



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

17 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 **Thursday, 2 October 2025**.

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Wednesday, 17 September 2025

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

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

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.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Roads—collisions with wildlife—petition 31-25

By Ms Clay, from 1,350 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 urgent need for the implementation of a virtual fencing trial along the section of Erindale Drive between Farrer Ridge and Wanniasa Hills nature reserves to reduce vehicle collisions with wildlife.

Canberra experiences a high rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions, with kangaroos being one of the most affected. Rangers commonly record over 1,000 kangaroos called in as dead or injured by the road each year, and it's estimated that actual collisions may be twice as many as reported sightings. These incidents not only harm wildlife but also pose significant risks to motorists. Virtual fencing is a non-invasive and relatively inexpensive technology designed to prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions by alerting animals to oncoming traffic. It involves the installation of small roadside devices on posts spaced approximately 25 metres apart that emit high-frequency sounds and flashing lights when they detect the headlights of approaching vehicles at night or in low-light conditions.

These signals are designed to deter animals, particularly kangaroos, from crossing the road when a vehicle is approaching. The technology does not harm wildlife or require fencing that restricts animal movement across the landscape. Virtual fencing technology has proven effective in reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions in various regions:

- In Eurobodalla, NSW, a virtual fencing trial led to a 90% reduction in

kangaroo fatalities along a known hotspot.

- In Victoria's Surf Coast, a virtual fencing trial has halved the number of vehicle collisions with macropods.

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

1. Initiate a virtual fencing trial along Erindale Drive to assess its effectiveness in reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions. Collaborate with the relevant ACT Government agencies and local communities to monitor and evaluate the trial's outcomes.
2. Consider expanding the use of virtual fencing to other identified hotspots in the ACT based on the trial's success.

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

Roads—Canberra Avenue—petition 48-25

By Mr Emerson, from 1,826 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 of the need for an overpass for students at St Edmund's College and St Clare's to safely get to school.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to look at approving an overpass for Canberra Avenue for school students.

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.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Roads—collisions with wildlife—petition 31-25

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.02): I am pleased to speak to the petition calling for virtual fencing along Erindale Drive. Canberra is a progressive city, and people have so much pride in living so close to nature. We do not have to look far to be surrounded by beautiful reserves, to see native wildlife and to connect with our natural environment. Unfortunately, our wildlife also have to live close to us, and that includes living with

our roads.

Every year, thousands of Canberrans have the traumatic experience of hitting a native animal with their vehicle. It usually leads to suffering and death for the animal, and it is deeply distressing, dangerous and costly for the people involved.

I want to thank Aisha Bottrill and her many colleagues who have come here today, and who have brought this petition. I want to thank them for their campaigning to raise the need for virtual fencing here in the ACT. They have managed to gather 1,350 signatures, and it has been great hearing the conversations they have been having with Canberrans about this issue. There is a huge amount of support for this one.

Aisha has cared for animals that she found left injured on the side of the road, and this is one of the reasons that she is personally motivated to make sure that we have more measures to protect and support our wildlife, like virtual fencing. Just the other week, she stopped and waited with an injured female kangaroo on Erindale Drive, and that injured roo also lost her joey. It was flung from her pouch and it was hit by a car. Since then, Aisha has seen many more dead kangaroos on the side of the road.

The Conservator of Flora and Fauna has confirmed the numbers. There has been a higher call-out rate for wildlife accidents on the roads this year—4,464 call-outs, compared to the average of 2,700 in a regular year. In June alone there were 621 call-outs.

Virtual fencing is low-cost and non-invasive technology. It is designed to prevent wildlife vehicle collisions by alerting the animals to the oncoming traffic. It can be almost no cost to government if government partners with insurance agencies on this. There is a benefit for insurance companies, as it will reduce the number of claims paid out for vehicle damage.

Virtual fencing consists of devices on roadside posts that emit high frequency sounds and flashing lights when they detect the headlights of an approaching vehicle at night or in low light conditions. The signals are designed to deter animals, particularly kangaroos, from crossing the road when a vehicle approaches. They do not harm wildlife and it does not restrict animal movements across the landscape.

A trial is the least that we can do to see how we can better care for our city's wildlife, and today's community petition shows that many Canberrans are on board regarding this. Canberrans have raised with me that the ACT trialled wildlife crossing deterrent devices in the 80s and the 90s, so it is not a foreign concept, and many of us are familiar with these when we drive down to the south coast or other places. But technologies, methodologies and research have advanced, and that is why we need a new trial to test the efficacy here in the ACT and to create safer roads for our people and our wildlife.

There have been some recent trials of virtual fencing elsewhere, and those have reported great success. Eurobodalla council reported a virtual fencing trial that led to a 90 per cent reduction in kangaroo fatalities along a known hotspot. Victoria's Surf Coast have reported a trial. They say that, over three years, there was an 81 per cent reduction in wildlife road collisions. These are really great results.

Wildlife carers are very supportive of virtual fencing. They want to see it rolled out in more regions, including here in the ACT, and they have seen a real, on-the-ground difference with virtual fencing when it is placed in certain hotspot areas.

The ACT Greens went to the election with a policy to trial virtual fencing across Canberra to reduce unnecessary collisions and wildlife deaths, and that was part of our broader platform to care for our nature and our environment. We know that wildlife try to cross where roads have become a barrier to them moving through their natural range, and the mapping shows us where the worst locations are for our wildlife. That mapping has informed this community petition on where the trial should take place in Canberra. The Greens encourage government to consider expanding a trial to more of our known hotspots.

Virtual fencing is also good for our drivers. It will reduce distress caused from hitting an animal. It will reduce calls to insurance providers. It will reduce collisions, and it will improve safety. It will decrease the risk that you will swerve to avoiding hitting wildlife or that you might have a crash. These are all great reasons to test out the latest fencing.

Once again, I thank Aisha and the Save Canberra's Kangaroos group, who have campaigned and got 1,350 signatures on this petition. We are very much looking forward to the government response and very much hoping that we will get a trial here in Canberra.

Roads—Canberra Avenue—petition 48-25

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.07): I rise to speak on the petition calling for an overpass on Canberra Avenue. I want to thank Aiden Stuart and his mother, Nektaria Stuart, for bringing this petition to the Assembly today. On 28 March, as members know, Aaron Way and Aiden Stuart were hit by a speeding, out-of-control car, not on Canberra Avenue but alongside it. They were not crossing the road; they were waiting to cross.

They were seriously injured. Aaron's father, Josh, arrived on the scene to find Aiden bleeding out. Paramedics have made it clear that Josh's actions saved Aiden's life that day, but Aiden is still facing lifelong injuries as a consequence of that incident. He still does not have any feeling in his arm and, when I met with him recently, he had shards of glass still coming out of his face from time to time, coming back to the surface. He spent 49 days in hospital after the incident, and during that time he spoke with his mother about what he could do to keep this from happening to someone else. For someone of his age, I think it is such an impressive conversation to have initiated while still in hospital. He has sought to try and create some good out of what was a terrible thing that happened to him and that will have lasting consequences.

Aiden reached out to me about sponsoring this petition, which I was very happy to do. Since then the petition has garnered 1,826 signatures. There would have been more, but many of the St Edmund's College and St Clare's school community members live in New South Wales. I am told that, for St Edmund's College, around 40 per cent of students live across the border, so if we added another 40 per cent to the signatures collected, we would be up, easily, to 2½ thousand signatures.

After the incident, the government announced, on 12 May, a signalised pedestrian crossing on Canberra Avenue near Burke Crescent, which was an announcement that I welcomed, and I called at the same time for a 40-kilometre zone on Canberra Avenue. We have done such zones on other avenues, like Northbourne Avenue and Barry Drive. To me, it makes sense to have a 40-kilometre zone there.

Aiden and Nektaria are concerned that a signalised crossing would not have stopped what happened to Aiden and Aaron, and they have been calling for an overpass. Other community members have suggested that an underpass might be more feasible at that site. My strong view is that, whatever is done, I hope that there is a clear, final and prompt decision in response to this petition, and that it is active. Canberra Avenue currently is in the same shape it was in when this incident occurred. Nothing has changed since then, and it is equally as dangerous as it was on 28 March, when these boys were hit by that car.

I urge the government to move as quickly as they possibly can, and to act on community concerns regarding the safety of Canberra Avenue, which have been raised for decades prior to this incident; obviously, they have been brought to the surface and accelerated because of what has been a real tragedy.

In closing, I again acknowledge Aiden, who is recovering. His family is seeking to raise funds to see whether he can get treatment overseas for the nerve damage in his arm. While he was in hospital, there was a conversation with his mother about whether they might need to amputate. The fact that he is taking the time to reach out, have a petition come to this Assembly and push for positive change is just so inspiring and shows really impressive leadership from this young man. I hope that the Assembly takes this petition seriously and respects the strong community call for real action on the safety of Canberra Avenue.

Roads—Canberra Avenue—petition 48-25

MS LEE(Kurrajong) (10.11): I thank Mr Emerson for sponsoring this petition, which was signed by over 1,820 Canberrans. The petition simply calls on the government to look at approving an overpass for Canberra Avenue for school students. At the outset, no-one could have predicted the actions of one man that have caused so much heartache for the families and friends of the two boys that were seriously injured in March this year, and the impact that it had on the broader Canberra community.

Sadly, this is not the first time that safety concerns have been raised by the school communities at both St Edmund's College and St Clare's College. As Mr Emerson has pointed out, this issue has been raised with the government for many years, including back in 2022, when I sponsored a petition to reduce the speed limit on Canberra Avenue in that area to 40 kilometres an hour, which would bring it in line with the rules governing 40-kilometre zones near schools. This was following the passionate advocacy of the then principal of St Edmund's College, Mr Joe Zavone, and the broader school community, who were really concerned about the safety of their students at that particular road.

The response from the government to that petition back in 2022 was disappointing. It

said:

Given that Canberra Avenue is a main arterial route between Canberra and Queanbeyan, the current reduced speed limit of 60km/h is appropriate. Introducing a 40km/h speed limit on this road section is unlikely to be an effective measure without extensive traffic calming measures, which are incompatible with this road's arterial function.

Once again, there is nothing that could have predicted, or probably perhaps prevented, one man taking the actions that he did that caused so much heartache earlier this year, and no-one is saying that putting in place reduced speed limits, or even an overpass, would have prevented those terrible events. But the point is still clear; that is, safety concerns, especially for our young people, especially for our students, in that specific area have been an issue in the public arena for quite some time and should be a priority, not just for the ACT government but for the entire Canberra community.

I do send my thoughts out to Aiden, who is obviously still in the throes of recovery and has shown incredible courage and leadership in thinking about his fellow school students and the school community, in making sure that this petition has made it to the Assembly today. I urge the ACT government to listen to the community and consider the measures to make this part of Canberra Avenue safer for everyone.

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) (10.14): Mr Speaker, with your indulgence, I would like to speak again about one of the petitions that was tabled yesterday.

Yesterday, in speaking to the petition tabled by Mr Emerson in relation to Wakefield Gardens, I indicated that the government engagement would open shortly. My media release said formally that engagement would open on 22 September. That really related to the start of those pop-up sessions, the first of which is on 23 September, from 7.30 am to 9.30 am, at Ainslie shops. But the survey itself is now open, and has been for a few days, and it is available on the ACT government Your Say website. I thought I should correct the record on that.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.15): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period—1 January 2025 to 30 June 2025—the Eleventh Assembly Standing Committee on Environment and Planning considered a total of 29 appointments and re-appointments to the following bodies: the ACT Architects Board, the ACT Heritage Council, the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board, the Animal

Welfare Advisory Committee, the Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority Governing Board, the Climate Change Council, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, the Rail Safety National Law Drug and Alcohol Analyst and the Suburban Land Agency. I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 30 June 2025.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.16): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period—since the committee’s formation on 26 June 2025 to 30 June 2025—the committee considered no appointments or re-appointments to any bodies.

I now table a schedule for this reporting period:

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 26 to 30 June 2025.

Racism and extremist ideologies

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) on Sunday 31 August 2025, anti-immigration rallies were held in Canberra and across Australia. The rallies were used to promote messages of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia and antisemitism;
- (b) these rallies were not an isolated event, but were a visible demonstration of the re-emergence of extremist ideologies that threaten the fabric of Australian society, one which the vast majority of the Canberra community rejects;
- (c) demonstrations of other acts of extreme hatred, discrimination and blatant racism have been seen in Canberra for some time now, including attacks on religious temples and the propagation of racist material in our suburbs;
- (d) these acts leave our multicultural community feeling unsafe in a way that no Canberran ever should; and
- (e) vulnerable cohorts of people may be more susceptible to extremist views and, as a community, we must actively promote the positive benefits of

diversity and inclusion and prevent people from being coerced into these harmful and radical belief systems;

(2) acknowledges:

- (a) the importance of multiculturalism, and the significant value Canberra's growing cultural and linguistic diversity contributes to the city and community;
- (b) that the overwhelming majority of Canberrans reject extremist ideologies, and reject acts of fear and exclusion, including any acts of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and antisemitism;
- (c) that Canberra is recognised under the Welcoming Australia Network with Advanced Accreditation and that Canberra is a Refugee Welcome Zone, both of which demonstrate the Government's commitment to welcoming refugees, asylum seekers, and promoting and celebrating inclusion, diversity, and social cohesion; and
- (d) the Government's commitment to continue to work closely with people who may be vulnerable to extremist views, including undertaking early intervention and prevention activities to steer them away from radicalisation and harmful behaviour;

(3) requests that the Standing Committee on Social Policy undertake an inquiry into the re-emergence and rising prevalence of extremist political ideologies and belief systems in the ACT. The inquiry should consider potential recommendations on actions to help prevent and intervene early in the radicalisation of vulnerable cohorts in our community; and

(4) calls on:

- (a) all Members of the Legislative Assembly to publicly re-affirm their support of Canberra's multicultural community and condemn the anti-immigrant sentiment expressed in the rallies held in Canberra on 31 August 2025;
- (b) the ACT Government to work with the Commonwealth Government to continue to strengthen anti-racism and anti-discrimination frameworks and, subject to the findings of the above inquiry, consider developing an anti-racism strategy; and
- (c) the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to provide an update to the Assembly by May 2026 on progress made against recommendations of the racial vilification inquiry of the Tenth Assembly, since its response to that inquiry was provided in March 2023.

Like the vast majority of Canberrans, the ACT government recognises the importance of multiculturalism and the significant value Canberra's growing culturally and linguistically diverse community contributes to our city. Everyone is welcome here, and we unequivocally condemn acts of hatred, racism and discrimination, including Islamophobia and antisemitism. Over the past few years, we have seen the rise of extremist ideologies across Australia and the world. We are incredibly fortunate that Canberra has not seen the worst of these behaviours. But we are not immune to this larger national trend of polarisation and extremism.

On Sunday 31 August 2025 anti-immigration rallies were held in Canberra and across Australia. Unfortunately, these rallies promoted messages of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia and antisemitism and showcased extremist groups. Such messages run

counter to Canberra's values as set out in our Charter for Multiculturalism, which promotes respect and celebration of our diverse multicultural community. Disturbingly, reports followed of alleged attacks against trans people of colour in our city, including a car vandalised with racist and homophobic slurs. I am deeply sorry this happened. These are not the values of Canberrans.

While these rallies across the country were a visible flashpoint, they are not isolated. In recent weeks, we have seen the Indian Australian community unfairly targeted in a cruel debate on immigration, despite their immense contribution to our city and country. In recent times, we have seen both Palestinian and Jewish communities suffer increasing discrimination as geopolitical tensions spill into personal abuse and vilification. It is critical that we are unified in calling out this abuse and discrimination as unacceptable. We must also work together to better understand what is happening in our local community and prevent the further spread of hatred.

In March, racist pamphlets from white nationalists were distributed in Florey with explicit Nazi references and calls to violence. This flyer and this call to action are abhorrent. I am proud to say that the Florey community stood up to this racism and distributed a counter pamphlet that upheld the values of Canberrans, making it clear that Canberra is an inclusive place for all people.

Disappointingly, for some time we have seen hate symbols like swastikas being graffitied across our city. This has been occurring at a range of settings like parks and playgrounds, shopping centres and on public buildings. We have also witnessed, plastered on poles and shopfronts for everyone to see, stickers containing imagery that causes great distress to Jewish members of our community.

In more troubling cases, we are aware of direct contact with extremist groups and Canberra teenagers. The end result of this radicalisation can be violence and terrorism, and this is something that we must confront. While young people may not always understand the depth of what they are doing, this behaviour nevertheless creates an unacceptable risk to our community.

We have also seen sustained vandalism, deaths and damage over the past few years at religious places of worship. In recent years, Hindu temples at Florey and Mawson and the Buddhist temple in Nicholls have been vandalised. These temples are significant cultural and religious centres for people who worship there, but they also represent our community. I have had the great privilege of visiting some of these religious centres and spending time meeting with members during celebrations and religious ceremonies. They are truly beautiful communities and places of worship. As with all places of worship, people should be able to practise their faith and congregate with their community without experiencing fear. This should be a sentiment exercised and shared by all.

The list of recent incidents is too long and really disappointing. But for many in Canberra, their experience of racism does not make the news like these cases have; it is the everyday lived experience. So to them I say that we here in the Assembly stand together in our desire to eradicate this behaviour.

All members will be aware that we already have laws in place to support antiracism and

prevent discrimination to better protect our multicultural community. In 2023, the Assembly passed legislation, the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, making it an offence to publicly display Nazi symbols. In 2025, changes to the Discrimination Act came into effect by introducing a positive duty requiring proactive steps to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and vilification in government entities. From 2027, this will apply to all organisations in the ACT. These are legislative changes that we should be immensely proud of.

These reforms sit alongside the Multiculturalism Act 2023, which enshrines the Legislative Assembly's belief that our community is enriched by the long and continuous cultures of the First Peoples of Australia and the diverse cultures, languages, religious or spiritual beliefs of the many other people who have made our community their home. The charter states what Canberrans can expect when they live in our great city. We must work to uphold these expectations. These include feeling welcome and being free and safe to practise and celebrate your cultural identity, religious and spiritual identity.

To strengthen these efforts, this executive motion requests the Standing Committee on Social Policy inquire into the re-emergence and rising prevalence of extremist ideologies and bring forward recommendations to help prevent and intervene early in radicalisation. This executive motion also calls for the Assembly to reaffirm its commitment to the celebration and active promotion of multiculturalism.

As the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I stand proudly in the Assembly today and say our city is better for multiculturalism. I uphold our values of inclusion, diversity and respect every day, and I categorically say that we do not stand for any behaviour that threatens these values.

All arms of government are working to stamp out racism in our community, and we are striving every day towards our vision of Canberra as an open, inclusive and welcoming city. The ACT government will deliver our election commitment to strengthen antiracism and antidiscrimination frameworks to protect our multicultural community and to promote Canberra as an open inclusive and welcoming city.

As the minister, I have a unique opportunity to see the value that multiculturalism brings every day. I see the incredible work of people, organisations and community groups and what they do every day to make Canberra a better place. This last week, I had the tremendous honour to attend the 2025 ACT Multicultural Awards with some of my fellow members and celebrate the incredible work of volunteers, organisations and community leaders who, across Canberra, make our city better each and every day. These Canberrans are amazing. They matter, and they deserve to live free from extremism. I ask Assembly members to agree with this executive motion so that we can realise our vision of Canberra as an open, inclusive and welcoming city.

MS CASTLEY(Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.25): Before I talk about the motion that is currently before us, I would like to provide a little bit of background. In the last sitting week, the Greens approached us with their own motion on the same topic and, at that time, they said their desire was to work with all of the members to produce a motion that was broadly agreeable, to be a unifying moment for the Assembly and for the community. While we worked constructively with them, we had concerns with the

late notice and the need to suspend standing orders. It turns out that Labor shared those concerns and later undertook to bring forward a similar motion as executive business this week.

Our understanding was that this executive motion would have the same intention and goals as the motion which was already drafted. This was a motion that I believe was quite close to achieving consensus across the Assembly. But what we have today is not that motion; it is not the product of consensus or even consultation. We were not consulted; we were instead provided with a draft copy of the motion shortly before the notice paper deadline. We were not asked for feedback or if we had any concerns. In fact, we were not even asked if we were supportive. Consequently, this motion seems to be another political motion, which clearly demonstrates that Labor's idea of a unifying moment for the Assembly is one where everyone does what Labor wants.

We should also think about how unifying it is to move a motion that condemns one set of rallies last month but ignores another set of rallies in the same month. Both rallies featured acts of hatred, both included threats of violence and both found certain people advocating for views that certain groups would find offensive and threatening—views that left them feeling unsafe and unwelcome.

It is, of course, outrageous that any member of our community should be left feeling unsafe or unwelcome because of who they are or where they come from. That is something I and the Canberra Liberals condemn in the strongest terms. But when incidents occur where local people are made to feel unsafe, we should not be selective about which groups receive the attention and support of the Assembly.

Imagine how it feels to move across the world to live in Australia, perhaps as a uni student attending ANU or a family who has relocated for work. Imagine how it feels for them to see rallies around the country where members of the public and even elected members of parliament stand together. They stand together amongst Hamas and al-Qaeda flags; they stand beneath portraits of the Ayatollah; they stand together around people chanting “death, death to the IDF” and casually making comments that would be totally objectionable and offensive if they were made about any other faith, race or ethnicity. It is not just our Jewish community who are offended by this. We have a significant population of people who have come from the Middle East to escape lives under the Ayatollah, under Hamas or under al-Qaeda only to see those same murderous entities celebrated in Australian streets.

My concern is not just with how those people felt on the days of those rallies but also how they must feel today, knowing this parliament is expressing outrage about similar rallies that happened to other people but not them. Do we want some of our local Israeli, Persian, and Arab residents to feel ignored? Do we want them to feel excluded or do we want them to feel like they are as genuine a part of our community as everyone else?

If the government had bothered to consult with us before the motion was lodged, if they had have approached this as a genuine moment for unity, we would have expressed these concerns and asked for the motion to be expanded before it was lodged. We would have asked for a little more breadth and a little more thoughtfulness, and we could have supported it without the need for amendments or for debate. I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MS CASTLEY: I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(a), insert:
“(b) on 3 August 2025, marches were organised by Palestine Action where placards including pictures of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei holding an assault weapon were shown, flags for Hamas and Al-Qaeda were flown and protestors chanted “death, death to the IDF” and “long live the Intifada”.
2. In paragraph (4)(a), after “2025”, insert: “and any politically-motivated violence”.

I believe our amendments strengthen what we are talking about today. I hope we can all agree that we refute and do not want any politically motivated violence here in the ACT. I do not think our amendments are controversial. I think they strengthen the motion before us today, and I ask all members of the Assembly to consider those.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.30): Speaking first to the motion, I rise today to reiterate my condemnation of the racist, hurtful and harmful so-called March for Australia rallies that have taken place across our nation over the past couple of weeks. These rallies have inflicted unquantifiable hurt—not only on multicultural communities, but on all Canberrans. That includes those who were born here, those who grew up here and those who have chosen to make Canberra their home.

These rallies run directly counter to the core values of Canberra. For me and so many in this city, Canberra has always stood for diversity, for compassion and for a welcoming spirit. It is a place where people from all walks of life can come together, where cultures are celebrated and where kindness is a foundation of our community. Those values represent the very best of us.

But these rallies have shown us something that we must never ignore: that even here in a city that prides itself on inclusivity, we are not immune to the viruses of hate and fear. A small number of people are intent on dividing us. They spread fear, they spread misinformation and they seek to normalise racism and antisemitism. In those moments, we as elected representatives have both power and responsibility. We are uniquely placed to call out this behaviour for what it is: unacceptable, dangerous and un-Australian.

But calling it out is not enough. We must also commit ourselves to taking deliberate, concrete steps to combat racism and antisemitism wherever they appear. We must also understand those protests in the context of democracy. Whilst there has always been a place in Australian democracy for peaceful protest, there must be no place for fascism or racism, as these are inherently violent towards other members of our community.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the Aboriginal Tent Embassy for their leadership and courage in organising counter-protests to these rallies. For over 50 years, the embassy has been a symbol of resistance, resilience and truth-telling. Their presence and advocacy in recent weeks will have provided strength, hope and comfort

to many Canberrans. Their leadership does not go unnoticed, and I am grateful for it.

This is not a battle that ends with one motion in this chamber. Combating racism and antisemitism requires constant vigilance and continual effort. Passing this motion is one step in the right direction, but history will not look kindly upon us if we stop there. That is why, today, I call on the government to provide an update on its intent and its timeline to implement the recommendations of the Assembly's inquiry into racial vilification from last term. That inquiry laid out a clear pathway for action. The events of the past week only strengthen the case for immediate implementation. If not now, then when? If these rallies are not a wake-up call, I cannot imagine what would be.

It also underlines the importance of the Welcoming Cities framework, in particular line 2.15 that calls for specific anti-racism programs. If we are truly serious about building an inclusive and welcoming city, then we need to ensure that we invest in having the challenging conversations to help our community become anti-racist.

At the same time, I cannot help but observe that politics has yet again been allowed to overshadow principles. When Senator Nampijinpa Price made comments vilifying the Indian-Australian community, it was an opportunity for all political parties to stand united against racism. Instead, we did not see a universal condemnation of those comments. Those comments were inappropriate. They were offensive, inflammatory and utterly unbecoming of an elected representative. They are better suited to *Sky News After Dark*.

We all know that this chamber and parliaments across this country are places of unique power. That power comes with responsibility. To refuse to use that responsibility at every available moment is unconscionable. Silence is complicity, and complicity only emboldens those who seek to divide us. Let me be very clear. The Greens absolutely and unequivocally condemn both the words and the actions of Senator Price on this matter. Racism in all its forms has no place in Canberra, in our politics or in our future.

To the communities who have borne the brunt of those abhorrent rallies, who have endured the cruelty of racist remarks, who have had to stand once again in the face of hatred, I want to say to you: "You are us. You are an integral part of our Canberra community, and we are stronger because of you. You are welcome here. You are valued here. You are loved here. You are Canberra, and Canberra is you."

Building a community free of racism is not easy, but it is essential. Today's motion is one step. The implementation of the recommendations of the racial vilification inquiry are another. Speaking out every time racism rears its head is another. Together they build towards the Canberra and the Australia we know are possible.

Moving on to the amendments which we received from the Liberals about 10 minutes before 10 o'clock, let me explain my position before Mr Hanson puts words in my mouth. The Greens are a party of peace and non-violence. I do not support showing pictures of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei holding an assault weapon. I do not support showing flags of listed terrorist organisations such as Hamas and al-Qaeda. I do not support chants that promote violence. Those go against the tenets of my party. I do not deny these events did occur, with reports that they seem to have occurred on the Sydney Harbour Bridge protests as part of the National Day of Protests. Those signs and those

flags were held by individuals, not by the organisers themselves: the Palestine Action Group.

I agree with Mr Hanson—in an unusual moment—that those actions are not acceptable, but I will not be supporting the inclusion in today’s motion of that particular reference. Firstly, due to the late notice, there has not been an opportunity for us to be able to negotiate a position on this. Secondly, because it is tying the actions of the organisers with the actions of the individuals.

I believe by making my speech today I am very clearly showing what I do or do not support and that I condemn those actions. Therefore, I will not be supporting the first amendment, but the Greens will be supporting the second amendment.

Therefore, I seek to divide the question.

Ordered that the question be divided.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.37): In the last sitting period I spoke on this very topic in expressing the hurt, disappointment and, in some ways, despair at some of the abhorrent sentiments that were being chanted loudly at rallies around the country on 31 August. I will not repeat them now because my words are captured in *Hansard*, a privilege and a curse for us elected members in this place.

Mr Speaker, I start my contribution to this debate by talking about some of the messages and comments I received in the wake of that speech. On the whole, I received enormous support from across the community, including from this very building. For that, I thank you. But I also received other comments and other feedback, and these comments confirm for me exactly why I gave the speech that I did and why it is necessary. One email I received said:

Your action of posting this has inflamed racial hatred more than anyone who attended the march. You have spread lies and caused division amongst the community. Shame on you.

A comment that I received via social media was:

As a proud Australian with a real understanding of what’s happening to our future for our youth, what’s truly, as you say, horrific is how quickly some people play the victim card rather than addressing the very real concerns of ordinary Australians. No-one’s questioning your right to belong here if you came the right way, follow the law and want to contribute. What are you even talking about? But twisting legitimate frustration about uncontrolled immigration into some sob story about your insecurities is pathetic, manipulative and dishonest.

Another poster commented:

We are wanting what’s best for the country as a nation. The current situation is unsustainable. Don’t like it? You have options. Explore those.

Another post was a picture of a white woman holding a sign that reads, “Mass immigration equals mass risk for women.” Here is another, Mr Speaker:

Stop your pathetic virtue signalling grandstanding and come along to the next rally and see for yourself just what a sad bunch of deranged cretins really looks like. By the way, the exercise will do you a power of good.

