fund one part and not the other, you have an imbalance, and that is what we want to address. Given that we have heard these warnings since at least 2017, I think the time for delay is over and the time for action is now.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.18): Mr Hanson may be feeling slightly disoriented, as I am in full support of his motion today. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and our ACT Legal Aid Commission, so ably led by Ms Engel and

Dr Boersig respectively, clearly require additional funding, given the pressures that they are facing, and that they have articulated now in public fora, including the estimates process.

It is vital, when it comes to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, that we are served by an office that is adequately funded. We rely on Ms Engel and her office to take carriage of all ACT criminal matters where ACT Policing lay charges, including family violence matters, sexual assault matters, murders and a range of other offences, as well as conducting appeals to the ACT Court of Appeal and the High Court where required. The office also assesses charges laid by police to determine which charges should proceed.

The director has publicly raised her concerns and stated that the office's most recent funding falls short of the necessary long-term funding to meet the increased demand for the work of the ACT DPP, and that if the DPP is not adequately funded, in the director's view, community safety will be compromised. We know that the office has seen a 50 per cent increase in prosecution numbers in family violence and a 170 per cent increase for sexual violence over four years. As Mr Hanson referenced, the director has said:

... we are asked to deliver the impossible, with a budget that has fallen significantly behind and has left us out of step with the service prosecuting agencies are able to provide in other states and territories.

I think the new director has been very forthright in her comments and has certainly brought a perspective to the office, and she has now articulated that perspective, having got into the seat and assessed the state of the office.

I was pleased to read, in the government's response to the Select Committee on Estimates report, that the DPP has received additional expertise temporarily to support its upcoming budget bids and for wider corporate functions. However, the government's lukewarm response, in "noting" the committee's recommendation, does leave a question mark as to what the outcome will be. I understand that, technically, of course, the government will take that position because future budgets are not decided yet, and that is the nature of those responses, but it means that the question remains a live one.

The budget did provide one additional full-time equivalent at the ASO5 level to the Witness Assistance Service, and support to service the additional criminal listings from the announcement of the creation of a 10th magistrate position. The funding for one Witness Assistance Service position and support to service the additional court listings is welcome. However, as Ms Engel noted, "it does not meet current demand for victims or witnesses facing complex barriers to justice and falls short of the necessary long-term funding to meet the increased demand of the work of the ACT DPP".

At the risk of verballing Ms Engel, I recall in a previous term of the Assembly being struck by how one of her first asks in her new role as director was for funding for Witness Assistance Service team members. Not long after she arrived—this was when I was the Attorney-General, of course—she made this point quite early. She felt that the ACT had under-resourced this area historically, compared to her own experience in different jurisdictions.

Her victim-centric focus from the outset heralded a positive tone for the office, and it was certainly hard not to be moved by the stories she shared of the positive impacts that the Witness Assistance Service teams have made in other jurisdictions that she had practised in. This service provide critical support to vulnerable victims and witnesses, and they are often the only support service that a victim or witness engages with, whilst facing an unknown and complex system.

At the time I was pleased to be able to act quickly, as the then Attorney-General, to provide funding for four additional Witness Assistance Service positions. This was done from the Confiscated Assets Trust Fund to enable a quick response; of course, that is necessarily a temporary funding path, and it was done with an eye to undertaking a long-term approach through subsequent budgets. Of course, those are budget processes with which I am now not involved in the early stages. It was good to be able to provide that short-term response to meet those immediate requests. I remain, as does the director, concerned about the base funding of her agency, which compromises the needs of vulnerable people at the centre of the justice system.

Just as Canberrans are served best by a well-resourced Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, as Mr Hanson has correctly pointed out, we must also have a commensurately well-funded Legal Aid Commission. Legal Aid are in receipt of flatlining funding in the face of increasing costs and demand. There can be no doubt that the commission plays a unique role in the ACT legal landscape by making sure that people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged can get legal help to stand up for their rights across a variety of areas of practice.

As Dr Boersig raised in estimates, we need to revisit the Legal Aid threshold for eligibility to reflect income growth over recent years. The ACT Greens took to the 2024 election an ambitious community safety initiative that included a plan to raise the income threshold to \$498 per week, which is 120 per cent of the June 2022 quarter Henderson poverty line. This would have addressed the current gap in access to legal services for around 120 low income members of the ACT community per year who do not qualify for Legal Aid but who cannot afford private legal representation.

It is vital that Legal Aid is better resourced, and that any increase in the scope of the work it is called on to perform, like appearing before more judicial officers, in a wider range of matters or in more matters due to increased prosecutions, is also better funded.

We did see, of course, through this year's National Legal Assistance Partnership funding increase, more money made available, but once that was broken down nationally, it led to a very small increase for the Legal Aid service here in the ACT. Whilst the headline number seems generous, the reality is that, once it is smeared out across the country, it had very little impact here in the ACT for that service. That was a point of disappointment for me.

As Mr Hanson touched on briefly, I will be moving amendments. My amendments seek only to expand Mr Hanson's motion and not to limit it, in order to recognise that there are other community legal centres in Canberra that are also operating in this tight-fisted environment, in the face of ever-increasing demand for their services from Canberra's most vulnerable residents. These community legal centres provide incredibly valuable

work in the face of these real funding pressures, and they are seeing those same increases in demand.

To be clear, the amendments are not to detract from the good work of these agencies—that is, the DDP and the Legal Aid Commission—rather, to highlight that there are others who are experiencing the same challenges. Some of them do operate directly in the criminal space, where the DDP operates. Others are operating across civil and other areas of the law.

I took the opportunity, upon receiving notice of Mr Hanson's motion, to consult with some of these community legal centres and ask them what their current experience is. Care financial and legal services told me:

Additional funding for legal services including CLCs such as Care Consumer Law would be a welcome development. There is increasing demand across the CLC sector and underfunded CLCs do not have capacity to respond to the increasing demand. There is also significant funding uncertainty. For example, funding for Care's Mobile Debt Clinic was extended for only 12 months to 30 June 2026 and our ACAT duty lawyer service funding will also end then.

I also took the opportunity to discuss Mr Hanson's motion with the Women's Legal Centre. Their observation was:

Calls to the Centre's advice and intake line have increased by 30% in the last 12 months and 48% in the last two years. Requests for assistance through the Centre's website have lifted by 86% in the last 12 months. There are more people reaching out which is an excellent sign that the ACT Government's commitment to raising awareness of gender-based violence has been successful but resourcing has not followed.

From the perspective of the Sexual Violence Legal Service, lengthy delays in prosecution have significant negative effects on their clients, who can effectively find their lives on hold while matters are waiting or delayed.

I must also mention the Aboriginal Legal Service, who do the very best work and on the smell of an oily rag, representing our First Nations defendants in our local courts and supporting them in a range of programs and initiatives, like the Front Up Program and with bail support and post-prison support. Any increase in the work that the DPP sees or is funded to do must also flow on to additional funding for the ALS. We have a duty to take every step we can to support First Nations justice, and to reduce the over-representation of our First Nations men, women and children in the legal system. Given the significant over-representation, if we do see an increase in capacity for the DPP, clearly, the Aboriginal Legal Service and Legal Aid will see a number of those clients and will be called upon to support them. Mr Hanson put it well: we need to make sure that the scales of justice remain balanced in that sense.

In closing, the Greens are pleased to support Mr Hanson's motion today, and I commend my amendments to it. I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move:

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

“(f) the increasing demand noted above has impacts across the community legal sector, and underfunded community legal centres do not have capacity to respond to the increasing demand. They are also impacted by significant funding uncertainty.”

2. After paragraph (2)(b), insert:

“(c) provide commensurate resources to other community legal centres in the ACT including the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), Women’s Legal Centre and Care Consumer Law.”

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) (3.29): I do not think I will speak for too long because we are on a unity ticket here, as much as Mr Hanson might personally hate that. It is because we agree.

This is, as we have heard, an issue that has been growing since 2017, including through multiple ministers, notwithstanding that I have been in the role for less than 11 months. I think it also stems in part, if we go right back, from self-government. Effectively, from the beginning, we have been in a vertical structural imbalance, and difficult choices have had to be made all the time about how we are funding things. A theme from across the contributions we have heard in budget estimates, not just from agencies but from different areas of government and the community sector, is that more funding is required.

We agree. We would like to provide more funding. I think there has been a genuine acknowledgement, in the contributions in the chamber so far, that this budget, the first for me as minister with responsibility for this area, has sought to put us on a course of correcting the ongoing vertical imbalance that we have here.

I would note the quite extraordinary cognitive dissonance that we are faced with in this place. The first is that Mr Hanson, through this motion, has finally admitted that police numbers have grown and are making a difference, which is terrific. Thank you, Mr Hanson; I appreciate your realisation.

The second—and Minister Steel has already touched on this—is that, constantly across this chamber, and it does not matter in what forum, we are being asked for more and more, while also there is recognition that the budget is in a very difficult state. We cannot do both. While other parties and Independents in this place may not be in a position of government at this point, it is in some ways quite reckless to be peddling this narrative when what we would hope from a mature parliament is that we would all be working together on an appropriate response that seeks to address some of the fiscal realities that we are facing. As Minister Steel and the Chief Minister have pointed out, they are not unique to the ACT, by any means.

I would absolutely agree with Mr Rattenbury—and we support the amendments as well, of course—that the new DPP, Ms Engel, has brought a renewed focus on some areas, including schemes that have been in existence for some time but have not necessarily

had the resources that reflect the need. Her renewed focus and perspective on this have been articulated well and, I think, quite clearly to government, and especially to me, as a new minister in this space. With her fresh perspective and my fresh eyes, we are working collaboratively together.

I certainly think that there are multiple opportunities that have been taken in this term so far where I have sought publicly to back Ms Engel in the decisions that she has been making. She has enormous responsibilities as the Director of Public Prosecutions, as well as for her staff and the welfare of her staff, who are incredible. I have met many of them. I would like to meet all of them, but I have met many of them. The work that they do is unbelievable. I think it causes us all extraordinary distress, on a personal level, let alone when we are thinking about it from a justice perspective, that staff are not able to prepare sufficiently in all cases. I would not say that it is in every case, by any means. I think the work that the DPP does is self-evident, in many ways. I would note that, when you have a workload that far outpaces your resource level, of course, that creates enormous pressure.

Going to some of the effort that we have undertaken in this budget, there is additional investment for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to support them. This relates particularly to the initiative regarding the ACT Magistrates Court, where we have an initiative to establish a 10th magistrate. I think Ms Engel was the first person from the justice sector that I met with. I think her words have rung true in every conversation that I have had. As Mr Hanson quite eloquently reflected on it before, if you invest in one area and you do not make commensurate investment in all areas, it quickly becomes unbalanced and there will be, effectively a clogging of the pipe at some point, which obviously has very real consequences on a human level and on a justice level.

In making the decision to establish a 10th magistrate, there is also, with that funding, an additional prosecutor grade 3, an additional prosecutor grade 2, and 0.5 of an FTE of a paralegal. The initiative also included increased resourcing for Legal Aid—again, going to Mr Hanson’s point before—and some further support for the ACT Coroners Court, especially as it relates to the people who are doing the work. Again, it is an exceptionally small team. It is a common occurrence across the ACT government, but we really were looking to not create a further imbalance in any one area.

I particularly note Ms Engel’s recognition of the Witness Assistance Scheme. I note that, just last week, at the JACS director-general awards, the Witness Assistance Scheme won an award, which was terrific to see, as did many other parts of JACS that work to support victims and to support people to engage in the justice sector, which does result in fair and just outcomes.

Mr Rattenbury is absolutely right: all over the place, we have a history, I suppose, of funding different parts of the justice sector with funds from the Confiscated Assets Trust. What is so problematic about this is that this trust fluctuates. I would not say that it is volatile, but it certainly fluctuates every year, having regard to how much is in it. It is not a sustainable funding stream. What I am looking to do over the course of this term is to move some of the resources, particularly when it is human resources, away from being funded through the CAT fund and into something that is a lot more sustainable, and returning the CAT fund to something that is a bit more short term

based, where there is a top-up needed, or similar. It is problematic to keep drawing on a fund when we have no guarantee as to what is going to be in it in future years.

With respect to Legal Aid, it receives a recurrent core funding grant and non-recurrent program-based funding for short-term initiatives from the ACT government. In this budget we agreed to a range of initiatives, including funding to maintain Legal Aid grants of legal assistance at 120 per cent of the Henderson poverty line over two years, ongoing funding for Legal Aid duty lawyers to attend the children's care and protection intensive list, additional resourcing to progress cases before the courts, additional funding to support Legal Aid's engagement with the Intermediary Program and the Human Rights Commission, and continuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse liaison officers. Mr Assistant Speaker, I think you will understand exactly why that investment has a lot of merit and is certainly warranted.