Mr Speaker, for a woman politician, a healthy dose of body shaming is just par for the course.

For some of these keyboard warriors, who are quick to jump online and make their views known, it is clear that they did not take the time to read or watch my speech in full. I repeat here again that the organisers of those marches may have had genuine intentions to raise awareness and lobby the federal government about legitimate concerns that they hold about immigration policies. I acknowledge that, for many Australians who indeed marched, that is where their intentions started and remained.

But, Mr Speaker, as I said in my speech in the last sitting, when known neo-Nazis and white supremacists are willingly given a public platform to spew their abhorrent and hateful racist chants, when an official poster publicising the marches specifically singles out one ethnic group for criticism of government immigration policy, you can no longer hide behind a justification of, “We’re just marching to legitimately express our opposition to government policy.”

I am a strong defender of freedom of speech. It is a cornerstone value, not just of the Liberal Party but of Australian democracy. But no freedom exists without responsibility. We all have a duty to shape the society in which we live and the society in which we want our children to live. As elected representatives, our duty is even greater—we who have the privilege of a platform that many do not, we who have the privilege of having a direct vote on the laws that affect all of us.

I have been on the receiving end of many attempts to shut me down, freeze me out and push me out. It takes a toll, and it can be incredibly personal. But I promised myself that, when I was first elected, I would not shy away from what is right in the face of all attempts to intimidate me into silence, in the face of all attempts to gaslight me into questioning my own convictions, beliefs and values, and I intend to keep that promise.

I am here to be a voice for those who are not necessarily in a position to speak for themselves. For too long, our parliaments have lacked the diversity we see in our communities, and those lived experiences and voices have been missing in public policy debates that have shaped our country.

Back in the early 80s, when my parents were considering migrating from Korea, they considered a few options and ultimately chose Australia because they were drawn to the Australian values of a fair go, an open and inclusive society, where everyone is treated equally no matter what, and reward for hard work, whatever your chosen vocation. My parents chose Australia because they were drawn to this beautiful, multicultural country that welcomed and celebrated different cultures that added to the vibrancy and economic prosperity of our nation.

My parents have always expressed how grateful they are, as migrants, to Australia and its people, for the opportunities that we have been afforded and for the lives that we

have been able to lead. For decades they have always lived humbled by the gratitude they feel, and that will stay with them for their entire lives.

I also want to say to them that Australia is lucky to have them, too. My parents speak with heavy accents. Their English will always be broken. They prefer kimchap and bulgogi over vegemite sandwiches and avo toast. They have probably happily watched chuggu—or soccer—and baseball over cricket, but they have lived their whole lives giving back to the country that gave them opportunities for their children.

They have worked hard their whole lives to achieve the great Australian dream of owning their own home. They have worked in minimum wage jobs because they are grateful to have jobs. They have started businesses through blood, sweat and tears to contribute to the Australian economy. They have taught us the value of doing our part to make a positive contribution to our community, and I know that Australia is a better country for their courage in taking that leap of faith to start a new life here.

But this is not a story that is unique to my family. This is the story of thousands and thousands of migrants who come to Australia seeking a better life, not just for themselves and their families, but for the Australian people, too. I reiterate: these rallies may not have been intended to be anything other than a genuine expression of opposition to legitimate government policy. But we cannot ignore the effect of some of the public displays of abhorrent and extremist views.

I turn to the amendments that Ms Castley has moved. I say at the outset—and I will say this very clearly—that there is no place in our society for extremist views, whether it is about race, religion or any other discriminatory and divisive topic. There is no place in our society for politically motivated violence, and there is no place in our society for the abhorrent words that were contained on the placards, as outlined in Ms Castley's amendments.

I also want to make clear that the Assembly's condemnation of the abhorrent words that we saw chanted at rallies around the country on 31 August must be called out for what it is, and I would have concern if there was anybody—anybody—who took that to mean anything other than that event alone being deserving of condemnation.

I am concerned that we need to be very careful that there is not even a perception that the calling out of those abhorrent racist sentiments, specifically at the rallies on the 31 August, are not stand-alone. We cannot have that perception. They do stand alone. They are abhorrent. I welcome and support Mr Pettersson's motion today.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.46): I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing this matter forward today, following the discussion at the end of the last sitting period. I thank him for the motion, and I thank Ms Lee in particular for her contribution just then, and particularly the point she made at the conclusion of her remarks.

I think it is clear that global events are impacting on social cohesion in Australia and that certain events that have occurred around our nation are now impacting on social cohesion within our city. It is now more important than ever to make some clear statements to reiterate what many of us have said on the public record on many

occasions. It is appropriate this morning that we take that opportunity.

I begin by reaffirming the government's view that Canberra is a proud, diverse community that values its unity over division, that we reject fear and exclusion, and that we stand firm in protecting the rights, the safety and the dignity of all Canberrans. We stand with community members from multicultural and diverse backgrounds, and we thank them for the contribution they make to this city.

We acknowledge our achievement as a vibrant, welcoming city that is recognised, under the Welcoming Australia Network, with advanced accreditation. We acknowledge the need, now more than ever, to work together as a community so that all of our city's residents understand the value of diversity, and that we continue to build a sense of belonging for all Canberrans that is consistent with this city's values and ideals. I would hope that those values and ideals are shared across all of the mainstream political contributors in our city.

Our focus now, through the rest of 2025 and into 2026, needs to be on continuing to listen to the diverse Canberra community, to stand up against racism and hateful behaviour, and to continue to invest in the programs and policies that we know are delivering good outcomes for our diverse multicultural community. In my view, that is how we can continue to build a welcoming and inclusive Canberra that we are all proud of. Today is another small but important step in that journey, and I commend Mr Pettersson's motion to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.49): I rise today to speak in support of Minister Pettersson's motion, to reaffirm our support of Canberra's multicultural community and to condemn anti-immigration sentiment expressed in the rallies held in Canberra on 31 August this year.

On 29 August, Minister Pettersson and I released a joint statement on the "March for Australia" protest. In this statement I said:

What makes Canberra such a special place is our shared commitment to diversity, respect, and unity. We strongly condemn any movement that propagates extremist ideologies and threatens these values we hold.

Canberra is and will remain a community that is deeply proud of our diversity, and we will reject fear and exclusion to protect the rights, safety and dignity of all Canberrans. Any form of politically motivated, violent extremism that threatens this is strongly condemned.

I work closely with ACT Policing and the Security and Emergency Management Division of JACS to manage and respond to these threats. The ACT government takes a multidisciplinary and cross-directorate approach to security and ensuring public safety. We also work with the commonwealth to monitor, assess and address threats and keep Canberrans safe.

Earlier this year, the Director-General of Security at ASIO spoke about the concept of

politically motivated violence, and we are seeing the impacts of this starkly play out in the US at the moment. Politically motivated violence refers to violent acts or threats intended or likely to achieve a political objective. The Director-General of ASIO said that “these types of behaviours have become more common in Australia” and are expected to continue.

There is currently significant concern nationally about the National Socialist Network, a neo-Nazi group. This group took centre stage at many of the “March for Australia” rallies across the country.

Within the spectrum of politically motivated violence, the ACT government has policy and programs to address the predictors and causes of terrorism, fixated threats and violent extremism. These are delivered collaboratively by JACS, working with the Health and Community Services Directorate, the Education Directorate and ACT Policing. These include the ACT Countering Violent Extremism Strategy; the ACT Support and Intervention Program for people who might be at risk of supporting violence for social, political and ideological reasons; the ACT Counter-Terrorism Framework; and the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre.

The ACT’s Countering Violent Extremism program is supported by Step Together, a national helpline, website and chat service that provides advice and information to people who may be concerned about extremism or other concerning behaviours. Our approach to preventing and countering violent extremism is focused on supporting those who are vulnerable to radicalisation, manipulation and disinformation in our community, including young people. It also involves working across government to raise awareness and understanding of the challenges of violent extremism and how we can prevent and counter it.

The JACS Security and Emergency Management Division has recently completed work to ensure the ACT is well placed to meet the continuing increase in referrals to the ACT Support and Intervention Program, particularly for young people. This is a voluntary program, and it does not try to change people’s beliefs or thoughts. Instead, it helps them find safer and more positive paths so that they do not cause harm to themselves or others. The ACT government continues to work to understand and address the risks. We do that through working with ACT police, the AFP and commonwealth stakeholders.

A key aspect of security and public safety is community connection and inclusion. We live in a society, in Canberra, where people hold strongly the right to protest and the right of individuals to express their views; but we must continue to do that and be able to do that in a way that ensures this is a safe, connected and inclusive city. We must continue to work on being connected to each other, to ensure that no-one is left behind or falls victim to hate and extremist views that exist and can be exacerbated online and through social media. This is a responsibility that we all share.

I thank ACT Policing members for their work in ensuring the safety of the wider Canberra community during protest activities. I am proud to be part of a government which has a strong track record in protecting human rights and making sure Canberra remains one of the most culturally diverse, inclusive cities in Australia. I thank Minister Pettersson for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and I am pleased to vote in

support of it.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.54): I will try, so I am not labelled as the cry-baby of this Assembly, to keep my emotions in check.

I thank Minister Pettersson for bringing this motion forward. It would be, I guess, remiss of me not to speak to it. I have considered for a very long time what my response to this motion would be. In fact, it has given me sleepless nights. But I think it is important that this conversation is happening, and I think it is important to lay a few things on the record.

I would like to share my comments today not just as a member of this Assembly, but as a migrant woman, a mother and someone who wants to build her life here in Canberra. I speak from experience, and I speak from my heart.

Migrants are the building blocks of modern Australia. Most of us have not come here uninvited. We were invited—or at least we believed we were—but in many ways, we chose Australia before Australia chose us. We paid the price. We contribute in building our lives in Canberra. We start small businesses, open cafes and restaurants. We have worked multiple jobs. We work tirelessly to create opportunities—not just for ourselves, but for our families, and for the wider community. We embed our love for our homeland into our community here. We share our values, which we love deeply, from our homeland into Australian society, to make our community better for all. We build longer bridges and wider dinner tables to invite all those who want to be part of our family. This is how we make Canberra home.

Canberra is not just a city that prides itself on inclusivity. We are a refugee-welcoming zone. We are recognised under the Welcoming Australia network with “advanced” accreditation, as the Chief Minister has mentioned. The vast majority of Canberrans reject racism, discrimination and extremist ideologies.

The contribution of migrants goes beyond economics. We enrich our community with culture, food, our festivals, our arts, our community. Every cafe, every small business, every classroom with students from diverse backgrounds contributes to a Canberra that is stronger, more innovative and more compassionate. When extremist ideologies threaten that, they threaten us all as a community—not just directly, but also indirectly. So, we must call out the events of 31 August for what they are.

But, putting all of that emotion aside, I ask myself why. Why? Why now? Why Canberra? Why Australia?

Mr Speaker, I have sat here for many years and seen people play politics with migration. There is a lot of politics that goes into migration, because either one side votes, or one side does not vote, so there is a tug and pull. But being a realist, as I am, what we are seeing playing out today around the world is a government that is starting to lose its social contract with its citizenry.

I am echoing everything Ms Lee has said, but the reality is Ms Lee would experience racism differently to what I would because her accent is clearer and her skin is lighter. I am referencing Ms Lee because she is the other migrant here in this Assembly. So,

there is nobody, I think, more qualified than me in this Assembly to speak on this issue of racism.

But what we are seeing, Mr Speaker, is a society—again like I have said—that has lost its social contract with its citizens, and that is why. Why Canberra? Why now? Again, the reality we are facing is that the continued peaceful existence of the multicultural community in this place—in Australia, around the world—depends on the peaceful, continued progress of the broader Australian. When that progress starts to become threatened, we are the low-hanging fruit that gets picked on.

So, the conversation is wider than the events of 31 August. The question I ask is why. Why are lots of Canberrans choosing to go out and protest? If we put those events solely down to racism, that means the “party of patriots” would have a candidate in the parliament. Those numbers are enough to give them one seat if it is solely down to just racism. I think the conversation needs to go beyond that. We need to look at why? Why are people feeling that we are a threat to them in this country?

Now, it is true that racists do not need an opportunity. If there are no opportunities, they will find one. But the issue should not be a left versus right divide. The issue should be broader. We should start having conversations about how we are making Australia better for everybody as members of this Assembly. Like I said, the continued coexistence—peaceful existence—of people who look like me depends on the broader success of the general Australian population.

So I call on members of this Assembly: if you truly care about multiculturalism you would make decisions and you would put policies in place that guarantee the prosperity of us all. Because, again, when people start to feel uncomfortable, when their lives and livelihoods are threatened, we are the low-hanging fruits that will pay the consequences. The conversation is way broader than the events of 31 August, while I acknowledge that that is what this motion is about, I think there needs to be a think about how we ensure that we are genuinely doing things that benefit all of Australia. Because the tensions are rising. People are uncomfortable. They are suffering. So they lash out, and they do things that threaten us all.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.02): I welcome this motion today. I thank the government for bringing it on. I would like to thank those who have already made contributions. I refer particularly to the lived experience of both Ms Lee and Ms Barry, which was very powerful.

Members, I am also a migrant. I came to Australia when I was 16. I grew up in another country and came here. I am the son of migrants and I am married to a migrant. In fact, other than our Indigenous brothers and sisters, we are all immigrants or descended from immigrants since 1788. Like most migrants, I came here because of the wonderful opportunities offered by Australia. I believe that I have contributed to this great country, and I think that is our Australian migrant story. It is a very proud one. We built a great nation together.

I support immigration. That is our party’s policy. I think that view is shared by the majority of Australians. Certainly, I—I think we all—condemn national socialists or those who spew racist hate and hate against immigrants. I condemn those attacks. We

are all here lawfully and, collectively, we have built Australia.

It is different, however, from the view, as Ms Barry alluded to, and the concerns we currently have in Australia that immigration levels are too high, and that it is not being well planned or implemented. We should be very careful in this place not to conflate legitimate concerns about immigration levels as a policy issue which concerns a lot of people with hateful attacks on migrants. One is a legitimate policy debate; the other is bigotry.

In fact, most polls show that over 50 per cent of Australians believe immigration levels are too high. I tend to agree with that sentiment. You can be a migrant, you can be pro-immigration, and you can still believe that levels are too high. That does not make you a racist, in having those views, or an extremist. From the polls I have seen, that is a view that is currently shared by 53 per cent of Australians.

We have a housing crisis, we have a lingering cost-of-living crisis, and we have a lack of adequate infrastructure, particularly in our major cities. The majority of Australians are concerned by those things, and they are questioning them—most of them in a very legitimate way. I agree with Ms Barry that this is not a left or a right position. In fact, it is across the political spectrum. There were recent articles in the *Canberra Times* taking this from a left position; there are those from a right position. I do not think this is an issue of left or right.

In our society, you are also free to say that there should be zero immigration. I disagree with that view. Fundamentally, I disagree with that view. But free speech allows a lot of things to be said that I disagree with. For example, I do not agree with people chanting anti-Semitic, genocidal slogans like “from the river to the sea”, but we see that chanted regularly in public marches across Canberra and across Australia.

Let me quote from the *Sydney Morning Herald* in May 2024 regarding the Senate debate on that slogan, “from the river to the sea”, and what was said. I quote from the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

The Senate voted 56-12 on Thursday to condemn the “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” slogan, saying it “opposes Israel’s right to exist, and is frequently used by those who seek to intimidate Jewish Australians via acts of antisemitism”.

The motion also welcomed comments by Albanese in which he backed former Defence department secretary Dennis Richardson’s view that the slogan is “a very violent statement” which could “easily flow into actions of violence against communities in our own country”.

It is very important that we understand there is a lot being said out there in the community and there is a lot being said at marches. If we are going to have a committee inquiry into extremism, we cannot not include things like chants and the issues that Mr Pettersson raised in his speech about posters and so on across the city that are being condemned by the Australian Senate.

Going to the other comments that have been made, and the amendments from Ms Castley, I certainly do not support the flying of Taliban, ISIS, Hamas and al-Qaeda

flags. But we have seen that, and that is something that affects our Jewish community here in Canberra. I do not support posters of the Ayatollah holding a machine gun, but we have seen that in Australia.

In fact, not only are the Greens chanting “from the river to the sea”; we saw Labor and Greens politicians having their photos taken in front of posters of the Ayatollah carrying a machine gun, and they then posted that on their social media. They cannot say they were not aware of it or that it was inadvertent, as they then posted it on their social media. That is the message that our Jewish community are seeing. It is abhorrent.

Mr Pettersson raised those concerning anti-Semitic posters that we have seen across Canberra. We cannot have a debate, an inquiry, into extremism and not take that into account, whilst we also condemn any sort of neo-Nazi or extremist ideology. I do not support the burning of the Australian flag, but we have also seen that. We have also had calls for Australia to be abolished.

I think it is very important that, if we are going to talk about what causes hurt—and I agree with that—and if we are going to talk about extremism—and I agree with that—we must be consistent; otherwise those people who are the victims of that hurt will, rightly, then say, “Here we go again; people can say one thing about us, and say things that are hurtful, have hurtful imagery, and we’re not going to look into that.”

From a personal perspective, as a former member of the ADF, as a veteran, we lost so many of our people in Afghanistan, and when there are people out there flying the Taliban flag, the ISIS flag or the al-Queda flag, it is abhorrent. Chants of “death, death to the IDF” and “long live the intifada” are terribly hurtful to our Jewish community. Are we going to ignore that emergence that we see—some of it in Canberra, some of it interstate? We are all subject to the same media, including social media. We want to make sure that that does not arise any further here.

Equally, it is important, Madam Assistant Speaker—and it goes to your point about the debate—to note that those who have gone along, waved the Australian flag and expressed legitimate concerns about immigration are not racists or extremists. We cannot assume that. We cannot make that assertion. It is okay to have political opinions and to protest peacefully. We have just witnessed, tragically, in America, with the murder of Charlie Kirk, what happens if people inadvertently or deliberately mischaracterise people engaging in legitimate debate as extremists.

I welcome attempts to curtail extremism, and peddlers of hate like national socialists and anti-Semites, but let us make sure that we do not smear people who have legitimate, differing views. We have people who go to a “free Palestine” march; the vast majority of them do not support the ISIS flag. I am sure that the majority of people going there who have raised concerns about immigration do not support neo-Nazis.

Any inquiry must look at the hateful role of national socialists, bigotry and racism, of course, but it must also look at that ideology that is inhabiting the “free Palestine” marches, the posters that we see across Australia and the impact that is having, in particular, on our Jewish community.

As you said, Madam Assistant Speaker, these issues are much broader. Let us make

sure that we encompass the broader view and that we do not miss this opportunity today to do that by narrowing the scope. Let us make sure that we have the broader view that you said is so important.

MR EMERSON(Kurrajong) (11.12): I rise to speak in support of Mr Pettersson's motion today. In doing so, I want to reiterate briefly that I think it is a shame that this debate was not supported by the Assembly when Mr Rattenbury tried to bring forward a condemnation of racism in the last sitting week. I felt it was a missed opportunity then, although it is good to have an opportunity today to revisit that conversation.

This motion was brought about, as we all know, in response to the abhorrent events of 31 August. That is not to say that other events should not be condemned, which, of course, is the question raised by Ms Castley's amendments. What other events and extreme ideologies ought to be condemned? The list of such events and ideologies would be very long and, while I strongly condemn the ideologies referenced in proposed clause (1)(b) of Ms Castley's amendments—I have no qualms about doing so—I cannot support it as I do think it unhelpfully broadens and deliberately, or otherwise, politicises the debate today, when we do not need to politicise it.

As Mr Hanson indicated, there is a lot being said out in the community. Adding just one other instance of extremism to the list expands the scope of this debate, but not sufficiently to have a genuine conversation today about the risks and consequences of violent extremism on the left and on the right, and anywhere else.

I also think it risks derailing what I still hope will remain a unified conversation about the matter at hand. Again, I am sympathetic to Ms Castley's and Mr Hanson's concerns that they shared in their remarks, and I would welcome a broader debate on the risks of various forms of extremism, but this motion is not the opportunity to do that.

The motion before us today is about telling our multicultural community members that they are wanted and respected here. They make this city a better place to live. This community, our community, is, in its veins, a multicultural community, and this Assembly is not anti-immigration. That is what we are voting on here, as per clause (4)(a).

As elected representatives, it is our job to openly address these kinds of issues. We must not fall into the fallacy of thinking that Canberra really is a bubble. The recent anti-immigration rallies showed that, like every other jurisdiction, we are at risk of far right extremism and, if we do not discuss this real risk and confront the causal factors driving it, we create a vacuum—a vacuum that is being filled by bad actors.

As Mr Rattenbury's original motion stated, scapegoating migrants and refugees for systemic failures is both morally reprehensible and a deliberate strategy of the far right to fracture communities and shift blame away from those in power. The noting of that has disappeared from this motion, but I think we have a responsibility in this place to engage in good faith with those from across a wide political spectrum and, I would say, to support the right to protest peacefully for all, including those with whom we disagree, while also acknowledging, as I think Mr Rattenbury was indicating, that the housing crisis, cost-of-living pressures and growing inequality are policy failures, not the fault of migrants and multiculturalism.

As Ms Barry communicated more eloquently than I think I am managing, it is on us to be honest about the role that we can all play, and that we in this place, certainly, as elected officials, play and have played in these policy failures which create an environment that risks fostering further radicalisation.

We must do so without excusing the deliberate and targeted mobilisation of the anger brought by those failures through vehicles of hate—hate felt by some of our most marginalised community members who I think deserve to know that we in this place know that these are extreme, fringe views, rare views in the ACT, and that people of all backgrounds are not only welcome here but are wanted here, and needed here. Indeed, it is not for people like me to say who is and is not welcome here; why should it be?

I thank Mr Rattenbury for his attempt to bring a substantive debate to this Assembly on this matter earlier this month, and I thank Mr Pettersson and the government for bringing this motion so that in this place we can be unified, I hope, in acknowledging and celebrating the value of diversity in Canberra.

I hope that this is the beginning of a robust debate, not only about how abhorrent the extreme ideologies promoted at these particular rallies were, but also about how we as an Assembly can tackle extremism in our community, and about how we can instead platform the incredible diversity that makes Canberra a great place to live.

Of course, this is not an issue that will go away simply by ignoring it or refusing to debate it. With that in mind, I look forward to participating in the social policy committee's consideration of this motion's request, should it be passed, for an inquiry into extremist political ideologies and belief systems in the ACT.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.17): I want to thank Mr Pettersson for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I also want to thank everyone who has contributed thus far, but I must single out Ms Lee and Ms Barry, because their contributions come from a different place than most of us here, and I thought they were both remarkable contributions.

Ms Barry is one of the strongest women I have ever met. She has achieved much in her life personally and professionally, but she has fought hard to achieve all of it, and she has fought hard with enormous strength. Despite the fact that she is such a strong woman, we saw her today reduced to a blubbing mess because of the hatred that has come to her. We all understand that emotion. Well, we try to understand it; I cannot understand it fully because I have not experienced it. But that emotion was on full display here, and I want to thank her for bringing it to this chamber. I also want to thank Ms Lee for her honest appraisal of the feedback that came to her from these outliers.

We are a welcoming and inclusive city. I think that is a credit to the government, but I think it is also a credit to virtually all of the members of this place over a number of decades, because I think that most of the things that have gone on in the multicultural space in this city had had bi, tri and multipartisan support from everybody. We are all on the same page. This is a welcoming and inclusive city, but there are always outliers who are not with the program, and many of those outliers see freedom of speech as a licence to push their narrative beyond a level of decency that we understand but

somehow they do not. Maybe they do understand it, but they just do not care.

Please do not get me wrong; I am not being critical of Mr Rattenbury when I say that I believe that the tone of this motion is much better than the motion that was proposed in the last sitting week. I think more than anything else that is just because more water has passed under the bridge and there has been more time to think and consider the best approach to this issue.

This motion speaks of a re-emergence of extremist ideologies in Australian society. You do not have to look all that far around the globe to find a similar sentiment in a number of other Western nations. What is going on here is not out of the norm. What we see happening here is happening elsewhere.

Mr Pettersson is right to point out that the rallies were used by some participants to promote messages of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia and antisemitism. But I would hate for us, as an Assembly, to make an assumption that every individual who turned up on 31 August is racist, because that is simply not correct. It is just not correct. The ongoing “free Palestine” protests that rolled out around Australia also feature individuals who are promoting messages of racism, discrimination and antisemitism. But it would be completely wrong to peg every participant at those events as being racist and antisemitic, because that is just not the reality. I am fully supportive of both of the amendments from Ms Castley, because they point out that racial hatred is racial hatred. It does not matter where it comes from; racist hate is racist hate.

In response to Mr Emerson’s comments about the singling out of that event, we are debating this motion today because this protest occurred on 31 August. But at this time in our history as a nation, it is a fact of life that there are ongoing “free Palestine” protests. They are the two protest movements that are attracting the most attention, and that is why we are discussing them in this motion. I think it is almost impossible to separate the two. I will certainly, like Ms Barry, be fully supportive of both of those amendments.

To condemn every participant at the 31 August protest as being racist would be to condemn a large chunk of middle Australia, many of whom turned up on that last day of August because they are frustrated with the outcomes of long-term government policy with regard to infrastructure, housing supply and cost of living. For the vast majority of people who turned up on that day, that is why they were there. They were there because of personal outcomes for them and their families. It is extremely regrettable, from my view, that, for a large number of people, their focus is on immigration levels. But, irrespective of that, I find it very difficult to condemn every protester. I would note that this motion does not call for that, and I think that is a good.

I just want to end by pointing out to this place that the latest Resolve voter intention poll has, for the first time, shown the national One Nation primary vote climbing above the Greens vote. You have to sit back and say, “What is going on there?” don’t you, particularly given that the vast majority of One Nation voters are in regional areas of Queensland and New South Wales? Obviously, they are spread out more broadly across the country, but they are centred in certain areas. But this is a national figure that is diluted by that sort of geographic spread.

I think it is impossible to separate that rise in One Nation support from the things that we are discussing in this motion. I would say that, given the size of the national cohort, it is also impossible to ignore the root concerns of those who are drifting right. I am not talking about racist concerns; I am talking about the concerns of wider government policy regarding infrastructure, housing supply and cost of living. I think one of the things that comes from those voter intention figures is that it is so important that we, as political leaders, that we as communicators, do whatever we can to change the narrative which is pushing people into this direction. So I absolutely support Mr Pettersson's motion and I absolutely support Ms Castley's amendments.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (11.24): I want to speak very quickly to the amendments, to put the government's position on the record. The government views these amendments as a cheap debating trick. It is quite simply a red herring. This is seeking to distract from the issue at hand in this motion. I think it is deeply regrettable that these amendments were moved at all.

I think the attempt to conflate the two rallies is extraordinarily disingenuous. On one hand, we are talking about a moment where neo-Nazis were platformed, led marches down the streets of Australia and had megaphones out the front of Parliament House in Melbourne and, on the other, we are talking about the rally for peace, the March for Humanity. I agree with Mr Hanson that there were bad faith actors who were a part of that crowd who expressed sympathy for extremists and terror groups, but it is not the same thing. To insert that into this debate is completely disingenuous and bad faith, which is why the government will not be supporting the first section of Ms Castley's amendments.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.26): I rise to support Mr Pettersson's motion and Mr Rattenbury's motion from last week and add my voice to the debate. I am also deeply troubled by the anti-immigration marches that have been held in Canberra and across the country. Branded as the "March for Australia", they called for an end to mass migration and promoted fear, division and hate. As Ms Barry says, the conversation is broader. The organisers wrongly blamed migrants for the cost of housing and for hours of waiting in hospitals, scapegoating communities who contribute so much to our society. This is not just misinformation; it is dangerous rhetoric designed to fracture the social fabric of our nation.

As an elected representative, I believe it is important to state clearly that I firmly reject this politics of hate and division and the violence that accompanies it. I recognise the fear and anxiety these marches have caused among our multicultural and First Nations communities. Everyone in our community deserves to feel safe. I believe in a Canberra that is inclusive, safe and welcoming for all. We must stand united against hate and we must act. That means supporting an inquiry into the rise of extremist ideologies and strengthening the anti-racism programs. I confirm my support for Canberra's multicultural community and condemn the anti-immigrant sentiment expressed at the rallies.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.27): I welcome the opportunity for the Assembly to reflect on these matters today. I welcome a range of the thoughtful,

insightful and at times quite raw contributions that we have had this morning. I think it gives us a chance to really reflect on our role as leaders in the community and to think carefully about how we build social cohesion and combat those who seek to divide us.

We are incredibly lucky in this city that we have a community who is supportive of a whole range of cultures and a whole range of communities. We have a really diverse community, we have a really cohesive community and we have a community that shares its background, experiences and knowledge with each other in ways that are so very generous.

As MLAs in this place we get a particular insight, in that the community events we get invited to are extensive. Certainly in my time in this place, I have had marvellous opportunities to be embraced by and embrace a range of different cultural practices, experiences and perspectives, and I am incredibly grateful for that.

By contrast, what we saw in the rallies on 31 August was leaders promoting fear and division and scapegoating people by the colour of their skin or their geographic origin and other attributes. This was not about freedom of speech or debating important issues; it was about seeking to divide our communities and to pit neighbours against neighbours. That is what it was. It needs to be stated very clearly what we saw there. This was not some thoughtful public debate; this was something very different. I am pleased to hear this Assembly today condemning that sort of conduct.

I particularly welcome Mr Pettersson's motion in the way it frames issues, particularly where, right in the first paragraph, he calls out messages of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia and antisemitism. For me, that is a very important encapsulation of what we are talking about, because there are debates going on about a range of issues. Gaza is a key one as are circumstances in the Middle East. There is a whole range of issues that are taking place. We need to have those sorts of debates without starting to scapegoat people or attack individual groups or name them or shame them or vilify them. That is such an important difference. Putting all of those points into paragraph 1(a), I think the minister's motion underlines that importantly.

We face some really big challenges. As a community we need to embrace our common humanity and work together to solve the problems we face. We do have a housing crisis in in this country. People are struggling with cost-of-living pressures. Our health systems are under strain. The climate crisis is so significant, as is underlined by the report that came out this week. To say it has not been noted by many is an extraordinary thing. On page 33 of the National Climate Risk Assessment, there is a little box that says, essentially, if you find this distressing, here are the numbers for Lifeline and Beyond Blue. That is in an official government report about climate impacts that are so severe the authors felt it was warranted to put in the contact details for Lifeline and Beyond Blue.

We have some really big challenges, and, as human beings, we need to confront those together or the future is quite a dark one. That needs to be the message that this Assembly sends out. We stand together to address these challenges. We are going to debate along the way how we get there—that democracy and that is the point of this place—but, if we can stick to that understanding, we will get so much further and our community, our whole community, will feel safe. They will feel part of a community

and they will not feel scapegoated and vilified. I am pleased to support the minister's motion today. As Mr Braddock has indicated, we will be supporting Ms Castley's second amendment, but not the first.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.32): I rise today to speak in support of Minister Pettersson's motion. Racism in any form is abhorrent. It weakens our community. We have heard this morning the first-hand experience of members in this chamber experiencing racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Thank you, Ms Lee and Ms Barry, for sharing your stories this morning and sharing them with us. That is powerful for this debate. Thank you.

I cannot speak any language other than English, but every day people across Canberra, even here in this chamber, go about their daily lives speaking English when it is their second or even third, fourth or fifth language. That is something that should be respected, something that should be celebrated, not derided. No matter whether you are speaking with an accent or fluent English, that is something that we should celebrate. We are at our strongest, smartest and most interesting when we are working together rather than working to exclude. It is not enough to simply be tolerant. Tolerance suggests that you are accepting something inferior. Celebration, curiosity and understanding is what connects us through differences.

Everyone has a story of how they became Australian, from our First Nations community, who have the longest continuing culture in the world—something to be celebrated, not mocked; to colonial immigration of convicts and free settlers, which is where my family fits into the Australian story; to the waves and waves of migrants from the gold rush to World War II and everyone since looking for a new future for them and their family and who have made our city, our community, our country, a better place for it. My last ancestor to come to Australia that I can trace on my family tree is Charles Grothe, who was born in the 1850s in what is now Germany. Before that, it is mostly a mix of Irish and British convicts with the occasional free settler thrown in there.

These rallies on 31 August claimed to be about problems like housing and other stresses faced by the community. But what they really were was a way to have anti-immigrant and racist gatherings of white supremacists and neo-Nazis with a platform. These gatherings harmed our social cohesion and are harming our community. We should not stand by and let these things happen; we should continue to support our multicultural community, to support everyone in our community.

Lingering and divisive rhetoric slows us down. Everyone in this room, I believe, shares a common goal, regardless of party, to advocate for the people of the ACT. No matter if your family has been here for generations, for years or for tens of thousands of years, I believe we should all share that common goal to have a strong, multicultural, cohesive and, frankly, brilliant Canberra and Australia.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Castley's first amendment to the motion be agreed to.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Castley's amendment No 1 negatived.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question now is that Ms Castley's second amendment be agreed to.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Castley's amendment No 2 agreed to.

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

MR PETTERSSON(Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (11.38), in closing: I would like to start by thanking Ms Lee and you, Madam Assistant Speaker Barry, for your contributions and sharing your experiences. Some of the experiences that you have both highlighted are completely unacceptable, and I apologise as a fellow member in this place that that is your experience. That is completely unacceptable.

Responding to a couple of things that have emerged in this debate, Ms Castley in her remarks made reference that she was of the belief that this motion was not shared with her with enough notice. I can confirm that we provided that motion to the Canberra Liberals on Monday morning. Members would be aware that yesterday I came into this place to delay debate on this motion to provide members as much time as they thought they needed to be able to get across this motion. I sought numerous times to get updates as to how those conversations were progressing, only to come down here this morning to see an amendment dropped right as the debate was about to start on the amendment. So I believe the concerns of timing are somewhat disingenuous.

However, be that what it is, I am very glad that, ultimately, the tenor of this debate and the shared views of members in this place to stand in support of our multicultural community at a time when they are very visibly under attack. We are in this place unified in standing in support of our multicultural community. I see members of this place at multicultural events all the time—frequently. It is very clearly a part of this job that each and every one of us loves. I am proud that we exist in a parliament that behaves in such a manner.

Reflecting on some of the experiences that have been shared in this debate, it brought me back to the inquiry that I was part of in the last term, the inquiry into racial vilification. That was an inquiry brought by Ms Jones in the wake of COVID. What Ms Jones at that time had identified was that there was something bubbling within the community—that some of the tensions and some of the issues that had occurred within the COVID period had brought out an ugliness in our community that had vilified many members of our community.

In that inquiry we had a large range of submissions. We had stakeholders come in and share with us their experiences. What was shared with that committee at that time was not like what we are seeing right now. There were not references to neo-Nazis. Political extremism was not a large thing with that inquiry. What we are seeing now is different. It is more heated; it is more extreme; and it is dangerous. I am very glad that we as a

chamber recognise that this is something we need to contend with, because it is not something we have been dealing with previously.

I might address some of the remarks that Mr Parton and Mr Hanson made. This motion is not about immigration—it is not. This is a motion speaking to the deep concern felt by our multicultural community and some of the extremism that we are now seeing in our society. There is a time when legitimate debate is to be had about immigration—it is a source of public policy. But I do not see the need to ventilate that debate as we have this conversation—once again, continuing to link it in, I think, such a dangerous way to what we are seeing voiced by dangerous elements right now. I think it takes a great responsibility by members of this place, members of parliament in general, to tone things down. So to see in this debate, once again, constant inferences to immigration and trying to speak to the good-hearted nature of the people at those rallies—I just do not think this is the place. I actually think their sentiment is generally fine. I believe it is entirely legitimate to protest those things. I just do not think this is the debate to speak to those issues.

I called the amendment moved by Ms Castley a cheap debating trick, and I was curious to see if the Canberra Liberals would vote for their amendment. I heard one vote from Ms Castley. So I somewhat withdraw my critique that it was a cheap debating trick. Ms Castley was true to her word. She did indeed support that amendment.

We are a city that is proudly multicultural and many members in this place take great pride and pleasure in being involved in citizenship ceremonies where we welcome people into the great Commonwealth of Australia. As we stand here and debate this motion calling for a more peaceful, a more harmonious and a more cohesive community where we call out the extremist elements that are a risk to that, we actually gathered today on Australian Citizenship Day. So I hope everyone reflects on the wonderful country that we call home, because it is the best country on earth, and it is that way due to our multicultural story.

As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I remain committed to strengthening our anti-racism laws and policies and addressing discrimination as it appears within our community. I look forward to continuing to work collegiately with each and every member in this place to ensure that we make Canberra an even better place to live.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, agreed to.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

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

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

ACT Local Hospital Network—Part 1.2.

[Cognate expenditure: Canberra Health Services—Part 1.11]

Debate resumed from 15 September 2025 on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this expenditure be agreed to.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I remind members that in debating part 1.2 they may also address their remarks to part 1.11.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.45): I rise today to speak in support of the health components of the Appropriation Bill. I want to thank my colleague, the Minister for Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith, for her dedication in steering our health system for another demanding year. A commitment to equity and high-quality care underpins much of what this budget delivers. I also want to thank our health workforce—the nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, administrators and volunteers who keep our system going every single day.

This budget continues our government's record investment in strengthening the ACT health system so that every Canberran can access safe, high-quality care where and when it is needed most. That is why I am so proud that the \$8.5 million Southside Hydrotherapy Pool in Tuggeranong at Lakeside Leisure Centre has been delivered. This is not just a pool; it is a health service. The water is kept at skin temperature to relax muscles and the nervous system. The facility is fully accessible, with ramps, slip-resistant flooring, a bariatric-rated hoist and a changing places changeroom designed after direct feedback from people with disability.

The pool is already making a difference. I have spoken with residents, who told me they cannot wait to check it out and who, as soon as an opening day was announced, they were asking how to book in and how to access it. It helps people feel mobile and independent again. People can manage their conditions with dignity. That is what investment in health infrastructure looks like when it is grounded in equity.

Alongside this, the Tuggeranong Community Health Centre and Tuggeranong nurse-led walk-in centre continue to expand local access to outpatient and allied health care where and when it is needed. I cannot tell you how many times I have visited the Tuggeranong nurse-led walk-in centre over the years, from getting antibiotics when I had chronic tonsillitis to minor injuries and even a dog bite. Just down the road, the new Tuggeranong Medicare Mental Health Centre—thanks to the federal government—is strengthening community-based mental health support.

What I am really proud of and looking forward to seeing open next year is the South Tuggeranong Health Centre—or the Lanyon health centre, as many of us in the Lanyon Valley have nicknamed it. The health centre is one of four new health centres that will open across the ACT, making sure people have access to outpatient and other services closer to home—the others being in the inner south, North Gungahlin and West Belconnen. The South Tuggeranong Health Centre will have 11 consultation rooms and support services, including paediatrics, pathology, dementia care, diabetes clinics, falls and falls injury prevention, chronic disease programs and, what I think people are really excited about, a virtual care room. It is expected to open around September next year. As a local resident, I think I speak for all local residents that we just cannot wait to see it up and running.

A couple of weeks ago we also marked Women's Health Week. For me, this is always

personal. I have lived with endometriosis since I was 11 but was not diagnosed until 24. Like so many women, I have had pain dismissed, told it was just bad period pain, and I know I am not alone. One in seven Australian women live with endometriosis, and the average wait time for diagnosis is still over six years. That is why this budget's investment in women's health matters. From maternity services to screening programs, from endometriosis care to perinatal mental health, we are saying that women's health is not niche; it is central to how we design our hospital network.

One initiative in women's health I particularly want to highlight is the funding for perinatal mental health. This budget includes funding for the feasibility study for a perinatal mental health residential mother and baby unit. The budget commits to scope a six-bed facility to provide therapeutic care for new mothers and their babies here in Canberra. Right now, too many Canberra families are forced to travel to Sydney when they need this kind of residential support. I have spoken to families who have had to travel to Sydney who spoke about the upheaval it causes, particularly when there are older children as well. So having something in Canberra will make the world of difference.

This study is the next step in closing that gap, delivering on a clear election commitment, something I have advocated for within the ACT Labor Party, something that will make a tangible difference in the lives of families. It builds on the important work of the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre here in Canberra. It complements the federal government's election commitment to fund a new perinatal mental health centre in Tuggeranong run by the Gidget Foundation. Together, these initiatives mean that new parents in our community will be able to access world-class perinatal mental health closer to home with their families and supports around them.

The budget also included additional funding for the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre and the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance. I just want to take a moment to say that perinatal mental health is not something I have spoken a lot about in the chamber but it is really close to my heart. I am a former client of the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre. I became a client when my son was about three months old, and I remained a client until his second birthday, which is when you are formally discharged from the service. The services they offer are invaluable—the listening ear, the encouragement, the emotional support, the practical support like offering an on-site creche for when attending support groups run by absolutely lovely women who you know you can trust your baby with while you sit in these support groups, to the fortnightly check-in phone calls. They do so much.

I used to have fortnightly check-in phone calls from support workers who would just call, and we would have a chat about how things were going. If I was having a bad day, I knew I could just pick up the phone and call them. If they did not answer there and then, they would call me back pretty quickly, and we could have chats about anything and everything that was going on in my life and to do with my son. Running into one of my support workers, while out on the campaign trail last year, on Anketell Street, was such an uplifting moment for me. She came over to me to tell me that she was proud of me for standing there and running for election. So I am really proud to be part of a government that is delivering on perinatal mental health.

This budget sets clear priorities for our health system: sustaining public hospital services under rising demand and costs; funding eating disorder residential treatment

centres full of multidisciplinary teams providing support services; establishing new medical imaging outpatient services at the Belconnen Walk-in Centre, which is improving community access to x-rays and other radiology services—and, having used the radiology services at the Weston Creek walk-in after getting a dog bite last year, I can say this is a really great service; expanding our School Youth Health Nurse Program, so every high school has a nurse on site a couple of days a week, offering consultations and health education; supporting new national lung cancer screening programs; and funding an insourcing transition task force to bring cleaning and food services back into Canberra Health Services, something that is really important for the dignity and the treatment of our entire health workforce. Beyond these initiatives, is the commitment to activity-based funding, making sure our hospitals are funded transparently, tied to the service they deliver and supported to meet national safety and quality standards.

The budget is also about a smarter use of our health workforce, like expanding the scope of pharmacists to treat simple conditions, like UTIs in women, and provide more vaccinations, in a practical step to free up GPs and reduce hospital presentations. I have heard from young women in Tuggeranong who have waited days for GP appointments for something they can now go to a pharmacist or a walk-in centre for, rather than having to wait days for treatments. That is why these reforms matter: to make the system more responsive and patient focused.

Our health network also must support conditions that do not always make the headlines. In July, nine Canberra landmarks lit up for World Fragile X Day, a reminder of the 90,000 Australians affected by or carrying the gene. For those families, access to early therapy and integrated health care changes lives. I was lucky enough to meet with Liz, from Fragile X Australia, last week.

We recently marked World Hepatitis Day. There are 6,000 Canberrans who live with hepatitis B or C, many without knowing it. Hepatitis C can now be cured, but only if people are tested and supported into treatment. Hepatitis ACT runs free clinics, education programs and outreach, and our health system plays a vital role in partnering with them to break down the stigma and barriers and help people get treatment.

Just last month, I joined my constituent, Belinda Lee-Makrides, who I have spoken about a few times, on her walks to climb all the main peaks around Canberra after she has climbed the eight highest peaks of Australia. She started her work to raise awareness for breast cancer screening, and it turned into a walk to raise awareness for rare blood disorders, after she was diagnosed with one and is the only person living in Canberra with her rare blood disorder.

Hydrotherapy, community health, pharmacy, women's health, conditions like Fragile X, hepatitis, rare blood disorders and things like cancer screening may all seem like separate issues, but they all connected by one principle: our health system must see the whole person and not just the condition. It means prevention as much as treatment, equity as much as efficiency, and making sure women's health and community voices are at the centre of service design. Just as in education, when we talk about equity, in health we need to have the same mindset—removing barriers, investing early and supporting people to live with dignity.

The appropriation before us is not just about numbers; it is about ensuring our hospitals and our health systems are modern, our community health centres are strong and our workforce is supported. I am proud to support this budget.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.55): There was much that I was considering saying in this debate but, given the amount that has already been said, I think I will keep my remarks tight and focused on one significant issue from my perspective.

There is no area of the ACT budget where the cost of providing services is greater than health, and there is no area that attracts more federal government funding, there is no area that has a greater influence on the trajectory of spending in the ACT. While other areas are increasing faster than spending on health is projected to increase—or at a faster rate at least—the volume of money cannot be ignored. That is why it is absolutely critical that the government gets its projections right.

Disappointingly, over a fairly extended period of time at this point, those projections have not been right, and the degree to which they have been out has been increasing. The government have gone some way in this budget towards addressing that. They have included an increase in the appropriation to try and catch up in the model, essentially. The problem is, though, that the projection does not address the rate of growth.

The government want to assure us that they are going to get things under control, that they are going to somehow constrain costs, but the track record is deeply, deeply concerning. When you look at spending and allocations across Canberra Health Services, the Health Directorate and LHM combined—and I will start us from after the COVID period—for 2022-23, we had an additional appropriation required for \$71.839 million, bringing the total appropriation for the year to \$1.548 billion. The following year, though, the appropriation came in at \$1.538 billion—less than the total appropriation for the previous year. In the same year, we suddenly needed a \$200 million additional appropriation.

Again, the 2024-25 appropriation came in considerably under the total appropriation for the previous year. And, of course, quite famously, we had an extra \$330 million additional appropriation required this year. As far as concerning trends go, this one is deep, and it has not been fully addressed. There is a bump in the increase in spending, the rate of growth, has not been addressed.

This provides a really significant risk for the budget. If the government has again got its numbers wrong—and we already know that the number of presentations are above what the government expected to see in a hospital—then we may well see more money needing to be appropriated, resulting in more increases to the deficit and more money spent on services that future generations are going to have to pay for, services today that our kids will have to pay for. I do not believe that that is what any of us want to see. Whatever your perspective on intergenerational fairness, having our kids pay for the services of today is clearly not where we should be.

I look forward to seeing what happens in this budget, because we have heard positive noises from the government. I just rise today to note that we are pretty concerned when you see in the budget, despite everything the government says about increasing health costs driving all of the problems, the fact that the increase in appropriation for

something like admitted services is in the region of 0.56 per cent of an increase compared with the previous year's final outcome and, for mental health services, the increase there is in vicinity of 0.56 per cent. These are not increases that even keep up with inflation, let alone wages and let alone any increase in service provision. I hope to be proved wrong. I hope the government somehow manage to get their costs under control. But, Madam Assistant Speaker, the signs are not good.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.00): I rise to express serious concerns about the fiscal position of the budget and acknowledge the significant risks in the 2025 budget estimates from the pressure on the health budget. In recent years, there has been a supplementary appropriation to provide enough funding for the health system. This year's budget does increase the base funding; however, the forward estimates only increase, on average, by 1.6 per cent a year, and more funding is likely to be required over the forward estimates.

Within this tight fiscal environment, the government has to include its election commitments and infrastructure commitments. I am not clear how all the election commitments for health are progressing or whether they are all included in the budget, but we will find out from Mr Cocks's motion, which requires a progress report on the government's election commitments.

While the budget is tight, we still need to look at the needs of the community I would like to see the following projects included in the pipeline of infrastructure projects and prioritised to be delivered when fiscally responsible: the Safe Haven in Woden—not in the hospital setting, but in the town centre, a drop-in to provide an opportunity for connection and support from peer workers for people needing support with their mental health before it becomes acute. The election commitment for a multi-storey car park on Yamba Drive at the north end of the hospital to make it possible for visitors to access the hospital and visit their loved ones is really important. It is also important to progress an inner-south walk-in centre in Griffith.

I would also like to understand how the ACT government is working with the commonwealth government with its commitment to the urgent healthcare clinic in Woden. The budget is tight, but the community needs to be looked after. So priorities need to be carefully considered.

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

Questions without notice

Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. The motion directing you to establish an inquiry into the health system, which was agreed on 24 June 2025, explicitly required it to be an independent inquiry. This was to ensure the inquiry would hear from health workers, who would otherwise feel uncomfortable speaking of their experiences, and to ensure the inquiry would serve the interests of the territory's residents and the health system's patients, rather than the government. Minister, how have you interpreted "independent"?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question and for

the opportunity to talk about the inquiry, for which we have appointed Michael Walsh PSM to be the independent lead.

We are also, as I indicated in my media release, announcing this, and we have said previously in this place that the Health and Community Services Directorate is undertaking a procurement process to procure independent consultants to support Mr Walsh in undertaking this inquiry. The motion that was supported by all parties in this place required that the inquiry be led by an independent person who had not—I do not have the exact wording in front of me right now—been engaged by the ACT government recently at all. Mr Walsh fits that criteria.

Mr Walsh also has extensive experience in the governance of health systems, in the management of health systems, and in digital health as well—having set up New South Wales eHealth. I think he was the inaugural CEO of NSW eHealth before moving to Queensland. He has also undertaken work for national governance, including being one of the two leads on the mid-term review of the National Health Reform Agreement, prior to his return to the director-general job in Queensland. So, he is very familiar with funding arrangements. He is very familiar with the complexities of managing a jurisdictional health system, and he is very familiar with electronic health records as well.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you ensure there are appropriate protections for health workers who want to make a public submission or appear at the inquiry but fear reprisals or professional retribution?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Absolutely. That is what we have committed to. I have had a conversation with Mr Walsh about that. How, exactly, he conducts the inquiry is a matter for him. We have indicated to him that the Assembly has said that people should be able to provide information in confidence. The caveat that he has placed on that is that he will have to tell people that the information they provide to him could be subject to freedom of information requests, or, indeed, 213As.

It is this place that has set the example of requiring members of the ACT public service, who have provided information to cultural surveys that they believed would be held in confidence and be not identifiable, to provide that information to this Assembly. It is this place, and it is that opposition, that has actually breached that undertaking that we used to be able to give to public servants: that information that they believed was being provided in confidence would be held in confidence.

Now, every person who provides information to an ACT government process—despite it being done independently—needs to be provided with the information that what they are providing could be subject to FOI or could be subject to a request from the Legislative Assembly that would override this request for confidentiality, because we have had this opposition require that to be overridden—now, on multiple occasions. I would love to be able to guarantee to people that they could provide information and their experiences to Mr Walsh completely confidentially. I would absolutely love to be able to guarantee that. The reason I cannot is that that has been overridden repeatedly by those opposite.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you be actively encouraging Health Directorate and

other health staff to come forward and tell their stories to the inquiry, to ensure that the inquiry is effective in improving our health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, absolutely. And I think in my media release I did so. I will continue to do so.

I will also note for the Assembly, that Mr Walsh has indicated that he would write to both Ms Castley and Mr Rattenbury and, I understand, potentially, Independent members of the Legislative Assembly as well, and offer to meet with them to talk about his processes and their expectations for this inquiry. He certainly recognises that this is an inquiry that was initiated by the Legislative Assembly, and people have expectations about how it will operate. So I would strongly encourage Ms Castley, if she has not already, to take advantage of that invitation and to express any concerns she may have to Mr Walsh.

In the meantime, I absolutely encourage anyone who has anything to tell Mr Walsh about their experiences as workers in the ACT health system—if they have expertise to share about digital health or the operations of Canberra Health Services—to absolutely take the opportunity to get in touch with Mr Walsh. They can do that by email to an email address that will be managed by the consultants that are being procured to support Mr Walsh to ensure that that this a completely independent process from any ACT government official.

Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, what processes did you and the directorate put in place to ensure that the chair of the independent health inquiry was truly independent and free of any political affiliations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not aware of whether Mr Walsh has any particular political affiliation. That did not factor into consideration. He has been a public servant for a very long time. As far as I am aware, he has never stood for political office, he has never indicated a political affiliation, and he has successfully supported governments of all stripes—Liberal-National governments, Labor governments—in his various roles.

With respect to the process for appointing Mr Walsh, which I think we have shared with Ms Castley before, or publicly, to set up the inquiry in the timeframe that was required, the Health Directorate did a bit of a scan of who had the types of expertise that would be required to undertake this type of role, and had not previously been contracted by the ACT government or worked for the ACT government in recent years. That ruled out some individuals, identified several individuals who met those criteria, went out to those individuals to have a conversation with them about their potential availability, got some further information from them about that, assessed the qualifications, experience and availability of those individuals, and made a recommendation to me that Mr Walsh was both available and highly qualified for the role. I then accepted that recommendation and wrote to the Chief Minister to seek his agreement to the appointment, which was made prior to cabinet consideration for timeliness reasons, and subsequently notified cabinet.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, are you aware that the chair of the independent health inquiry has actually been appointed to five senior roles by Western Australia, Queensland and the federal Labor government?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have not counted the senior roles that Mr Walsh has been appointed to by various governments. My understanding is that he has undertaken work and inquiries for LNP governments as well. Of course, Mr Walsh is a long-term public servant. The Assembly put some clear criteria in place that the person appointed to undertake this inquiry was not to have worked for the ACT government or been contracted by the ACT government in recent years, and we looked for someone who had the expertise and was available. It is not on me that most of the state and territory governments over the last many, many years have been Labor governments. People who have undertaken senior roles across state and territory governments over many years are very likely to have been working for Labor governments because Labor has been more successful at state and territory level. And maybe Ms Castley is demonstrating why.

MR COCKS: Minister, how many other candidates were considered at each stage of the selection process that you have described?

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

Default insurance fund—horseracing industry

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for workplace health and safety.

Minister, you have proposed legislation for a government insurance scheme to underwrite all claims for deaths and accidents at Thoroughbred Park. I imagine there was rigorous policy work involved in the preparation of this legislation. Can you tell the Assembly what criteria or principles you applied when deciding to select the horseracing industry for a special government insurance offer?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. The ACT government has proposed a bill that, if supported by the Assembly, would enable the executive to deem certain classes of worker eligible to have their workers compensation coverage provided by the default insurance fund and for a fee to be charged for that access. We have identified that horse training here in the ACT is the industry that is experiencing the highest workers compensation premiums in the territory, currently sitting at about 20 per cent of payroll and expected to rise to 30 per cent in their next insurance year. This has placed tremendous pressure on this industry, and the result of that is that that work is progressively occurring across the border in Queanbeyan whilst they still race and live here within the ACT.

We acknowledge that this is the most dangerous industry in the ACT. These workers deserve to have the appropriate protections that all workers here in the ACT enjoy, to make sure that that work, which is predominantly for the ACT industry, is done under the conditions and standards that we rightly expect of all work taken for the benefit of ACT.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, will you apply these same principles to other

businesses struggling with their premiums, like the arts sector, live music, hospitality, small business and anyone uninsurable due to climate risk?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question.

I am not sure that all of those sectors would necessarily be best supported by the mechanism that is proposed in this bill. The government is looking forward to the report from the Assembly's inquiry into insurance costs, and we look forward to being able to respond fulsomely. We acknowledge that insurance costs are an issue across the ACT across a range of insurance products. We will look to sensible solutions, where we can, to support industries to make sure that the ACT remains a wonderful place to do business.

MS CLAY: Minister, what is the projected total financial liability for government if the legislation you have proposed passes the Assembly?

MR PETTERSSON: I will have to take the detail of the question on notice. The cost to the ACT government is not necessarily a straightforward figure. There are a range of competing elements which might offset each other. So I have taken it on notice, and I will try to get a comprehensive answer for the member as soon as I possibly can, in advance of debate on the legislation.

Health—treatment by pharmacists

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. In February, you announced the expansion of pharmacy services to include treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections and the resupply of oral contraceptives, describing it as merely the first step toward full scope of practice for pharmacists. Given ACT Labor's clear commitment to implementing full scope before the 2024 election, why has your government failed to fully deliver on this promise?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, can I ask that Ms Castley repeat the question?

MR SPEAKER: Let's take it from the top, Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, in February, you announced the expansion of pharmacy services to include treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections and the resupply of oral contraceptives, describing it as merely the "first step" toward full scope of practice for pharmacists. Given ACT Labor's clear commitment to implementing full scope before the 2024 election, why has your government failed to fully deliver on this promise?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can advise Ms Castley that, yes, we did make that announcement in February and, as of May 2025, 27 community pharmacies have been granted extended scope of practice authority to supply antibiotics to women to treat uncomplicated UTIs and to resupply oral contraceptive pills to women who have been previously prescribed oral contraceptives by their doctor.

As part of ACT Labor's commitment, this trial will be extended to all community pharmacies in the ACT over the course of 2025, and we will continue to work to expand

scope of practice for pharmacies. But, as the Treasurer and the Chief Minister have had to explain to the opposition on multiple occasions as well as to the Greens, in some instances, and the crossbench, not all government election commitments are delivered within the first year of a new government. Election commitments are for the next term of government. We will continue to work with pharmacies, pharmacists and other jurisdictions to continue to expand scope of practice, particularly New South Wales, maintaining as much as possible consistency across border.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why is your government continuing to restrict pharmacists from prescribing medications that could safely and efficiently alleviate pressure on the broader health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure which medications Ms Castley is referring to. But there is work nationally being undertaken and there is work being undertaken by the Health and Community Services Directorate in partnership with the NSW Health to look at where we go next in terms of expanded scope of practice. But there are legitimate concerns around some of these scope of practice proposals, and there is work that needs to be done to ensure that these can be implemented safely, including identifying appropriate training programs, amendments to regulations and ensuring that there is consistency.