Of course, Legal Aid, just like our community legal centres and the Aboriginal Legal Service, receive funding from the federal government as well. We are all very grateful to see the injection that was provided through the National Access to Justice Partnership—something that I signed with my fellow attorneys-general in November last year. We also know, based on the information that we have, that we are still falling short of the resourcing that is required. Again, I think that is a reflection across the country and something on which I and my fellow ministers in the Standing Council of Attorneys-General will continue to engage with the commonwealth government, as we seek to address this.

In short, that was a lot of words to say that I agree. We will be doing as much as we can, in partnership with our justice sector, to effectively right an imbalance that has been in place for several decades. It is not an easy task, but I do appreciate the attention that has been given to it by members who asked questions and provided opportunities for opening statements during the estimates process and through this motion and the amendments today. I commend it all to the Assembly.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.41): In closing, as I indicated before, we will be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendments, for the reasons outlined. I welcome Mr Rattenbury's enthusiasm. It has taken a while. Miss Nuttall said that she fully supported me, in the last sitting week. You do get older and wiser with age; hopefully, Mr Rattenbury has now realised that supporting my motions is a better way of doing it. I welcome his support and look forward to it in the future.

On a serious note, Minister, I welcome your response to the motion; thank you very much. I would say, though, that we have been collectively banging on about this for a while, as have DPPs—a succession of them—and as have the CEO of Legal Aid and others. It is time to make this happen. I think we have to see some substantive action rather than just ongoing commitments that do not lead anywhere. I will take you at your word, and I thank members for their support.

Mr Rattenbury's amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Public transport—south Canberra

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.43): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) residents across Canberra's south use three north-south corridors to transit north: the Tuggeranong Parkway, the Monaro Highway and Adelaide Avenue/Commonwealth Avenue;
- (b) Canberra's south includes Woden, Weston Creek, Molonglo, Tuggeranong and the Inner South;
- (c) the Adelaide Avenue/Commonwealth Avenue corridor is the only one of these being planned for a dedicated public transport corridor to provide journey time reliability into the future, with journey time a key driver of patronage;
- (d) the Light Rail Stage 2B will eliminate the existing transit bus lanes along Adelaide Avenue/Commonwealth Avenue used by rapid bus services;
- (e) the Light Rail Stage 2B Environmental Impact Statement states that:
 - (i) assessment of the outcomes of the traffic modelling, both with and without light rail in future years, has highlighted that without further investment in roads and public transport (including light rail), significant traffic congestion and deteriorating vehicle and bus travel times will occur, especially during peak hours; and
 - (ii) an integrated light rail network is more than just the journey between stops; it creates better connections to buses and improves "last mile" offerings, including cycling and pedestrian routes;
- (f) there is very limited information about how Light Rail Stage 2B will integrate with the bus network from across Canberra's south;
- (g) ACT Labor's 2024 Policy Position Statement states "building light rail to Woden will help create a fast frequent and reliable transport spine that better connects some of our major town centres. This will make it easier to get between town centres as well as improving suburban accessibility in combination with our strengthened bus network"; and
- (h) planning for good public transport needs to consider the reliability, frequency and travel times of services. These characteristics are required to attract residents to use public transport;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) stage 1—the bus network and how it integrates into light rail was released after light rail was constructed;
- (b) stage 2—the routes for the bus network across the south, and how they integrate into light rail are unknown;
- (c) many members of the community are concerned about the lack of information about how many changes will be required to travel to the city and total journey times; and
- (d) to facilitate an informed discussion, it is necessary to understand the form of the future public transport network across Canberra's south; and

- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) develop the draft bus network for Canberra's south to show the routes from each suburb that will form the service to the city, including integration with light rail;
 - (b) identify the location and number of times passengers will change public transport vehicles to travel from their suburb to the city;
 - (c) identify the indicative total journey times and assess reliability of services from each suburb to the city, for both the State Circle and Barton dogleg alignments, including underlying assumptions; and
 - (d) report back to the Assembly by 2 December 2025 with (3)(a) to (c).

I rise today to speak on behalf of the many residents across Canberra's south, in Woden, Weston Creek, Molonglo, Tuggeranong and the inner south, who rely on our public transport system to stay connected to work, education, health care and community life.

These communities depend on three key north-south corridors: the Tuggeranong Parkway, the Monaro Highway and the Adelaide Avenue-Commonwealth Avenue corridor. Of these, only the Adelaide Avenue-Commonwealth Avenue corridor is being planned to carry dedicated public transport into the future; that is, light rail stage 2B. Despite the expense and significance of this project, there remains a troubling lack of information about how it will integrate with the broader public transport network across Canberra's south.

The environmental impact statement for stage 2B makes it clear: without further investment in roads and public transport, Canberra faces worsening congestion and deteriorating travel times, especially during peak hours. While the minister states that buses will continue from the south to the north, it is unclear how the government will guarantee reliability while buses are potentially stuck in traffic, given the worsening congestion.

The EIS also rightly notes that a successful light rail network is more than just the track between stops. It must connect seamlessly with local buses, cycling infrastructure and pedestrian routes. Kent Street is the only interchange with buses that the minister has mentioned.

The problem is that we still do not know how the network will work. Let me give some examples. With respect to north Woden and the inner south, which is on the alignment, buses like the 57, the 58 and the R6 will no longer have dedicated bus lanes on Adelaide Avenue. They will be stuck in general traffic, with unknown opportunities to interchange with light rail. Residents in south Woden may need to change to a rapid service and then again to light rail at Woden, adding complexity and time to their journey. For people living in Weston Creek and south Molonglo, buses like the R7 and the R10 will continue to travel along congested corridors, with no dedicated alignment, making journey times unreliable. I would ask the minister to speak to the NCA about bus lanes on Commonwealth Avenue.

For Tuggeranong residents, they may need to take a suburban bus to the R4 or the R5, then change again at Woden to light rail, or travel on buses along the parkway or the Monaro Highway, both of which are expected to become increasingly congested. This

is not a reliable service.

These are not theoretical concerns. They are real, lived experiences that will affect thousands of Canberrans every day. We have been here before. During stage 1, the bus network was only released after the light rail was constructed. Now, with stage 2, we are again being asked to support a major infrastructure project without knowing how it will serve the suburbs it is meant to connect.

Residents are rightly asking, “How many changes will I need to make to get to the city? What will my total journey time be? Will the service be reliable?” These are not unreasonable questions. They are essential to building public confidence and encouraging public transport use.

Good planning requires transparency. The community needs to know how the network will benefit them, and who the winners and losers are. I therefore call on the government to develop and release a draft bus network for Canberra’s south, showing routes from each suburb and how they will integrate with light rail.

I would like to thank Mr Cocks, Mr Braddock and Minister Steel’s office for their cooperation in progressing this motion for transparency for people from the south. We cannot afford to build a transport spine in isolation. We must plan for a network that works for the people who use it. That means having transparency and giving people the information they need about travel times and interchanges now, not after the fact.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.48): Canberra’s population is growing, and we need to plan for a city with 700,000 people by 2050. In Woden, we will see the population grow from around 40,000 to around 80,000. That is why we are planning today for and investing in an integrated public transport network, to avoid the congestion and the problems faced by other cities in the future.

We do need proactively to build a transport network that our growing city needs, and that brings together all transport modes. That includes light rail as a mass transit system, buses, active travel, rideshare, and making sure that we are supporting the continued use of private vehicles on the network as well.

Extending the light rail line to the south will establish Canberra’s north to south transport spine. Extending mass transit is essential to our government’s future-focused plan for an integrated public transport network. The extension of light rail to Woden will provide Canberrans on the south side with the same high-quality, frequent, reliable services that have been provided on the north side of Canberra, with the delivery of stage 1 of light rail, which has been incredibly successful. It is something that we want to continue to deliver and connect to the south.

I appreciate that there have been some concerns raised by members as to what the individual public transport trips will look like with the commencement of light rail stage 2B. I appreciate that those concerns also form the basis of the motion moved today by Ms Carrick, and I would like to thank Ms Carrick for working constructively with my office on the amendments to the motion which I will be moving.

Buses will still play an important part in our transport system once light rail stage 2B becomes operational, by providing services to the suburbs and closely integrating with light rail. They cannot deliver the mass transit system that Canberra needs by themselves, though. It is critical that we have the extension of light rail down to the south side of Canberra to provide that extra capacity on our transport network, particularly in key bottlenecks in the city, like Commonwealth Avenue. Light rail will provide an additional capacity of 2,400 trips per hour in that critical transport connection that bridges our city, quite literally.

We will be building a new bridge as part of the planned project, in between the two existing spans of Commonwealth Avenue. This is subject to the draft environmental impact statement that is being consulted on at the moment. We will be physically building the extra capacity required to move more people more efficiently across the city.

The alternative to that has been put forward and debated at the election, which is to take lanes off Commonwealth Avenue for buses. That, of course, reduces the network capacity overall, affects the movement of private vehicles, and has flow-on effects for the rest of the network, including for buses.

That is why the government will continue to provide an integrated network that has mass transit light rail at its central spine, connecting with buses. There will still be direct bus services from the south side to the city following the completion of light rail stage 2B. We have consistently made that commitment, and it is a position that I continue to reaffirm in this debate, and have done previously, as recently as question time, as well as in the response that I provided to Ms Carrick which was taken on notice during the inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026.

In this response, I stated that the ACT government has consistently said that there are still expected to be direct rapid buses from the south side to the city, once light rail stage 2B operations commence, including from places like the Molonglo Valley. I also stated that there are great opportunities with light rail to integrate these bus services with a new mass transit system, which were simply not available before, providing connection points to light rail for passengers connecting from rapid buses from Molonglo and Weston Creek, like the R10 and the R7, which would then continue on to the city, and provide an integration point with the new light rail stop infrastructure for those residents who either wish to go north to the new stops in the parliamentary triangle, accessing the employment hub there, which supports 40,000 workers, or indeed south to Woden, if they wish, utilising that interchange point, particularly from the Kent Street stop, which is a great opportunity for a connection point, providing options for passenger connections to light rail services.

Consistent with the introduction of light rail stage 1, Transport Canberra will oversee future network planning to optimise bus and light rail integration. Preliminary work is underway, and considered in the environmental impact statement draft, to explore how the existing bus fleet could be deployed to enhance network reach frequency. As network demands and traffic movements change, transport planning studies will continue to be undertaken that will inform future public transport network adjustments and improvements, including to places like the growing Molonglo Valley region.

It is important to point out that a lot goes into designing, communicating and implementing a full bus network—a fully designed network. When designing the network itself, Transport Canberra has to consider a lot of variables. I refer to the changes to the community that have occurred since the previous network that needed to be served by buses—and the changing Molonglo community is something that we absolutely need to be considering.

The number of buses in the operational fleet is a consideration, the workforce, how many drivers we have and the distribution of full-time, part-time and casual bus drivers. I refer also to how routes and services will be distributed across driver shifts, and school bell times, which vary from school to school and change from year to year. Our services will need to drop off and pick up students as close to these times as possible.

Of course, there is the road network itself and the changed road network environment. Traffic today will not be what it is in seven or eight years time. We need to consider what infrastructure is in place at the time that the network is being designed for. That, of course, changes from year to year. We need to consider things like bus priority measures as well—transit lanes, bus jumps at intersections and temporary traffic changes due to construction works which may be happening—private or public construction works that may be happening around the city from time to time and that need to be factored into network timings for the timetable, and the actual network itself, in terms of diversions that may need to be made for a particular period of time, for example.

Once all of those details are worked through, there is a practical and legislated process to put a proposed network into effect. This includes mandatory timeframes, consultation with driver workforce, allocation of shifts, and the time needed to communicate these changes to the broader community.

Given the time and considerations needed to prepare a new bus network, we need to ensure that it is done at the appropriate time which ensures that the network information provided is contemporary for the design of the network, so that it meets the needs of the community at the particular point in time that it is being proposed to be implemented. That is why a full network design simply cannot be done now, ahead of the finalisation of construction, according to the timeline that I outlined in the Assembly and that I tabled in the sitting week. It is simply not possible to deliver a full network design and timetable now, while not knowing what the conditions will be, and what those variables will be, ahead of commencement of stage 2B operations.

I appreciate the intent of Ms Carrick's motion, but it is simply not possible, based on the original motion, which is why I will be moving a set of amendments which I hope will meet the intent of her original motion, but which are far more practical in looking at what potential interchange opportunities and bus connections will be made, to make sure that we get the maximum benefit from this new light rail investment that we are planning to make.