Ms Castley seems to think that pharmacists are trained to prescribe any medication that they feel like. That is not the case. There is specific training associated with a number of these matters. So we are working very closely with the Pharmacy Guild, with whom we have a good relationship in this government, with pharmacists, with our Chief Pharmacist in the Health and Community Services Directorate and with our Chief Health Officer to work through what that expanded scope of practice looks like. We have already expanded scope of practice in relation to vaccinations. We have expanded the age range and the number of vaccines that pharmacists can deliver. That has been very, very welcomed by pharmacists and the community.

MS TOUGH: Minister, why is safe, affordable access to contraception and abortion services so important to Labor governments?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Ms Tough. As I said earlier, access to resupply of oral contraception is really important for many women who require this service. We know that the ACT has a relatively low rate of bulk-billing and a low proportion of GPs per head of population. So this expanded scope of practice has been really welcomed.

Of course, when it comes to supplying antibiotics to treat uncomplicated urinary tract infections, that can also occur at our fantastic nurse-led walk-in centres, and we continue to expand their scope of practice as well. A number of other sexual health presentations can also be managed through our fabulous nurse-led walk-in centres. Then, of course, we have our program to support free access to abortion and to long-acting reversible contraceptives. We are now working to look at what that looks like, given the Albanese Labor government's significant investment in women's health, including substantial increases in the MBS, the Medicare Benefits Schedule, rebates for long-acting reversible contraception.

So, between the Albanese Labor government and the ACT Barr Labor government, we

are taking woman's health very seriously, and we will continue to expand across 2025 the availability of expanded scope of practice to pharmacists from the current 27 community pharmacies.

Horseracing industry—work health and safety

MS CLAY: My question is for the minister for workplace health and safety. This question talks about deaths and accidents that happened at Thoroughbred Park, and it might be upsetting for anyone involved to hear. I am really sorry about that. It is important that we discuss this issue to try to make the industry safer for others.

Minister, Thoroughbred Park's annual reports show the death of a track-work rider in 2017 and the death of a jockey in 2024. They also report a casual worker injured in 2019, two track work riders injured in 2020 and two more workers injured in 2021, and you have described this as "the most dangerous industry in the ACT".

Most unions would have shut this down by now to lobby for a safer workplace. Instead of taking regulatory action, you have proposed a government insurance scheme to underwrite claims for deaths and accidents. That really worries me, because one of the roles of civil law claims and insurance premiums is to make industries safer by giving them a financial incentive to avoid accidents.

What regulatory action is the government taking to try to make this industry safer?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Ms Clay for the question, and I appreciate her reading, for the benefit of the Assembly, about the dangers of this industry. People that work in horse training are exposed to a very dangerous workplace. Whether you are a track rider or a strapper, the prevalence of injuries is incredibly high. I understand that for a sustained period of time WorkSafe ACT has had a particular focus on the activities of the horse training industry in the ACT, particularly in light of some of those events.

The principle in which the government brings forward the bill and, as we have indicated, in which we would seek to utilise that power, is in recognition of those dangers. Those working people, we believe, should have access to the appropriate protections that ACT workers compensation provides. The insurance protection that is in place across the border in New South Wales is not as good as what exists here in the ACT: with higher thresholds to claim and lower benefits.

Working people that live in our community are seeing their work move across the border from the ACT into Queanbeyan. They are still part of the ACT racing industry. They are still conducting their races here in the ACT. But the work underpinning that industry, the training, is occurring in New South Wales, where those injuries are occurring. I appreciate this is an uncomfortable conversation to have, but these are the realities of this industry, and I believe the people that work in this industry deserve the protections that should come with working in an ACT industry.

MS CLAY: Are you concerned that by creating an insurance slush fund for the horseracing industry, the ACT government is inherently making Thoroughbred Park a

more dangerous workplace?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Ms Clay for the question. No, I do not agree with that assessment. I understand that WorkSafe has, and I suspect will continue to have, a strong focus on the horseracing industry in the ACT. We are stuck in an awkward position. If we do not act, these workers will undertake their work across the border in Queanbeyan, and they will be exposed to these risks but not have the same protections that we are seeking to have legislated by introducing this bill.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how does this legislation align with the right to work?

MR PETTERSSON: The right to work? You have somewhat stumped me on that one. Mr Speaker, the ACT government is proud to support jobs in the ACT across all industries. We have a goal to have 300,000 workers here in the ACT by 2030. We appreciate that horse training is part of the ACT community. It is a dangerous industry, but that is not the purpose of this conversation. The purpose of this conversation is to make sure that, for the work that occurs, those working people have access to workers compensation that is fit for purpose, not the inferior offering across the border in NSW.

Planning and Development—CSIRO Ginninderra

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. In a briefing with Senator Pocock's office in 2023, CSIRO and the Suburban Land Agency provided three possible scenarios for anticipated housing yield when the CSIRO Ginninderra site is developed. The low-density option—similar to old Canberra, with mostly single houses and blocks of close to a quarter of an acre—had a forecast yield of 4,522 dwellings. A business-as-usual approach—medium- to high-density housing, with a mix of lower density—would yield 6,176 dwellings. The stretch scenario—with lots of medium-density housing—is forecast to yield 8,185 dwellings for around 20,000 residents.

Minister, why then has the SLA, in their response to an estimates question on notice, anticipated that the site will yield only 2,984 dwellings? That is significantly less than even the lowest density scenario of 4,522 dwellings previously proposed.

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Emerson for his question and his interest in CSIRO Ginninderra east. That site, of course, is not owned by the ACT government. We are continuing our negotiations with the commonwealth in that space. This has brought some complex issues that both the ACT and commonwealth governments need to consider, which I cannot talk about until the contract is finalised. I am happy to inform the Canberra community about that in due course.

I think what Mr Emerson is referring to is both east and west portions of land in CSIRO. The portion of land that is around 2,900 dwellings, up to 3,000 dwellings, is in the part of the CSIRO portions of land that the ACT government is in discussions with the commonwealth about.

MR EMERSON: Minister, has cabinet received a business case from the SLA for the proposed sale? If not, when is it expected—given testimony during estimates indicated

that was the final hurdle to signing the deal with the commonwealth?

MS BERRY: I might take that question on notice, but it is well known publicly that the ACT government is in negotiations with the commonwealth. I cannot discuss any detail on that at the moment. But, as I said, as soon as we can and as soon as those negotiations are completed, I am very happy to inform the community of the outcome of those negotiations.

MS CLAY: Minister, what proportion of the CSIRO Ginninderra dwellings will be public and community housing?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Those are considerations that will be taken into account after the ownership of the land—should we be successful in our negotiations. It is our intention to have community, public and affordable housing in line with the government’s current policy of 15 per cent, but the actual numbers will be considered, should the ACT government be successful.

Woden Early Childhood Centre—lease

MS CARRICK: My question is to the minister responsible for Infrastructure Canberra and ACT Property Group, Minister Stephen-Smith. Minister, Woden Early Childhood Centre is a longstanding, community-managed early learning provider, with an NQS overall rating of “exceeding” since 2013. Its current enrolment is around 80 children, and it employs 20 staff. Their site is leased from ACT Property Group, and I understand the lease has expired and is currently on a month-by-month arrangement. Minister, is it the government’s intention to issue a new lease to the Woden Early Childhood Centre, and, if so, for what term?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I will just clarify that I am not the minister responsible entirely for Infrastructure Canberra. The overall responsibility for Infrastructure Canberra largely sits with the Chief Minister, but I am responsible for what is now called Places and Spaces.

There are a number of organisations that are currently on a month-by-month lease. I will take on notice to ensure that I can get the detail for Woden Early Childhood Centre, but for Ms Carrick’s information, I think this will be relevant. Infrastructure Canberra currently manages 84 peppercorn arrangements of properties across the community facilities portfolio. Almost all of those are legacy arrangements that have been administered by different entities over time. That means that there are more than 68 variations of the peppercorn lease.

Infrastructure Canberra is currently working towards renewing and standardising the peppercorn arrangements. Last year the then Special Minister of State agreed to Infrastructure Canberra issuing community tenants with a letter of comfort regarding the renewal of peppercorn arrangements. Letters were issued to tenants in August and September 2024. ACTCOSS also shared this information widely across its membership. The letter noted that the then Property Group was undertaking a process to renew peppercorn lease arrangements with an intention of renewing all leases—but that this may take some time to complete. It sought to assure lessees that their arrangement would remain in holdover until the new lease was agreed, and that all the

terms and conditions of the lease would continue to apply.

The letter further stated, and I quote: “I would like to provide assurance that your organisation can remain in occupancy of the property while the renewal process is undertaken.” (*Time expired.*)

MS CARRICK: Minister, is the Woden Early Childhood Centre site included in the early site investigation of the Callum offices and surrounding sites being undertaken by Infrastructure Canberra and the Suburban Land Agency, which you refer to in your answer to question on notice 394 for the estimates committee?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, Ms Carrick. I do not believe it is. If I am incorrect on that I will come back to you, but I am pretty sure it is no. I am getting a nod from Mr Steele as well.

Just to provide some further information in relation to your previous question, I can advise that Infrastructure Canberra will offer the existing 71 not-for-profit tenants on peppercorn arrangements new five-year leases. There are 13 arrangements which relate to community arts facilities, which will be transitioned to new arrangements as well—but in a slightly different timing alignment. But, for the purposes that you are referring to, that should be the relevant information.

MR EMERSON: Minister, with those new five-year leases also all be peppercorn leases?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, that is right. I thank Mr Emerson for the question. The work that Infrastructure Canberra is currently doing is to try to make those peppercorn leases a uniform peppercorn lease, rather than having 68 variations of the peppercorn lease arrangement.

Aviation industry—Qantas

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I note media reports today that Qantas is planning to close its bases in Mildura, Hobart and Canberra, consolidating the home base of pilots and cabin crew in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Chief Minister, since the announcement this morning, what action have you taken to protect the estimated 30 staff and their families affected by this decision, and what plans do you have to ensure Qantas services in and out of Canberra are protected?

MR BARR: We have engaged with senior Qantas officials on a number of occasions already, since we were first alerted to this consultation process that the company was undertaking. I think there has been some confusion in the media reporting. It is not an end to QantasLink services. It is about the crew base, the home base for 30 staff. QantasLink would continue to fly to and from Canberra. Engineering services would continue to be provided at Canberra airport. The issue at question for Hobart, Mildura and Canberra is: will Qantas home-base those staff in those respective cities? We do not believe that there is a case, given Canberra airport is the ninth busiest airport in Australia, for Qantas to not have any Canberra-based crew and pilots. That is the position that we have put to Qantas.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, with your intimate knowledge of the aviation history, what is your government doing to protect flights and services for Canberrans, and with respect to the impact, if there is a reduction in staff?

MR BARR: There is not a reduction in staff. What Qantas are consulting with their staff and the unions on is the home base for the staff. Their proposal is that in Canberra, Mildura and Hobart those staff will be relocated to other places.

Ms Castley: So we're happy to lose them from Canberra?

MR BARR: No, we are not happy to lose them. We have made that very clear.

Ms Castley: And what have you done to protect flights?

MR BARR: I have already been in contact with senior Qantas executives in relation to the matter. We are working with our federal colleagues on the matter. It is not just Canberra. Ultimately, Qantas is a business, and it will make its decisions independent of government. It is not a government-owned entity, and it is certainly not an ACT government-owned entity. I think the distinction needs to be drawn regarding services, which was the question that Ms Castley asked. This is not about how many flights there are to and from Canberra; it is about what will be the home base of Qantas crew and pilots.

We believe there is a strong case, as Canberra airport is the ninth busiest airport in Australia, that Qantas should have home-based crew here in Canberra. That is what we are arguing back to them, and that is what the union representing those staff is also doing, together with federal MPs and federal ministers, including our own federal finance minister, Senator Katy Gallagher.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, did any of your federal Labor colleagues inform you of this decision before it was made public, and what have you done to protect airline services in the ACT?

MR BARR: Qantas advised my office and federal MPs' offices in Hobart, Canberra and Mildura, ahead of the commencement of their two-week consultation period with their own staff on this matter. We have responded to Qantas on numerous occasions, to senior executives within the business, to express our displeasure at this matter. Ultimately, though, it is a consultation process and a decision that Qantas will take as a private business. But we do not support it. We believe, as the ninth busiest airport in Australia, that Canberra airport should have a Qantas staff base. Again, because Mr Milligan may not have been listening to the answers to the previous two questions, this is not about the number of flights to and from Canberra; it is about where the crew and pilots would be home based.

Law and justice—affirmative consent

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

Minister, many Canberrans will have seen posters in bathrooms and videos on social

media from the government's affirmative consent campaign. Can you tell the Assembly a bit more about that campaign and the research behind it?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question.

Mr Speaker, I am just going to put it straight on the table: great sex starts with consent, and that is the key message of the ACT government's affirmative consent education campaign. This campaign will be in market from 16 July to 15 October. The campaign is targeted at Canberrans aged 18 to 40, and it incorporates paid advertising as well as promotion through key locations and events in the community, supported by detailed information available online. This campaign seeks to build awareness of the 2022 affirmative consent legislation and forms part of the overall strategy to reduce sexual violence in the ACT.

The independent research project to inform this key campaign was conducted in May 2024. Key findings were that many Australians have ingrained unconscious biases and beliefs around the topic of consent, which is also often gendered. All genders feel an elevated sense of risk due to the changed definition of consent, with concern as to whether the new law will be effective in protecting men from false accusations and women from harm. When faced with practising affirmative consent, people felt that it was awkward, transactional, over complicated and confusing. So those are the reasons why this campaign has been targeted in the way it has—to start to shift some of those ideas that are often entrenched in our community.

The campaign is running on social media, Tiktok, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit; on dating apps like Tinder; on Google search ads; on broadcast and video on demand, Netflix, 7 Plus, 10Play, Binge, YouTube, BeBo, SBS, 9, Kayo and ESPN; and on posters in public locations and in licenced venues around the ACT. I also thank Clubs ACT for their support of this campaign and for promoting it throughout their venues.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what impact has the affirmative consent legislation had so far?

DR PATERSON: This legislation was the first legislation that I introduced into the Assembly. It was introduced in February 2022 and passed in the Assembly in May 2022. This bill made it law that consent has to be given freely and voluntarily and communicated by saying or doing something. It also explicitly states that consent can be withdrawn at any time.

I want to thank the Attorney-General for her thorough review into the laws. The review found that consent laws may be one of several factors contributing to increased confidence in reporting sexual offences. Reporting and charging rates have both increased since the commencement of the laws, and the number of people reporting a sexual offence to police and then withdrawing the report prior to a charge being laid has also fallen.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what supports are available to victim-survivors of sexual violence in the ACT?

DR PATERSON: Sexual violence effects people at all ages and all walks of life. We

know that victim-survivors of sexual violence have differing needs, aims and understandings of justice. That is why in the ACT there are different support opportunities available at different stages of the process and depending on an individual's priorities.

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre offers counselling and practical support to all victim-survivors, regardless of if they have ever made a report to police. This year, we boosted CRCC's capacity to support victim-survivors, through the establishment of the independent sexual violence advisers, the Sexual Violence Legal Service. The service, a partnership between Victim Support ACT and the Women's Legal Centre, offers advice to female and gender diverse victim-survivors who want to better understand the legal processes which might apply to their situation, as well as tailored case coordination and connection with other services offered by Victim Support, like financial assistance and counselling.

In their own right, Victim Support offer a range of supports to victims of sexual and other violence including counselling, advocacy, financial assistance as well as the provision of information through the victims register.

In this budget, we announce funding for a new role of sexual assault advocates who will be embedded within the ACT police to support victim-survivors who choose to make a report to police by ensuring ready access to information and connection to other supports. The DPP's witness assistance service also provides tailored support to victims through the criminal process as matters proceed to trial.

Structurally, the wrap-around program, which was re-established in January 2025, ensures a consistent, coordinated and multidisciplinary response for victim-survivors of sexual violence.

The services provide a choice and empowerment for people who have experienced sexual violence, helping them to navigate the path that is right for them to support recovery and healing.

Light rail stage 2B—Yarralumla substation

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. The environmental impact statement on stage 2B of the tram shows that Yarralumla residents should expect a 240 square metre substation that will be up to 10-metres tall to be built in front of their homes. Minister, why must this 10-metre tall, 240 square metre substation be built in the middle of a residential street?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, the whole purpose of an environmental impact statement in its draft form that has been out for consultation with the community is to find out what the community's views are on the impacts that this major project may have on them, the surrounding environment and the heritage of the city. Of course, there are requirements in terms of powering our light rail system. It requires high-voltage DC power. That means that traction power stations have to be built, as they were on stage 1 and, as they will be, as part of stage 2A.

We are listening to any concerns raised by the community as part of the process.

Infrastructure Canberra will, of course, be assessing those now that the consultation is coming to a close, and then the government will be considering those matters and responding to those in the finalisation of the EIS. They will consider any alternative options that may be available in terms of location that might be able to mitigate those matters, and they will of course be assessed as part of the finalisation of the EIS.

MR HANSON: Minister, what have you heard from the community about this proposed site?

MR STEEL: I have probably heard the same as the fellow member for Murrumbidgee, Mr Hanson, has in relation to a retraction power station. I know that Infrastructure Canberra has heard feedback on that from the community. I believe there is a petition before the Assembly in relation to that matter as well, which the government will provide a response to in due course. So we are aware of the range of concerns that have been raised from local members of the community, and they will be considered as part of the environmental impact statement finalisation.

MR COCKS: Minister, what other sites have been identified and are under consideration for this 240 square metre substation?

MR STEEL: I will take on notice the exact detail of that. But, obviously, as Infrastructure Canberra have worked on stage 2B's design, they have looked at the range of options. They presented one proposal that is feasible from a constructability point of view. Of course, now is the stage where we are considering feedback from the broader community and, indeed, other stakeholders, including government stakeholders and the commonwealth government, to understand any impacts that may not have been properly considered through the draft and whether those can be further mitigated in the finalisation of the EIS for the project.

Housing—Rent Relief Fund

MS BARRY: My question is to the minister for homelessness. Minister, the government's response to the estimates committee included in-principle support for restoring the Rent Relief Fund. This followed compelled evidence provided by Care and community sector organisations. Minister, what are your plans for the reinstatement of the fund?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it as the responsible minister, Mr Speaker. I thank Ms Barry for the question and for the interest. I think there is very little more that I can say beyond the government response. I would note that the information we have provided to the media is that we are awaiting some further advice from the directorate about the best way to put this together. Regrettably, I am not in a position to make any government announcements right now, nor during question time.

MS BARRY: Minister, why is the government's approach an approach which severs the nexus with Care Financial Counselling Services?

MS CHEYNE: Can you say that again please?

MR SPEAKER: Can you repeat the question please, Ms Barry?

MS BARRY: Minister, why is the government's approach an approach which severs the nexus with Care Financial Counselling Services?

MS CHEYNE: The arrangement with Care had reached the end of the contracted period, and the government's consideration has been, while certainly lobbied by Care and others right across the sector, that this is about establishing, effectively, a new fund, and we are seeking advice on the best way to go about that that is consistent with the legislation and, particularly, our procurement rules.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why don't you admit the mistake to cut the Rent Relief scheme, and why don't you reinstate the program?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Castley for the question, and I refer her, again, to the government response. We are at a point where we do need to look at what we are funding, and how, and through what, and of course, there have been a range of other cost-of-living supports that have been provided through this budget, including some new things. I appreciate Mr Rattenbury's comments on the radio, in the news that I heard this morning, that some of those things are not necessarily a like-for-like replacement, and I understand that. But what the government is looking at now—based on some further feedback and receipt of some final data from the sector and some further analysis that has appeared in recent weeks—is providing, effectively, a new fund that is more holistic. This is what we are working towards.

Planning—rural leaseholders

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. It relates to agriculture.

Minister, I have been meeting regularly with the Rural Landholders' Association and was fortunate enough to attend their meeting on Monday night in Tharwa. Officials who report to you were at the event, as was the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development.

A number of concerns were raised by farmers at the meeting, including the difficulty they have with succession planning and running their farms as a family business when they are unable to house their children and grandchildren on their properties, given the restrictions around second dwellings. They said our planning system does not work for rural communities and their livelihoods. Other things that were raised include the need to reform our offsets policy. Some great work on local food was initiated last term, and many farmers are also wondering what the next steps are for that work.

Minister, are any of these issues that I just talked about included in your priorities for the agricultural portfolio? If not, what are your priorities for the portfolio?

MS ORR: The short answer to Miss Nuttall's question is yes, and I continue to work with my colleagues, including the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, on the matters raised.

Miss Nuttall: I have a point of order on relevance. The question was: of the things

I raised, which are your priorities, and, if none of them are priorities, what are the priorities for agriculture?

MR SPEAKER: There is still time on the clock if you want to resume, Ms Orr, but I cannot direct you on how to answer the question.

MS ORR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If I remember correctly, Ms Nuttall listed about three things. The answer is yes, those things are under my consideration, and we continue to work on them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, have you raised farmers' concerns about succession planning and second dwellings with the planning minister?

MS ORR: Yes.

MS CLAY: Minister, have you initiated any work on how our offsets policy applies to rural lands, given their critical stewardship of habitat conservation?

MS ORR: Again, the short answer is yes. We continue to look at offsets policy, and the directorate has been briefing me on potential options, but we are also waiting to see how federal reforms go. So I do not have any new policy announcement to make now, but I can assure the member who is asking the question that the government is not ignoring these matters.

Active travel—William Hovell Drive

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, the William Hovell Drive duplication promises to connect active travel options to the city and active travel provisions in both directions. However, there appear to be questions about the shared off-road path between Coulter Drive and Bindubi Street. Can you please confirm if this off-road path between these two streets is within the scope of works, or not?

MS CHEYNE: I appreciate Mr Braddock's question and his interest in this. I am going to take it on notice, due to some broader work that is underway on all of Bindubi Street and the connections into Whitlam and the Molonglo River bridge project. I do not have the answer in front of me, to be honest, but I expect I will be able to get an answer by tomorrow at the latest.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is the government still committed to having active travel in both directions alongside the William Hovell Drive duplication project?

MS CHEYNE: I do not believe there has been any change to our commitment with that. Active travel has always been a key consideration as part of this project, as have many other considerations, including wildlife crossings—both through wildlife crossing bridges and underpasses. I think that, after many years and considerable environmental engagement especially, I can speak for every member for Ginninderra that we are excited to be getting on with it now that the contract is signed.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you confirm that Labor will deliver on the commitment made

before the election to build seven kilometres of walking and cycling paths along William Hovell Drive?

MS CHEYNE: Yes.

Transport Canberra—bus driver safety

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, can you please provide an update to the Assembly on the delivery of measures aimed at addressing occupational violence on the Transport Canberra bus network?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. Addressing occupational violence and enhancing safety for our staff and the community remain a top priority for the ACT government. Our staff have the right to be safe at work, and our passengers have the right to be safe when using our bus services.

At the election, ACT Labor committed to reviewing our transport laws to provide additional powers for transport officers to manage and deter anti-social behaviour and promote safe journeys on public transport. This commitment has been complemented by a suite of actions aimed at addressing occupational violence in the Transport Canberra network, announced by the government in response to listening to the workforce and responding to reports of occupational violence, and supported through investment in the 2025-26 ACT budget.

We are delivering on our commitments. Consultation with the driver workforce and the Transport Canberra occupational violence steering committee has led to two styles of operator-driver cabin protection screens now being fitted across the bus fleet. These are now being fitted to all Yutong E12 battery electric buses, with fit-out underway on CB60 rigid and articulated buses, and CB80 vehicles scheduled for the next tranche of installations.

De-escalation training tailored for the Transport Canberra workforce is also being delivered. All transport officers, new starters and communications centre operators have completed the training, and so have 70 per cent of bus drivers, with the remaining drivers scheduled to have this training completed by the end of the next month.

Last sitting week, I introduced the Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Amendment Bill 2025—the bus safety bill—into the Assembly, which will provide additional powers for managing anti-social behaviour and occupational violence on public buses, together with our field transport officers, ACT police and the new team of dedicated transit enforcement officers announced in the budget.

Violence or harassment towards bus drivers or fellow passengers is not acceptable or tolerated on our bus network, and the government is well placed to deliver on our commitment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the recruitment of the new transit enforcement officers support the safety of the Transport Canberra workforce and public transport passengers?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. The new transit enforcement officers announced in the budget will provide a visible presence on our network to deter risk and respond to anti-social behaviour and occupational violence incidents. Our bus drivers and field transport officers already play an important role across our network, but our new teams of transit enforcement officers will allow them to focus on their work by providing them with the means to divert potentially dangerous situations to an appropriately trained person, to de-escalate the situation before it becomes serious.

As part of the 12-month initial deployment of these officers, the first few months of the trial will be focused on known hotspots, such as the city interchange on busy evenings over the weekend, and it will then increase their presence across the network based on feedback and known risk areas where incidents are more likely to occur.

Upon recruitment, these officers will undergo a training program, including de-escalation training, plus additional training to allow them to use the new powers that have been proposed in the bus safety bill. They will also be provided with specific high-visibility uniforms, to ensure that they are easily recognised and identifiable when out in the network, and they will be provided with two-way radios to support reliable communication between teams and the communications centre. They will also wear body-worn cameras to support transparency and accountability during interactions with the public.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what other measures is the government taking to support a safe and secure transport workforce?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary. An enthusiastic, committed and supported workforce is important to the success of our bus network. Alongside our investment in improving safety on public transport, the budget also builds on the government's investment in improving public transport services through the delivery of workforce entitlements under the Transport Canberra operations agreement 2023-26. This investment supports Transport Canberra to maintain its workforce of 1,000 bus drivers, including full-time, permanent part-time and casual employees, who deliver our current bus network, including the improved Sunday bus timetable, which commenced on 31 August. All new starters are receiving training in relation to de-escalation, but they are also receiving training in relation to customer service, to support positive interactions in supporting people to use our bus system.

Ongoing bus driver recruitment will ensure that our driver workforce is maintained, to ensure that we are able to continue to deliver reliable bus services to the community.

Stromlo district playing fields

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

According to the ACT Labor costings at the last election, design work for the Stromlo District Playing Fields had begun back in 2016. However, the development application for stage 1 of this project was only submitted in June this year. That is nine years of design work!

Minister, how much has the government spent so far on design work for the Stromlo District Playing Fields?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice on the detail, but it is a complex site. Most sites in Canberra now are becoming more complex to build on more generally, including for sports facilities. So it has taken some time. On the actual amount, I will take that on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how long will it take for the government to make a decision on this development application?

MR STEEL: I will take that question, as the minister for planning. There are statutory timeframes that are outlined in the Planning Act and regulations. The Territory Planning Authority, the independent authority, will assess any development application that is being put forward and make a decision in accordance with the Planning Act and regulations.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why is the government pursuing a playing field made of astro turf, which will leach microplastics into the water?

MS BERRY: I could guess that question was coming from Mr Braddock! He did not even need to ask it.

Because of consultation with our sports community in the ACT and the experiences that we have had across the ACT community, particularly with sporting ground use, in weather where it is inclement and there is a lot of wet weather, the different turfed grounds can be used without damage to the fields, as they would in with greenfields. So having a variety of different services means that sports can play even when the weather is wet. The technology with regard to turf, like the one proposed for Stromlo, is changing every time. It is becoming more sustainable and the recycling use of the turf after its lifespan has also become something that is being investigated, and that is evolving as well.

I know Mr Braddock does not like the different turf used on some of our fields. That is his prerogative. However, in our consultations with the sports community using something else or not having that opportunity to continue to play when there is wet weather would leave our competitions at a loose end, and that is the last thing we want. We often get complaints when we close the fields down when it is wet or when we close the fields down for maintenance. Having another opportunity to play on fields that are not impacted by the weather in the same way that they that natural turf fields would be just gives sports more options. In the hockey space, as I spoke about before, it would create a very, very dangerous environment for hockey if they were to play on a surface that was something other than what they use currently, which is a turf that does use water as well as turf and is a level and flat surface. If it is played on a natural grass surface, it just creates a lot of danger of injuries to players.

Roads—Molonglo Valley

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, how are the existing roads in Molonglo supposed to cope with thousands more cars from increased

population while we wait for completion of the east-west arterial, some time later than a decade away?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, the government's priority in Molonglo is to build the bridge over the Molonglo River, which, as Minister Cheyne highlighted in question time yesterday, is expected to be complete by the end of 2026 and will provide better options not only for broader users of the road network but also for public transport, with the future commitment that the government has made around providing an additional Rapid service, which can only be provided reliably once that infrastructure is built. So that is the priority at the moment.

We are also progressing work, in conjunction with the federal government, on the planning, design and, hopefully, future construction of stage 1 of the east-west arterial road, which will initially provide access into the new Molonglo town centre but in the future, with further stages, could provide access to the Tuggeranong Parkway as well. In addition to that, the government, through the Suburban Land Agency, is also progressing work on a new road, which would connect John Gorton Drive through the new suburbs of Sulman and Bandler to William Hovell Drive at the Bindubi Street intersection, which was also the subject of an earlier question. Minister Cheyne alluded to the potential future consideration of a new interchange at that intersection as well.

There is a lot of planning underway to make sure that people can move in that area, given the growing population that will be experienced over that time. The Cotter Road is experiencing a lot of that congestion in peak times at the moment. We expect that that will be relieved once the new bridge opens. But there will be further work that is required to plan for future road connections.

MR COCKS: Minister, is there some doubt over whether the later stages will actually connect to the parkway, given you have just chosen to say that it "could" connect to the parkway?

MR STEEL: No, but the commitment that we have made as a government is to progress stage 1 as a priority. Obviously, that links in with the broader Molonglo town centre. That is also a critical first stage for the project and then in future connecting to the Tuggeranong Parkway. We are continuing to look at the Cotter Road as well. It is not a set-and-forget there; we have active traffic modelling underway and are looking at options, particularly around bus priority but also general movement of traffic through that corridor and what improvements can be made to that road as well as the broader network, in conjunction with the federal government, which has provided us with funding, looking at both Parkes Way and the south-west corridor, which of course link with all of these roads.

MR HANSON: Minister, when do you expect the east-west arterial will be complete, including its connection to the parkway?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice. The project does sit with other ministers and involves both the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry

MR SPEAKER: Are there matters arising from question time?

MR COCKS: Under standing order 118AA—which I was tempted to use for Mr Werner-Gibbings’s question about the right to work, as I am not sure it was answered, but Mr Werner-Gibbings seemed satisfied—I would like to go back to the first question that was asked today. Ms Castley’s question was in regard to the minister’s interpretation of “independent”. While the minister discussed, in general terms, the content of the Assembly’s motion and spoke to the qualifications of the individual selected, I do not believe she addressed the question of how the minister interpreted “independent”.

Ms Stephen-Smith: A point of order, Mr Speaker. In terms of the question asking me personally how I interpret a word, that would seem to be Mr Cocks interpreting Ms Castley’s question as seeking an expression of opinion, which would then put Ms Castley’s question out of order. Mr Speaker, if you were to accept Mr Cocks’s position, I should not have answered the question at all.

MR SPEAKER: You have taken the words right out of my mouth. Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: On the point of order, it is a reasonable concern from the minister. However, in this instance the question was very much regarding the interpretation that was applied by the minister in the process.

MR SPEAKER: I will not make a decision immediately. I will consult with the Clerk, but I do hold the belief that the question, in the form in which it was asked, did ask the minister to provide an opinion. I would also point out that, in the subsequent question, there was quite a bit of information from the minister, although it did not go to her opinion on the interpretation of “independent”. We will consider it. We will go back and look at *Hansard*, and we will have a decision for you before the end of the sitting day.

Horseracing industry—work health and safety

MS CLAY: Under standing order 118AA, I asked the minister for workplace health and safety what regulatory action the government had taken to make the workplace safer. The minister told me that the government had put up an insurance scheme. An insurance scheme will pay claims after accidents and deaths occur. It is not regulatory action that will make the workplace safer. I would like to know what regulatory action the government is taking to make the workplace safer.

MR SPEAKER: Again, we will consider it. I would note that the minister, in his answer, referred to the attention of WorkSafe ACT in matters at Thoroughbred Park. Nevertheless, we will go through the *Hansard* and assess it, and we will have a ruling for you before the close of business today.

Housing—affordability

MS BERRY: Mr Speaker, I have been speech-checked. Yesterday, in response to a question from Ms Castley, I spoke about the ACT government's commitment for 30,000 homes. The Greens office kindly advised my office that, in fact, I mis-spoke, and it is indeed 30,000 homes by 2030.

Woden Early Childhood Centre—lease renewal

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In relation to the questions from Ms Carrick about the Woden Early Childhood Centre, I can confirm that Woden Early Childhood Centre, at section 80 block 21, is not being considered as part of the Callam Offices precinct design and feasibility study. This block is out of scope for this work related to the future of Callam Offices. I can also confirm that Woden Early Childhood Centre is on a peppercorn lease and it will be renewed for a five-year period, in line with other peppercorn leases. I am pleased to be able to provide that advice to Ms Carrick.

Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In relation to the question that I took on notice from Mr Cocks about how many potential applicants or nominees for the independent chair of the inquiry were identified, I can advise that four applicants were identified. One was ruled out due to availability, with the remaining three being considered. Mr Walsh was identified as the most suitable and was recommended as chair.

I confirm for Ms Castley, in relation to one of her questions—it may have been from Mr Hanson—in terms of Mr Walsh's work, that Mr Walsh is currently a quality assurance adviser for the Tasmanian Liberal government's digital transformation strategy, and he was the inaugural CEO of eHealth NSW, from 2013 to 2015. He was formally appointed in 2014, at which time you may recall that there was a Liberal government in New South Wales. *iNews* reported at the time that his departure from Queensland Health was "lamented by health unions and LNP opposition alike".

He was appointed by Minister Hunt to the board of the National E-Health Transition Authority in 2015-16 and subsequently the Australian Digital Health Agency. Mr Walsh was also chair of the Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre from November 2019 to February 2022.

Given the amount of time that Ms Castley spends bemoaning the implementation of the Digital Health Record, it seemed to us that having someone who was clearly a national expert on the implementation of electronic medical records and digital health would be a good idea. This is a great example of Ms Castley snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. She got the inquiry she wanted and now she is actively undermining it.

Early childhood education and care incident records Order to table documents

The Clerk, pursuant to standing order 213B, reported the receipt of correspondence from the Chief Minister, dated 17 September 2025, concerning a request to vary terms of a production order of the Assembly of 24 June 2025 for documents relating to early childhood education and care incident records.

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Early childhood education and care incident records—Order to table—Variation request, pursuant to standing order 213B—Letter to the Speaker from the Chief Minister, dated 17 September 2025.

Motion (by **Mr Speaker**) proposed:

That the request, as reported by the Clerk, to vary the terms of the order be agreed to.

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

Paper

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

Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (ACT), pursuant to section 245—National Law Amendment (Professional Indemnity Insurance) Regulation 2025, No 26/2025, dated 1 May 2025—Explanatory Statement, dated September 2025.

Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 10 April 2025, on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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) (3.17): This certainly underlines, Mr Speaker, the rather unusual approach that has been taken to what is otherwise such an important amendment, and I think that is where I need to begin.

For about six weeks, my office has been clear about the amendments that the government would be proposing, both in intent, especially following the standing committee's report, and then in the drafting and the circulation of those amendments. Despite repeatedly trying to engage with the Greens on this, given that this is their bill, we have struggled, and I do not know why that is the case. It seems to really degrade, otherwise, a moment that could be one of perhaps celebration or agreement in this place. It really is not in the spirit of the act, in and of itself, let alone the Latimer House principles.

I do not understand what has happened here. I would certainly value having a conversation with the Greens after this, because we have walked in to debate the bill in principle; we will then go to the detail stage, and perhaps we will be legislating for a right to housing today. It is quite remarkable that it was not until yesterday that we had any sort of substantive response from the Greens. Even as I speak now, there have still been negotiations going on. In fact, I am not even sure if it is a negotiation. If I have mis-characterised this, I will happily apologise to the chamber.

I am absolutely baffled about why, when we have approached this in good faith, the Greens appear to have not. Again, I am happy to withdraw that, if there is a reasonable explanation and I have missed something; I may well have. But I find this quite extraordinary, especially from a former Attorney-General, and where we are making pretty fundamental reform that affects every part of the public service, Mr Assistant Speaker—which is something that you would know well, having inquired before into the expansion of our rights under the act.

I wish I was speaking with a bit more confidence and excitement regarding the approach taken today, and getting to a point where we do support this bill in principle, and in the detail stage. Ultimately, we support it, subject to the government amendments. I will talk about those shortly; they have been circulated. I present a supplementary explanatory statement to the government amendments.

Certainly, I appreciate the work of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, a committee of which Mr Rattenbury is a member, and its report on the inquiry into this private member's bill. It has helped to inform the government position on the bill and the government amendments that I will be moving today.

Again, I appreciate that I do not know what the deliberations of that standing committee were, and nor do I purport to assume that there was not a dissenting report from Mr Rattenbury. I can only assume that there was a level of agreement with the recommendations to which the government amendments seek to give effect. I truly do not understand what is going on here, and I look forward to being enlightened, whether publicly or privately.

The right to adequate housing recognises that a home is not simply a commodity. Access to adequate housing is vital for human dignity and for the exercise of other human rights. As such, it is a priority for this government. In the statutory review five years after the commencement of the Human Rights Act, it was recommended that rights from the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights be added to enhance full protection of human rights in the ACT.

Since then, the ACT government has taken an incremental and considered approach to expanding the act, adding the right to education; cultural rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the right to work, which we talked about a bit in question time today; and most recently the right to a healthy environment. Those amendments further align the ACT framework with the international standards that are part of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

To advance that trajectory, this government made a commitment to develop a road map and timeline to include further economic, social and cultural rights in our Human Rights Act. While Mr Rattenbury's bill has brought forward the consideration of a key right—the right to adequate housing—this was already on the government's agenda, and it was firmly on the agenda that the Labor Party took to the election and as part of our commitments.

Under international law, the right to adequate housing includes both progressively realisable and immediately realisable aspects. This bill reflects that distinction. It recognises that access to adequate housing must be progressively realised over time and

depending on public resources, but it also affirms that certain protections must be guaranteed now.

These include non-discrimination in relation to the right to the protection against unlawful or arbitrary eviction, and the assurance that essential utility services, such as water and energy, cannot be withdrawn arbitrarily or unlawfully. Those protections overlap with existing human rights under the act—the right to equality and non-discrimination, as well as, of course, the right to privacy.

Existing rights already provide important safeguards in the housing context, such as protection against discriminatory treatment in accommodation and against unlawful or arbitrary eviction. The inclusion of the right to housing strengthens and complements these protections, creating a more coherent and comprehensive human rights framework.

At the same time, those human rights provisions in our act are not absolute, and they may be subject to limitations under section 28 if they can be justified in a free and democratic society. This caveat, Mr Assistant Speaker, again, as you know well, embeds the necessary discretion for public authorities to balance the different public interests and rights of community members.

In the ACT, we have existing legal frameworks that give effect to the immediate obligations and, despite my feelings about what is occurring today, I do recognise Mr Rattenbury's work in this area, and the Greens approach overall, and that this has usually been an area where we are at least united on the policy. This includes the Residential Tenancies Act, protecting against arbitrary eviction; the Discrimination Act, prohibiting discrimination in accommodation; and the Utilities Act, along with consumer protection codes, ensuring that utility disconnection can occur only in limited regulated circumstances, and there are hardship protections and dispute resolution mechanisms in place. Recent reform has strengthened enforcement capabilities against the arbitrary withdrawal of essential services. I think you can see why.

In the context of utilities, I note our commitment to transitioning from natural gas to clean, renewable electricity to meet our commitment to net zero. It is important to recognise that the careful and structured phasing out of one form of energy in favour of another will not amount to an unlawful or arbitrary withdrawal of an essential utility service. The transition is necessary to protect public health, reduce emissions and ensure long-term environmental sustainability.

What matters is that the transition will be undertaken in a way that is reasonable, proportionate and accompanied by safeguards, particularly for vulnerable households. Again, these concepts and how they are applied are not new, but this will be enshrining it further.

In relation to the obligations and progressive realisation of the right to adequate housing, key actions to improve housing for the most vulnerable—and, indeed, all—community members are underway. The ACT's current Housing Strategy 2018-28 outlines five key, concrete objectives—expanding housing choice, reducing homelessness, boosting social housing, improving rental housing, and supporting home ownership. The 2024-25 budget included more than \$285 million in funding for housing

initiatives, and the statement of planning priorities for that period focuses on more housing near rapid transport connections and diverse housing choices.

That is just a snapshot of our key actions and commitments. In addition, we are determined to fulfil our election commitments on housing. This has included plenty of things that members have heard Minister Berry talk about in this place, as well as funding that targets chronic homelessness, youth homelessness, older women and those escaping domestic violence.

I am pleased in some ways that Mr Rattenbury has brought forward this bill. It is an incredibly well-crafted bill. We can thank the Parliamentary Counsel's Office for that. We also know that that is due to drafting instructions, so I recognise that from Mr Rattenbury and his team.

Our overall position would be that, with the road map to the realisation of all of those rights that I flagged before that have not yet been enacted in our Human Rights Act, we were clear that that was our election commitment and our intention. The reason, as the Greens who are still here would recall, was that there was consternation in the public service about the right to a healthy environment. I do not think that has come to pass; but, as we are adding in more rights, especially rights that need some time for the public service to be trained in, and for us to explain that this will not necessarily be life-changing for our public service, but that these are the key things that they need to have consideration for, it does need time. That was really what the road map was about—setting out when we would do what, and giving a clear indication and signposts of what the public service could be prepared for, and when.

That said, I come to this role with what I would hope is my usual pragmatism. This is a bill, as I said, that is well drafted, and I think it is genuinely well intended. I think it mimics what the ACT government would have put forward. On the principle of the thing—just because it is not ours, and it is not exactly the way we would have gone about it—we have come to the conclusion that there is no reason not to support it.

There is a very good reason why I will be moving the amendments in the detail stage. It is important that our community fully understands the scope of these rights. We will be required to develop communication materials to ensure there is a broad and consistent understanding of the scope of the right. This is a right that will be able to be complained about, which is great. We want there to be that appropriate conciliation mechanism.

Again, Mr Assistant Speaker, as you know intimately, there are other changes occurring in the human rights complaints space, including the addition of ACAT as an escalation pathway, and all of these are dovetailing in different ways. Again, it is a lot for anyone to consider, let alone the public service or our judicial and tribunal systems.

For these reasons—again, I do not know what is going to happen next—I will be moving an amendment to delay commencement for 12 months, to 1 January 2027. This is to allow appropriate time for implementation of the right. This is consistent with the recommendation of the committee inquiry into the bill.

I will also move an amendment to clarify the scope of immediately realisable

obligations during the implementation phase. The three immediately realisable aspects of non-discrimination, protection from unlawful or arbitrary eviction, and protection from unlawful or arbitrary withdrawal of essential utility services listed in the bill are firmly established in international law.

The government amendments that I will move limit the immediately realisable obligations to those three listed aspects, so that we have clarity and certainty during this implementation phase. After two years, that constraint would sunset, and the list of immediately realisable aspects of the right would become an inclusive list. That way, we strike a balance between the need for clarity and the alignment with international law in the longer term.

Certainly, those are simple amendments, but they are powerful, important ones. It is so that we do get this right and so that we bring people along, when we are doing significant reforms. That is the intent. There is nothing untoward or sinister, trying to one-up, or anything like that, as part of these amendments. These are simple, straightforward, good-faith amendments. I wish I knew what was going to happen. I am hopeful, I suppose, that these arguments have been persuasive.

Let me be clear that the Canberra Liberals have been engaging this week, and I appreciate that their minds were not turned to it until this week, when they knew that it would be debated. With respect to my office, I sincerely commend my senior legal adviser and my chief of staff for their engagement or attempts at engagement. Certainly, Ms Castley, the engagement with your office has been excellent. I am still unsure about what is going to happen. My watch has been buzzing for this entire time, so perhaps someone is trying to tell me. I thank you, and I thank your chief of staff as well, for engaging in good faith.

Hopefully, we will get a great outcome here today, a nation-leading outcome—one that will not solve all of our housing challenges overnight, but will still be a pretty powerful building block to our legal foundation. It will ensure that housing decisions are made with human rights at their core; and, in turn, that policy development in other areas also needs to consider housing rights. It strengthens our human rights culture, and it builds a fairer territory.

While it is not exactly how I would have gone about introducing a bill, let alone getting to this point, certainly, we do commend it. I thank Mr Rattenbury and his office, and the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, for their work. Hopefully, we will have a good outcome today.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.35): I am very happy to be talking today in support of the amended housing-as-a-human-right bill. I want to acknowledge the work that Ms Cheyne has done in this area. It is a complex place, as Ms Cheyne has talked about at length, regarding changing laws and legislation, and what that means for actual people. So, making sure that we get that right from the start is the way forward here.

I also acknowledge Mr Rattenbury's work in this space. I know we have had conversations in the last term of government about a human rights bill and what that

would mean for housing. So, I imagine there has been a lot of work done in that space to make sure it does not actually cause more problems than it attempts to solve.

I think we all agree that we should have housing as a human right.

The detail that Ms Cheyne has gone to, describing where it currently sits in international law and now, hopefully, assuming we get through today, in ACT law as well. It sits very rightly alongside the ACT government's legislation around the right to education and the right to a healthy environment. I am glad the government in the

The ACT has a proven track record of continuous enhancement of human rights. And so why shouldn't the right to housing join these other human rights? It absolutely should, and rightfully so. These rights include the road maps that the ACT Labor Party committed to in 2024, to implement more economic, social and cultural human rights.

For Housing ACT, which is the arm of government that provides public housing and coordinates homelessness services, this right to housing solidifies and reaffirms its purpose and its way of doing business.

Australians have long held home ownership as evidence of a successful life. And that may be the case for most of it. While it is not everyone's ambition, many prefer to have the security and the freedom that comes with owning their own homes—at least that we find where we want to set down and live for a little while, or forever.

As the cost of living has increased and our housing crisis continues, this is becoming increasingly difficult. I think we all recognise that. We might disagree on the way that we work towards resolving that crisis, but we certainly agree that there is something and we need to do more to attend to that need in our community. I think we all share the aspiration that people who might not have the chance, have the chance to have a happy home. And that could be in a rental occupancy agreement, for example, instead of a mortgage. It does not make the worth of a human any less because of the arrangements that they are in, as far as their home is concerned. A home is a home in any case. And that really is what it boils down to.

Making housing a human right will give legislative life to the fact that each and every one of us deserves the dignity and opportunity that a secure and affordable home provides—regardless of where we live, our backgrounds, or our financial circumstances. It gives everyone that chance at a fair crack at happiness.

ACT Labor-led governments have demonstrated commitment to this idea through their housing policies over many years. That includes improving the condition of public housing by progressively insourcing repairs and maintenance. That is a significant task, and we are working through it carefully. It is the biggest contract that the ACT government holds. Unpicking that and making sure that our tenants are not collateral damage in this work, is important work that is going ahead. We look forward to updating the Assembly as that work progresses.

We are growing the amount of public housing available in the ACT. It is really exciting now to have people actually moving into homes, getting keys, and changing their lives.

We are facilitating the increase in affordable rental housing by providing support to community housing providers and the private sector in that space. We are improving protections for renters in the private market; enabling more housing in established suburbs; and releasing more land for prospective homebuyers. None of them on their own is a silver bullet to resolving and solving our housing crisis and putting more people into homes—but each plays an important role in how we respond to this issue that affects so many in our community, and Australia more broadly.

And we will continue to live through this commitment, as we address increasing demand and complexity around delivering housing.

As you would know, Mr Speaker, in your advocacy for people who are living in public housing properties, it is not just bricks and mortar that amounts to a decent home. Homes need to meet the needs of all types of families, of older people, young people exiting care, people with disability, those escaping domestic violence—a whole range of individuals with aspirations and hopes of their own, that only a home that meets their needs can meet.

They need to be culturally and socially suitable. They need to respect the traditions, values and lived experiences—especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, refugees and multicultural communities. It is a complex space of work, and we continue to navigate our way through it in the quickest and most appropriate way.

Homes should also be climate-ready and energy efficient and have the smallest possible impact on the environment as we adapt to climate change in our community. And we should be putting in these different kinds of modifications so that we can live happily and safely—also keeping our eye on making sure that we are adapting where we can, and stemming climate change as much as we can as well.

Homes should also have a strong connection to community, employment and recreation services.

All of these ideas, Mr Assistant Speaker, are underpinned by the policies that the ACT government has in place right now. These initiatives that we are working on are making a difference to people's lives.

I will say that I am proud of what the ACT government has achieved so far in housing, and I am excited about what we will achieve in the years ahead. There is a lot of hard work to do but, I think, together we can work towards making a difference to many more people's lives. By enshrining the right to adequate housing into legislation—which I understand and support will be bolstered with the amendments that have been proposed by Minister Cheyne—will ensure that we can continue our progressive approach to housing in a more meaningful and a more practical way. Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.42): Housing is a human right, and we should recognise it in the ACT. I want to provide a few examples from my community where that human right does not appear to have been fully realised in spirit, to demonstrate why we need to enshrine this right in law.

I have spoken to public housing tenants who have really been at a loss on where to go.

One very kind guy I met at Tuggeranong interchange talked about being unable to get Housing ACT or Programmed to do critical repairs on walls and bathrooms. He talked about not having access to an Aboriginal housing support officer or case manager, and the importance of having someone in his corner who “got it”. He was having to do so much extra work on behalf of his family to get bare minimum upgrades, living in housing which failed to meet their needs in the meantime.

I have heard of folks with a disability fighting for years to get things like serious mould remediation in their public housing property. This is a common story in public housing. You have to fight to get complaints, even about serious matters, escalated and rectified. These are places where people live. They should not be exposed to threats to their health and their safety and their wellbeing on a daily basis.

Back when I was working at the library, a lovely older lady came in because she needed help filling out a public housing application form. She apologised that English was not her first language and that she was struggling to make sense of the forms. I had a look at them—I am university trained, I had a background in admin and English does happen to be my first language—and I was also struggling. We managed to gain a bit of ground. It took us close to an hour to do so. You should not have to have a degree and an admin background, or a background in English, to be able to get a house that meets your needs. Our system should be set up around that right to, and the principle of, universal access to housing.

I have spoken to young people who have lived in youth homelessness services that have felt unsafe, unheard and unsupported as they have tried desperately to advocate for themselves. We know that with youth homelessness, services including crisis accommodation and transitional housing are stretched incredibly thin to meet demand. Young people are given very little choice in their housing situation if it is not safe for them to live with family or if they have found themselves sleeping rough.

Young people have had to advocate fiercely for themselves because they have not been given the courtesy of basic safety requirements like lockable doors and windows. They have been relocated to areas that have made them feel incredibly unsafe, without their genuine input and without any attention to the fact that they have trauma surrounding these areas. We are putting them in a position where they have had to advocate tirelessly for their own right to housing that is safe and meets their needs. And it feels like the whole system has been stacked against them.

I really struggle to argue with them on that front. We have students in occupancy agreements on campus with no guarantee they will have a place next year. Sometimes they do not get cold water on their floor for weeks, so you just have to kind of time it right, so you get the shower from lukewarm to scalding. Sometimes things flood and take days to get fixed. If they were kicked out unfairly, which could happen at very short notice on the current occupancy agreement laws, the burden would be on them to fight for their housing—their human right—in ACAT. You cannot tell me that their right to housing is secure are safeguarded by our laws and systems.

Lastly, I want to dwell on a situation that I and a lot of my peers find ourselves in. Some of us are living with our parents because the housing market is cooked. It is not the system but the love of our parents and the luck of the socioeconomic draw that

safeguards our right to housing in those cases. And a lot of us now are renters. I am one of them. You should not believe everything you hear on the internet, but I was scrolling Instagram—bear me with me, Mr Rattenbury—and someone was talking about his experience as a renter, and it really resonated. Many of us are on a year-to-year lease and know that, with appropriate lead up, we could be uprooted at any time if our landlord wanted to move back in or sell the place. This person was saying, and it was hard to argue: “Why put down roots? Why meet the neighbours? Why plant seeds in the garden? Why turn up to the community barbecue? Why work towards improving a place when you could be turfed out? You just see the end of it.” We try anyway, right? It means a lot to us to get involved in the place we are, and the community that we find ourselves in. But when you are on year-by-year leases, you cannot help but feeling a little transient—like you are a visitor, a minder of places that can never quite relax into calling the place home.

I have my office upstairs for longer than I have my current home, and I could do more to the walls without asking permission. I will not. Do not worry, OLA, you have got my guarantee on that. I have, excuse the vulgarity, crap tons of privilege. I am white. I am the kind of queer that bigots have declared more socially acceptable. This job pays ludicrously good money, especially for my age. I have an incredibly supportive family that I could run to if my rental fell through.

But when you start to peel back those layers of privilege—if you take them away; if your family is not accepting or safe to be around; if you are not benefiting from generational wealth; if you are working crazy hours to afford to study; if you are at any intersection, whether you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, a person of colour, disabled, trans, or gender diverse, queer, a woman, all of whom are systematically, historically and currently disadvantaged by our social and economic systems—my God, the wheels fall off so quickly. And our system is not always there to catch you.

Our system should catch you. Housing is a human right. It is a basic need, and it is something that the government should be fighting fiercely for across all that we do. Enshrining this right, which affects every single one of us so deeply, is an incontrovertible first step to an Assembly that sees the right to housing realised in practice, and in spirit, for every single person in Canberra. Thank you.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.48): I will just speak really briefly; I know Ms Barry has a little more to say on this. We do have a few concerns with the potential impact that this may have on the territory, particularly with litigation which may be undertaken and the associated financial burden that it may pose.

There are obviously trade-offs when it comes to realising that a human does have the right to housing. The territory simply does not have the resources to fully develop the quantity and quality of housing that we may wish to provide. We need to be careful about how our limited resources are used, and I worry that the resources which will go into resolving litigation may come out of the resources that could go into improving the stock of public housing. So, we do intend to support the amendments that Labor have circulated. These effectively delay implementation of some of the changes. On balance, we felt a more gradual implementation was a reasonable position, given the impact these changes could have on Housing ACT.

Again, I just thank the minister's office for working together so well. With more time, I think we might have found common ground and achieved a consensus, but it is a busy week for everyone—busier than a budget week should be—and these things sometimes require a little more time. Thank you.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.50): I start by thanking Mr Rattenbury for bringing this very important issue to the attention of the Assembly. The Canberra Liberals are acutely aware of the housing crisis in the ACT—the lack of availability of public housing, the wait lists blowing out from 3,402 on 30 June 2025, and the lack of affordable housing in general. I echo all of the comments that have been made in this Assembly, particularly Miss Nuttall's, about the state of housing for people on low incomes and from marginalised communities.

Further, the inability to access housing or the subsequent loss of access to housing is a profound crisis affecting the individual and undermines our social contract. We agree with the submissions of Canberra Community Law that public housing conditions are often very poor, with inadequate heating and cooling, mould, asbestos, water ingress and damage, and depleted kitchens and bathrooms—all of the things that Miss Nuttall has very brilliantly articulated. This is a blight on our community and should be addressed urgently. It is our most disadvantaged citizens who disproportionately bear the consequence of policy failures.

The Canberra Liberals are a strong supporter of human rights, and I agree that this should be legislated into domestic laws. However, just putting my legal hat on for a second, I think that there are some risks that would be really good to pin down.

But, before I go into that, recently the government terminated the Rent Relief Fund despite advice from Care ACT that this would have a significant adverse effect on Canberrans facing short-term accommodation risks. It has taken a significant battle, and is still taking a significant battle, to force this government to recognise that error and to correct its ways.

As part of the introduction of housing as a human right—as I mentioned, just putting my legal hat on here for a second—I think we need to consider the risks that apply and hopefully put measures in place to mitigate those risks. One of the risks that has come to mind for me is that this bill potentially imposes significant additional requirements on public and private housing providers that would serve as a disincentive to invest. Yet I think we need more housing more than ever.

Another risk that I have identified is the potential that it imposes a legal obligation on the government to guarantee housing. That sounds really good, and I would love to see that. But, realistically, given the public housing stock and wait lists, we need to ensure that, if we are going to introduce new legislation and legal rights in domestic laws, we have the infrastructure and the capability to deliver on those rights. Quite simply and sadly, decades of underinvestment by this government means that we are simply not able to commit to this. I anticipate that the Attorney-General's amendments would probably mitigate this risk in some ways, essentially catching up our infrastructure, ensuring that we have the infrastructure before this law comes into effect.

Another risk that I think needs mentioning is that there is a potential that there will be

movements into Canberra. This legislation would be the first of its kind in the country, and if we do not calibrate what we will see is the waiting lists blow out of proportion. I think it is also important to mention here that the absence of capacity in the government to deliver on its legal obligations may expose it to increased litigation, resulting in pressures on the ACT Human Rights Commission and ACT courts as well as significant additional legal expenses for the ACT government. I am not going in to bat for the ACT government; I think that if someone has a legitimate claim that claim should be considered. But I also know that all resources need to be concentrated in providing homes for people to live in.

I note that these concerns arise at a that time the Housing Institute of Australia considers that policies, including land supply, taxes, charges on land and housing, zoning and development approval processes as well as other factors such as regulatory burdens and consumer and business financial settings, are having a significant impact on housing affordability and supply. Again, we need to calibrate for all of these things. Greater Canberra warned that the adoption of rights to housing could involve trade-offs that could impact on the housing supply and that this needed to be considered as part of developing housing policy. Again, I think it is important that we put those risks on the record, so that, in considering the implementation of this bill, mitigation strategies are included and those risks are accounted for.