The light rail stage 2B program update statement that I tabled in the Assembly on 4 September provides the key timeframes for progressing the project. At this stage of the project, between now and mid-2026, the government's focus is on progressing work on the final concept design and environmental approvals. The statement outlined that

construction is expected to take in the order of four years, plus a commissioning period of up to 12 months post construction, following the awarding of the contract for the main works.

According to that timeline, operations for light rail stage 2B are anticipated to commence in the early 2030s, so it is a long time from now, to be designing a fully designed network. Of course, we welcome having a discussion about integration more broadly, which we can certainly look at in a shorter period of time.

As the light rail project progresses, so will our focus on ensuring future bus network planning seeks to optimise bus and light rail integration, to enhance the reach and frequency of public transport services across Canberra. Through this project, we will also consider opportunities to provide new connections between light rail and rapid and local bus services, and complementary active travel improvements along the corridor, to improve last-mile offerings for cyclists and pedestrians, ahead of the light rail stage 2B operations commencing.

This is something that we will also consider as part of the development of a new draft southern gateway planning and design framework, which is an integrated land use and transport plan for the light rail stage 2B corridor, both through the inner south and through the Adelaide Avenue-Yarra Glen corridor down to Woden town centre, as well as further beyond, as far as Beasley Street in Farrer and Torrens.

This is an opportunity, much like the city and gateway urban design framework, to articulate what the opportunities are for future connections for transport, and anticipate where the future growth of the city may occur within that corridor, and particularly look at it through a transit-oriented development planning lens, so that we are not just focusing on delivering the integrated transport services for the current population today, but actually anticipating, given the period of time that we are talking about here, the population that may be living in this area in the future, when we do have more density being planned for our transport corridor, consistent with the Planning Strategy.

The Planning Strategy itself is up for a refresh. It is a requirement under the Planning Act 2023 to do a refresh of that plan. Of course, as both the transport minister and the planning minister, I am very keen to make sure that that is a well-integrated plan. It is my intention that we also look at undertaking work on a broader master plan of the rapid bus network and light rail network, as part of that refresh, in consultation with the community.

The current transport strategy, which was developed in 2020, prior to or in the early stages of the pandemic, did not anticipate some of the work that we have now done on future rapid bus connections, which, of course, Labor committed to at the election. We need to look at that, as well as the broader integration of the network. That will provide an opportunity, and it is reflected in the amendments that I will be moving shortly.

We remain committed to engaging with the community throughout the development of stage 2B, including on any potential changes to the bus network, before operations commence on light rail stage 2B. When the time is right, the government will make changes to the bus network to integrate with new light rail services to leverage the benefits on both transport modes. These changes will be made through evidence-based

decision-making.

We will look at the data on the transport network. We will look at the public transport patronage in the household travel survey data that we undertake semi-regularly, and we will consider customer feedback as well, to look closely at the integration benefits with other transport modes.

The amendments that I will be moving clarify important points, in that we do not have an intention to remove the transit lanes along Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen, as has been suggested by Ms Carrick. But we are having a look at bus priority improvements along the corridor; I have no problem with that. If the motion is premised on the fact that we are removing the entire T2 lane from Woden to the city, which was broken in parts, anyway, for network necessity, that is not actually the right premise for the motion.

I hope that the amendments articulate those well. We are supporting Ms Carrick's motion, if amended. I seek leave to move the amendments that have been circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I move:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(d).
2. Omit all text after "(3) calls on the ACT Government to", substitute:
 - "(a) commit to continuing to provide public transport users with direct bus services, including rapid bus services, from Canberra's south to the city once Light Rail Stage 2B operations commence;
 - (b) consider public transport infrastructure improvements, including bus priority and transit lanes, for major public transport corridors between Canberra's south and the city, including along the final light rail stage 2B alignment;
 - (c) publish conceptual options for the bus network from Canberra's south, integrating into light rail, by June 2026;
 - (d) release a future bus network which outlines the proposed rapid bus network, including interchanges between rapid bus services and light rail, and connections between light rails and rapid and local bus services across Canberra's south, as part of the public exhibition of the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Light Rail Stage 2B;
 - (e) develop an updated master plan for the public transport network, which includes the final light rail stage 2B alignments and proposed bus network, including rapid buses and local buses from across Canberra's south, as part of the Planning Strategy refresh;
 - (f) consult with the community at least two (2) years before the commencement of the new bus network aligned with operations commencing on light rail stage 2B; and
 - (g) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2026 on (3)(b) to (d)."

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.03): The opposition will be supporting Ms Carrick’s motion today. I note the amendment and a few conversations that I am sure will be had.

I just wanted to give a brief history of what we saw in Gungahlin when light rail came through. It did not expand or strengthen the network. It axed it. It was a deliberate, cynical choice to close down bus services to force commuters to rely on light rail—even when it meant longer, less convenient and less accessible journeys.

They killed the number 100 peak services, the 700 express services and the 900 weekend services. They changed the routes for a number of suburban services also. This was not done to improve services for commuters. It was done to ensure that people actually used light rail, even if it was inferior to their needs.

Labor invested a huge amount of political capital into light rail and they needed to show it was a success. It will be exactly the same when—perhaps I should say “if”—light rail to Woden ever becomes a reality. By that point Labor will have invested more than five billion in public dollars; money that will be costing us perhaps \$300 million a year in interest payments, and will be desperate to show that the investment was worthwhile.

They will look at whatever options are available to force commuters onto light rail, even if this service does not suit their needs. They will axe bus services, and they will make light rail free. Who knows? These are all things that Labor may choose to undertake. There will be significant roadworks along Adelaide Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue, creating congestion that will push drivers into using the tram. So do not expect them to have developed the bus network yet. We have seen time and time again that they go to whatever lengths they can to avoid any real transparency.

They do not want Canberrans to know what this project will cost them—either in financial terms or in the terms of congestion and travel time. Labor know that they are strongest when the community is not well informed about choices that they are making, or the consequences of those choices. They will keep us in the dark. No matter how much this hurts the community they are supposedly here to serve.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.06): I am speaking to this motion as a local member for Tuggeranong, but also as the former shadow minister for transport, and I thank Ms Carrick for bringing it forward. I think that this motion is underpinned by a want from Ms Carrick to achieve genuine public transport outcomes for the people that she represents, and I share that want.

Just imagine for a moment that Canberra’s public transport overarching policy was focused on genuine public transport outcomes. Just imagine. That is what this motion imagines. Because I am not sure that it is the case at the moment. Now, Mr Steel assures us that it is—but I do not know that it is the case. I think that, as of today, much of our public transport policies focus on building a legacy project for the Chief Minister, at any cost.

This motion gets back to what should be the core purpose of public transport in this city, and that is: getting people where they want to go in a timely manner, when they want to get there. That is really what it is about. Shouldn’t that be the main aim of the

government and the transport space? Of course it should be. But I am not sure that it is at the moment.

This motion reminds me of a motion that I brought to this chamber in November of 2022. My motion called upon the government to guarantee that the direct bus routes from the southern suburbs to Civic would be maintained, if and when the tram gets to Woden.

The motion was based on form; it was based on history. Because we know that prior to stage one of the tram commencing from Gungahlin to Civic, virtually everyone in Gungahlin had a relatively direct route to Civic. Once the tram arrived, the direct bus routes vanished. Although the people of Gungahlin were sold this dream of better public transport outcomes with the arrival of the tram, for many of those people, those better outcomes did not eventuate.

Some people got better outcomes. There is no question about that. Some people did. But most of them did not. Once the tram started its operation, the people of Gungahlin lost the 200 Rapid bus, 202 Expresso bus, the 251, the 252, the 254, the 255, the 259 Expresso routes, because the government was hell-bent on forcing those people onto the tram.

So the reality for so many of the residents of Gungahlin is that their public travel times increased because of the tram. Now, I know that there are instances where frequency has improved. I think that is a good thing. I think it is a great thing. But for many residents of Gungahlin, their travel times increased. Sure, you can balance that against increased patronage, but the reality for those former bus users is that their journey now takes longer.

Certainly, the situation would be exacerbated on the southside because the tram will dramatically increase the travel time between Woden and Civic as compared to the bus. Now, Mr Steel always says, “Oh, we are not comparing apples with apples”—because, think about all the extra services along that essentially rapid route at the moment between Woden and Civic; think about all those extra people that will be serviced.

I can remember chatting with my good friend Mr Solly about this on the radio and he blew up, Mr Steel’s suggestion, “Oh, actually think of all those people in Curtin and Hughes. Think of all these people who are going to get these additional services”.

I said to Mr Solly, “Look, that’s great. At the moment you can catch a plane from Canberra to Sydney, and pretty much the whole exercise takes you an hour. Just imagine, Ross,” I said, “if every plane journey from Canberra to Sydney had to also land in Goulburn and pick up passengers in Goulburn. The people in Goulburn would be over the moon. Can you imagine, if you were in Goulburn, that would be great. It would be sensational to them. But I am not sure that an hour 45 from here to Sydney would work for the many people who are currently flying that route. I just do not know that it would.”

I would say that since November of 2022, the narrative from the government and this debate has changed. I think it is changed for the better. There are a number of these amendments from Mr Steel that it is difficult to argue with.

I was just discussing briefly with Ms Carrick, and we have yet to hear from Ms Carrick what she is going to do with these amendments. But, again, I like that there is a black-and-white definitive statement, again from Mr Steel, committing to continuing to provide public transport users with direct bus services, including rapid bus routes from Canberra South to the city, once light rail stage 2B operations commence.

And, you know, it is unlikely to come into this chamber and give applause to Mr Steel for anything in this space. But I think that there are some sensible things in these amendments. And I would agree that, in its original form—although I think Ms Carrick’s motion had a great vibe to it and I can see exactly what she wanted to achieve—I think that there are parts of her motion that would have been difficult to achieve.

So, it looks as though—I think, I do not know, I am assuming—we are going to be supporting these amendments. I think I probably will. I do not know if I will break away from party lines or anything, but, I will not be the first or the last.

When it comes to public transport journey times, I just want to give the example for me, living way down south in the boondocks, down there in beautiful Theodore with the Kelpies, the Kelpies do not tend to ride the bus. In my experience, as things stand at the moment, if I am catching the bus in to here, I would walk for two to three minutes to the terminal on Chippindall Circuit and I would take the 79 to Calwell. That bus will take about eight minutes. From there I will transfer the R5 and it takes me straight here. It takes me straight here; drops me out the front. Thirty-seven minutes for that particular leg of the journey, so the total time is well under an hour. It is probably slightly under 55 minutes.

Under a stage 2 tram scenario—without an additional rapid bus route, as mentioned by Mr Steel in his amendment—I would take the 79 to Calwell, but the R5 will take me to the Woden interchange. I am assuming that there would be a longer ride from the Woden interchange to Civic. So, it is 37 minutes to the Woden interchange, but we have an additional transfer of time to the tram. So, at the end of the exercise, my 54 minutes turns into an hour and 15 minutes. So, we are talking about adding an extra two and a half hours’ travel time per week for me, if I am doing that five days a week. That just does not sound like a great public transport outcome to me.

I am pleased that the pressure that has been applied by various individuals, by Ms Carrick, by me, by some others, by PTCBR, is having some effect on the formulation of policy. And I think that this is quite a sensible discussion that we are having here today. Thank you.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.14): I rise to speak to Ms Carrick’s motion and thank her for bringing that to the Assembly. I would like to speak in support of Minister Steel’s amendments and reaffirm my support for the extension of light rail to Woden.

This is a project that will transform the south side, and as it has done to the north side

of Canberra. The government has committed to extending the light rail south to establish Canberra's north-south mass transit public transport spine. The extension of light rail to Woden will provide Canberrans on the south side with the same high-quality, frequent and reliable services that have been provided to the north side with the delivery of light rail stage 1, which has been incredibly successful.

The future light rail route to Woden will extend the benefits realised in light rail stage 1 to nearly 20,000 adjacent residents and provide them with access to high-frequency mass transit services into the city and further to Dickson and Gungahlin, because this is an extension of the existing network. The line will be integrated with Rapid route bus services and will provide access to Rapid transport for the residents of Deakin, Hughes, Curtin North, Yarralumla and Forest, who do not currently have access to Rapid bus stops. Light rail will build this.