We will be looking to see the government's report on how ready we are to implement this bill. Once again, I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing this very important issue to the full consideration of the Assembly. It is an issue that cuts across all social hierarchies, and I really would love to see movement on this. Thank you.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.56): I welcome the bill brought forward by Mr Rattenbury, and I welcome the Attorney-General, the housing minister, Ms Castley, Ms Barry and Miss Nuttall's contributions—and, I am sure, some more contributions here. It is good to see that people are giving a genuine detailed consideration to the issues at the heart of this, which is the housing crisis, homeless Canberrans and people in Canberra who are trying genuinely to exercise their fairly basic need for adequate, safe and healthy housing.

If this bill passes, it is a really welcome statement of a clear intention today from the ACT government to recognise the human right to housing. But this bill is not merely symbolic. We do not currently recognise that people have that basic right to housing here in the ACT. We do not recognise it in our Human Rights Act and we do not recognise it in the lived day-to-day experience of many Canberrans. That is why we need this new law.

Our public housing waitlist has skyrocketed from around 3,000 households to almost 3,500 households in the past year. That represents thousands and thousands of Canberrans who need a home and do not have one and are stuck waiting on the waitlist. It also represents many more people who are not even on that waitlist, because many people do not apply.

There are a lot of reasons someone might need help but might not ask for it or not be able or willing to navigate the government systems to get that help. My colleague Miss Nuttall actually ran us through that in really, really good detail. But I think there

is also a pretty good understanding now of how these waitlists work. People get it. It is a lot of effort to get onto a waitlist if the average wait time for high-needs housing alone is almost three years. This is because we do not have anywhere near enough public and community homes for those who need one.

I am concerned when I look at the public and community housing approvals and the new builds. It is why I am so keen on individual projects that we can influence, like the community housing project in Belconnen's town centre and like CSIRO Ginninderra. In Belco town centre, that single project could create homes for 60 families in need. We need every single one of those homes.

I am also worried about whether we have enough homes in general, in addition to whether we have enough public and community homes. Under the National Housing Accord, the ACT government has committed to a target of 30,000 dwellings by 2030, or around 5,000 per annum. But I am worried about whether there are enough planning approvals year to year to meet that target. I share the fears of the property sector here. We are all looking at the same data. We are all seeing how many new dwellings were approved in the past year—2,731. If you deduct demolitions, that number comes down. We know how many new dwellings were completed. Last year there were 3,924 new homes. None of those numbers add up to 5,000 new homes in Canberra each year.

Housing affordability, homelessness and housing insecurity are growing, and a lot of people are affected. Many people who were traditionally housed securely now find they are not. Around one in five people accessing homelessness services in the ACT are in paid employment. You can be employed and homeless in this town now. That rate of those who are employed and accessing homelessness services is running higher than in any other jurisdiction in Australia.

Homelessness also affects a lot of particular groups in society in different ways. Here in the ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are almost 10 times more likely to seek support from specialist homelessness services. Here in the ACT, the number of people who have a current mental health issue and are seeking homelessness support has increased dramatically over the past eight years. Mental health is both a key driver and a consequence of homelessness. If your mental health was good before you became homeless, odds on, it will not stay that way.

Here in the ACT, we have the highest rate of persistent homelessness in Australia. We have a lot of children who are homeless. I am running national data here. It was recently released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. It showed that nationwide, almost one in five people seeking support from homelessness services are unaccompanied children—kids on their own.

I have spoken a lot about the situation here in the ACT, and the data. I also, like Miss Nuttall, want to share some of the stories of some of the people I have met recently in Canberra. There are a lot of people who are affected by an inadequate housing situation or no home at all in Canberra, and this is just a couple of the stories from the past six weeks. I have come across a disturbing number of constituents who are unaccompanied children who are homeless. A lot of our services are not available for people in their age group or in their situation, and it is complicated. Some of these people are getting some assistance, but it is astonishing and heartbreaking that we have

so many unaccompanied children in this town who need help.

I have one constituent who is an adult now. She took some time recently to share her story with me, and I am really grateful for how generous she was in doing that. She really wanted to make sure that her story might help others. She was homeless from the age of 15 and she is now an adult in public housing. She has had a lot of different experiences in that, and I have picked up a lot of those tales and tried to assist her with them.

With the most recent one, she was transferred from one Housing ACT property to another. The new property she was transferred to was not cleaned and inspected in between tenants. She reported this to Programmed and her Housing ACT case manager. She reported it a lot. They initially said it was a tenant's maintenance issue, and that she had to fix it. The carpets, the walls and the fittings were all stained with urine, the air in the home was unbreathable and the home was uninhabitable. She had to find her own emergency accommodation, so she went couch-surfing and she stayed with friends. Eventually, Housing ACT arranged short-term accommodation for her but, even after that, Housing ACT continued to charge her rent for the uninhabitable home.

Programmed and Housing ACT have now agreed that the property was uninhabitable and that this constituent was not responsible for its condition because it was like that when she moved in. Housing ACT has now arranged carpet replacement. The tenant is doing her own deep clean to deal with the rest of that situation. It is really fortunate for her that her health is up to that kind of deep cleaning, because a lot of people would not be able to. She is still trying to recover the rent that she was charged when she was allocated an uninhabitable home.

I was shocked by a lot of elements of this story, but I am just going to talk about the rights in here. In the private sector, this person would have been better protected. A simple end-of-lease inspection would have shown the state of the property. A commercial landlord would have had to fix it before leasing it. If they did not, no tenant would ever have agreed to lease it in that condition, and no landlord in the ACT could possibly have charged rent for a property that was uninhabitable at the start of the lease.

We need more homes and we need more community services to look after our people. We need much better practical recognition of people's right and need for housing that is in a fit condition to live in. We need housing that will provide people with the opportunity to live the best life they can, that is safe, comfortable and that allows them to be part of and participate in the Canberra community. I am really pleased to see today's progress in the law, and I am really looking forward to seeing more improvement on the ground.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.04): I rise to speak in support of Mr Rattenbury's bill, and to thank him for bringing this important piece of legislation to the Assembly. The housing crisis is an urgent one, and it is now a deeply entrenched part of community life in the ACT. A growing number of Canberrans are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Town centres and the city centre are home, so to speak, to increasing numbers of people sleeping rough. This is a crisis and one we need to act on with the urgency that it demands.

Enshrining housing as a human right is a good start, and I commend the Greens for bringing this forward, while noting that giving effect to this right necessarily requires significant ongoing collaboration across the Assembly and across government. This is a systemic issue which requires a systemic response, because it is clear to all of us in this place that the status quo cannot give meaningful effect to this right.

A public housing system, for instance, and the people who rely on it have suffered from decades of neglect. Members of the Assembly will know that Housing ACT operates as a public trading enterprise, but many members of our community might not. They might not understand that accepting some funding and capital injections along the way means it is required to generate revenue to fund its operations. How can it possibly do that sufficiently while also fulfilling its purpose of providing significantly subsidised housing for vulnerable community members? Someone has to cover the spread somehow, which seemingly forces Housing ACT to liquidate the only assets they have—namely, public housing properties, people’s homes.

When succumbing to the very financialisation of housing, which is destroying our housing system and is destroying people’s faith in the system across Australia, what we see as a consequence is Housing ACT selling off high-value properties in well-located areas to increase its stock further out in the suburbs, at a distance from critical services and employment and education opportunities. I understand the economic justification, but it is a ruthlessly utilitarian approach, where a government housing provider is pulled not to centre the needs of its tenants in its decision-making processes, and is required, instead, to see vulnerable people’s homes as chips to trade. We would not expect other essential infrastructure like schools and hospitals to generate enough revenue to sustain their own operations.

So what needs to change for us to stop viewing housing as an asset and start viewing it as necessary social infrastructure—where we view housing not as a financial investment but as an investment in human beings and in their rights; where we radically increase territory and commonwealth government spending on, and concessions for, public and community housing, taking a “housing first” approach to addressing disadvantage; where we have the courage to draw on KPMG analysis showing that every dollar of public investment in social housing generates \$2.30 of economic activity elsewhere and saves \$2 in future health, justice and community safety and other public services costs? Hopefully, this bill moves us in that direction and centres people in our housing policy-making processes.

A lack of investment in our social housing system not only is resulting in a system that dehumanises the people it is supposed to help—as we have heard with many of the stories already told today—but it is also borne out in sobering statistics with dire human consequences, as Ms Clay indicated. In the ACT, almost 1,000 children reached out for homelessness support in the past year. Almost 200 children sought support alone, without a parent or guardian accompanying them. Yet only a quarter of children seeking help in the ACT are provided with housing.

Despite this, initiatives like the brand new Woden CIT Youth Foyer remain empty and still without a clear timeline for when young people can move in. The foyer can house 20 vulnerable young people—over a tenth of the children who sought housing support last year without a parent or guardian accompanying them; 20 that could be radically

changed by government action and will be. Yet the government is still in the procurement process to find a service provider to use the brand-new foyer. If there had been adequate forward planning, this site could already have had a service provider and could be housing vulnerable young people today, with any building defects being addressed while those people were housed there.

As Homelessness Australia chief executive Kate Colvin has stated, many children who seek homelessness services without parents are fleeing situations of violence; in which case, delays in providing housing can be the difference between life and death. This is the message I hear repeatedly from Canberrans who are experiencing homelessness or insecure housing, or maybe are not but are seeing it across our community. We need to move more quickly.

The consequences of this lack of urgency when it comes to addressing the housing and homelessness crisis were also seen earlier this year with another example, when young people living at the Our Place Youth Foyer had to come into this Assembly to ask whether funding for their program would be extended. The life-changing funding that provided them with care, support and safety—support that meant they had opportunities they never would have received without government investment—was up in the air. This uncertainty was completely unnecessary, and deeply careless when considering the incredibly traumatic experiences of homelessness that had led these young people to need the support of the Our Place Youth Foyer.

We might see the extra months taken to provide funding certainty as a part of normal government processes, but government processes have human consequences and “normal” is not working. Better forward thinking could have meant those 20 beds at the CIT Youth Foyer could already be filled today. Better forward thinking would have meant the young people living at Our Place Youth Foyer would not have had to go through months of uncertainty, living in limbo, unsure of whether they would still have a home, lobbying members of this Assembly asking us to ensure that they did. Government systems must be able to look further ahead when it comes to providing services to the most vulnerable members of our community, which I think is one critical way that we can immediately start giving effect to housing as a human right.

While we stand here today legislating this right to housing, the ACT is moving backwards on the provision of appropriate housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The statistic is worsening, despite commitments to the contrary under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We are the only jurisdiction, other than Tasmania, to see our outcomes worsening on this front. This, too, requires that we, as a society and as a parliament think seriously and act seriously when it comes to the members of our community who need more urgent and comprehensive support to fully realise their right to housing.

There are steps that we can take to do so: maximising our funding from the Housing Australia Future Fund; providing dedicated land releases for social housing that align with HAFF funding rounds; looking at whether it really makes sense to charge full rates to Housing ACT; and providing rates concessions and other incentives to community housing providers, who stand at the ready, willing to collaborate.

As a jurisdiction, the ACT has the lowest proportion of community housing in our social

housing mix. The sector is keen to get in there on the front foot and collaborate. As Ms Clay indicated, there are 3,402 approved applications on the Housing ACT waitlist right now—people we know who cannot afford market rates. The community sector wants to help house those people; they just need the support, strategic planning and forward-looking collaboration to do so.

It is easy to say all these things—I get that. I understand that housing is a complex policy area and that there is no quick fix. But what could be more important than ensuring every Canberran has a safe place to sleep at night; responding to the pleas of people experiencing violence in the home who cannot leave because they have nowhere else to go; providing an answer to young people who are asking, “What about me; what about my future?”; offering secure housing options to people experiencing homelessness, often because of mental health challenges, traumatic upbringings and repeated failures on the part of people and institutions that were supposed to support them but have failed?

Housing is a right; it is not just an asset. That right needs to be reflected in government policy, at all levels, at all times. This area is complex, which is why it must be a constant focus for this Assembly, where we work collaboratively to unpick this complexity. We know that, if we do not act, the cost is ultimately borne by the members of our community who are least equipped to bear it. Enshrining housing as a human right is a fantastic start. On the back of the passage of this bill, I urge the government to be courageous and ambitious to realise this right—not to tinker around the edges but to show real ambition, having the courage to position in the centre of their vision for the future of our city the urgent need to address vulnerable Canberrans’ experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness.

Again, I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing forward this bill. I hope to see the right to housing fully realised over the coming years, acknowledging, as Miss Nuttall indicated, that it is the responsibility of those of us who are securely housed to play our part in upholding this right for those who are not.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.13): I also rise today in support of Mr Rattenbury’s bill enshrining housing as a human right. This bill represents a vital step forward in recognising what should be a fundamental right: that housing is not a privilege; it is a human right. Across Canberra, thousands of people are struggling to keep a roof over their heads, and too many people are homeless and sleeping rough.

Over 5,000 individuals remain on public housing waiting lists, and countless essential workers are locked out of a rental market that prioritises profit over people. Housing ACT should not have to generate revenue to build more stock. The government needs to invest more in public housing. Also, it is not clear what the problem is with opening the Woden Youth Foyer, and I urge the government to make sure there is enough funding for a provider to run the service.

By enshrining the right to adequate housing in the Human Rights Act 2004, we will compel current and future governments to consider housing impacts in every decision they make, whether it is in legislation, policy or service delivery. It reframes housing from a commodity to a social necessity.

Importantly, the bill empowers community organisations to advocate for tenants, which is a powerful tool for justice, especially for our most vulnerable Canberrans. This is one tool to support people, but the government needs to do more. I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing this important bill forward.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.15), in reply: Today, the ACT becomes the first jurisdiction in Australia to debate legislation to make housing a human right. Shortly after coming to the crossbench of the Assembly, the Greens circulated a draft bill to make housing a human right, and by April this year we had introduced it. This is a legislative reform that has been talked about for more than 20 years in the territory, and it is well and truly time to deliver it. Our prioritisation of this bill reflects the importance we place on making housing a human right.

The Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025 amends the Human Rights Act 2004 to include the right to adequate housing in the ACT's human rights framework. It inserts a new section into the economic, social and cultural rights of the Human Rights Act and provides explicit statutory recognition that everyone has the right to adequate housing.

I would like to thank the stakeholders, organisations and office holders who have championed the call for a right to housing, including Better Renting, ACTCOSS, Canberra Community Law, the ACT Human Rights Commission, ACT Shelter and the St Vincent de Paul Society, among others.

I would like to thank everyone who made a submission to the committee inquiry into the bill, everyone we consulted with during the drafting stage, and everyone in the community who took the time to write in with their stories and support. The number of submissions and their contents demonstrate the volume of passionate support for this reform. It is heartening indeed to know that we live in a place where people support housing being a human right. The only differences of opinion were thoughtful debates around drafting issues and how the right is expressed.

Like education or health care, affordable housing is an essential service and key to living a life with dignity. From childhood through to adulthood, housing provides the basis for stability in all aspects of our lives. For too long, politicians across the nation have treated the government's role in the housing market as providing for private profit rather than safeguarding our community from the skyrocketing cost of finding and keeping a home.

Now, more than ever, in the middle of the most urgent housing crisis in living memory, we need to think about housing differently. We need to set the groundwork for a complete rethink of the government's role in the housing market. This bill will provide a starting point for deeper, more ambitious discussions about how the government can ensure everyone has access to housing.

This legislation put forward by the Greens reflects a practical way we can focus the priorities of the government, ensuring that the government properly considers housing in decision-making. If this bill passes—and I believe it will today—the government will need to consider the human right to housing, which includes the impact on security of tenure for Canberrans, affordability, services like water and electricity, accessibility,

location, and cultural adequacy.

It is my hope that this legislation will also start a conversation outside the government about the level of change that is needed to prioritise building homes for people over the private profit of property investors in companies, and the need for market interventions to increase public housing and ensure renting is affordable.

I would like to quote Dr Pene Mathew, our ACT Human Rights Commissioner, who has long advocated for housing to be a human right. She said:

The current housing crisis, the cost-of-living crisis and even the possible impact of recent international economic uncertainty on Australia, all underscore how precarious adequate and affordable housing has become for so many in our community. For Canberrans who do not have safe and adequate housing, many of the other fundamental rights protected in the Human Rights Act, are jeopardised. For example, women and children subjected to domestic violence may be forced to remain with or return to their abuser because they cannot secure adequate housing.

When we talk about adequate housing, we are talking about more than just shelter—adequate housing means a home, which is prerequisite for other human rights; and it means the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.

We believe there is strong community support for strengthening existing legislative and policy protections for housing, by bringing the right to housing into the Human Rights Act.

Incorporating this critical right in the Human Rights Act would cement the ACT's leadership in this area, moving the Territory closer toward fully realising the right to adequate housing and a more comprehensive human rights framework.

Those words from the Human Rights Commissioner sum up very well the very point of this legislation. By enshrining the right to adequate housing in the Human Rights Act, the ACT will pioneer a human-rights-based approach to housing in Australia. This reflects the reality that more people than ever are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. We need to think differently about housing, reframing decisions about housing through the lens of social need rather than private profit. This is the only way to address the current housing crisis that we are facing.

When I introduced this legislation in April, I spoke about clients of Canberra Community Law and Victim Support ACT who would have benefited from having an enshrined human right to housing. Today, as we sum up this debate, I would like to mention organisations supporting the bill who raised serious concerns about Canberra's housing crisis through the committee inquiry, highlighting how the right to housing could help to address the issues they have raised.

The Inner South Community Council reported that they regularly hear from public housing residents struggling to access safe, adequate housing and maintain reliable utility connections. They said enshrining housing as a human right would compel the government to better uphold the rights and dignity of public housing tenants.

Canberra Community Law shared a powerful case study where the absence of this right directly led to homelessness. A refugee experiencing serious health issues was evicted from their home while in hospital and ended up living in their car, an outcome that human rights legislation could have made easier to prevent.

Care Financial stressed that Canberra has become one of the most unaffordable rental markets in the country for low income earners. They said this bill would require the government to meaningfully consider housing affordability in its decisions and policies.

ACT Shelter pointed to data showing more than 20 per cent of Canberra's private renters are experiencing rental stress—higher than in many other parts of the country. They said this bill would create a legal obligation for the government to take responsibility for addressing this.

The Council on the Ageing raised particular concern for older women, who often fall through the cracks—earning too much to qualify for public housing but not enough to afford market rent. They emphasised that the bill would force the government to design housing policies that respond to these kinds of structural gaps.

I note the extensive comments from the Attorney-General. I can assure the Assembly that the Greens will be supporting the government's amendments, and I think this will see the passage of this bill today, which is a great outcome for the citizens of the territory, because that is what this is about. It is actually about the citizens of the territory. I am optimistic that this legislation will have a tangible impact on the lives of very vulnerable Canberrans and give those who advocate for them an even stronger case to make in their support. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.23), by leave: I move amendments Nos 1 to 3 circulated in my name together [*see schedule 1 at page 2702*].

I have already explained the purpose of these amendments, and I am bemused, bewildered and delighted—a weird mix of emotions—that the government amendments are being supported. I thank all those who texted me while I was speaking, and afterwards, to confirm that, and to take the anticipation away from this afternoon for me. I do hate surprises.

I very much want to acknowledge the public service—those who will come after us, those who are there now, and those who have got us to this point. While this is not a bill that has been led by the government, there has been extensive engagement from the policy team in JACS with my office, with other offices and with cabinet, in effectively

getting us to this point.

This is an incredible reform. It is a momentous day for the ACT, and I am truly grateful that we are able to get to this point in agreement, not just on the bill itself but on these amendments. Again, that is a very powerful statement we are sending to the community and, indeed, the nation today.

Ultimately, I am very grateful. It really was down to the work of JACS. They brought me along very early in their detailed analysis of the bill and how it would be delivering effectively things that we were already doing, and that it was not that scary. I think that plain language approach, while still being an incredibly considered approach, is something that I see throughout the public service, but especially among our officers in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. While they do not feature so prominently in this debate, there was a lot of work done behind the scenes, and I am truly grateful. I am very grateful that we got these amendments drafted. There is a very straightforward, excellent supplementary explanatory statement, if I do say so myself. I look forward to the Assembly's support today.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.26): The Greens will be voting in support of the government's amendments today. They do reflect a somewhat delayed impact of the legislation compared to the version that we put forward; but, at the end of the sitting today, if the ACT has enacted a human right to housing, however restrained that may be expressed for now, that is a better day than yesterday, in my book.

The first amendment extends the delayed commencement period in line with the committee's recommendation No 5. This will have the effect that the bill will commence on 1 January 2027. The government's rationale is that this delayed commencement will ensure that agencies have an opportunity to adjust their policies and practices to align with the right.

The second amendment from the government implements a progressive realisation of the immediately realisable rights. It makes the list of examples exhaustive, so that the immediately realisable rights are limited to the following: everyone is entitled to enjoy this right without discrimination; no-one may be unlawfully or arbitrarily evicted from their home; and no-one may have essential utility services to their home unlawfully or arbitrarily withdrawn.

The factor that moved me over the line to support this amendment is the inclusion of a sunset clause. After two years, this list of examples becomes non-exhaustive, reverting to the bill that I introduced. I am told that two years will provide operational agencies, such as Housing ACT, with greater clarity during the implementation stage, and allow agencies to focus on implementation and educating staff about these clear aspects before having to prepare for a broader scope of the right. I am reassured that this sunset clause demonstrates an intention to fully implement the right in a staged process, not to permanently constrain the right.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that, in the committee process, the large volume of submissions actually argued in the opposite direction. They wanted to see a broader range of immediately realisable rights. We have probably ended up in a different place to where most of the submitters recommended that we go. I think the committee

recommended the bill as it was in that regard. But this is where we find ourselves and, as I said, it will be a better day after this than it was yesterday, because of the passage of this bill. To play on the words of human rights law, we will see a progressive realisation of this legislation.

I want to thank the attorney and her office for their communication around their proposed amendments. We signalled very early that we wanted to debate this now and, despite some of the comments earlier, there have been some pretty good endeavours to get this done. We will sort out the rest of it later.

Once again, I want to thank the organisations and individuals who have advocated for decades for housing to be made a human right. I have been chatting to some of the advocates today. One of them told me that there used to be a poster on the wall at ACTCOSS in the early 2000s, campaigning for housing to be made a human right. That was 20 years ago. To get to today and finally see housing introduced as a human right is, I think, a really terrific outcome. As a territory, I would not say we can feel proud; it is not about that. It is not about us feeling proud, but we can walk out of here today knowing we have done something that has been a long time coming—something that so many community advocates know will make a real difference in our community.

I want to thank all members for their support for the legislation. I certainly hope, for the advocates who have worked so hard to get this done, that they feel good today about their endeavours and the impact that they have had on the territory statute books, and in very real terms on improving the lives of Canberrans. That community advocacy is so important in moving the agenda forward and encouraging those of us here in the Assembly who have the privilege of legislating to get on with these sorts of reforms.

Amendments agreed to.

Bill, as a whole, as amended, agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Crime—illicit tobacco and vaping products

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that illicit tobacco and vaping products retailers are brazenly operating across the entire Canberra suburban area;
- (b) that some smaller suburban supermarkets in the ACT have reported a decline in legal cigarette and tobacco sales by as much as 80 percent over the last five years;
- (c) that illicit tobacco now comprises 50 percent of total tobacco consumption in Australia, according to the latest report from FTI Consulting;
- (d) that nicotine consumption in Australia is trending up again after a long period of decline, according to the most recent wastewater data;

- (e) the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that 18-21 year olds are the age group most likely to use vapes and 49 percent of vape users are using the products daily;
 - (f) that the shift to illegal tobacco sales has seen a drop in excise of over \$7 billion annually and the Federal Government continues to lower their estimated revenue for the future;
 - (g) that the ABC's Alan Kohler has reported that organised crime is making \$10 billion annually from the sale of illegal tobacco products;
 - (h) the current fines for the sale of these products in the ACT are simply absorbed as a "price of doing business" cost by the sellers;
 - (i) the proven links between the sale of illicit tobacco and undercover crime gangs; and
 - (j) the growing concerns about the health implications of the completely unregulated illicit tobacco and vape market;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) the growing concerns surrounding the impact of illicit tobacco and vaping products trade on organised crime in the ACT;
 - (b) the criminal consequences in Victoria which has seen 130 separate arson attacks, and other violent crime linked to the sale of illegal tobacco;
 - (c) other jurisdictions, including New South Wales and Queensland, are actively legislating new powers and regulatory options to control the provision of illicit tobacco and vaping products; and
 - (d) that Victoria and South Australia have implemented policies that have effectively regulated the provision of illicit tobacco through temporary closures of stores selling illicit tobacco, issuance of fines for possession of large commercial quantities of illicit tobacco, licencing schemes to exchange tobacco and the establishment of a tobacco regulator; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) pursue legislative action consistent with the approach of the Queensland and New South Wales governments to severely penalise the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products; and
 - (b) urge the Albanese Labor Government to provide sufficient annual funding to the States and Territories to effectively regulate and enforce these laws.

One of the greatest challenges, and one of the greatest successes, in public health in our lifetimes has been the campaign against tobacco and nicotine products. Once the addictive quality and the health impacts were understood, governments explored a range of policy interventions to try to help people to quit smoking, and they embarked on a long-term campaign to better educate young people, and old, about the risks and harms.

These interventions rolled out over decades, and some of them were hard fought. But we landed in a place where smoking was gradually fading out as a public health challenge, particularly amongst young people—those who have the most to lose, as a few random cigarettes on a night out can transform into an incredibly expensive addiction that could ultimately cost some people their lives.

It is incredibly disappointing how governments around the country have dropped the ball—both with vaping products in the past few years, and recently with the rise of illicit tobacco. This is so much more than a regulatory failure; it is a regulatory catastrophe. The rates of smoking and vaping, particularly among teenagers and adults, are much higher than they ought to be, and much higher than they would be if governments had kept their eye on the ball.

The consequences of the growing trade in illicit tobacco and vaping products go beyond young people, and they go beyond public health. First, the trade is seriously impacting legitimate businesses in our community. Those who are doing the right thing and following the rules are being negatively impacted, as they lose business to the dodgy operators who have flooded the market. It is hard enough to run a business in the ACT without having to compete with operators who do not sell a legal product, who do not pay tax and who do not have to comply with the regulatory burden. As the trade in illicit tobacco consumes an increasingly large share of the market, federal excise revenue is down \$7 billion.

Second, this trade is empowering bikies, gangs and other syndicates like nothing else in this century. It is funnelling something like \$10 billion a year into organised crime—revenue that is not only enabling these operations to expand and spread out, but in some cases also growing the links between organised crime operations and hostile international actors.

Third, the trade is driving a real loss of trust in our regulatory systems and fuelling doubts about our state capacity. I do not want to talk down our regulators, but those questions and those doubts are entirely legitimate, given where we are at, and given the complete failure of governments to respond, even as this issue has become a full-blown crisis.

I should say that not all Australian governments have failed to respond. Queensland has set an example that, I think, it would be wise for us to follow. I note that the South Australian and New South Wales governments are also taking action. It is high time that the ACT followed suit, which is the purpose of today's motion.

Action on this issue in the ACT is long overdue. It seems our local government left this as an issue for the commonwealth to address, but it turns out federal Labor is as useless as ACT Labor in a crisis. Now local Labor is talking about taking action, but we do not need talk; we need action, legislation and enforcement, and we need to protect our local community from these illicit products and all the harms that have come in their wake.

Today's motion simply calls for action. If Labor is not able to deliver reform this year, we will introduce private legislation and do it ourselves. Our local communities, our young people and our legitimate businesses cannot afford to wait.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.35): I thank Ms Castley for bringing this issue to the Assembly. I think that, at the end of this debate, we will have unanimous agreement to support the amendment that I will move in a moment. It is pretty disappointing that Ms Castley spent her whole time not actually talking about

any of the issues, but basically saying, “ACT government useless, federal government useless.”

Ms Castley: Did you listen to my speech? I can email it to you.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Sorry; I missed Ms Castley’s interjection there. I will take this opportunity to move the amendment that has been circulated in my name. I move:

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

(1) notes:

- (a) that the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products is occurring across Canberra;
- (b) that some smaller suburban supermarkets in the ACT have reported a decline in legal cigarette and tobacco sales by as much as 80 percent over the last five years;
- (c) that illicit tobacco now comprises almost 40 percent of total tobacco consumption in Australia, according to the latest report from FTI consulting;
- (e) the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that 18–24-year-olds are the age group most likely to use vapes and 49 percent of vape users are using the products daily;
- (f) that the shift to illegal tobacco sales has seen a drop in excise of over 5.2 billion annually and the Federal Government continues to lower their estimated revenue for the future;
- (g) the ABC’s Alan Kohler has reported that organised crime is making \$10 billion annually from the sale of illegal tobacco products;
- (h) current fines for the sale of these products in the ACT are simply absorbed as a “price of doing business” cost by the sellers;
- (i) alleged links between the sale of illicit tobacco and organised crime;
- (j) growing concerns about the health implications of the illicit tobacco and vape market; and

(2) further notes:

- (a) the growing concerns surrounding the impact of illicit tobacco and vaping products trade in financing organised crime in the ACT;
- (b) that Victoria has seen 130 separate arson attacks and other violent crime allegedly linked to the sale of illegal tobacco;
- (c) other jurisdictions, including New South Wales and Queensland, are legislating new powers and regulatory options to control the provision of illicit tobacco and vaping products;
- (d) that Victoria and South Australia have implemented policies that have effectively regulated the provision of illicit tobacco through temporary closures of stores selling illicit tobacco, issuance of fines for possession of large commercial quantities of illicit tobacco, licencing schemes to exchange tobacco and the establishment of a tobacco regulator; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) pursue legislative changes to strengthen enforcement capacity and

introduce stronger penalties for the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products in the ACT; and

- (b) urge the Albanese Labor Government to provide sufficient annual funding to the States and Territories to effectively regulate and enforce these laws, noting funding for the states and territories to combat the trade of illicit tobacco announced in March 2025.

I would also note that there were a couple of typos in the amendments as it was originally circulated. I have given the officials some amendments to that, to address those typos.

As I was saying, I support the intention of Ms Castley's motion. My amendment corrects some factual errors that were contained in the original motion, in the notes part of the motion, and notes the growing concerns surrounding the impact of the illicit tobacco and vaping products trade in financing organised crime in the ACT—a concern that we share. Work is already underway on legislation to address this issue. It is not something that the ACT government is unaware of. It has been the subject of conversation at health ministers meetings between the commonwealth, state and territory health ministers as well.

As Ms Castley notes, other jurisdictions have taken action recently in this area. In a number of cases, those other jurisdictions were playing catch-up. Some of those jurisdictions did not have tobacco licensing regimes in place at all. The ACT has, of course, been a national leader when it comes to tobacco regulation, including non-smoking areas. The ACT continues to have the lowest smoking rate in the country by quite a long way, because of the very active work that the ACT government has done to support the community to understand the harms associated with smoking and vaping and also to ensure that those who sell tobacco in the ACT are appropriately licensed.

It is an opportune time to be debating these issues. We recognise that they are growing issues, that these products are a scourge on our public health community safety and that the growing issue of illicit tobacco is affecting licensed businesses who have taken steps to comply with legislation—again, legislation that has existed in the ACT for some time and an act that I have amended a number of times since I have been minister.

We particularly recognise the serious health risk of smoking and vaping to young people and other vulnerable populations. I remain committed to protecting the community from harmful substances, ensuring that products sold in the ACT meet legal requirements and ensuring that our public health system is also suitably equipped to respond to the risk. The harms are well established. Smoking increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, lung diseases and diabetes; leads to dependence; and impacts adolescent brain development of young smokers and vapers. I have moved an amendment to this motion to reflect the body of work being undertaken in this regard, as well as to note that this issue will not be solved by local enforcement alone. This is an international and a national issue, requiring a multi-government response.

I also note that Ms Castley has taken the approach, yet again, of drumming up a sort of fear and inaction response to this. It is really important that we understand that we have not seen yet in the ACT the kinds of impacts that we have seen in other jurisdictions—for example, in Victoria. Mr Parton, we spoke earlier today. The ACT government is

taking this seriously and, as I said, we are already in the process of developing legislation to amend the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act. But what we have seen in Victoria and New South Wales is really a significant and very worrying intersection of illicit tobacco and organised crime. Part of the reason we have not seen that in the ACT is because we had a licensing system to start with. We had stronger regulation of tobacco than either of those jurisdictions, to start with. So it was more challenging in the ACT.

I advised the Assembly during the debate on the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025 in April this year that I would be bringing forward a further bill to improve the regulatory framework for tobacco and other smoking products and provide a graduated enforcement option to address illegal supply in the ACT. So not only is it work that is underway; it is work that I have previously told the Assembly is underway.

When I introduced legislation to strengthen the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act in relation to vaping this year—not in ancient history; this year—I said I would be bringing forward legislation later this year. I look forward to presenting that bill to the Assembly. In doing so, I will obviously carefully consider the national and local issues regarding the sale of illicit smoking products in Canberra and ensure our approach is fit for purpose for the ACT.

The Health and Community Services Directorate and Access Canberra, now within the City and Environment Directorate, are closely monitoring the legislative and other developments in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia regarding illicit tobacco. Rather than calling out a specific response from the ACT to mirror New South Wales and Queensland, one part of the amendment that I have moved is to make it a more general call on the ACT government to pursue legislative changes to strengthen enforcement capacity, and recognising that we might take lessons from across all of those four jurisdictions and in the other jurisdictions as well.

We are exploring and continue to explore how we can work effectively with other jurisdictions in developing our enforcement approaches. We will also work with our commonwealth, state and territory partners to tackle the illicit tobacco and e-cigarette trade. A coordinated national approach is essential to combat this issue. This includes participating in the National Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Committee to coordinate regulator and law enforcement efforts to target and disrupt the illegal tobacco and e-cigarette markets.

We acknowledge that the Australian government has implemented several measures to combat the illicit tobacco trade already. This includes establishing the Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Commissioner, or ITEC, in July 2024 to: coordinate efforts across all levels of government to address illicit tobacco and e-cigarette products; report on the prevalence of these products, evaded excise and customs duty resulting from this trade; and the enforcement statistics.

The government also announced a package of \$156.7 million in funding to combat illicit tobacco in March 2025, which included making available \$40 million to support states and territories to establish local-level capability to respond to compliance and enforcement challenges, noting that the delivery of this funding is currently being

negotiated with states and territories.

Crucially, illicit smoking products are only available due to the porous borders and their capacity to come into Australia. The role of the Australian Border Force in combating the illicit tobacco trade remains critical, together with the expertise and advanced capabilities of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission; the Australian Transactions Reports and Analysis Centre, or AUSTRAC; the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions; and the Australian Tax Office. These agencies are using a range of legislative powers at their disposal to effectively target, disrupt and dismantle serious actors of organised crime syndicates that deal in illicit tobacco. ACT Policing actively assists the Australian Border Force with this compliance activity, which resulted in two people being charged with related offences in 2024.

There are efforts underway to address the sale of illicit tobacco and e-cigarettes in the ACT. It is an offence to import or supply tobacco products that do not meet labelling or other requirements set out under the Public Health (Tobacco and Other Products) Act 2023, commonwealth, and this applies nationally, including in the ACT. In the ACT, the current enforcement powers under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act were designed to encourage compliance with a licensing scheme, as opposed to actively enforce against an illicit market. That is what we are seeking to address.

The requirement to hold a licence to sell tobacco existed well before self-government. Today, operational functions under the act are carried out by Access Canberra, and the Health and Community Services Directorate is responsible for policy matters. The Commissioner for Fair Trading, public health officers, police, and the investigators under fair trading legislation are all authorised officers under the act. The regulation and sale of tobacco, including illicit tobacco and other smoking products, comes under the Health and Community Services Directorate and Access Canberra, and they work closely with ACT Policing to combat the illicit tobacco and vaping market.

ACT Policing can and do act when required, but they do note that we have not seen the same level of targeted arson and other crimes associated with tobacconists in the ACT as there have been in other jurisdictions. To date, they have not seen the organised crime syndicates become formally involved with the activities of ACT tobacconists—or, at least, that is the advice that they have provided to us—but they are monitoring the situation closely. Last year, ACT Policing laid charges against two men, as I mentioned earlier, who were selling vapes and homemade cannabis to teens via social media. This resulted in the seizure of almost 2,500 vapes. Between August 2024 and this month, the ACT government received 18 complaints related to prohibited vaping products or illicit tobacco. Seven of these complaints referred to illicit tobacco in the ACT.

We take this issue seriously. The importance of addressing this illicit and harmful trade and preventing its further growth is absolutely front and centre for us. That is why we are already working on legislation—which I look forward to bringing to this Assembly in the coming months—that strengthens our enforcement capacity, introduces stronger penalties and is fit for purpose for the ACT.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.48): I welcome this motion that has been brought

forward by Ms Castley today. I think she raises some important questions. Issues of illicit tobacco and vaping products being sold across parts of Canberra is a concern.

As I indicated in some comments I made on radio the other day, I think this is an area that warrants further consideration. I think members have heard various stories at times. Certainly through the inquiry that the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs has been holding on body corporate issues or issues under the Strata Act, we have had reports of, for example, where a tobacco outlet is open in the basement of a building, that building being subjected to a significant insurance cost increase because of the presence of that retail outlet in the building. It is one small part of the story that Ms Castley has pointed to. It is interesting where this issue has come up in different places. But, overall, this is a concerning issue, and one that does warrant further consideration.

I do note the focus in Ms Castley's motion is on the suppliers—those who are selling these products. That is, I think, an important focus, certainly when it comes to a harm minimisation in this space, we would not want to see a focus on the users, those with a nicotine dependency, but rather on those who are doing the illegal selling. I note that users are not the focus of the motion. I am pleased about that. I think this is a very different thing.

In chatting with my colleagues about this, when we talked about a possible amendment, Ms Clay wryly suggested that given the struggling nature of the tobacco industry we take a truly ACT approach to it and offer them \$8.5 million of annual funding and access to a default insurer scheme! Her tongue was firmly planted in her cheek when she made that point. Alternatively, if members are keen for money for enforcement, Ms Clay will bring forward an amendment to the budget—probably tomorrow—proposing to remove \$8.5 million of funding for the horseracing industry from the JACS line, and that could also go to enforcement. So there are a couple of opportunities for members there!

But, on a more serious note, obviously the minister has brought forward an amendment which she has spoken to in detail. I think there is unanimous support for that amendment. It does make a few, I guess, corrections in places, and it draws out a couple of points. I understand there is support for it. It does not change the fundamental point of Ms Castley's motion, which is certainly a question I have checked with her. So the Greens will also be supporting the minister's amendment today.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.51): I want to comment briefly on this motion. I am pleased to see it before the Assembly. I actually put out some social media content about it today, and Peter commented on my TikTok video about it.

Mr Rattenbury: Peter Cain?

MR PARTON: It was not Peter Cain, no.

Peter said to me, "I will not be happy if you make them illegal." I wrote back to Peter and I said, "I hate to break it to you, big guy, but they're illegal now."

We find ourselves in a bit of a mess here in this space. It is a mess which is not of our doing. It is a mess which is the result of long-term policy decisions that were made by

governments of both Labor and Liberal persuasion around regulation and around excise. The unintended consequences of those long-term policies are coming home to roost. We find ourselves in this extreme situation now where Mr Minns, in New South Wales, among others, is calling on the federal government to make some cuts to tobacco excise federally. Obviously, that is completely outside of the jurisdiction that we are in, and we cannot really influence that other than writing and banging the table. But we are at this point now where, even if you slash the excise by 40 per cent, the black market is so established that I do not think it is going to make a big difference. We—when I say “we”, it is mainly them—have to see that the situation here is just going to be remarkable to unravel.

I understand that some tobacco users are unhappy with what is going on in this chamber today, because, if things change legislatively in this space, and if you are a big user of tobacco and you tend to buy the cheapest stuff, which is the illicit tobacco, it is going to cost you more money, and that is obviously not a good outcome. Again, I was having a conversation privately with someone about this, and I said to Colin: “You are you purchasing an illegal product. If you were buying cheap tobacco from the pub every Friday night, from a guy who you knew had stolen the stuff from a supermarket, he had maybe gone in and robbed them, would you be happy to keep on going back and buying that cheap tobacco?” He said, “No, no, no, because that would be wrong.” Well, this is kind of wrong as well.

I have had conversations with a number of supermarket operators who certainly reported to me the dramatic drop-off in legal cigarette sales for them at a time when the wastewater data shows that our smoking rates are going up. Ms Stephen-Smith has just told us—and I am going to quote her directly: “We are aware of the problem.” That is good. How could you not be aware of it? I know you have gone to great lengths to talk to us about things that have been in place and things that are moving and stuff that is going to happen later in the year. Ms Stephen-Smith has been the health minister for a long time. This government has been in place in various forms since 2001. The Crisafulli LNP government have been in place for less than a year—less than a year!—and they have legislation on the table, ready to go.

I am pleased that we are going to get to the end of this debate and we are all going to essentially be on the same page. That is a wonderful thing. I think this motion basically says, as is the case with a lot of areas of policy development and government business, that this place, particularly the Canberra Liberals, will be watching very closely what goes on, because there are some outcomes here that we need to arrive at that we are looking forward to being a part of.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.55): I am very pleased to speak today in support of Minister Stephen-Smith’s amendment and the progress that the ACT government is making in terms of countering the illicit tobacco and vape trade.

I also acknowledge the work that Minister Stephen-Smith has done over a long time in terms of addressing this issue and acknowledge that, while we are in a situation now, we have seen smoking rates decrease significantly across the country. I think the federal

policies, to a large extent, have met their intended outcomes, but I do think that it warrants us looking at this issue today from a different context.

ACT Policing takes the illicit trade of tobacco and vapes very seriously and particularly its links to organised crime. ACT Policing's organised crime investigations team continue to target individuals and syndicates looking to profit from any illicit activity, including the commercial sale of tobacco in the ACT. ACT Policing also has a dedicated criminal assets investigation team, specifically targeting the proceeds of crime arising from the sale of illicit tobacco and tobacco products. ACT Policing also works very closely with the AFP National Operations and commonwealth and ACT health departments on this issue.

To date, ACT Policing has not witnessed the same issues other states, such as Victoria, have experienced in relation to the firebombing and standover incidents. Minister Stephen-Smith outlined some of the reasons why that has happened, particularly with respect to the ACT leading the way in having a licensing scheme here. ACT Policing have also not seen outlaw motorcycle gangs and other criminal gangs formally become involved in any ACT tobaccoists. But, of course, they are monitoring this situation very closely.

In May 2024, ACT Policing signed a joint agency agreement with the Australian Border Force to formalise their cooperation to target illicit tobacco. In response to the illicit tobacco trade, Operation Barracuda has been stood up by Border Force, ACT Policing and the AFP to work closely with Border Force to: identify individuals and companies engaging in and profiting from the sale of tobacco in the ACT; gather evidence of criminal assets and/or unexplained wealth likely to be derived from the sale of illicit tobacco in the ACT; target criminal assets for restraint under the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Act 2003 ACT; and issue penalty orders under the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Act 2003, commensurate with the assessed value of the financial benefit obtained from the sale of illegal tobacco.

On 31 May 2004, ACT Policing and Australian Border Force executed search warrants on a property in Narrabundah and two commercial premises at Holt and Belconnen. In total, 285,000 cigarettes were seized along with almost 2,000 vapes and about 100 kilos of loose-leaf tobacco, 100 nicotine pouches, more than \$14,000 in cash and other items suspected as being the proceeds of crime. The potential excise value from the number of illegal cigarettes and loose-leaf tobacco seized equates to about \$550 million. In early 2025, ACT Policing and Australian Border Force again conducted search warrants in the ACT, resulting in the seizure of illicit tobacco and vape products. Commonwealth challenges relating to the sale of vapes are currently being considered by the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

I want to take the opportunity to thank ACT Policing for their collaborative approach with the commonwealth government in fighting this illicit trade. The ACT government takes this matter seriously and condemns in the strongest terms the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products. We also recognise the significant harm that this causes to the community. I have complete confidence in ACT Policing and our commonwealth colleagues to continue to disrupt this criminal activity and hold those responsible to account.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.00): Mr Speaker, I thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion to the Assembly, I thank you for your own contribution and I especially thank Minister Stephen-Smith for her amendment. I am delighted to hear that there is agreement across the floor.

Minister Stephen-Smith eloquently put the point that I still think needs to be stressed over and over: that states and territories largely would not need to have a role with dealing with illicit markets if it were not for our porous borders. We do welcome the national initiatives and I do acknowledge your own contribution, Mr Speaker, about successive decisions made at, effectively, a national level that have resulted in a situation that is pretty hard to put back in the box.

That said, outside of the border issues that we have and the work that we are entrusting to the federal government to begin to correct, we do have responsibilities here in the ACT. You have heard from the Minister for Police and the Minister for Health, and I simply wish to add Access Canberra's role. Access Canberra is responsible for regulation of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act, effectively to ensure that licensed retailers and wholesalers meet requirements for the display and sale of tobacco and smoking products. This forms part of Access Canberra's regular program of inspections and compliance activities. Where compliance officers in the ACT receive information or complaints through their investigations, they pass information on to the other regulators and to relevant Australian government agencies for action to be taken.

I have directed that compliance activities are to remain a priority in Access Canberra, and it is explicitly referenced as a priority activity in the Fair Trading Commissioner's statement of expectations for this financial year. As a result, compliance officers will put added emphasis on inspecting licensed retail outlets and supermarkets across the ACT for compliance with the act and they will establish baseline compliance levels with obligations under the act. This aligns with what Minister Stephen-Smith outlined earlier this year and has reiterated today—that the government will be presenting a further bill in the Assembly to improve the regulatory framework and to provide graduated enforcement options to address illegal supply in the ACT.

No single measure will solve this problem, and effort is required in a coordinated way. With that, I wish to thank all of the compliance officers across government, from Access Canberra to Policing to our health officers. I think we are all probably in agreement that compliance is not always sexy and it is very often thankless. But I think this motion highlights exactly why it is so important. I welcome the opportunity to put on the record my thanks to every officer who is involved in this vital program of work.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

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

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

ACT Local Hospital Network—Part 1.2.

[Cognate expenditure: Canberra Health Services—Part 1.11]

Debate resumed.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

City and Environment Directorate—Part 1.3.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.04): I will use a road user hierarchy to structure my speech today. For the information of members, the road user hierarchy is the safety principle that places users who pose the most harm to others at the bottom, requiring them to take extra care. In this hierarchy, the most vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians, are at the top, followed by cyclists, motorcyclists, and then various motor vehicles with larger, heavier vehicles at the bottom. This system emphasises that the responsibility for safety increases with the potential harm that a vehicle can cause in a collision.

So firstly, starting with active transport, I use the government's own words from the transport strategy:

Walking and cycling are efficient and active transport modes that can move large numbers of people across dense environments. They also emit zero air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and noise while improving the vibrancy of places. They are ideal for short local trips and for connecting the last leg of public transport journeys.

I could not agree more. Unfortunately, when it comes to this budget, it is less than impressive in achieving this vision. Feedback provided by stakeholders and community members went along the lines of: “nothing about modal shift”, “no regulatory or infrastructure change”, “good words in pre-budget announcements but ultimately still piecemeal and bandaid”, “fewer indicators than previous years”, “lack of detail on policy initiatives”, “nothing in the budget that will tangibly force down transport emissions”, and “need to update budget accountability indicators to reflect policy and strategy documents”.

Whilst there is an active travel infrastructure maintenance program, this is an offset from the asset renewal program. These are not new investments but simply the renewal program at work. The only NPP is the Active Transport Fund, which ramps up slowly to \$441,000 per annum over the course of the forward estimates. This is extremely

disappointing, as active transport is an extremely cost-efficient mobility option for governments to implement—ideal to help with the budget situation. The Greens want as many Canberrans as possible to choose walking and riding, but without a city-wide network of footpaths it is not an option for most people.

The ACT already has a city-wide map which shows where we need to invest, but there is no plan to make it happen. More Canberrans would choose to walk and ride if they did not have to compete with cars on the roads. But many people who cycle around Canberra are forced onto the road and have to rely on thin, painted cycle lanes. Paint is not infrastructure, and these lines do not offer people enough safety. This danger stops many from getting on bikes. By separating bikes from cars, we can ensure that more people, especially women and families with children, feel safer choosing to ride where they need to go.

The ACT Greens also believe there needs to be secure sheltered bike storage in our town and city centres. That is why I happily sponsored the petition for secure sheltered bike storage in the Gungahlin town centre. All of this will make it easier for more people to ride more often. That is why I am concerned that government did not specify whether the cycle paths along Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen, and associated pedestrian and cycle bridges, will be done and available for community use before light rail 2B to Woden is completed. This is a critical step to ensuring an active travel network to the south of Canberra is ready to handle the upcoming disruption.

I am also concerned about what is being done at a systemic level to make sure paths are accessible and safe for everyone. The lack of suitable key performance indicators for path quality and maintenance means the quality of our path network is not measured, valued or reported on to the extent it should be.

Going down the road user hierarchy, being private motor vehicle use: did I mention road transport makes up 3.5 per cent of the 2025-26 budget, costing \$333 million this year? Or, phrased another way, it totals over \$1.3 billion over the period of the budget. This is the long pole in the transport budget tent, yet strangely immune from criticism from the opposition or the government. As an example, the total funding for the Monaro Highway upgrade increased to \$260.5 million, which includes both ACT and federal contributions. This is an increase of \$30 million. This is another example of the costs of road duplication which should be difficult to justify given the situation in the budget.

Moving on to the electrification of the motor vehicle fleet, the Greens would like to see the electrification of the vehicle fleet through incentives that drive effective behavioural change to reduce transport emissions, which currently make up 62 per cent of the ACT's total emissions. Driving this behavioural change requires taxes such as stamp duty, fees such as registration, and incentives all pulling in the same direction.

I am disappointed with the government in its response to the estimates committee's recommendation number 62:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government amend Table 8: Strategic Indicator 3.4: Increased electrification of transport (*Budget Statements E*) to align with the ACT's zero emissions vehicle strategy ambition.

The government response was:

Noted.

The Government reviews strategic indicators each year and will consider any changes to this strategic indicator as needed in future updates.

Here is a committee recommending that the government align its own strategic indicators with the government's own strategic document, and it is simply "noted"! I hope this is not the government stepping back from its own strategy.

Moving on to buses, I will not go into detail on MyWay+ today, given the ongoing inquiry into the rollout of this program, and I am sure we will have yet more debates on this. I will note that the rollout of this program has had a detrimental impact on users' experience of our public transport system, putting them off and dissuading them. It is a far cry from the world-class ticketing system I would love to see Canberra actually have.

What concerns me more is the lack of a plan to replace the passenger information displays at interchanges. Here we are nearly a year after MyWay+ went live, and the government is still considering options for an information display that they knew would go dark when the old MyWay system was turned off. Now it is the users of our public transport system who have been left in the dark. Before the minister says, "They can refer to their phone," I point out that not all bus users have phones, whether they be seniors, children or other members of community who simply do not have one.

Another area of disappointment is the response to the questions on notice that stated only 409 out of the 2,495 active bus stops in the network are Disability and Discrimination Act compliant. This only serves to remind us that the majority of bus stops prevent some sections of our community utilising the bus network. I do welcome the government's announced increase in bus frequency, but my enthusiasm is tempered, given this is only hourly and is only up to 2 pm on a Sunday afternoon. This frequency is still challenging for those who are seeking to move around our city by bus, whether it be to work a shift in hospitality or catch up with friends or family—and it does not help if you need to do this on a Sunday afternoon or evening.

For all of these laments, it does not have to be this way. With vision and planning, it is possible to improve frequency with the existing bus fleet and driver workforce. If we get our buses out of traffic, we can have more services with less waiting time and get more people on board. We need to invest in more bus lanes, starting with our three biggest bottlenecks, being: Belconnen town centre to the city via UC and the northside hospital; the ANU to Constitution Avenue via the city bus interchange and the Legislative Assembly stop; and Molonglo to Adelaide Avenue.

I look forward to seeing the results of the feasibility study on the Belconnen transitway that is expected to be completed by the end of 2025, but I am concerned there is as yet no timeframe for public release on this document. An important element that needs considering in this study is the future-proofing for light rail stage 3 to Belconnen. We also need to maximise dedicated bus lanes along Cotter Road for the R7 and R10 services. Jump lanes are helpful but will not be sufficient to deal with the demand already existing in that rapidly growing part of Canberra.

We also need to be future focused and start working on building more bus depots in order to improve bus frequency and add more suburban school services. The main priorities for these are bus depots in Mitchell and then west Belconnen. This will let the ACT grow our bus fleet and allow us to keep improving bus services.

I will move on now to libraries. I appreciate the ACT libraries were in the middle of an internal working group process whilst this budget was developed, but the lack of additional injection into ACT libraries in this budget is disappointing, given the evident challenges within that system. We know that libraries across Canberra are struggling to staff their facilities, leading to regular unplanned closures and increasing pressure on staff. Public libraries are not a luxury. They are vital community hubs, and among the last truly inclusive spaces where all Canberrans are welcome free of charge and free of judgment. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

Our librarians are essential workers who serve, with dedication and humility, Canberrans from all walks of life. They deserve job security and good working conditions for their invaluable contribution to our community.

The government talks about how ACT libraries are meeting the standards. I agree with this in terms of one standard—the opening hours. But the report is silent regarding the other standard, which is the number of full-time equivalent staff for the population. This is cherry-picking a performance against one benchmark without mentioning the other, to the detriment of the debate.

The benchmark is 0.8 FTE per 3,000 population. Based on our current population of 453,885 people in the ACT, that should equate to 121 FTE in our libraries system. Unfortunately, there are currently only 86; or, to express it another way, we are running on only 70 per cent of the national benchmark. No amount of cutting back on opening hours, closing branches or changing service offerings will make up for that shortfall.

As I have previously stated in the Assembly, I note the recommendation for a midcycle budget adjustment of \$1.7 million per annum. I appreciate the minister's comment that there is interdependency, as this may be impacted, depending on which of the report's recommendations are implemented. But I return to the point that there is no getting around the fact that staffing levels per population are under the national benchmarks.

Finally, in terms of room hire, while not a budget decision per se, I point out that the decision to increase the fees for library room hire for not-for-profit organisations is an example of losing sight of what is important for our community. This change, done in the interests of simplifying fee structures, will result in a doubling of room hire fees so as to align with commercial organisations. This is despite the immense value these organisations provide to our community. They might be teaching languages, raising awareness of health issues, or simply bringing community together. These organisations are already struggling with spiralling insurance costs, and now they are being hit with yet another fee increase. I am glad to see that the government have agreed in principle to address this issue in their response to the estimates committee report.

I want to move on to climate change—specifically, climate adaptation. It is very timely that we should be discussing climate change in this debate on the ACT budget, as the

federal government released its National Climate Risk Assessment on Monday. There is some sobering reading in this national assessment. There are some things that we already know. Our climate has already changed and will continue to change. Future changes in Australia's climate will not occur gradually or smoothly. As climate hazards change in frequency and increase in severity, it is likely that we will experience more compounding, cascading and concurrent hazards in the future.

Here in the ACT, we can expect to see more extreme heat events and a longer bushfire season every year. This will double or quadruple the amount of time we spend in heatwaves. Mortality due to extreme heat will increase, as will deaths attributable to poor air quality from bushfire smoke. We have already seen an impact on the mental health of children and young people as a result of climate change. We can only expect mental health outcomes to deteriorate over the coming years. These are the risks we need to be ready to face in the coming years, but the question is: is the ACT ready?

The budget is a principal tool through which the ACT government grapples with those risks, in an effort to keep the overall cost of those risks as manageable as possible. A good budget would look at the medium to long-term risks and work out the investments needed to minimise the costs over the long term. Does the latest budget do this? Is the budget responding to the risk of climate change appropriately?

The budget spends \$238 million on the environment, sustainable development and climate change combined. In previous years, the ACT spent around three per cent of its budget on this portfolio. This year, it has dropped to just two per cent of the budget. Can Canberrans be confident that we are ready to face the risks outlined in the national assessment?

When I look at this budget, I am not seeing much on the transformational scale that is needed to respond to the scale of the problem of climate change. The ACT is a leader in emissions reduction, but we need urgently to continue our climate mitigation agenda. Canberrans expect us to do our part in reducing emissions and to ensure that we do not see some of the runaway risk of global warming as detailed in the national assessment.

A big, known and obvious gap that we need to deal with is the electrification of apartment blocks. The problem comes in two dimensions. The first is the replacement of communal gas hot-water systems, which became a standard fixture of apartment developments over the last few decades. This so-called transition fuel has left us with a big transitional problem. The second problem is access to electric vehicle charging infrastructure in residential car parks. Apartment buildings were not typically designed with any meaningful level of power supply to their basement areas in mind.

Solving these issues is not simply a matter of changing over a water heater or running a few cables. The scale of an apartment building throws up additional challenges, including the possible need for base electrical supply upgrades and new metering systems to ensure equitable billing. Sinking funds of owners corporations have not been prepared with these needs in mind, creating new challenges for financing them. This is just one example of a transition we need to undertake in the face of a changing climate.

When it comes to adapting to our changing climate, Canberra should be taking advantage of the unique character in our city to champion interesting and innovative

solutions. This could include city cooling interventions like misting systems, water features, shade structures and planted facades. This could transform areas of high urban heat into vibrant and attractive urban spaces right in the heart of our city and in our town centres.

We should be looking at how the government can increase access to parks and green spaces during heatwaves. Wetlands, ponds and lakes play an important role in cooling. Our network of parks and water bodies should form part of our climate adaptation strategy.