There will also be bus services—though they will be integrated with the mass transit line—because, for the first time, they will be able to open up new connections in the network that do not currently exist. There may also be opportunities, which were not available before, to provide connection points to light rail for passengers connecting from Rapid buses from Molonglo and Weston Creek, which would then continue to the city. I thank Minister Steel for the progress so far on light rail and look forward to being able to travel from Woden to Civic on light rail

I would also like to speak to the benefits, detailed in the report last year. The traffic along Northbourne Avenue decreased with stage 1 by approximately 20 per cent, compared to 2016-19 road count data. Population growth along light rail stage 1 was 4.0 per cent, compared to 2.5 per cent across the rest of the territory. Business growth increased by 26.4 per cent in Gungahlin suburbs along the corridor and 19.7 per cent in the city along the corridor. This data shows the great opportunity that will be afforded by the extension of the light rail to Woden. This is why I strongly support this project.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.17): I want to speak today as probably the member who has spent the most time on light rail here in Canberra. I also speak as somebody who has spent an awful lot of time on those red Rapid buses going up and down Northbourne which were stuck in the traffic. Literally, we would go at a crawl down Northbourne. So I celebrated when light rail opened. Despite having to catch a connecting bus, it made for a far more effective service.

That is a sentiment that is shared by a lot of Gungahlin residents. That is why they are regularly corresponding to me seeking for light rail to go further so more and more people can enjoy the benefits that light rail actually brings. Something that is very interesting—and which Dr Paterson did not mention in her stats—is that a lot of the people who started catching light rail had never previously caught the bus. So we were getting new public transport users utilising our public transport system and getting them out of the cars—and guess what? It even benefited those car users who were going up and down Northbourne. So the benefits of light rail are extensive.

The reason we are supporting Ms Carrick's motion is that we agree with the core question that she is asking, although our reasons are a bit different. We will also be supporting the government's amendments that require management of the scope and the timing so that work could reasonably sit within the capabilities of Transport

Canberra and within a timeframe as to when that information can be developed.

Light rail is a project anchoring Canberra's future urban design. That is a good thing. We are building a city that we want up from a city that we currently have. We are trying to plan for a more compact, efficient city with urban amenity and green spaces needed for being one of the world's most liveable cities, all within a sensible urban-grown boundary that supports our natural environment—or at least that is what we hope the government continues to work on.

Yes, travelling times matter. As our population grows and densifies, transport corridors are liable to become more congested in the absence of capacity upgrades. This is what we are going to see in the next two decades in Canberra's south. That is why we need to invest in efficient modes of transport, both rail and bus networks, plus the cycling paths and walkways that help people become less reliant on expensive motor vehicles.

Adding capacity for cars should be at the bottom of the hierarchy of our transport planning for our city, because they are the least efficient use of space and resources when it comes to putting people-moving capacity into our public transport systems. For every public transport route you do not build, multiple additional road projects are required over the long term, costing far more in the long run. For every kilometre of rail line you do build, you are freeing up bus resource capacity to run new routes and services across the entirety of the city, to the benefit of everyone.

This is why the Greens have supported light rail. There is no substitute for it, as a high-capacity mass transit system that will set us up for the future. The more you delay these projects, the harder they get to build. The cabinet should consider themselves reminded that they should already be planning for stages 3 and 4 in order to ensure that our city is ready for light rail.

People like light rail. It gives a sense of permanency and certainty about the local transit system when it comes to making decisions about where to live and where to work—thus, shaping our city. That also goes for knowing how and where Canberra's bus networks will be integrated with the light rail network. So, yes, the Greens would love to see the government's plans as to how the bus network will integrate with light rail stage 2B. It will help improve the vision for the project, guiding people for their choices about where they want to live and how they can commute to where they need to study or work. It will help us see how much in the way of bus kilometres is freed up by the introduction of stage 2B and how the government envisages using it. When stage 1 became operational, one million kilometres of bus services were reinvested in the entirety of the network, increasing the coverage of routes plus also the frequency provided.

Having this sort of information gives us a better sense of how the public transport network is going to work for our city. It will also give us a better sense of what the interchanges will be trying to achieve. We did not get a lot of this information on stage 1 until much closer to the start of its operations. So it represents, I think, a useful lesson to be applied for stage 2B. Minister Steel's office has been in touch with mine as to what information is feasible for the government to provide and by when, and we are thankful that engagement. Likewise, we are thankful for Ms Carrick and her office's engagement as we negotiated the amendments for this motion.

The government's amendment to 3 (a), which committed to "continuing to provide public transport users with direct bus services, including Rapid bus services, from Canberra's south to the city once light rail stage 2B operations commence" will require careful consideration as these conceptual options are developed. We will need to balance elements in tension, including the need to not duplicate services for an efficient and cost-effective service, plus freeing buses to maximise coverage and frequency across the entirety of our city to the benefit of all Canberrans—all whilst ensuring that those in Canberra's south are provided with an effective service. The Greens will be supportive of this particular commitment, given there will be a place for direct services in some spaces on the south side. The extent and nature of these will be a critical question that will need to be answered over the course of this term.

Building extra useful information into the final environmental impact statement and then the refreshed planning strategy sounds like a good approach. The Greens will be supportive of the minister's amendments and the motion. I look forward to the report back next year.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.23): I rise to speak in support of Minister Steel's amendments to Ms Carrick's motion. It should come as no surprise to my colleagues in the chamber today that transport in the south of Canberra, particularly Tuggeranong, is a topic that I am invested in.

The minister has mentioned the southern gateway planning for light rail and transport down to Farrer and Torrens and transport-oriented development and the role transport corridors play in supporting an increase in housing density and housing supply in our city. I am going to talk about a previous private members motion of mine. Earlier this year I moved a motion calling for the government to commit to transit-oriented development and design in Tuggeranong, with a focus on ensuring the integration of transport corridors, particularly public transport, with increased housing along these corridors and at our major shopping centre hubs. So, safe to say, I am interested in how buses run in the south of Canberra, particularly into Tuggeranong, and how they connect into the north and what light rail to Woden and further into the south will mean for that future.

Like Mr Speaker, I live down in the south, although further south than the beautiful Theodore, on the other side of Tuggeranong Hill in the wonderful Lanyon Valley, where the R5 starts before going through Calwell, Erindale and Woden before heading into Civic. There are a lot of stops to get to Civic. As part of ACT Labor's plan for Tuggeranong, we have committed to a new Rapid bus from Lanyon to the city, recognising that not everyone in Lanyon wants to go via Woden to get where they are heading—no shade on Woden whatsoever; it is just that some of us do not need to go via Woden all the time; sorry.

While I recognise that bus routes cannot just be added to the system and recognise the need for network planning, I am looking forward to it becoming part of the network in the future. When I talk to Lanyon residents about this proposed bus route, people are very excited and very welcoming of it. So I welcome the development of an updated master plan for the public transport network and how future light rail fits into the bus network to ensure that transport corridors and public transport continue to be accessible

and becomes more accessible for Tuggeranong residents. It is no secret that Tuggeranong is looking for renewal. I welcome the updated population projections the minister released last week showing that the population of Tuggeranong is growing again.

As we look forward to Canberra's future, it is pivotal that public transport be considered just as much as anything else when we work to better integrate our communities across Canberra. This means the government working towards considering how light rail through Woden to Tuggeranong will connect with the Rapid and local bus routes in the south for an integrated public transport network.

I thank Ms Carrick for bringing this motion and for Minister Steel for moving these amendments.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.26): I would like to start by thanking Ms Carrick for bringing this motion forward in the way she has today. What I think Ms Carrick has quite successfully done is bring the focus around this project and this discussion back squarely into the realm of transport, because that is how things have been sold to the community for a very long time.

In the 2016 election campaign, when light rail from the city to Woden was first promised, it was very clear that what the government was selling then was a solution to congestion. It was a transport solution. It is only in much more recent times that the government has so strongly pivoted to focusing almost solely on the idea of city-shaping infrastructure.

As a development project, to increase the value of the land, there is one perspective on the value of this project. But, as a public transport project, which is what most people see it as, it has to stack up in a very different way and we have to make sure we are not disadvantaging people and not making it more difficult for people to get from the places where they live to the places where they need to be.

The Canberra Liberals have been trying to fight for that information for a pretty long time. When Mr Speaker—who spoke previously—was in a previous role, he endeavoured unsuccessfully to get exactly this sort of information from the government. So I am very pleased to see that we are finally going to see some sort of information and some sort of commitment around non-tram travel for people in Canberra's south.

I want to briefly mention at least one concern I have when I look at the minister's amendments. Sometimes the government likes to bring things that have a fair bit of wiggle room in it, and this has a bit of that feel to it. In this amended "calls on" there is simply a commitment to providing public transport users with direct bus services from Canberra's south to the city once light rail stage 2B operations commence. That does not specifically tie the government to direct bus services from Woden, nor from Weston Creek or from Deakin, for that matter. The wiggle room in this is somewhat concerning.

The other thing I want to mention briefly is that, even once we get all of the information from the government covered here, Canberrans still will not have all of the information they need to understand the full long-term impact of light rail, whether you are talking about the Woden leg or whether you are talking about—as, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think

you mentioned—the other legs of light rail to come in the future. There is no clear comprehensive information about what that future looks like. We do not know the prioritisation. We do not know when it will get to Tuggeranong. We do not know when it will reach Weston Creek and Molonglo. We do not know when it is going to get out to Belconnen. We do not know the cost of any of that. We do not know the cost in terms of dollars. We do not know the costs in terms of time. We do not know the cost in terms of interest, which the people of Canberra are going to have to meet the bill for over the course of generations.

I think it is absolutely critical that we manage to get back to considering this as a transport project, understanding the economic impact of that project and being able to understand the full cost to the community in the long-term across the entire life of this project. This is something that was promised in 2016. The full network was promised to occur way back in 2016. So far we have one and a bit legs—one and a little bit. There has been a little bit of progress to try and get it to the lake. That is all we have. I think Canberrans deserve to know how long it is going to take, what it is going to cost and, in the meantime, how they are going to get from a to b—because, when people are stuck in traffic, whether that is in their car or on a bus, that is time that they could be doing other things. I think it is about time we had a genuine, honest conversation about it.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.31): I rise to speak very briefly to Ms Carrick's motion on the bus network for Canberra's south. I thank Ms Carrick for explicitly including Tuggeranong in Canberra's south, because Tuggeranong also stands to benefit greatly from the light rail when it finally inches its way down towards us. A well-connected light rail system, the backbone of our transport system, will free up our bus fleet to reach suburban areas that are currently underserved.

I want to get on the record a couple of issues that I have heard from my community when it comes to the bus system. A couple of big one that come up include that we need more routes in specific areas like Kambah and Oxley and we need more frequent routes, like the 182, and weekend buses. Some parts of Tuggeranong are currently underserved by buses. Routes do not penetrate far enough into Kambah—you can kind of tell if you look at the map and there is a bunch of grey areas—and they take a pretty long time to get to Woden.

I have heard that constituents are also concerned that there are parts of Oxley where it could take about a 15- to 20-minute walk to get to a bus stop. Access to reliable bus routes within walking distance is an equity issue. I would also like to gently point out—as Ms Tough did—that we still do not have a Rapid or even a direct bus between Greenway and Lanyon Marketplace, and I absolutely think we should. If we are underserving areas, the people it impacts most are those who cannot drive—many people with a disability or mobility issues, older Canberrans, young people and, frankly, anyone who cannot afford a car, and that is more and more people these days. A bus route absolutely impacts our ability to participate in society, work and study but also leisure—getting to Floriade, for example; hanging out with your friends; meeting up with your loved ones; getting to the skatepark. Every single Canberran deserves to be well served by bus routes.

Frequency is a big issue. I have spoken before about needing to expand the timing of the 182 bus, which runs on peak hours between Lanyon, Calwell and Chisholm into the

city, so that people can get home with enough time to cook dinner and hug their families before they sleep. I think every single Greens member has spoken at length about the need to improve the frequency of our weekend buses. So I will not dwell on that too much. But I do have people in my electorate who sometimes do not go out on the weekends because of the buses. So enough said there.

I also want to talk—well, grumble really—about transport connectivity when stage 2B is finally complete, God willing, by 2033. I do not envy the position the government has put themselves in. We are now in a position where ACT Labor is taking so long with the light rail and refusing to stagger that design and construction, that Tuggeranong residents will bear the consequences of poor planning for decades. We are certainly eager to see the completion of the full light rail spine as soon as possible, because that is what is going to improve travel times, minimise transfers and turbocharge the frequency of south side services. The kind of convenience you get from arterial transport every six minutes will be so incredibly enabling for all the things our Tuggeranong community loves to do.

I hope the government will take the things I have mentioned into consideration when they give south Canberrans much-needed clarity on future bus networks and the way they will integrate with the long-awaited light rail.

I would like to thank Ms Carrick for bringing this motion forward.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.35): In closing, I would like to support the amendments. This is a public transport project. It is about public transport and the services that we get. I appreciate that the minister says that we will still be getting direct buses from the south to the north. But I would like to make sure that they are on the Adelaide Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue corridor, as well as the Monaro Highway and the Parkway. There is wiggle room in (a), and that is a little bit concerning, but he did mention keeping the bus lanes on Adelaide Avenue, the T2, so I hope that they stay.

Light rail is about managing congestion. So I ask the minister to consider talking to the NCA about dedicated bus lanes on Commonwealth Avenue. I know they will not be happy about that, but they manage Commonwealth Avenue and Canberra's south moves through there, and they need to consider that.

I support buses on the Parkway and the Monaro Highway—and good on you, Ms Tough, if you get one—but I do not support a lack of a bus lane and second-rate services where your service will be stuck in traffic. Hopefully, with the growing population and the growing congestion, your bus will be okay. But I would be advocating for a better service. Without dedicated bus lanes we are at risk of spending billions of dollars on public transport but still having many southsiders on buses stuck in traffic.

I was not asking for a full network design; I just want to know how the government is ensuring that we get great public transport that is reliable and frequent and we get good journey times that attract people to use public transport and get them out of their cars. How many times will we have to change public transport vehicles and how long will it take to get to town? To this end, I am pleased that the government will publish conceptual options for the bus network by June 2026. This, I assume, will give us options. It will provide options, and we can consider what the better network is.

What I wanted to achieve out of this motion was consideration of the services for people who do not live on the alignment—people in Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Molonglo. Their services are important. Their time is important. Their access to economic opportunity in the city is important. I hope from now on all southsiders are considered when the business cases are developed—not just the people between the city and Woden.

With respect to Mr Braddock's views, the south is different to Northbourne Avenue. We keep hearing about the buses being stuck in traffic on Northbourne Avenue. We have to understand that parts of Canberra are different. If there is one thing southsiders are really lucky about it is that we have grade separations. Between Woden and the city, buses and cars move through there. We do not get stuck at traffic lights—and we do not want more traffic lights along the corridor. We have had bus lanes. It is a completely different corridor to Northbourne Avenue, and you cannot compare them. To try to compare them and say what happened in the north and use that as an example for the south just does not work—and it drives us nuts. You may have had poor services and light rail is better, but we have had great bus services and we do not want our public transport services to be worse. So I ask that people understand the differences in different parts of Canberra.

I would also like to say, back to Ms Tough, that I think you should be concerned about the fact that Athlon Drive duplication does not provide space and future proof for light rail. So good luck with that one. And please do not compromise Southsider services with the dog leg.

Mr Steel's amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Education Directorate—Part 1.1.

Debate resumed.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early

Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.41): In my contribution to the budget debate this afternoon, I want to talk about the education budget funding in the 2025-26 budget. This budget is making strong investments in the public education system across Canberra.

More than \$1 billion is allocated to the Education Directorate and its 92—soon to be 93—public schools. Funding for the ACT public school system accounts for 22 per cent of total ACT budget spending. This budget contains the largest investment in public schools in the ACT government's history. In fact, it is also an increase of more than five per cent on last year's investment, and it recognises the important place public schools have in our community.

The ACT has the best funded public schools in Australia. We continue to be the only jurisdiction to fund all of our public schools not just up to, but above, the school resourcing standard. In addition to the significant funding provided by the ACT government, and thanks to negotiations undertaken with my federal government counterpart Jason Clare, commonwealth funding to ACT public schools will increase over coming years as well, under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement.

Under that agreement, the commonwealth contribution of 20 per cent of the school resourcing standard will increase to 25 per cent by 2034, including increases to 21.25 per cent this year and 22.5 per cent in 2026. That extra funding is already starting to flow across our education system. This budget funding supports a high-quality education for more than 50,000 students enrolled across the public school system. It also supports the more than 7,100 staff across the ACT public school network and the Education Support Office who ensure that our system continues to deliver teaching and learning every single school day.

I will not have time to highlight all of the funding initiatives across the public education system in the ACT budget, but I do want to highlight a few, for the benefit of the Assembly today. The ACT government is committed to equity across the public school system. All students are entitled to receive a high-quality public education wherever they are from, regardless of their circumstance. This budget sees more funding for meals in public schools, as part of the meals in schools program, helping to make sure that students have full bellies so that they can learn better.

We are also investing in the Future of Education Equity Fund, supporting an additional 1,000 students and their families with the cost of education essentials, like school uniforms, school excursions and sporting equipment, through financial support for eligible families across all ACT schools. The government is stepping up to make sure that school camps are a real equaliser for students, investing more than \$3 million to ensure all ACT public school students can attend one free school camp at Birrigai. Mr Assistant Speaker, I cannot tell you how popular this program is, with parents, with the students who attend, and with the amazing staff out at Birrigai. I have seen firsthand how these programs give students a fair go, no matter where they come from or their circumstances, and that is what public education should be about. And that is what this government is about.

As well as making public education more equitable, we are also building and upgrading more schools than ever before. The government is undertaking significant

modernisation projects at Narrabundah College, Telopea Park, Majura primary and Garran primary. Of course, we are opening our 93rd ACT public school, Strathnairn school, next year. Construction is well underway by an all-female-led construction team, the first in the ACT. The first stage will be finished and open for early primary school students on day 1, term 1, 2026. But we are not stopping there, and our 94th public school, in Whitlam, is planned to open in 2027. Further down the line, we are also committed to a second college in Gungahlin, which will be built in Nicholls.

Of course, maintaining our existing facilities is just as important, particularly for some of our older schools. One example of this is the work being done on heating and cooling systems across our school system. In this budget, there is \$15 million for heating and cooling projects to make sure schools are cooler in summer and warmer in winter. As I mentioned earlier, this budget funds more than 7,100 full-time equivalent staff across our schools, as well as the Education Support Office. It provides \$2 million to attract even more teachers into ACT public schools by offering scholarships for people who study teaching, including career changes.

I recently visited Farrer Primary School and met Jackalyn Herrick, who is a Canberra public education success story. Jackalyn is Canberra born and raised, attended ACT public schools as a student and is now a public school teacher. She recently completed a Master of Education degree at UC, supported by our ACT Teacher Scholarships program. Jackalyn told me that her master's degree has had a lasting impact on her, and has deepened her understanding of curriculum and shaping her classroom practice. She sees her studies as a stepping stone towards contributing more broadly to public education into the future, which is exactly what we want to see, and exactly what this scholarship program is about—creating great teachers and great pathways. The ACT government will always support our teachers and support people who want to become teachers in our school system.

Another initiative that I want to mention is the School Youth Health Nurse Program, which is an important initiative in our high schools. We all know that high school years can be a complicated time for students, and the ACT government has committed over \$1 million to expand the School Youth Health Nurse Program next year, ensuring that a school youth health nurse is available in every high school three days per week.

The government is continuing to invest in early childhood education. Learning in the early years has lifelong benefits, which is why the government rolled out three-year-old preschool, and why I am committed to supporting the early childhood workforce. Three-year-old preschool gives families access to 300 hours of free preschool delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher. More than 140 early childhood education and care services across Canberra are delivering this program, helping to give children the best possible start in life.

The ACT government is absolutely committed to a high-quality public education system, and we have shown that over the years and are showing it through this budget. We have made this very clear over numerous budgets by increasing funding and investment into our system year on year on year. This year's budget delivers the funding that supports our system and the students, staff and teachers across it. I commend the 2025-26 ACT budget to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

ACT Local Hospital Network—Part 1.2.

[Cognate expenditure: Canberra Health Services—Part 1.11]

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand it is the wish of the Assembly to debate part 1.2, ACT Local Hospital Network, cognately with part 1.11, Canberra Health Services. That being the case, I remind members that, in debating part 1.2, they may also address their remarks to part 1.11.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.48): Through the 2025-26 budget, the Barr Labor government is making a record investment in public health to support our growing city and make sure Canberrans have access to the health care they need, when and where they need it.

Over recent years, we have faced extraordinary challenges in our community, including a pandemic, natural disasters and, of course, high inflation and cost-of-living pressures, which impact not only the community but service delivery as well. Like all other Australian jurisdictions, we have been tackling challenges over recent years, including increased activity in our public hospitals and the escalating cost of delivering health care. These have been exacerbated by the ongoing impact of the pandemic—something that I know the opposition does not really accept, but healthcare workers and health system managers know is very real—and by a decade of neglect of primary care and aged care under the previous coalition government.

This budget meets the challenges we face while delivering on the commitments we made to Canberrans last year and supporting better care across our city. This budget provides record funding to support access to high-quality public hospital and health services. It addresses the growing demand in outpatient, emergency and admitted patient services and key increases in costs.

The increases in funding for Canberra Health Services will support expanded elective surgery and endoscopy services, the implementation of virtual care and care closer to home, improved chronic disease prevention, and better support and discharge planning for long-stay patients.

At more than \$80 billion a year, public hospitals are the biggest and fastest-growing part of health spending across commonwealth, state and territory governments as Australians need more complex care, the population ages and chronic disease becomes more prevalent. Most Australians now live with at least one chronic condition, such as diabetes or heart disease, and a growing number have two or more. As a result, hospital admissions are rising, as are the costs of those admissions.

This year, the Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority—IHACPA—found that the national efficient price—the NEP—had increased by 12.2 per cent over the last year. This reflects the significant cost escalation experienced across Australia's public hospitals over the past couple of years. Some commentary has said that IHACPA sets the national efficient price; and, to some extent, that is true. But the reality is that the

calculation of the national efficient price is based on the actual costs faced by states and territories. As such, it is a lagging indicator, and all jurisdictions have been managing this pressure post COVID.

Through this budget, the government is investing more than \$171 million in 2025-26 specifically to meet cost pressures across the territory's public health services. This investment enables our health services to continue to respond to growing demand for outpatient services, increased emergency department presentations and more patient admissions. It also addresses key increases in costs, including medical and surgical supplies, costs of blood products, support services for patient care and personal protective equipment.

To complement this investment, the government has committed a further \$53.7 million in 2025-26 to achieve a number of goals. We will continue to expand elective surgery capacity and invest the funds to deliver on ACT Labor's election commitment of 70,000 elective surgeries over the next four years, which I note is the same commitment that the Canberra Liberals made. We will ensure more public endoscopy procedures can be performed, to continue addressing the public endoscopy waitlist, which we agree is not acceptable.

Canberra Health Services will continue to optimise patient flow through our public hospitals, to manage end-to-end patient experience across acute, planned and subacute or maintenance care, including delivery of services beyond hospitals and into community settings in people's homes. This will ensure cost-effective and patient-centred delivery of exceptional care across the ACT.

We will continue developing opportunities and pathways for early intervention and diversion from acute hospital care for people with chronic disease, in partnership with consumers and carers and with our partners at Capital Health Network, in primary care and non-government organisations. We will do this including through the provision of additional medical appointments across renal, respiratory, nutrition, paediatrics and sexual health services. Long-stay patients will be better supported, with a focus on timely discharge, while still delivering quality care for maintenance-care patients in ACT hospitals who are awaiting access to residential aged care, NDIS or other suitable options in the community.

We are also planning for the future. Importantly, we have set aside \$13 million to support the transformation of our health service. We know that to deliver a sustainable health service into the future will require transformation of the ways we deliver health services to the community. This investment over the coming three years will support this work and ensure that our dedicated public health workforce is empowered to achieve and deliver this change.

One of the first things we are investing in through this fund is the independent inquiry called for by this Assembly. The government has appointed Mr Michael Walsh PSM to chair this inquiry and is procuring external consultancy support to ensure he can undertake this work independently. Mr Walsh brings more than 30 years of health system experience to the role. He was Director-General of Queensland Health, he was the independent co-reviewer for the mid-term review of the National Health Reform Agreement, and he established eHealth New South Wales and was the inaugural Chief

Executive Officer.

His wealth of experience across New South Wales, Queensland and the Western Australian health system, as well as roles nationally working for governments of all views, means he is uniquely credentialed to provide expert advice to the government. I encourage all interested parties to engage constructively in this inquiry to ensure the inquiry delivers local insights that will support a more sustainable health system into the future.

While primary care is a commonwealth responsibility, the ACT government understands the difficulties of accessing GPs and bulk-billing across Canberra, and how important primary care is to underpin a sustainable health system. That is why the budget delivers targeted investment to strengthen local general practices, improve affordability and access to primary care, and support the GP workforce. This complements significant investments in Medicare being made by the Australian government, including the expansion of the triple bulk-billing incentive and additional incentives for practices where all GPs fully bulk-bill. Our changes to payroll tax for GP medical centres support this initiative.

In addition, we have committed more than \$7.3 million over four years to support Canberrans to access the right care in the right place with a stronger primary care system. This investment will support general practice through incentives to support bulk-billing for children and young people under 16, wellbeing and professional development support for GPs, and more junior doctor placements in ACT general practices.

Work has also begun on developing a pilot to enable expanded scope of practice for GPs to better support patients with ADHD. In July, an expression of interest process was opened for GPs. More than 40 responses were received in less than a week. Once the design of the pilot is finalised, GPs will be endorsed, after specific training, to have broadened medication management for their current patients, or with further training to be able to diagnose ADHD and commence treatment.

Just in the last week, health ministers have agreed that we need to work towards a nationally consistent approach on this scope of practice expansion, but that individual jurisdictions should not slow down their own work on GP ADHD diagnosis and prescribing.

This budget will provide funding for young people across the territory to get the mental health support they need, with more than \$9.4 million over four years to strengthen community-based programs. Again, this investment complements the investment already made by the Albanese Labor government, including in establishing the Medicare Mental Health Centre Kids Hub in Tuggeranong.

The investment reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting young Canberrans and their families by providing mental health care that is accessible, timely and effective, reducing pressure on the public hospital system, while enabling children and young people to thrive. This initiative will be delivered through five community-driven programs that will now receive ongoing funding.

MindMap is a digital mental health navigation tool helping people to find the right service and connecting young people and families to real-time support from clinical staff and peer workers. Youth Aware of Mental Health is an early intervention and suicide prevention program delivered in high schools by MIEACT. WOKE is a free dialectical behavioural therapy—DBT—group program for young people experiencing emotional distress. It is a partnership with the University of Canberra, and it is a great opportunity for students to get practical experience working with young people and their families.

Stepping Stones, delivered by Marymead CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn, is a trauma-informed service supporting children exposed to family violence and trauma and their caregivers. The ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Alliance is a collaboration of community services and government focused on improving mental health outcomes for children and young people. It was a key commitment I made during the last election campaign to provide certainty for these excellent services, and this budget delivers on it.

We will also enhance the mental health and wellbeing of infants, parents and carers in the ACT by addressing a critical gap in the existing perinatal mental health service sector and providing targeted community-based support. This includes \$506,000 over two years to enable the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre to meet demand, ensuring timely access for mothers and birth parents experiencing perinatal mental health challenges.

It includes funding for the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance, which aims to build awareness of perinatal mental health in the community and the service environment, reduce stigma around perinatal mental health, and encourage health-seeking behaviour. I want particularly to acknowledge the contribution of Kat, who spoke about her lived and living experience at the launch of the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance, and left no-one in any doubt about why this is so important.

The budget also continues the process to deliver on our commitment of a residential perinatal mental health mother and baby unit, with \$732,000 to deliver a feasibility study, building on previous scoping work.

The workforce is the backbone of our health system. Thousands and thousands of skilled, compassionate and committed doctors, nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, wardies, cleaners, support staff and administrative staff work across our hospitals, our community-based services and in our community partner organisations. I take this opportunity to thank them all, on behalf of the government and the Canberra community.

Our workforce is diverse, but we can do better. The ACT government will provide funding to target a critical shortage of First Nations people in the ACT health workforce by addressing systemic racism, creating career pathways, providing helpful and responsive supervision, offering clinical placements and ensuring comprehensive support for these critical health workers.

Specifically, this budget provides funding for First Nations staff to support the formation of First Nations-led actions and the development of an ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce action plan. This plan will promote career

pathways in health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including culturally responsive supervision, clinical placements and wraparound support. Funding aims to address systemic racism within the ACT health system through anti-racism training and implementation of locally effective initiatives, and the establishment and facilitation of a First Nations health workforce governance group.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the work of Indigenous Allied Health Australia and the academy that they have been running for some years now, in partnership with CIT and some of our high schools, and the fantastic young people who have gone through the academy and come out with a real passion for undertaking health work, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentice or trainee of the year, Jaharn Mundy-Drazevich.

Going back to the budget, this investment in our First Nations health workforce is part of the ACT Health Workforce Strategy Action Plan 2024-26, which was published on 18 June 2025. As the first action plan for the ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-32, it includes a range of initiatives to support the development of a sustainable health workforce for the ACT.

As I have already mentioned, the budget also supports the general practice and primary care workforce through a \$3.6 million professional development and wellbeing fund. The fund will be designed in consultation with GPs and practice staff and the Capital Health Network to determine the best ways it can be used to support their continuous learning, innovation and wellbeing. It will support GPs to continue to deliver high-quality care to Canberrans across their lifespan.

There is an additional \$400,000 over four years for the support organisation Drs4Drs to provide further wellbeing initiatives on top of and supporting their current 24 hours a day, seven days a week mental health support line for doctors and medical students. This funding will ensure support for our general practice workforce with confidential support, advice and care to enable them to continue caring for not only themselves but others.

In further work to support the GP workforce in the ACT, we want to ensure that general practice is seen as the valuable career it is. Through the budget, just to build on my earlier conversation about primary care, \$1.22 million of the funding I previously talked about for additional junior medical officers in primary care is for those junior medical officer positions in Canberra Health Services to allow rotations of JMOs into urban general practices in the ACT. Funding of additional places will ensure that the availability of junior medical officers for hospital rotations is not affected, with \$402,000 of the four-year funding supporting the general practices in their clinical supervision of the junior doctors. These investments in primary care, again, deliver on key government commitments made during the 2024 election.

The 2025-26 budget will provide ongoing funding to address gaps in community-based palliative care services, providing funding to support Leo's Place at a new purpose-built site in Garran to operationalise two additional beds. This expansion of service, in partnership with Palliative Care ACT, will support the provision of overnight and day respite for people with life-limiting illness, and their families and carers.

The palliative care initiative also provides First Nations end-of-life support, which includes a community Aboriginal liaison officer at Canberra Health Services to provide outreach support and case management, including a dedicated vehicle, a fund for material and transport assistance to support First Nations families to undertake culturally important end-of-life rituals, and capacity building and training in palliative care for the Canberra Health Services Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison team.

We will expand after-hours access to palliative medicines through the Palliative Medicines in Community Pharmacies program by providing grant funding to seven pharmacies, which will include subsidisation of medication costs, training support, financial incentives for permanent stocking of medicines, and support for extended opening and delivery hours. We committed to Canberrans to make these vital investments during the election campaign, and I am pleased this budget delivers on those commitments.

Another commitment we have commenced in this budget is through our investment in funding a Baby Bundle program to support vulnerable, in-need, first-time parents and their newborns; and, indeed, some vulnerable parents having a second or subsequent child. Each bundle will include essential items to promote newborn health and development and reduce the financial stress of first-time and vulnerable parents in need during the cost-of-living crisis, which, of course, we know that many parents in the ACT experience in an ongoing way, particularly those who are reliant on the insufficient income support. Again, I call on the commonwealth government to raise the rate.

The first phase of the Baby Bundle initiative will meet the needs of vulnerable parents and their newborns in the ACT, achieving this with a strong emphasis on dignity and sustainability. The Baby Bundle program will also emphasise individualised care, equity and evidence-based practices, aligning with the aims of the Maternity in Focus: the ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-32 to create a more woman and person-centred maternity system.

We are delivering this initiative in partnership with the fabulous Roundabout Canberra. This funding enables Roundabout to continue doing the incredible work that they do, upcycling baby and child clothes and other accessories and needs from the wider community, providing those in packs that are lovingly pulled together by volunteers, and delivered through our incredible social workers, healthcare workers, midwives, and child and family centre workers to those families, depending on exactly what they need. It is always wonderful to go and visit Hannah and the team at Roundabout Canberra. If there is any member of the Assembly who has not done this, I strongly encourage them to do so.

The Deputy Chief Minister spoke briefly about the School Youth Health Nurse Program, and I also want to acknowledge that last year the government committed to expand the School Youth Health Nurse Program over this term. I am pleased that, through this budget, the program expansion will commence from 1 January 2026. School youth health nurses support the health and wellbeing of high school students as they transition into adulthood through promotion and referral to appropriate services, and they will be able to provide one-on-one student consultations and educational health

activities, and support teachers to deliver the health curriculum.

School youth health nurses play a vital role in addressing contemporary health and social issues through education and health promotion activities, including mental health, menstrual health and pelvic pain, contraception, sleep hygiene and general hygiene. They aim to foster strong relationships between young people and their caregivers, recognising that parents and carers are often best placed to support access to health care. This initiative will ensure that a school youth health nurse is available in every high school three days a week.

The 2025-26 budget provides \$5.2 million over three years to support operation of the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation service, which will help to address the disproportionate burden of the harms of alcohol and other drug use experienced by First Nations Canberrans and First Nations people from the surrounding region.

The new service, which is the ACT's first, is currently under construction in Watson and will be operated by Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services. It is expected that clients will experience reduced substance dependencies, improved physical and mental health indicators, social connection and economic participation. The facility will have flow-on benefits for clients' families and communities, given the societal costs associated with alcohol and other drug dependency and the emotional impact of having a loved one experiencing substance dependence.

As a First Nations community-controlled service in a suburban bush setting at the base of Mount Majura, the new service will support increased connection with country and culture, and improve access to culturally appropriate health services for First Nations peoples. It will support the human right to self-determination and cultural safety.

This budget delivers investment that reflects our community's values, meets rising demands in our public health system, and delivers the services Canberrans need when and where they need them. It reflects our commitment to delivering high-quality, inclusive healthcare infrastructure that meets the needs of Canberrans now and into the future.

I will speak later, on Infrastructure Canberra, about the significant health infrastructure investments that we are making. For now, I commend the 2025-26 ACT budget to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.12): It is always a pleasure to be given the chance to talk about the funding of health services in the ACT under this Labor government because it reminds me of my childhood. I did love a fairytale and some make-believe, and that is the story of how health has been managed under the ACT Labor government. It is well-told by the minister, and it includes great stories, such as this: "We are investing so much money in ACT Health and hospitals, and everything is going so well. Nothing to see here. Do not ask any questions. Gee, our waiting times for elective surgery and the emergency department aren't as bad as they used to be. It's all the commonwealth government's fault that we have the lowest bulk-billing rates in the nation and the highest out-of-pocket costs in the country. No, really!

It is the surgeons' fault that they have decided to resign and leave. The workplace culture in ACT Health is topnotch. Our staff have nothing to complain about. Nothing to see here. No, the operations centre really is doing its job. It doesn't interfere with medical specialist assessments or second-guest surgeons. No, the digital health record project was a resounding success. The fact that we blew our budget on this by at least \$160 million is money well spent."

I am sorry, Mr Speaker, but I have to inform the Assembly that all of these claims are nothing more than fairytales. The reality of the ACT health and hospital system is very different. In the 2025-26 budget that has just been handed down in June, we have seen the government introduce 25 new and higher taxes: higher taxes that have slugged Canberrans when the cost-of-living crisis is still a reality for hundreds of thousands of Canberrans.

Do you know what the health minister admitted, Mr Speaker? She said, "It's a tough budget. We had to make some really challenging decisions." Well, the tough decisions are costing Canberrans much more, who are already struggling to pay for food, grocery bills, their rent, petrol and all of those household expenses. Yet the government has the temerity to tell Canberrans that now it is time to cough up and pay a bit more, simply because the government has blown their budget.

First, we had the \$250 health tax that was not going towards health. It was a tax that even their own federal colleagues said broke Labor party principles of universal health care. It was reported in the *AFR* that, when asked if the principle of universal health care had been breached, the federal minister described the tax as:

... no different to the Medicare levy imposed on taxpayers by the federal government, the proceeds from which is directed towards general revenue and ostensibly used to fund health.

"At the end of the day, that government is accountable to the good burghers of the ACT for decisions they take in their budget," he said.

If you cannot convince your own federal colleagues, how should Canberrans feel? Remember what Albo and Labor said at the last election? He held up a Medicare card and said, "This is all you need." Under ACT Labor you do need your Medicare card, but you will also need your credit card.

The health minister admitted that, for some, the new \$250 health levy would heap extra pressure onto already tight household budgets but said that across the ACT the tax was appropriate. I encourage the minister to reflect on her words and say how higher taxes would be appropriate when you cannot afford, as I said, to put fuel in your car or to send your kids on an excursion or to soccer after school. In recognition that the \$250 health tax was going to hurt Canberrans, they buckled and reduced it to \$100. But the \$250 bill still is applied to commercial ratepayers, so there really has not been that big of a backdown.

But it is not just the health tax that Labor is hitting the wallets of Canberrans with. Let's not forget the ambulance tax. As a tax, that sounds good. Canberrans and ambulance services all assumed that they would be able to deal with the record increase in triple zero calls. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In a real-life case of political fairytales, the new increase in the ambulance levy will not go towards the ambulance service. It goes into the government's general coffers to go somewhere else. No doubt to help pay for the massive increase in interest payments on their massive debt.

ACT Labor have increased its ambulance tax by 10 per cent, meaning the 319,000 Canberrans with private health insurance will pay more for health care and get nothing in return. The cost of private health insurance will go up by \$180 per year for adults and \$360 for a family.

The proceeds from the new ambulance tax will go into consolidated revenue and are not going directly to the health budget, and this is the same process for Labor's new \$100 health tax. That means there is no guarantee that either tax will go towards improving health services.

The federal government investment in ACT hospitals has reached its highest level on record, with a total of \$630 million allocated for the 2025-26 year, including an extra \$50 million recently announced, effective from 1 July. Yet ACT Labor continues to blame the federal government.

In selling the recent budget, the Treasurer suggested the commonwealth government was partly to blame for the territory's need to introduce the \$250 levy. However, the federal health minister hit out at that and said:

... next week the Commonwealth will increase its funding to the ACT hospital system by 16 per cent. I'm not sure there's ever been a bigger increase in Commonwealth funding to the ACT hospital system than the one that we will deliver next week ...

Last Friday, the health minister fronted up to the Health Ministers' Meeting claiming to go in and fight for a better deal for Canberra. The outcome, Mr Speaker? Nothing. No extra money, no extra support. Just what is the point of having Labor here in the ACT and federally when they will not even look after the ACT?

Taxes on health care are going up. Taxes on business are going up. It is right to ask: where is the money going raised by these taxes? The minister claims that it is all going on health because of the cost pressures. I believe, of course, there are cost pressures, but the reality of where it goes is far removed from the fairytales we hear.

I want to put it this way: according to the 2025-26 budget, health expenses are increasing by \$180 million across the forward estimates—the next four years. That is a 6.4 per cent increase. According to the same budget, the interest expense is going up by \$472 million. That is the interest payments we owe on the record ACT debt. The increase is 94 per cent.

When Canberrans ask, "Where are all these extra taxes going the government is forcing us to pay?" the answer is on interest payments. It is going to dead money. Interest payments is money that could have otherwise been spent reducing waiting times for elective surgery in emergency departments and for extra preventative health measures

to give Canberrans the high-quality patient care they deserve. If you listen to the minister, it is all going on health, but that is just simply not the case, no matter how hard the minister spins it.

I would like to raise the issue of the amount of money that ACT Labor have wasted on health. We had a rebrand. We have spent \$378 million on the digital health record, \$160 million over budget. Yet we have just heard recently that dementia patients are at risk because the DHR system does not record their stats properly. We have also heard of complaints from orthopaedic surgeons that their request to include their data were refused, leading to alternatives being pursued. For \$378 million, Mr Speaker, you would expect a system that works across the board.

I also mention the \$150 million just spent buying a public hospital—that they really did not need to do. In another episode that I am sure has been lifted from *Yes Minister*, the independent report into the process of taking Calvary, and the way the health minister managed this process, contributed to public confusion about the exact total costs of the Calvary Public Hospital acquisition and contributed to the impression that the minister was not being fully transparent.

We are paying more and getting less. I have got a few stats for you. We have the worst bulk-billing rates in Australia and the highest average out-of-pocket costs. From the AIHW report 2023-24, the median wait time in the ACT for the ED was 25 minutes, and the national median time is 18 minutes. In the ACT, the proportion of people seen on time is 62 per cent, but the national is 67 per cent. For elective surgeries performed within clinically recommended timeframes, across all categories, in July 2023, 66.1 per cent were being seen; but we have gone backwards, and in May this year it is 65.8 per cent. Looking at waiting times to surgery in days: in July 2023, it was 44 days; in May this year, it was 55 days.

The ACT budget when it comes to health is a fairytale. It raises taxes on every Canberran, and there are specific taxes on health, yet it fails to deliver better services. Canberrans are struggling with higher taxes. It makes it hard to see a doctor.

One of the main roles of government is to provide high-quality health services at the lowest possible cost, and ACT Labor have failed at both. The health minister has been in the role for around six years, and the fairytale continues. The excuses continue and the blame continues, all while Canberrans are paying more and getting less. The ACT community deserves far better.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.22): I rise this evening to speak about these health lines of the ACT budget, the local hospital network and Canberra Health Services. Canberra's health services are one of the most important elements of the budget, not only because they make up a significant portion of the budget, at \$2.9 billion, but also because getting it right—what we spend this \$2.9 billion on—is essential to the health, wellbeing and lives of Canberrans.

The first point I would like to make is that the ACT Greens remain concerned that the full scope of health funding has not been adequately accounted for and represented within the budget papers that have been presented. The reason I make that point is that, over the forward estimates, the growth of health expenses has been limited to only a

one to two per cent increase per year. However, at the same time, we have just seen, this past financial year, the cost of health care relative to the National Efficient Price has increased by 12 per cent. Whilst, of course, the picture is more complicated than these two numbers alone, I think it is clear to see that there is a big difference between the two numbers.

I would then add to that observation that the remaining costs associated with the implementation of the Canberra Hospital Master Plan do not appear to be funded at present. These points underline a general issue in the budget, which has also been picked up in the estimates committee report, that across many aspects of the budget, the forecast in the out-years does not reflect the full suite of likely expenses that will occur during that period. The health budget is certainly no exception. So we are concerned that in the absence of, potentially, that information being more accurate, and in the absence of significant reform in this space, the health budget in the forward estimates is perhaps not reflective of what will ultimately be needed to be spent in this space.

When it comes to health funding in the territory, one area we are focused on is ensuring that the ACT achieves a fairer and increased allocation of commonwealth health funding. Payments from the commonwealth are meant to reach 45 per cent of all hospital costs, yet in 2024-25 the ACT achieved only 37 per cent funding for the ACT's hospital costs. According to the budget papers, that proportion is expected to decline over the forward estimates, and that is obviously a point of concern for us.

The situation was compounded this past year, when the aspiration to receive an additional slice of the national health funding did not eventuate. We had to appropriate an additional \$105 million in this year's second appropriation, to make up for the commonwealth National Health Reform Agreement revenue shortfall. That had been hoped for, for want of a better term, or perhaps anticipated, and did not eventuate.

We discussed that in the hearings for the second appropriation, back in February. The minister gave a really clear explanation. I am not seeking to re-prosecute that, but it represents a point of risk that does sit there in our health funding. That \$105 million, of course, was in addition to the extra \$227 million that also needed to be injected into the health budget in that mid-year budget allocation.

We understand this issue of percentage is affected by the fact that the ACT is delivering services at a cost above the National Efficient Price. It is a complicated discussion as to why that is, perhaps, and I think that is probably the subject of an entire speech in its own right. But at its most simple, our analysis is that the ACT needs to both seek the efficiencies that can help to close the gap between our current cost profile and the National Efficient Price and to make the case to the commonwealth to recognise the differential circumstances of the ACT and reflect that in our funding agreements. We certainly support the health minister in her endeavours to do both of those things, and we will seek to assist with that case in any useful way that we can.

We also understand the increasing pressures on our health system and the increasing costs of providing health care are complex matters. However, aside from needing to engage with the federal government for this funding, we also need to think critically about what is driving increasing demand for health services in Canberra and whether our budget is adequately supporting people to access preventative health services, or

whether there is too much focus on addressing care at the acute level.

On 24 June, as the minister has touched on, we were pleased this Assembly supported a motion to establish an independent inquiry into several aspects of the health system, including, but not limited to, what data is available for health practitioners, patients and us, as policymakers, to understand what is happening in the health system. We look forward to the outcomes of this inquiry and hope this may also be used as one tool by which to understand the pressures in our health system.

Funding acute care is essential to Canberra's health system. However, the vast majority of funding in health is concentrated in acute care, rather than on the preventive health care and supportive programs that can assist with keeping people healthy and, ideally, out of hospital.

More people than ever are unable to access GP appointments, or delaying, due to the ACT having the lowest number of bulk-billed appointments in the country. Canberrans pay more than ever for out-of-pocket expenses to see their GP. And yet, out of the \$2.9 billion allocated to health in this budget, just \$4.3 million is spent on increasing the number of bulk-billed appointments. This is the tiniest of drops in a big bucket of funding for health care, yet, as I hear from Canberrans, it is one of the most important aspects and touchpoints of access for medical care. We welcome the investment that has been made in the budget, but we think there is more work to be done.

We also remain concerned that there seems to be a contradiction between this \$4.3 million investment for increasing the rate of bulk-billed appointments and the government's decision to reduce the threshold for payroll tax. We remain concerned that this may limit the ability for clinics to increase rates of bulk-billed appointments and may counter any of the improvements that this investment would have made.

It is also worth noting that even with the introduction of the additional incentive of exemption from payroll tax when patients under 16-years-old are bulk-billed, we have not seen modelling that this incentive that would lead to changes. Indeed, in 2023, the ACT government introduced a two-year payroll tax exemption if bulk-billing was provided to 65 per cent of patients. The data we have shows that there has been no significant increase in bulk-billing rates in the ACT since the introduction of this program.

From an ACT Green's point of view, our focus when it came to payroll tax reform was to ensure only that the biggest companies were paying more. The government, the Labor Party, has taken a different approach, lowering the payroll tax threshold and bringing more businesses into the frame of paying payroll tax. We are concerned this will have a perverse outcome on bulk-billing rates.

This is why we have also recommended that the ACT government model and report on the impact of payroll tax changes to general practitioner bulk-billing rates and allied health provision. That was contained in the estimates report. The government has only noted this recommendation, and in the commentary noted that modelling the impact of payroll tax changes on bulk-billing rates would require this impact be separated from other factors and be resource-intensive and a theoretical exercise with low confidence in any outputs.

I would therefore love to understand why the government has chosen to also implement exemptions from payroll tax when patients under 16-years-old are bulk-billed to incentivise increased bulk-billing. You simply cannot have it both ways. You cannot say that it will increase bulk-billing rates for your exemptions but also say it is too difficult to say what reducing the overall threshold will have on bulk-billing rates.

We welcome the increased investments in this budget for Canberrans with chronic illness; however, we are keen to understand more about it, and to put it into perspective and remind ourselves that this investment made for chronic health represents \$27 million out of a total budget of \$2.9 billion for health funding. We are concerned that the \$27 million to be spent over the forward estimates on improved chronic disease prevention and management lacks specificity and that the government has not provided detailed information on how this will be spent, even after detailed questions through the course of the estimates process.

In the government's response to the estimates committee recommendation that the government provide greater details for the outlined \$27 million fund for chronic disease management and prevention, they did only "note" it, firstly; and then, in the explanatory text, the explanatory information for this is directly, word for word, copied from the budget outlook. So we learnt nothing new out of the response to the estimates process, which, frankly, was frustrating, and I think a shame. As I reflected in estimates, I was a bit surprised that Treasury let that one through without the specificity. We will be keen to see how that plays out over time. Overall, it is a positive thing. We are just keen to understand where it will actually go.

For Canberrans seeking support for mental health care in the territory, we have seen funding for the Safe Haven at the Canberra Hospital delayed. This is disappointing. This service has been planned for a number of years. (*Extension of time granted.*) Even just last year, in a previous estimates, we were told that it would be open at the end of 2025. Now we seem to need that funding just to keep the first Safe Haven in Belconnen open. We have been told that it is subject to an evaluation, but we will have to wait and see what happens there.

We have seen the first Safe Haven being an important and valued service for people seeking mental health support. We are living in a cost-of-living and climate crisis. People are experiencing higher levels of distress than ever before, placing more pressure on our mental health systems. But mental health care is expensive and wait times can be lengthy. The sorts of early intervention and preventative services like Safe Haven are essential in providing Canberrans with a network of support before they reach the crisis point and find themselves needing to go to hospital or seeking out other acute services.

We have also seen that it continues to require an incredibly long time to access dental services. The mean waiting time for someone just to sit on the waitlist for an appointment is 14 months. During estimates we heard from the community sector that access to dental services was limited by not only the long timeframes and lack of timely care but also the cost of dental services. Despite the public nature of the public health system, they still also attract a high co-payment, which has increased even further this year to a maximum co-payment of \$550.30 per treatment plan.

The Greens certainly will continue to advocate for the inclusion of both mental health services and dental services in Medicare. That is obviously a national policy and one that my colleagues will take up at a national level. But it would make an enormous difference for people in the ACT to be able to access mental health services and dental services in the same way that they should be able to access a general practitioner with their Medicare card.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, we will certainly continue to advocate for people to be able to access the care they need when they need it, not just when they are in crisis. We will continue to maintain a strong focus on preventative care. We see the health budget continuing to grow. We know Canberrans support having a well-resourced, effective health system, but we also know we have a whole lot of other services we need to provide. We need to ensure that our health system remains affordable and sustainable. The sorts of budget increases we have seen in recent times are troubling in the sense of the health budget continuing to grow as a percentage of the ACTs overall expenditure and, in doing so, crowding out other areas that desperately need resources as well.

This is a real dilemma for the government. I acknowledge that. When people need health care, they need it. We have a long-term project here, where we need to put greater emphasis on preventative health. We need to do that in order to ensure that that very difficult choice for government is made a little easier and to enable the health funding to, I guess, live within its means as much as possible.

We want to ensure that people will have access to early intervention services or their GP long before they end up at the emergency department. We want to make sure that we are taking care of people, not simply building more hospitals. We need a truly free, accessible health system that is focused on looking after people. This focus is clear throughout all of these aspects of the budget that I have highlighted, and they will certainly continue to be key focus areas for us as we continue discussion about health policy going forward.

Having made all those remarks, we will be supporting this element of the budget. As I said, we have some reservations, but it is clear these are services that are essential for Canberrans. We acknowledge there is a range of areas in the health sector where performance is improving. We welcome that progress. We certainly look forward to seeing the outcome of the review that has been put in place. I am pleased to see the appointment this week of the independent expert by the health minister, and we are very keen to see how that work progresses.

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

Statement by member Belconnen—crime

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.37): I rise to speak about the concerns being raised by me in West Belconnen. I am currently doorknocking in West Belconnen about, particularly, the rise of crime in the streets. Certainly, there was a very significant and distressful event at Kippax on the weekend. When I have been out doorknocking, many residents have told me they feel increasingly unsafe, with break-ins and property damage

becoming far too common.

These fears were brought into sharp focus on Saturday morning, when a stolen front-end loader was used in a ram raid at Kippax Fair shopping centre. Witnesses described the terrifying sound of glass shattering as the offender attempted to break into the centre's ATM. Thankfully no-one was injured, but the damage and the shock to our community was and is significant.

Our small businesses and local residents deserve better. I ask the government: when will it take action to address this escalating crime and ensure people in West Belconnen, and particularly in Kippax, once again feel safe in their community? It is unfortunate I have had people tell me they do not go to shop at that significant shopping centre because of fears for their safety. I urge the minister and the government to do better and to provide more policing resources. I have had two petitions calling for that; so far, they have been ignored.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Breastfeeding

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.39): I want to talk about a situation at Melbourne Airport that I have been reading about today. It has been reported that yesterday, while in the Virgin Australia business class lounge at Melbourne Airport, a doctor, Dr Elise Turner, was pumping breastmilk when she was asked to leave and express in the bathroom because she was making other guests uncomfortable. Virgin Australia has since apologised, but that does not change the fact that Dr Turner needed to pump breastmilk while in the lounge yesterday.

Pumping is not something you do when it is convenient for you; it is something you do when your body tells you that you need to do it, so your child can be fed when they need to be fed. It is not an issue of convenience; it is a matter of feeding a child. Do any of us prepare our food in the bathroom? No. So why should we be forced to prepare a baby's food in the bathroom? Why should Dr Turner have to go to a toilet cubicle to prepare food for her baby? There are a lot of logistics involved in pumping breastmilk, including making sure the pump is clean and the bottles are clean—and a toilet cubicle is just not the place to do this. Pumping as a form of breastfeeding is protected under the Sex Discrimination Act—something that has been in place in Australia for over 40 years now. This is not a new concept. So how in 2025 is this still a thing that is happening to mothers?

As a mother who exclusively pumped for my child until he was about eight months old, I am very across the logistics of pumping—pumping while travelling, pumping while out and about, pumping in various places. Thankfully, my experience does not reflect the experience of Dr Turner. The experience I had here in Canberra was quite positive.

While I sometimes got strange looks when pumping in a cafe with a feeding scarf on, no-one ever said anything or made me feel uncomfortable. I even once pumped while playing lawn bowls at the Weston Creek Labor Club, because my body needed to pump and my child needed food and that was the only way of feeding him.

No-one should be made to feel like Dr Turner felt yesterday. Everyone should be able to breastfeed or pump whenever and wherever suits them. Babies need to be fed, and this is just one of the ways that that happens.

International Day of Democracy

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.41): I rise today to reflect on International Day of Democracy, which was marked yesterday. This day is not just about acknowledging a date on the calendar; it is about recognising a principle that underpins our way of life here in Australia, a principle that is both formidable and yet fragile: democratic processes. Democracy is about more than just casting a vote; it is about every citizen having the right to speak up and have a say in how they are governed without fear of retribution or punishment. It is the right to have your opinion freely expressed without fear of retribution.

It is not something we should take for granted. It does not run on autopilot. It requires care, courage, commitment and vigilance. In today's world, unfortunately, particularly in many parts, we are beset with misinformation, disengagement and cynicism that can so easily erode the trust we should show in each other to hear each other out and to hear each other's opinions. We cannot and must not allow this trust to diminish or this tolerance to diminish.

Democracy is not just a gift from government, it is a responsibility shared from all of us, built in the way we educate our children, in our homes and in our schools and in the way we gather as community groups and in the daily conversations we share. It is strengthened when we listen and when we turn up and participate, not just for ourselves but also for the sake of those who come after us and the sake of those we live amongst.

Debate, when it is robust and respectful, is not necessarily divisive. It can actually be an opportunity for people to learn from one another, even though they may start from a point of initial disagreement. This is democracy at its best. It is not about silencing different opinions; it is about being open-minded to think, "Maybe there is something I can learn here." A democracy is strongest when every opinion can be heard, when ideas are tested and decisions are made in full scrutiny of respectful behaviour and reasonable and rational debate.

As we reflect on International Day of Democracy, I call on all Australians, regardless of background, belief or political persuasions, to re-commit to the democratic principle—to stand up for truth, to stand together in respect and to stand firm in the belief that our democracy is strongest when we defend it, nurture it and share in its responsibility and treat each other with respect.

In closing on these principles that I have attempted to outline—and I have always respected elsewhere in the world—that today is, sadly, the third anniversary of the death of Ms Mahsa Amini in Iran, who died in police custody in that nation for not properly

wearing a head covering. It is a sobering reminder that respectful dissent and disagreement is not always well treated. That is something that we should be mindful of and appreciate here in our country.

Waste—Food for Soil

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.45): Last week, my colleague Laura Nuttall and I had the pleasure of visiting Food2Soil, a Canberra-based start-up run by two amazing women, Josie and Annabel. They are taking high-quality food organic waste from Harris Farm Markets and then turning it into this really amazing bio-fertiliser that has live microbes in it and it returns our most important nutrients to the soil. They showed us their production facility. From start to finish, it is a wonderful example of how we can use circular economy principles to make something really great out of what would otherwise be considered waste. They have saved 57,217 kilos of food waste from landfill. They have also avoided 108,713 kilograms of climate emissions. They are a really, really small operation; so imagine the scale they could get to.

They have networked with local organisations and they run trials of their product with mining companies who are doing land rehabilitation. They have enough ground to scale up. They are ready to partner with government land-use projects like large-scale landscaping. Unfortunately, they are about to move their facility to Bowral in New South Wales, where they can partner with the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce and get support from the New South Wales government for their operations. I am really, really happy that they have found a pathway, but it is not the only story I have heard of an amazing homegrown start-up here in the ACT that is leaving the territory because they do not have enough government support.

We need to prioritise investment in innovation where it aligns with our sustainability objectives. There are so many opportunities like this that we could be leveraging much better. In the meantime, congratulations to Josie and Annabel and good luck with the move. I hope your involvement with the ACT is not over, because we really need more people like you taking care of our planet.

Sport and recreation—The Pines Tennis Club

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.47): I stand with pleasure to welcome and wholeheartedly support the Pines Tennis Club's efforts to expand its footprint in Chisholm and grow the game of tennis across Tuggeranong. Apart from being the location of my first tennis lesson, which was probably in 1988, when we moved to Canberra from Wagga Wagga—I have distinct memories of (a) driving there under the big red suspension bridge across Isabella Drive and (b) throwing a massive tantrum when I was given a wooden racket to use instead of a nice big red one—the Pines Tennis Club is the definition of a Tuggeranong community sports club.

It is a not-for-profit organisation run and managed by its members since 1986, and it has long been a cornerstone of our community, offering not only a place to hit but also a place to connect, to learn and to grow. The club's commitment to inclusivity, youth development and grassroots engagement has made them a model for what a community sports club should be. I have been an enthusiastic fourth and last team member of the club's lovely and weekly social tennis evenings, while all of my kids have had, are

having or will have their tennis lessons there under the excellent coaching of ACT Club Coach of the Year 2024, Rod Jameson.

The club's volunteer community is dedicated and positive, with a really healthy leavening of vision and pragmatism. They know where they want to take the club, they know what they need to do to get there and, once there, make it work. This is why I was delighted by the ACT Labor's commitment in its 2024 plan for Tuggeranong to work with the club on its expansion plans, and even happier when the club's expression of interest in gaining ownership of the property that currently surrounds the existing premises in order to double the number of courts and accommodate the unmet demand for tennis in central and southern Tuggeranong—an expression of interest fully supported by Tennis ACT—was assessed as successful, so the club could participate in the second-stage request for tender, which commenced earlier this year.

No part of the Tuggeranong and Lanyon valleys are overwhelmed by high-quality tennis courts. So the expansion of the Pines Tennis Club to an eight-court facility in this specific location, given the proximity to existing club premises and the enabling of it to host wheelchair tennis, hotshots, pickleball and pop tennis makes perfect sense. It will improve the sustainability of the club and the health and wellbeing of the whole community and will go a long way to securing a future for tennis in Tuggeranong. The demand for accessible, high-quality sporting facilities in Tuggeranong is increasing, and tennis—one of the most inclusive and lifelong sports—deserves a strong and sustainable presence in our region.

The club's proposal to expand is timely, strategic and deeply aligned with the ACT government's goals for community wellbeing and active living. If the club is not successful in this tender, there is not a foreseeable future opportunity for an eight-court venue in Tuggeranong. The benefits of this expansion are clear. More courts mean more opportunities, for juniors picking up a racket for the first time, for seniors staying active and social and for families looking for healthy ways to spend time together. It means more coaching programs, more tournaments and more chances for Tuggeranong to shine on the regional and national stage.

I want to celebrate the club's leadership, volunteers and members for their passion and dedication. Your work has already made a lasting impact, and your future plans promise greater things.

Papua New Guinea Independence Day

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.51): Halo olgeta. Tudei bai mi hamamas na tok: Hepi 50th Independence Day long ol manmeri bilong Papua New Guinea. The language I have just attempted to speak is Tok Pisin, one of the main languages of Papua New Guinea. I want to extend my warmest congratulations to the Papua New Guinean diaspora here in the ACT. Happy 50th Golden Jubilee Independence Day!

Papua New Guinea is often called “the land of the unexpected” and “the land of a thousand cultures”. These names capture its extraordinary diversity. With more than 800 languages, PNG is the most culturally diverse nation in the world. Its cultures are rich with history, custom and a remarkable resilience in facing challenges.

Australia and Papua New Guinea share a long and intertwined story. Our geographical, human and political histories are inseparably bound together. But it is important to acknowledge that this history includes colonisation. Australia administered Papua New Guinea until its independence in 1975. That colonial past has left legacies which remain with us today and it carries with it a responsibility to recognise that history honestly and to work towards a future relationship grounded in respect, reciprocity and a true partnership.

The shared history is also a physical one. The Kokoda trek stands as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices and bonds formed during the horrors of the Second World War and, to this day, many Australians travel to Papua New Guinea to walk that path and honour that history.

There is also much that Australia can learn from Papua New Guinea. One example is the value of *Luksave*, a principle of recognition, loyalty, respect and support for those around you. This spirit strengthens communities and reminds us of the importance of looking after the collective, not just the individual.

From the highlands to the islands of Manus and New Britain, from the coastlines of Milne Bay to the great Sepic River, Papua New Guinea is a nation of extraordinary beauty and cultural richness. Today, we celebrate the vibrancy, resilience and strength of the Papua New Guinean people, including the many who call Canberra home. On this 50th Independence Day, I join with all Canberrans connected to PNG in saying, “Happy Independence Day, and here’s to your future.”

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.53 pm.