The government could take some steps to help guide and facilitate our transition so that it can proceed efficiently and equitably, but the budget looks to be kicking that can down the road in a way that makes the transition more expensive for everyone in the long run. The national assessment has provided the foundational building blocks to understand climate risk. The next step is for us, as decision-makers and elected representatives, to mitigate runaway warming and to work to adapt to climate risk.

When I look at this budget, I am not optimistic that we are ready to face those challenges. The Greens will continue to fight for genuine climate action in this Assembly because we know that Canberrans expect the ACT to take strong action on the climate.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.22): The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's *Close to the edge* report found that "government spending on the environment at all jurisdictional levels is meagre and demonstrably inadequate". Her report also found that a lack of reform is "tacit acceptance of and contribution to the biodiversity crisis". She said that it was locking in year-on-year degradation. She said that at a time when only three per cent of our budget was spent on climate, environment and sustainable development. This year's budget puts aside only two per cent for climate, environment and sustainable development.

Environment is one of our 12 wellbeing priorities. That means it should be one of our funding priorities. But this budget does not prioritise the environment. The estimates committee report recommended that the government consider the level of environmental funding, given the commissioner's recommendations. The government has noted that. The government has not provided any commentary or any kind of meaningful response to that. I am quite worried that next year's budget may have two per cent or one per cent for climate, environment and sustainable development. We do not know.

If Labor want to show that they value biodiversity, if they want to stop species going extinct on their watch and if they want to restore ecosystems, it cannot happen without a fundamental shift in our policy and our environmental funding landscape.

There is a really long list of environmental projects that a Greens budget would have prioritised. We would have made sure there was proper funding and good process for community environmental organisations. We would have delivered the Conservation Council's biodiversity network—that network of all the corridors and patches throughout Canberra that provide habitat for all our wildlife and that make sure that our environmental areas are connected. We would have used strategic land use planning

and habitat restoration, and we would have made sure that there was much better weeds management than there has been. We know climate change is making all these problems worse. We also would have overhauled our offsets policy; instead, we saw environmental cuts.

I want to talk a little bit about the environmental organisations who are the backbone of environmental protection here in the ACT. They do all the hard work. They are providing \$21.5 million in free labour for government. That was the finding and a recommendation from former commissioner reports. Many of those organisations are government partners in habitat restoration work and, after years of partnership and good-faith engagement, they have been repaid with a structural refunding process that they were not involved in. There were no performance issues flagged; the government simply decided that those organisations needed to operate more efficiently, and the government decided that they wanted these small community organisations to compete in a public tender for their own turf, so to speak, to maintain our grasslands.

The government has not been able to demonstrate how their intellectual property has been respected. We have not seen how the existing volunteer base will be factored into the open procurement process that has been commenced. The government has not been able to say whether the exemptions in the Government Procurement Act that apply to these situations have been considered. The minister told us that she kept them informed, but that is not what we heard from the organisations. We heard that the organisations were treated inconsistently; different organisations got different information throughout the process.

I want to spell out exactly what happened here. The organisations went to the directorate to have meetings, and the directorate told them they could not tell them anything because it was up to the minister to make those decisions. These organisations then went to meet the minister, and the minister told them that she could not tell them anything about the process because it was up to the directorate to make those decisions. The same advisers were in the room for both of those meetings, and the organisations still did not know.

I asked the minister about this during estimates, and the minister said, “All of this is under review. I can’t answer these questions. It’s under review; no decisions have been made.” A few days after the estimates process finished, the notices appeared on a public tender website. We still have not had a public explanation for what is going on here.

Usually, when government has run commissioning processes or public tender processes, it does a needs analysis to see how much funding is required. That usually involves an uplift in funding. The one key piece of information we have had on the public record from the minister during this process is that there will be no uplift in funding.

Usually, the process takes years, and it is developed in deep consultation with the sector, and that is clearly not what happened here. We still do not know, with one of these tender processes, whether three catchment groups will be defunded and drop down to one catchment group, whether those groups will have to compete with one another, or quite what the structure is, because only one tender has been notified on the advance tender website, and the organisations themselves do not know what is happening.

I asked a question seeking the details of the funding for these organisations on 15 August. The answer was due on 22 August. I received that answer at lunchtime today, four weeks late, and four hours before we were to debate the budget. I would love to ask the minister some more questions, but I cannot, because we have no opportunity to do so. The answer was that Landcare ACT have had their funding dropped from last year to this year. The Canberra Environment Centre have had their funding dropped. The Ginninderra Catchment Group have had their funding dropped. The Southern ACT Catchment Group have had their funding dropped. The Molonglo Catchment Group have had their funding dropped.

I do not know whether this is a comprehensive answer. It clearly took a lot of time for the minister to put together, given that it arrived one month late. I do not understand why it was so difficult to get this information, given that the directorate—the minister or somebody—was clearly involved in the funding decision because they were restructuring it. I do not know whether this is the complete answer or whether there is some other funding somewhere else. We have not even had a chance to ask the organisations themselves if they understand that their funding may have been cut.

This is not the right way to make these decisions. An environment minister needs to make decisions that benefit the environment, as a bare minimum. A minister needs to explain what the decisions are, answer questions and provide the information on the public record and to the groups affected.

I am looking forward to finding out more information about these funding cuts, and I am very much hoping that the answer to this question on notice is somehow, in some way, misleading, that it does not represent real funding cuts and that there is other funding somewhere else. Clearly, that will be a conversation for another day because the time has now expired.

We have had some other disappointments from our environment minister in this patch. There is some new money for dragons, which is great—\$4½ million, plus another \$1 million from the Canberra Airport Group, to try and reclaim some social licence from the habitat destruction that has gone on there. Federal Labor's approval of the road and ACT Labor's acceptance, in doing basically nothing to influence their federal counterparts, was another nail in the coffin. We are wondering how this stacks up with Labor's claim of no new extinctions on their watch. We are very much hoping that we can hold that up.

Of course, we have seen the deaths of 38 of the dragons in the government's captive breeding program during this time. It is clear that habitat protection and restoration and keeping the dragons in the wild are even more important. The minister has not committed to any of this funding going to protecting remaining areas of dragon habitat. We have been told that it is business as usual. It is clearly not business as usual. We need to protect that habitat if we are going to save them.

The budget has funded a landscape plan and a landscape architect position. I am pleased to see those. The landscape architect, again, is Greens policy, and it is good to see that coming along. We do not have a lot of information about what that position will achieve, and it is certainly doing some heavy lifting in the environmental space. It would be

great to get some details.

We asked whether that position would perhaps be working to set up the biodiversity network that the Conservation Council worked on for the last few years, and whether that position would be helping to protect important habitat off-reserve on rural lands, public unleased land and a lot of the sites and places that are not currently protected. The only clear information we got was, “No, that’s not what that position will do.” The estimates committee report recommended that the landscape architect role should be clearly defined, and the only comment we got back from government was that it was noted. We still do not actually know what this role will do.

I am also very disappointed to see that it looks like the Healthy Waterways program has essentially ended. We do not seem to have any new projects or any money in the forward estimates for this. I believe my colleague Laura Nuttall will have a little more to say about that.

There is some good news on the circular economy. We are finally getting around to building some of that important infrastructure here in the territory. Unfortunately, it is costing us quite a lot, and we have a bit of a lack of clarity around whether we are getting value for money on that. The new materials recovery facility which processed household and commercial recycling burnt down in a battery fire in 2022. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

That recycling facility was meant to be replaced in 2025. It will not be ready until 2028. In the meantime, we are spending \$10 million a year—\$60 million, for the six-year delay—to ship our waste interstate. It is also hard to see how we are getting a really good deal on this new recycling facility. The ACT government is paying around \$280 million to build and run it. The last facility—and this was just for the facility, not for the operations—was valued at \$3.2 million. I am finding it quite difficult to understand how much the costs have shifted in that time. We are also only getting \$10½ million of commonwealth funding to help us to build this facility, and it is quite expensive—\$280 million. It does not look to me like a lot of commonwealth funding.

I am worried that that facility will not meet our community expectations about recycling. When these plants were first set up, they were designed to recycle everything that you bought in the supermarket. That facility is not currently designed to recycle soft plastics, plastic bags, disposable coffee cups, bamboo plates and cutlery, bioplastic plates and cutlery, medicine blister packs, wax-lined or plastic-lined containers, and many of our hard plastics. That is an awful lot of fairly basic packaging material that will not be recycled in that plant, and it currently does not have any plans for national product stewardship to make sure that that material will be designed out or recycled through another scheme.

It also will not recycle soy sauce plastic fish containers. We thought maybe that was a simple one to ban because we already have the system for banning these little, problematic plastics. It is on the list of national problem plastics. Unfortunately, when the ACT government were recently asked whether they would follow the South Australia ban, they instantly said, “No, we won’t.” I am very much hoping that the ACT government will reconsider that, because banning it, if you do not want to recycle it, is a really great option. Until we have mandatory product stewardship schemes in place

for our hard-to-recycle items, our waste to landfill will keep increasing.

Our new FOGO food and organics facility is progressing. It is still under procurement. Again, the costs and the delays are worrying. There are other options for how we could recycle in this town. There are a lot of homegrown businesses. We are already getting great results from the windrow trial that we are operating. There are many councils that are using lots of different recycling solutions for our food and organic waste. Some of the councils in our region are actually using ACT businesses to do that.

The FOGO plant will cost the ACT government over \$100 million and, so far, it looks like only \$13 million will come from our federal Labor friends. Again, I am quite concerned about how little commonwealth funding we are getting for quite an expensive piece of plant. It was meant to be finished by 2023. It will not be operating now, we think, until 2028. In the meantime, a lot of our food waste is going to landfill, where it is generating the destructive greenhouse gas methane.

I am genuinely pleased to see the urban wood waste strategy being funded and shaping up well. I know the former minister was pretty passionate about that one. With the industry consultation and the shape of that scheme, it actually looks like it is progressing extremely well, and we will probably have great results from that—a great crossover with our industry, our art and the use of our street trees. It is a really good example of circular economy policy that can be done well.

I also want to acknowledge some other good news in the environment which is happening now in my electorate, in Belconnen. The government is doing some good work with our Landcarers out there by co-developing the playground upgrades at Umbagogong in the budget. There were a few blips along the way. I think that is landing in a really good place, with good consultation. We are also pleased to see that there will be some upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park coming through.

There are some good city service upgrades coming through as well. We have some good co-design projects coming along. I think it is important to make sure that we are co-designing those projects. People in Canberra have a lot of great local information about their areas and a lot of strong opinions. We cannot please everybody with the way we design these things, but we can at least listen to them on the way through.

A lot of people in west Belconnen would like to see a dedicated, separated cycling path, so that they can get from Belconnen all the way through to Civic and to other areas in Canberra, where they need to work, where they have friends and family, and where they need to go shopping. We need much better connections in west Belconnen in particular. We also need much better paths than we have at the moment for all of our communities, so that we can walk around more easily, so that those of us who are mobility impaired or pushing prams can get about town, and so that people can get down to their local bus stop. It is really important that we properly fund our paths and our bike paths.

We have seen a bit of progress with our planning work, both in the budget and in government policy at the moment. We need a lot more funding to deliver and maintain our community infrastructure, our green spaces and our urban environment, but it is really good that we are proceeding with some major decisions. It is great to see the progress on our missing middle reform. The Greens are pleased to help move that along,

and it is good to see that genuine consultation coming along.

We are also pleased with the commitment to set city limits and to protect our western edge. It is really important that we do that work well and carefully, so that we are looking after our environment. It is great to see that we will move to that compact city that we have talked about for so long and recognised in policies and brochures, but in actual fact have not been delivering on the ground.

It is good to see that we are trying to bed down this new planning system. There are still a lot of blips along the way. I was a bit disappointed during estimates to find out that, two years on from the new act coming in, the City and Environment Directorate is only now considering the appropriate scope and delivery method for the first major evaluation under the evaluation framework. The results of that work will help to show us how well the system is working and which bits of the system we need to fix up.

I am also quite worried about compliance. I think we are now moving towards having much better laws, but our compliance is letting people down on the ground. We have a lot of evidence that people are not complying with the terms of their lease. We ran through this in question time yesterday. We have seen that with Big Splash, Richardson shops and Hawker Tennis Centre. We have seen it with so many sites around Canberra. Government needs to make sure that the leasehold system is used to support compliance and enforcement action. We have good powers in there. Now we need to use them. The Greens are very supportive of making sure we have additional resources allocated to our compliance teams. If that is the hold-up, let us give them some more people to do the work.

We also support the allocation of funding to deliver more housing to current and future Canberrans, and to do that as quickly as possible. We need to do that within our existing urban area. That, of course, will mean there are much better results for people. It will mean that, when we are building new homes, and when we are allowing new homes to be built, they will be close to schools, shops, public transport, parks, playgrounds, and all the services that people need.

It is really important that, as we increase the density in our existing urban areas, we are also looking at how much green space we are preserving in those areas. We need to preserve that both on the residential blocks and on our public land. We supported the improved green space and tree canopy requirements on residential blocks in the missing middle work. The Campbell 5 development and the associated Hassett Park show us how increased density and well-designed public spaces can work together on some of our key sites. I am looking forward to seeing that in Belconnen town centre as well.

These concerns about environmental impact are echoed in the release of the National Climate Risk Assessment and National Adaptation Plan that my colleague Mr Braddock has already mentioned. We need to understand the nature of climate risk, and we need to embed the need for climate adaptation and reduction into our land use, our housing and our core infrastructure planning, as we move into a much hotter and more dangerous world.

I am pleased to see funding being put into future studies, like the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. Those studies include the ones being promoted by

the private sector, like the Ainslie Football Club, and they were identified in our district strategies as possible change areas. If they are developed, those areas will increase our housing numbers, and they will increase those numbers in areas that are close to public transport, community infrastructure, green spaces, shops and employment. That is helping us to get housing in the right location.

There is a lot of change going on in Canberra at the moment. It is important to make sure that we are connecting with our communities as we are making these changes, that we are looking after our First Nations cultural rights and our environmental rights, and that we are looking after the rights of some of the people who have less loud voices in a lot of these spaces. It is important that we are making decisions today that are looking after the future of Canberra, to make sure that we still have the beautiful bush and the beautiful environment that we are enjoying at the moment.

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

Max Kiermaier—tribute

MR SPEAKER: So that it is recorded in *Hansard*, I want to mention that we are mighty pleased to have Mr Max Kiermaier back in the building assisting us, in the absence of Mr Duncan in this fortnight. It has been a pleasure to have him here.

They call him “midnight Max”. That is because when he took over as clerk, there were a number of sittings immediately afterwards that went past midnight. But I am happy to say that that is not going to occur in this particular iteration of his involvement here. It is always good to have Max here.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 118AA Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry

MR SPEAKER: There were some matters raised at the end of question time pertaining to standing order 118AA.

The first of them came from Mr Cocks, regarding Ms Stephen-Smith’s answer to question 1, particularly on the question of:

Minister, how have you interpreted “independent”?

After discussions with the Clerk, we have found that there is no basis to the call of 118AA here. In part that is because the question did ask the minister for an opinion, and additionally because in answers to subsequent questions we think that she very clearly did cover much of the area regarding the independence of the appointment of Mr Walsh, and further detailed in information that was put on the table in matters arising from question time. So, the answer, I am sorry, Mr Cocks, is no.

Horseracing industry—work health and safety

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay raised a similar call regarding Mr Pettersson’s answer to the question:

What regulatory action is the government taking to try to make this industry safer?

We are not ruling in favour of Ms Clay on this. We think that Mr Pettersson touched briefly on WorkSafe ACT's focus on Thoroughbred Park. I think we take on board that probably 95 per cent of Mr Pettersson's answer was not directly related to that specific question, but he did relate his answer to things that had been raised in quite a long preamble.

So, in this instance, the 118AAs have not landed.

Statements by members

Environment—Intrepid Landcare

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.46): Last week my lovely colleague, Ms Clay, and I had the pleasure of meeting Carmen and Rosie from Intrepid Landcare. Landcare are the backbone of environmental protection in the ACT and across the country. They get their hands dirty and do the hard work that few others, including government, want to spend their time or money on—the weeding, the planting, and yes, more weeding.

Now when I say Landcare, it probably evokes an image of your lovely neighbour, maybe in their 60s or 70s, tirelessly dedicated to protecting their local patch—and of course, bringing the best bikkies or scones along to support the troops. But this Landcare group is different. Intrepid Landcare are young people, empowering other young people to do stuff that matters.

Carmen and Rosie told me that the ACT branch, which is part of the club's network at ANU, has almost 150 members. That is massive: 150 young people spending their free time digging weeds. I was gobsmacked. They want to expand their group outside of the ANU, so young people in the ACT can join in. So if you are listening!

It is so important that organisations and volunteer groups like Intrepid Landcare are able to do succession planning, to keep our communities connected to our natural environment and keep a really strong pipeline of people who are dedicated to supporting our ecosystems. In order to do that, these groups need our full support, and I urge everyone at the Assembly to connect with Intrepid Landcare and support them in whatever way you can.

Community events—Sri Chinmoy Oneness Home Peace Run 2025

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.47): I rise to speak about the recent Sri Chinmoy Oneness Home Peace Run 2025; a global relay for peace that visited Canberra recently. I was honoured alongside some of my Assembly colleagues—and I will name them towards the end—to welcome the international team at the Legislative Assembly as they shared with us the torch and flame, a powerful symbol of hoped for harmony, good will and unity. The peace run, founded in 1987, has visited more than 150 countries, carrying its simple but profound message: "Peace begins with me".

In 2025, the team ran around Australia with over 15,000 kilometres, engaging with schools, communities and leaders across the nation. Some of the runners who were here

in Canberra had actually done the whole course, which is quite amazing.

Holding the torch here in Canberra was a reminder of the importance of respect, hope and shared humanity. I want to thank the peace run team for bringing this message to our Assembly and inspiring us all, as well as reminding us all of the importance of carrying the spirit of peace to our daily lives, even in this Assembly.

And I do want to acknowledge as well that it was lovely to be joined by Ms Lee, Mr Rattenbury, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick on that occasion.

Animals—superb fairy-wrens

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (5.49): I just wanted to quickly talk to the Assembly tonight about the news over the weekend about the loss of many superb fairy-wrens at the Botanic Gardens and Mount Ainslie. I know it is unusual for me to be talking about something like this, but I was so taken by the story I thought it would be something useful to provide to the Assembly for members' information.

I just love the social nature of fairy-wrens and how, as a group, they look after each other and support each other. But what has been described as quite remarkable is the ABC reported a 60 per cent decline in superb fairy-wrens at the Botanic Gardens. ANU researchers have been monitoring the fairy-wren population for 40 years. Twenty years ago there were 180 fairy-wrens at the Botanic Gardens, and now there are just 37.

I heard a lot of conversation about this decline in numbers and the actual causes of it. It is complex, but they believe what has also contributed to the deaths was the late autumn heatwave that we had in the ACT, followed by the extreme cold temperature drops, and so they just froze.

The wrens, which weigh about 10 grams, spend their entire lives within a few hundred metres. Breeding pairs are often helped by offspring from previous years to help out. Males often perform charming courtship rituals—they are apparently quite promiscuous—and superb fairy-wrens are known for their vocal mimicry that sometimes incorporates the alarms of other bird species in their repertoire.

Education—student performance

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.50): I rise today to share a statement, to be brought to the attention of the Assembly, from a young man who attends a local independent school in Tuggeranong. With his permission, I share the following:

Dear Taimus,

I believe that a more serious approach should be taken in teaching in middle and high school. Education is the cornerstone of developing the youth to prosper and grow. The current educational teaching standards are poor, as teachers tend to focus more on giving students worksheets rather than understanding their strengths and weaknesses, and helping them develop their unique skill sets. And because of this, student performance in the ACT is decreasing, and as more resources are used

towards education, students continue to underperform.

Currently, student motivation in schools is low, where high grades are seen as ‘nerdy’ or ‘not worth the effort’. Teachers can significantly help in fixing this issue by teaching in a manner where students feel more eager and motivated to learn, aiding in bridging the gap in students’ learning by focusing more on each student as an individual.

We desperately need greater effort and support from teachers to ensure Australia’s future is successful and in good hands. Teachers can be supported in these goals by increasing salaries, conducting more mandatory parent-teacher interviews/conferences, adding more assistant teachers in larger classes, increasing teaching modes to boost student engagement, and highlighting the importance and effects of teaching during teaching courses.

Aviation industry—Qantas

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.52): I was contacted yesterday by one of the staff directly impacted by Qantas’s planned closure of its Canberra crew base. Plans, I am told, were communicated to staff through an email entitled “Heads-up” followed by an afternoon in town hall.

Mr Speaker, if this closure goes ahead, around 30 Canberrans will face the decision to either walk away from the lives they have built in Canberra or to walk away from their livelihoods. To quote the email I received yesterday:

The thought of having to take my children out of school in Canberra, leave our friends and network, and start again in a city we do not want to live in, is extremely hard to take. Canberra is our home.

I know it is hard to do business in the ACT and that changes like the ACT government’s payroll tax may make it even harder for larger businesses to stick around, but I urge Qantas not to proceed with the closure of the Canberra base, because that closure would be at the expense of local staff and the community, as well as at the expense of trust in the Qantas brand.

Community events—Toora Women Re-love fundraiser

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.53): On Sunday, 28 September, at Belco Labor Club, the Re-love Fashion Parade and Pre-loved Clothing Sale is back: bigger and better than ever. Tickets are only \$15, and doors open at 1 pm, with a fashion parade at 2 pm. You can shop for women’s designer labels, unworn pieces, pre-loved clothes and accessories of all shapes and sizes. Clothes are in sizes six to 24, all for the great bargain of \$5 an item. The best bit is that all proceeds are going to support Toora Women, helping local women impacted by domestic violence and homelessness.

Earlier this year, my office and I donated some clothes to Re-love when they were doing their big clothes drive, so I hope they find a new home on the 28th. It promises to be a great afternoon, with a raffle and lucky door prizes. Come along and support Toora and pick up some great outfits, all while recycling clothes.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Roads—William Hovell Drive

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.54): I rise to speak on something that has already been raised in the Assembly today on behalf of thousands of Canberrans who travel William Hovell Drive every single day: parents rushing to school drop-offs, nurses heading to early shifts, tradies hauling gear before sunrise and students chasing opportunity. This road is more than just asphalt; it is a lifeline for many in west Belconnen and, of course, the developing region of Ginninderry. Right now, it is failing people who rely on it.

The government's plan to duplicate William Hovell Drive is, on paper, a step in the right direction. But in reality, it is too slow, too costly and far too disconnected from the lived experience of our community. Three years and \$107 million are the timeline and the price tag that we have been given. But what about the real cost of delay? The near misses at unlit intersections; the frustration at gridlock; the anxiety of parents waiting for their kids to get home; the resignation of commuters who feel their voices do not matter.

I have spoken to the residents in west Belconnen in particular, and their stories are not just about traffic; they are about being frustrated by the lack of progress. They are asking: "Is anyone really getting on with this?" I want them to know that I am certainly going to be speaking, as I am now, and continuing to speak, to call on the government to act more promptly and find ways to make this happen.

Infrastructure must reflect the dignity of the people it serves: roads should be safe, projects transparent, and government must act with urgency and not delay. I call on the government to accelerate the timeline, because safety delayed is safety denied; to breakdown the budget, because transparency builds trust—show us the detail; and to engage meaningfully with the community, because consultation is not a box to tick but a conversation, and a real one, to be had. William Hovell Drive is not just a project; it is a promise that is very, very important to the people of central and west Belconnen.

Mr Speaker, I want to stand with the community, and I promise to keep advocating for the government to deliver in a more timely manner this very important infrastructure. I do want to thank the Greens for highlighting during question time today, as well, the promises, or so-called promises, for walking paths and active travel options, and shared off-road ramps. We hope to hear more about that as well.

Dementia Action Week

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.57): Today I want to bring your attention to Dementia Action Week, which is running from 15 to 21 September. Led by Dementia Australia, this year's theme is "Nobody Can Do It Alone". With an estimated 433,300

Australians of all ages living with dementia and 1.7 million people involved in their care, chances are you know someone who is impacted by dementia.

Of those living with dementia, there are an estimated 29,000 people living with younger onset dementia, diagnosed when they were younger than 65. Additionally, about 1,500 children are living with childhood dementia. In the Australian Capital Territory, there are an estimated 6,100 people living with all forms of dementia, and an estimated 430 people living with younger onset dementia. This figure is expected to more than double to 12,300 by 2054.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has just revealed that dementia is now the leading cause of death for all Australians. It is the leading cause of death for women and is second to heart disease for men.

Dementia does not just impact the person living with the condition and their immediate carers. It also impacts their friends, family and wider social network. People living with dementia often report that friends and family often drop away, not knowing how to interact with them once they have a diagnosis. This leads to social isolation and loneliness and can further drive stigma and discrimination.

According to a recent dementia discrimination report, almost half of people living with dementia said people treated them differently since finding out they had dementia, and more than half of people caring for someone living with dementia felt isolated. We need our local communities, businesses, institutions and ACT government frontline services to become dementia friendly. This will lead to a greater understanding of dementia, less stigma, more people seeking help early and more inclusive support to keep people active in our communities for longer.

I welcome the initiatives taken by ACT libraries to be dementia-friendly spaces. I welcome the newly formed Canberra Dementia Alliance and wish them well with their vision to create a dementia-friendly city, where those living with dementia and their carers can live well, be valued, feel understood and stay active and engaged with the Canberra community. As part of Dementia Action Week, I encourage everyone in the community to reach out and reconnect to someone impacted by dementia, because nobody can do it alone.

Bishop Pat Power—tribute

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (6.00): I want to use my adjournment speech tonight to talk about Bishop Pat Power and my relationship with him over the years I knew him—decades, probably. I met him for the first time when I was organising with United Workers Union. Just like everybody else who knew Bishop Pat Power, I was surprised, despite his age, and deeply saddened to learn of his death on Monday, 15 September. He was the kind of person who you thought would live forever and was ageless, so it did come as a surprise to me, as perhaps anyone who had ever met Father Pat would understand, with his connection and true commitment to people in our community and people anywhere.

He was often described in his time as a bishop in the ACT as one of the most progressive and outspoken bishops within the Catholic Church, particularly around the clerical sexual abuse within the church, and with his words towards the Vatican and how they responded to that. I know in the conversations I had with Father Pat that it affected him deeply and personally. The decision he made to retire as bishop and to return back to being a priest was because he was so hurt by the lack of decisions by the Vatican. He thought his role would be more powerful working within the church as a priest, and that he could support people better by doing that work.

But what I most admired about Father Pat was his dignity and the respect that he automatically afforded to anyone, regardless of who they were and where they came from. His kindness was shown in any circumstances, and even during those hard times for him personally, he was always there for everybody else.

I always listened to Father Pat when he spoke. I think everybody did. He was quietly spoken, but his words were full of strength and honour and hope. Listening to him speak during the rallies I had attended with him before working here—he was an incredible person. I know that he will be so missed by everybody.

When I heard of his death, I scrambled around in my kept memories and found some letters he wrote to me. He had handwritten them on his Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn Auxiliary Bishop paper, with “retired” next to it, continuing to make the point about why he retired. He wrote one letter congratulating me on being elected, which was lovely—having a handwritten note from somebody like Pat Power. I feel incredibly lucky. He also wrote to me and said, “Just a little note to offer my support in what must be a difficult time for you.” Something was going on in my life, and he said:

You are to be admired for sticking to your guns, and I have seen you stand up consistently for people doing it tough in the Canberra community. I promise to keep your family in my prayers, Yvette. No need to reply. God bless. Pat Power.

Pat knew I was not a religious person, but he treated me equally, and the same as everybody else as well. We used to have some lovely chats about what we were going to do to make Canberra better for the people in our community that needed our support.

I will miss Father Pat. I will miss seeing him at all of the rallies that he used to come to. I will miss his standing up and speaking out for those in our community that are the most disadvantaged.

Today I want to pass on my sincere condolences to friends and family of Father Pat and to anybody that knew him, like me. His contributions were rare for somebody in his role, but they certainly will not be forgotten.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.05 pm.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025

Amendments moved by the Minister for Human Rights

1

Clause 2

Page 2, line 3—

omit clause 2, substitute

2 Commencement

- (1) This Act (other than section 4A) commences on 1 January 2027.

Note The naming and commencement provisions automatically commence on the notification day (see Legislation Act, s 75 (1)).

- (2) Section 4A commences on 1 January 2029.

2

Clause 4

Proposed new section 27D (2)

Page 2, line 15—

omit everything before paragraph (a), substitute

- (2) The immediately realisable aspects of this right are the following:

3

Proposed new clause 4A

Page 2, line 20—

insert

4A Section 27D (2)

omit everything before paragraph (a), substitute

- (2) Immediately realisable aspects of this right include the following: