



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

18 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 **Friday, 3 October 2025**.

Thursday, 18 September 2025

Petitions:

Ecosystems—understorey planting—petitions 28-25 and 61-25	2707
Motion to take note of petitions.....	2708
Ecosystems—understorey planting—petitions 28-25 and 61-25	2708
Public Unleased Land (Fees) Determination 2025—DI 2025-222 (Disallowance motion)	2709
Appropriation Bill 2025-2026.....	2720

Questions without notice:

ACT population projections 2025-2065	2748
ACT population projections 2025-2065	2749
ACT population projections 2025-2065	2750
Horseracing industry—workplace health and safety	2751
ACT population projections 2025-2065	2752
Planning and Development—CSIRO Ginninderra.....	2752
Phillip—Callam Street design and feasibility study	2752
Free school camps	2753
Horseracing industry—workplace health and safety	2754
ACT population projections 2025-2065	2755
Mitchell—parking and lighting	2757
Schools—out-of-area enrolment applications	2757
Heritage—national park huts.....	2758
Nursing and midwifery—staff-to-patient ratios	2760
Planning—Gungahlin cinema.....	2761

Supplementary answers to questions without notice:

ACT population projections 2025-2065—standing order 118AA	2763
ACT population projections 2025-2065—standing order 118AA	2763
ACT population projections 2025-2065—standing order 118AA	2764
Phillip—Callam Offices	2764
ACT population projections 2025-2065	2764
Horseracing industry—workplace health and safety	2765
Mitchell—car parking and lighting	2766
National parks—huts—restoration	2766
Active travel—William Hovell Drive	2766
Standing order 118AA.....	2767

Papers.....

Child care—early childhood education and care incident reports—order to table documents—variation request	2768
Community and other events—support	2781
Economy—credit rating	2789

Motion to take note of papers:

Transport Canberra—bus frequency—government response	2805
Appropriation Bill 2025-2026.....	2807
Legislative Assembly—standing order 118AA	2813

Statement by member:

Sport and recreation—Hawker Tennis Centre.....	2814
--	------

Adjournment:

Australian War Memorial—expansion.....	2814
--	------

Thursday, 18 September 2025

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Ecosystems—understorey planting—petitions 28-25 and 61-25

By Mr Braddock, from 350 and 247 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the importance of shrub and understory vegetation for ecosystems in the ACT, noting that:

- A multi-layered habitat, including grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees (including dead trees and fallen timber) is essential for a wide variety of small native animals including birds, lizards and insects.
- Healthy understory vegetation helps maintain soil structures and retain water within the landscape.
- A focus on tree-planting alone will have limited benefits in helping the ACT adapt to climate change, and trees in a mown area do not create an urban forest.
- There are many areas currently mown which could become complex habitat. In areas under trees when mowing ceases, native grasses and mid-story plants such as wattles often emerge. The funds currently spent on mowing these areas could be spent on weeding and planting understory.
- With appropriate government support, such as weed identification training, tools and insurance, some of the weeding and other maintenance could be done by local residents, including but not limited to Landcare groups.
- Some areas, mainly newly developed, incorporate complex habitat, for instance the light rail corridor and some sections of the median strip of

Drakeford Drive.

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

- Cease mowing treed areas except where necessary for fire or visibility and within 2 meters of paths, and repurpose associated funding towards weeding and the planting of understory vegetation;
- Retain dead and fallen timber within the landscape where it does not obstruct public amenity or present a risk to safety;
- Incorporate shrub and understory planting practices into the Government's tree-planting and maintenance activities; and
- Replace gravel median strips with grass, shrubs and trees where appropriate.

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.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Ecosystems—understorey planting—petitions 28-25 and 61-25

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.02): I wish to speak to the petition on habitat development in urban Canberra, lodged by Dr John Giacon as the principal petitioner. Members may be familiar with John's work along Emu Creek in Belconnen. With the backing of the Landcare group that he started, he has been able to revegetate a significant amount of land through that corridor into an urban oasis for native plants and wildlife. Mr Speaker, walk by on a wet day, and you will hear the frogs enjoying the puddles that are now retained in the landscape along the swales that John installed.

John's vision is one where we look to build our urban environment with vegetation rather than concrete. It is one where you recognise the value trees play in shaping our public spaces. It is one where you do not have to mow the grass, because what grass is there is part of a rich understorey ecosystem. It is one where kids can go outside and find an abundance of birds, reptiles, small mammals and insects that are thriving around us.

To get to that vision, the government needs to get better at visualising what is possible. Not everything needs to be a multi-million-dollar project that goes out to tender. It is incredible what a few people can achieve, just with some shovels and tubes of seedlings.

Western culture developed with a mentality that, in order to progress, you have to clear

the land, but we are now increasingly learning the harms that come from that way of thinking. While we have got a lot better at embracing the natural environment over the decades, there are still aspects of our society and our government that find themselves stuck in the old ways of thinking.

As the government respond to this petition, and if a committee chooses to inquire, I would like them to think about what can be easily done in this city to cultivate abundance—the things we can do to build ecosystems, retain water in the landscape and produce a more beautiful bush capital. Not only is this work critical for adapting to climate change and safeguarding ourselves against rising levels of urban heat; it is also critical for keeping us in touch with the natural world as our city grows.

I again express my thanks to John Giacon. You do good work, and I know there will be more good work to come for the benefit of Canberra.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public Unleased Land (Fees) Determination 2025—DI 2025-222 **Disallowance motion**

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.04): I move:

That Disallowable Instrument DI2025-222, being Public Unleased Land (Fees) Determination 2025 (No 2), made pursuant to the Public Unleased Land Act, be disallowed.

When I heard the government had introduced new fees for the closure of footpaths a couple of months ago, I thought this was a big win for our community. I welcomed it as such. Many community members have written in, sometimes multiple times, to my office—and, I am sure, other offices—detailing the detrimental impact of the closure of footpaths around construction sites on their wellbeing.

Footpath closures may seem like a trivial issue, but consider the impact on people with visual impairment, wheelchair users, parents with prams, elderly residents with walking frames, and children on bikes. Why should they have to accommodate developers' preferences rather than the other way round?

Footpaths are public assets. They belong to our community, and I have been looking at how we can require developers to keep footpaths open during construction activities. I was genuinely glad to see the ACT government introduce these new fees. I have been spruiking them as a way to start disincentivising developers from blocking footpaths unnecessarily.

But now, apparently under pressure from the Property Council, the government has introduced this instrument to defer these fees for 12 months, because of this pressure from the Property Council, from the developers, who would have to pay these fees. The Property Council has described the deferral as an advocacy win. It said:

We commend the ACT Government and Minister Chris Steel for listening to our concerns and postponing these new charges. We will continue to work with the

Directorate on the proposed changes to get the balance right.

I do not have an issue with the Property Council advocating for its members; that is their job. But it is our job to advocate for our community. The Property Council said the government had not consulted them on these new fees. But did the government consult our community on whether they wanted these fees delayed, in order to appease those who would have to pay them?

Were people with disability asked whether they would like financial incentives to keep footpaths open so that they could move more freely throughout our city? Were elderly residents, who often use their local footpaths to get groceries, catch public transport or just be connected to their community, asked for their views? Is this a disappointing case of the government committing to something a little bit more ambitious, something I and many others have applauded, but then backflipping because of pushback?

Today, will this Assembly decide to listen to the views of community advocacy groups like Pedal Power, who expressed “significant concern regarding the proposed deferral of fees for commercial activity and intrusion onto public unleased land”? They said that “this deferral poses a serious public safety threat to major and minor roads and importantly the community path system that Pedal Power have campaigned for since our inception 50 years ago”. Will we listen to the Braddon Collective, who said:

We are disappointed that the ACT Government is proposing to delay the introduction of daily fees for footpath and road closures—a measure that we think will encourage developers to keep footpaths open and accessible to the public. The ACT community is tired of developers operating without genuine consideration for their impact on people’s daily lives. We need our elected representatives to act.

Will we listen to Canberra by Bike, who said:

Public access to footpaths and other paths must always be maintained, regardless of what development is occurring on a site. Any proposed development that impedes access must provide detours that allow people of all abilities to continue to use that location in advance of the closure of the original path.

Developers and subcontractors cannot be allowed to determine who has access to a location, because they will always prioritise profit over public access, and put people at risk of preventable traffic violence.

Will we listen to the Conservation Council, who said:

Canberrans regularly face obstructions on our footpaths and cycle paths due to construction. Such obstructions are frequently dangerous and will stop people from walking or riding to their destination. This increases car usage, polluting our city, and increasing carbon emissions.

These fees are one simple solution to deal with this problem. We call on the Government to implement them as soon as possible

Will we listen to Living Streets Canberra, who said:

The ACT community should be concerned that the government is now proposing

to delay introduction of fees by a year in response to developer advocacy but without any consultation with the broader community.

Will we listen to these voices in this Assembly or just to the voices represented by the Property Council?

If this Assembly is serious about the needs of our community, we should pass this motion, and bring in fees for the closure of footpaths in this financial year, to meaningfully prioritise pedestrians and cyclists in our cityscape, acknowledging that their needs must be centred in decision-making processes if we want to stop Canberra remaining the least walkable major city in our country.

I also note that the fees for the closure of footpaths and roads, which could provide a clear and direct community benefit, are the only fees deferred by this new instrument. The new \$93 fee for using public land like parks for events like weddings and small concerts—or, as Mr Milligan says, barbecues—and the new \$150 fee for setting up a table and chairs around a cafe on public land remain in place.

I have been here for almost 12 months. I have not yet had a single person reach out saying they are sick of all these weddings and concerts going on in their local park. But I am constantly being contacted by people who are sick of footpaths being closed unnecessarily around construction sites. I refer, for example, to the community member who uses a wheelchair, and who was forced to use the road in rush hour to get to work because construction was blocking the footpaths she uses to commute. Why would we keep the fees for the weddings in the park and defer them for the footpath closures?

In budget estimates I asked about these fees, and they were described as a disincentive for developers. Why not disincentivise prolonged footpath closures now, because our community is being impacted by them now?

Other cities seem to manage it. The North Sydney Council already charges an up-front \$200 application fee for the closure of footpaths, alongside \$10 per square metre per day for closure of footpaths where pedestrians are forced to cross the road during works. The City of Brisbane does it. Sydney's Inner West Council does it. The City of Adelaide has clear guidelines—they are worth a read—that state pedestrian access must be maintained when construction occurs that affects footpaths. Here in the ACT, we are struggling to commit.

If this motion succeeds—and I call on members to support it—in 12 months time, we will have a clear sense of whether this new fee schedule is producing the desired behaviour change. But if we kick the can down the road, we will not even know the effect of these fees until mid-2027, at the earliest.

If the government is amenable to further lobbying by the Property Council, which the Property Council signalled, on this matter, one has to wonder whether this year's delay on closure fees will not result in another delay in the future or a new instrument that wipes the fees altogether.

For this reason, I have moved this motion in the hope that the prior determination will instead come into effect—the one that had these fees for the closure of footpaths and

roads commence this year. I urge all members of this Assembly to support this disallowance motion this morning so that we can make our city a fairer, more accessible place for our community.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (10.12): I want to thank Mr Emerson for bringing forward this motion, particularly following my recent posts on social media regarding the Public Unleased Land (Fees) Determination 2025 (No 2), and how it impacts Canberrans. However, Mr Emerson appears to be focused specifically on reverting this disallowable instrument from No 2 back to No 1. Under part 1, as Mr Emerson has already indicated, road and path closures would be enforced immediately, rather than being delayed for 12 months.

I understand the intent behind introducing the road and path closures to address the current lack of incentives for contractors, builders and developers to minimise their use of public roads, paths and other government infrastructure during development work. As Mr Emerson mentioned, this motion is in response to constituents' concerns about construction works that have limited their access to public spaces, particularly footpaths and bike lanes. But let us be clear: the Public Unleased Land (Fees) Determination 2025 (No 2) does not waive these fees immediately. It simply delays the implementation by 12 months.

We on this side of the chamber support this delay. Unlike Mr Emerson, we recognise that rolling out these additional fees now would ultimately result in higher costs for consumers. These are the very people who are trying to buy a home or set up a business. The additional 12-month transition period gives contractors, builders and developers the opportunity to adjust their budgets and accounts for these new fees ahead of 2026. This is a commonsense approach that balances accountability and economic reality.

What should truly be of concern to us and Mr Emerson is the new set of fees introduced through part 2 of the determination. These are fees that apply to everyday Canberrans who want to book a small area of public land for a private event. Whether it is for a child's birthday party or a family barbecue, there is currently a \$93 application fee for a permit. Understandably, our constituents were outraged about this new barbecue tax, and that is pretty much how we campaigned on it.

In recent developments, just this week, I have had the opportunity to work with the minister's office, and it was agreed that this component of the determination was an oversight. As I understand it, it was not the intention of this change to the disallowable instrument. I would like to thank the minister's office in advance for rectifying this oversight. I am glad this oversight has been identified early and that steps will now be taken to rectify it, ensuring that non-commercial permit applications are not unfairly charged.

I will leave it to the minister to speak in detail on the steps that will be coming forward. As the opposition, it is our role to hold to account not only the government but also the crossbench. We need to critique, and we need to propose better alternatives when policy or Assembly matters do not meet community expectations and do not match the current legislation.

In conclusion, the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this motion.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.16): In our first year in our new parliament, we have had two disallowance motions. I do not think we had any in the last term. What an exciting place this parliament is!

We are talking about the Public Unleased Land Act—something that I do not think has been talked about for maybe a decade, yet we have had multiple contributions about it so far this year. It is just wonderful, Mr Speaker. I am really excited to be Manager of Government Business!

Mr Speaker, where do I begin? It is terrific that people are engaged, and I do mean that, but it would also be nice if appropriate recognition was given to government commitments, effort and ideas to get this done, rather than suggesting that some people in this place are the first people ever to think of it. In fact, in March, I gave the Assembly an exciting update on PULA and its review. That included saying—and I quote:

We will modernise the act to ensure public land and its use and value are appropriately defined, that positive uses of land are supported and encouraged, and that supporting processes are simplified and ensure that encroachment on any public land that is used for through movement, including footpaths, roads and shared paths, are limited or otherwise appropriately compensated for.

I think that signalled very early that we were looking to do this, but I also appreciate that not everyone was listening, including plenty of our stakeholders, and that is perfectly fair.

With respect to where we have got to, regarding the disallowance that Mr Emerson has put forward, the reason that we reissued this fee structure is that it became quite clear to us that this was a significant change for industry and, when we made the decision for these fees to be in this disallowable instrument and to take effect from 1 July, it was not clear to us that the requisite level of industry engagement had yet been undertaken. It has since effectively been confirmed that it has not been undertaken.

As a result, certainly, the construction industry in particular was surprised. We can all appreciate that we do not want to surprise people, not least with fees, however tricky they might be to contemplate. We want these things to be successful. I was very concerned to hear that, effectively, contractors, builders and others were not in a position to give effect to it.

What options, then, would the government have? Just go out and enforce, and fine all these people, because they do not have the necessary gantries or do not perhaps have the fat built into their budget to change their TTMs, their construction plans or whatever it might be, when they needed some education about this? Effectively, our intention would fail.

As a minister, that does not sit very comfortably with me. If we are going to make these changes that the community at large wants to see, we also want them to be successful and not have really poor outcomes, where it is either not implemented, or not implemented and we are then undermining other government objectives like housing. I

am especially grateful to Mr Milligan's office for engaging so constructively with my office about this and fundamentally understanding this.

I can be clear, and I will reaffirm our commitment that, from 1 July 2026, a daily fee will be introduced for any closure that impacts a road or pathway, even in the reissued disallowable instrument. Mr Emerson was saying, "Oh, it's up for negotiation," and commenting on the Property Council saying that the Property Council wants to work with us, so, clearly, it might be a bit wobbly.

No, that is not the case. I said it at the beginning of the year. It is in the reissued DI, and I am grateful to the Property Council for wanting to continue to work with us so that this is implemented effectively. Interpreting statements like that in a way that suggests there is another meaning to them really surprises me, but I will save defending the Property Council for another day, maybe.

While I do appreciate that the intention is well meaning, I think we all recognise the impacts of road closures and footpath closures, and we want to see this in place. We want it to be a success. If we did not delay these fees, we would be risking making housing projects unviable, placing additional strain on industry to deliver much-needed new homes. Again, we are all pulling in the same direction in this chamber on the need for that.

This is a prudent decision. It is something that the government is still being clear on, but now we have provided sufficient notice to the community and to businesses so that they do have now, effectively, a transition period, and an opportunity to factor the fee changes into their forward planning for upcoming projects. It has put industry on notice—notice that, fair cop, we had not given them, except in a speech in the chamber, and I appreciate that that is not necessarily in newsletters.

We have put them on notice that we do expect them to fully consider the impact on the community and to limit disruption during the construction phase. This allows developers and proponents time to plan and budget for the new fees when they are implemented. It also allows us to continue the work on the procurement and the onboarding of an appropriate ICT regulatory system to support the new fees when they are implemented in July 2026, because this is actually pretty complicated.

The fee structures are in the PULA, both in the primary legislation, in the act, and in the disallowable instrument. The calculations are hard, and that amazing team has been working with the most atrocious IT that I can possibly imagine. They do an extraordinary job. The least we can do, if we are going to make such significant changes, is to ensure they have the right software in place to assist them, and that is what we have committed to in this budget as well.

Mr Emerson touched on this, and I am pleased to clarify that he is wrong, regarding the \$93 fee still being in place. We have identified that, through the implementation of this new fee structure, there have been other changes that have had unintended consequences, particularly for non-commercial, not-for-profit and volunteer groups, as well as individuals, including MLAs, undertaking community-focused activities.

Mr Speaker, I think you can imagine where a fee might be appropriate for large

gatherings that are not otherwise captured as a commercial or not-for-profit event, like a significant-size wedding, for example. Certainly, it was never intended to capture events that have very little impact on the land or a need to restore the land.

Recognising the impact on these groups, last week—seven days ago—the Deputy Director-General of the City and Environment Directorate authorised a fee waiver for all non-commercial activities under sections 3.5 to 3.8 of the fee determination.

Mr Milligan: Hear, hear.

MS CHEYNE: Hear, hear indeed. This decision was made in accordance with section 7(1)(c) of the disallowable instrument, which has been in place for some time and reflects the government's commitment to supporting activities that deliver clear community benefit. We agree; we want to see more of these things. I said that in my speech at the beginning of the year.

I want to acknowledge those that have provided feedback and have been really constructive on this with us—in particular, Mr Milligan. I would not necessarily call it a barbecue tax.

Mr Milligan: Good marketing.

MS CHEYNE: It was good marketing. It certainly got people's attention, Mr Milligan. I look forward to telling people that there is no barbecue tax; perhaps you can assist me.

There will be refunds issued to the 50 or so applicants who have already paid those application fees for the non-commercial uses over the last couple of months. I am one of them, so I look forward to my refund from the government. The licensing and compliance team within the City and Environment Directorate is now actively preparing these refunds. I am pleased to say that the flexibility in the DI has allowed for this adjustment, so that our policies remain fair, inclusive and supportive of the many individuals and groups who contribute to the vibrancy and wellbeing of our community.

I am glad we have been able to work quickly to resolve this, once it became clear what the impacts were. I think we are being innovative. We are working through a piece of legislation that, for so long, has not been fit for purpose. We are doing new things. We are making changes to fee structures and fee determinations, and sometimes there will be things that are not quite right or where we need to make adjustments.

I find it very odd that this is being seen as a backflip. Certainly, the construction fees matter is seen as a backflip, when it is simply being delayed so that it can be given proper effect and be put in place effectively. There have been plenty of other “calls on” in this place for us to reverse fees and make other changes.

You cannot have it both ways, Mr Speaker. What we would really like to see, instead of reversing things, is maybe some other people in this place coming up with some more ideas that the government does not already have for how we can get some more revenue. That would be useful.

Members interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: I will let Mr Braddock tell you all about his ability to raise revenue and do some more policy thinking for us. I have said way too much, Mr Speaker, but I really love this act. We will not be supporting this motion.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.29): I think we are all aware here of the botanical development in Turner, which gummed things up so much that we saw pedestrians walking both ways along the bike paths on Northbourne Avenue during peak hour. That is a result of the lack of incentives, through the current fees scheme against the closing of public paths and roads. So I would like to thank Mr Emerson for bringing forward this motion, which, incidentally, would raise funds for the government if it were to pass here today—which, unfortunately, does not appear to be the case.

We will be supportive of Mr Emerson, because we want developers thinking about walkers and cyclists, not just drivers, when making their traffic management plans. When Canberra block off routes for cars, we make sure there are planned, practical detours put in place. But we do not always see that same approach being applied for anyone who is utilising active travel. It is as if some people presume active travel does not include essential travel, and you see examples where people in wheelchairs, people pushing prams or people just simply trying to get from A to B forced into totally unwieldy or impossible detours. If these negligent oversights push someone into walking on a road, it is only a matter of time before something goes terminally wrong.

We do significantly better for travel through the city when we think of pedestrians and cyclists first, not as an afterthought. That active travel-first thinking is not always there, such as in how long it actually takes to cross Northbourne Avenue, which, you might recall, includes six lanes of traffic, two lanes of light rail and two slip lanes—and that is just one way. We find ourselves with a lot of hazards from people not wanting to wait for a light.

Property developers need proper incentives to minimise the closure of paths and roads. The problem and an ideal solution are clearly known, has a sound policy basis and a well-formulated regulatory solution that cannot be argued against. So I take some satisfaction in the minister's commitment for that 1 July 2026 commencement date. The government is presenting an argument that immediate implementation of the new fee system, designed to incentivise better traffic regulation, is not easy to react to overnight. Traffic management plans need to be designed, submitted and approved, which has a pipeline that takes time.

This is a genuine concern that has been raised by the Property Council and associated developer lobbying, and this has caused the deferral of the new fees. My concern is that other businesses, particularly small businesses, are also affected by the fees that are implemented in this new schedule. But we have seen the party of small business, the Liberals, not advocate on behalf of what they would say is their natural constituency. Instead, they are still voting to keep those fees in place whilst ensuring those larger companies and property developers are actually advantaged for an extra year. Therefore, we believe the government have fallen victim to this lobbying by the property developers and the opposition have done the same.

In terms of the barbecue tax, I too welcome the government's announcement of its decision not to charge individuals and not-for-profit organisations for coming together as a community. I think this is slightly missing the point, though, in that part of the unwieldy costs these groups and individuals are also incurring as part of hosting these events is the public liability insurance, which often totally outweighs the cost of the fee of \$93. They are usually in the order of at least \$250 upwards. This is an area we need to keep working on if we are to help these community groups hold events, keep our community coming together and connecting as a society.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.34): I support Mr Emerson's motion. Residential towers in Woden have seen paths closed and road lanes closed, leaving no access for people but to move down Melrose Drive—but, not only that, much to my horror, street trees have been removed to put up the residential towers. Whole rows of street trees have been removed so we can put towers up.

Today we have cars from residential towers parking on our footpaths. No matter how many Fix My Street's I put in, nothing changes. I do not know how prams or wheelchairs move down Melrose Drive. Therefore, I will be supporting Mr Emerson's motion.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.34), in reply: I thank all the members for their contributions. I am disappointed to know that this motion will go down today. I welcome Ms Cheyne's excitement at debating further disallowance motions and the new dynamic in the Assembly, which is acknowledged, part of which is this heartwarming bipartisanship between the two major parties on the so-called barbecue tax and also on proposing this motion.

I want to briefly take issue with the insinuation—which has been made a couple of times by different members of the government—that a new member taking an active interest in a policy issue implies that we are not aware that there has been work going on in these areas. In fact, when these fees were introduced and we had an exchange at estimates, I was welcoming of them. I celebrated them. I am very happy to do that and welcome good ideas, no matter where they come from.

So I am going to continue speaking on issues that are important to people in our community and will not be deterred from doing that because of remarks insinuating that, by doing so, I am taking credit for work that has been done by the other members of this Assembly. We have to do something. We are here to do something. It is our job to advocate for good policy, to support good policy positions when they are introduced—you are going to get that from independent members and other new members of the Assembly—and to oppose bad policy, as I am attempting to do today.

I want to touch briefly on Mr Milligan's concern about housing affordability. I think there would have been a pathway through here. The costs in the fee schedule for closing footpaths is \$100 per day, per block. The maximum cost is \$200 per day for a 24-hour closure. If that is the difference between a development being affordable and viable or not, I would be very surprised. That would suggest that our housing market is in much better shape than what it actually is in. So I dispute that claim, though I understand it being made. I am sure this is a talking point that the Property Council will have put forward, as one would anticipate.

I am pleased to hear about the fee waiver for non-commercial public land uses. That is a great outcome. I genuinely applaud the opposition for working constructively with the government to achieve that outcome and elevate the issue to public awareness. I want to thank Mr Braddock, Ms Carrick and the entire crossbench for their support on this issue today.

Some of the arguments that have been put forward about deferring these fees, I am sure have been made by the developers—“We need time to adjust and plan for this.” I raised this during estimates. I asked the minister in late July whether these new fees applied retrospectively to construction activities that were already underway. Their response was no, as it would only be future activities. So I think there would have been capacity to adjust. Twelve months seems like a long period to adjust. That to me, seems very much unnecessary.

I have touched on whether this will increase the costs of our projects. I am sure that is possible to an extent. I also asked during estimates whether these fees were intended as a revenue-raising measure or to drive behavioural change on the part of developers. The Deputy Director-General of the City Environment Directorate indicated that:

... the fees are designed to make sure that roads are not closed for long periods of time, particularly when they are not used and there is a disincentive to undertake some of those actions where there is not a safety or productivity requirement from the development itself.

He also spoke of the need to strike a balance, and I understand that. I respect that, I appreciate it and I share that desire.

If developers and subbies are saying, “We do not know how to make this work”, they do it in other cities in Australia and other parts of the world. We see things like open-ended shipping containers and gantries used to keep footpaths open where there are no other alternatives. Otherwise, we see construction lines set back behind the footpath, rather than ahead of it or alternative footpaths being made available. Canberra is an outlier in letting developers close the footpaths adjacent to their construction sites, as we do.

In the city of Adelaide, there is a requirement that pedestrian access must be maintained during all works, consistent with the usual width of the footpath. They are doing this in Adelaide right now. Non-slip temporary ramps must be installed when pedestrians are required to cross a curb to access the footpath. These are funded by the person who is closing the footpath. In circumstances where a minimum 1.8 metre footpath clearance cannot be maintained at all times and no other safe and reasonable alternative is available, you are required in the city of Adelaide to establish a pedestrian raceway, which essentially means installing barriers that create a temporary footpath on the road. So there is a real prioritisation of pedestrians going on there.

In Brisbane, a \$352 application fee exists to close a footpath in the city centre, plus \$11 per square metre per week for a permit to close those paths, with each permit incurring a minimum five-week charge. North Sydney Council charges a \$200 fee to apply for a permit to close a footpath, plus \$5 to \$10 per square metre per day the footpath is closed.

Sydney's Inner West Council charges a \$209 fee to apply to close a footpath for up to one week, plus there is a weekly lease fee of \$14.30 per square metre—a minimum of \$143 for that fee. So there are many other places that have these fees. Yes, they are new to the ACT, but I think we could have done that this year rather than next year.

On the topic of welcoming this change, again, in estimates I asked: “Is this a step in the direction of bringing the ACT in line with some other places where footpaths have to stay open and in good condition?” The response to that question was yes. So I think we have an opportunity—and I look forward to these fees coming into effect next year—to put the impost on people who are closing public land, rather than on government.

The minister mentioned ideas for revenue-raising measures. Well, one way we could save money is by not having to have Roads ACT staff go out and investigate sites and ensure that things are open appropriately, as I encountered. It is another matter that I raised during estimates at the botanical development that Mr Braddock mentioned, where three government employees were understandably on site trying to figure out a better alternative footpath for that development, which had required pedestrians to either go all the way across Northbourne Avenue and use the other side of Northbourne Avenue, that footpath—that was one detour—or to go all the way around Haig Park and cut through Haig Park and around to get up Northbourne Avenue. Of course, the consequence of those two detours being offered was that people just walked on the road—on Northbourne Avenue, on the footpath. Many members, I hope, will have seen videos of obviously tourists with suitcases doing so. Those staff being on site having to figure out a solution is a cost to government. There is a cost saving if we do not put that impost on government and not put the amenity impost on our community but instead put it on developers, those responsible for restricting this use of public land, of our public assets.

These have been long closing remarks. I thank members for their attention and look forward to the vote.

Question put:

That Mr Emerson's motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

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

Noes 17

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

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

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

City and Environment Directorate—Part 1.3.

Debate resumed from 17 September 2025, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.47): I rise to speak as the Greens spokesperson for water and agriculture—and it would not be a Laura speech if I passed up the chance to talk about wood heaters. We debated the government’s phase-out of wood heaters not long ago—so let’s be clear and simple. This budget removed funding for the next steps in the process of phasing out wood heaters. That was the regulatory impact statement.

I appreciate the government say they will complete this work within base funding and that it will still continue. I genuinely hope this is true. I have reasons for doubting. When talking to the minister about promotion last sitting, I tried to get a timeline on the completion of that work. It seems reasonable that, if the work is continuing, if it has not been consigned to the bottom of the to-do list, then surely we have a reasonable estimate of how long it will take. My constituents, who care about this issue and have been advocating for progress on it tirelessly for years, deserve to know how long they will have to wait before we see the next steps. It is not good enough to say, “Trust us, the work will happen; we just cannot tell you when.”

Anyone who has been around this place long enough—I am not sure whether I count myself in that category, but I have trusted colleagues who are—knows that nothing happens in the slow-moving ship of government quickly without a bit of fire underneath them. We use this place to put a level of priority on certain things when it is the will of the Assembly. But it was not the will of the Assembly or this government to make any clear commitment to the ACT about the phase-out of wood heaters. The community, who cares about this issue, is deeply disappointed and, frankly, a bit distressed at the outcome of the debate a few weeks ago. Despite the minister’s words to the contrary, it is pretty clear that the words of a former government minister, a government media release and an agree-in-principle count for pretty much nothing.

I am not the only one who sees the government’s position having changed from committing to phase out wood heaters to, “Office holders, yes, we will think about phasing them out, using only policies we have in place and maybe they will just sort of disappear by themselves over time.” In the meantime, people’s health is on the line. People’s rights to a healthy environment is on the line. With basically nothing to show in the environment portfolio in this budget, it is a shame that some of the biggest news we have seen is the retracing of steps that were committed to in a previous budget.

In water, sadly, we have much of the same story. There is no new funding for the

Healthy Waterways program. Let me repeat that: no new funding. This is for a flagship government program that has been instrumental in cleaning up our waterways and re-naturalising our drains, putting in new water assets that provide amenity and biodiversity havens for numerous species throughout the ACT—us humans included. The work of this program is cherished by the community.

I am thinking of the Tuggeranong Creek re-naturalisation down the old drain hole at Calwell completed last year. The difference is just night and day. It has come such a long way from a bunch of concrete and a couple of big holes that you could yell down, to a beautiful topographically interesting haven of reeds and walking paths. Rather than just watching the foamy nasties sort of float down the hill, it is incredibly heartening to know that all the phosphorous that we have fed our blue-green algal blooms in Lake Tuggeranong are instead being captured and absorbed by plants. I love nature and science.

These are the kinds of projects that Healthy Waterways has given our local communities. The program has not even been completed yet, and already the government seems to be drawing a line under it. Stage 1 is complete—hallelujah—and stage 2 is mostly complete, but there is one project that has not even been initiated. That is reconnecting the old creek line at the Tuggeranong Homestead in Richardson. I asked in estimates whether there was any funding available for the project to go ahead, and the minister said no. So, under this government and in this budget, we will not even see the completion of work already started. A cynic might think that this government has a vendetta against any work started by former Green ministers. I do not think I am the first person to think it or say it.

Yes, there is a small amount of funding to continue one FTE in the Healthy Waterways program to do some work on Lake Tuggeranong. This is important, and I look forward to engaging with that work on an ongoing basis. But the final projects in stage 2 would not be included in stage 2 and put on the government's website unless it was a scope project that was deemed worthy and necessary. So let's not pretend that we do not know our priorities for the area yet. The Greens will continue monitoring this area closely to ensure that all progress in water does not stall, so that our community and our environment can reap the benefits of more natural spaces and a bit less concrete.

Finally, there is no new funding in this budget for the agriculture sector. Last year, we saw the government release the Local Food Strategy, which set the ACT up to properly value our local food production, increase the capacity of our local systems and improve access to fresh, healthy and affordable food for everyone—a shout out to the fact that that happened under a Greens minister. The last budget funded the first initiative under the strategy, an analysis of our local food supply chains. This budget has not funded anything further under the strategy. That is a huge, missed opportunity to lift up our agricultural sector. It is a shame that the minister will not even release the work that has been done so far.

So what are the next steps for agriculture? I did ask this yesterday in question time. I would love to hear the minister's priority for this area in a bit more detail. There is no shortage of work to be done, and the Greens will continue advocating to get this work happening. That includes delivering a biodiversity network to protect the environment on rural leases so that the great conservation work of farmers is actually recognised and

valued by government. The government began looking into private stewardship payments, but they will not release that work either. We need to make sure our rules and policies work across the sector and that they do not inhibit different ways of living and business management, like supporting farmer succession planning by looking at how second dwellings for the family working on the farm can be allowed.

There is much more to be done to properly value our agricultural lands and our agricultural people in the ACT, and I really hope that the next budget can recognise that and continue the good work of the previous minister.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.54): I rise today to speak about the climate change and energy elements of this area of the budget. The ACT has a proud legacy in emissions reduction, but it does feel like the current government have taken their foot off the pedal on it. The ACT has now reduced its emissions by 50 per cent below 1990 levels, according to the last greenhouse gas inventory, which was released in December 2024. That is an outstanding achievement and one that is globally elite. But that is not an invitation to rest on our laurels.

As we have seen with the release of the National Climate Risk Assessment this past week, the risks for Australia, including this part of Australia, are incredibly significant and life changing for our communities and our way of life. That is something that should keep us extremely focused, and that is not what we are seeing in this budget. There are vital areas in the climate change portfolio that have simply not received the investment current and future generations so desperately need.

As I have said, the National Climate Risk Assessment discusses some of the risks over the coming years as warming increases. These include risks to people, risks to specific places across Australia and risks to our way of life. As warming increases, we can expect to face increasingly frequent and severe weather events. It is interesting to note that the national assessment was released in the context of pressure from my federal Greens colleagues. That report had been available for some time—at least nine months—before it was released. It is a disappointing wait, but I am pleased that it is now public.

It is possible that there was some strategy there to not let us see this information or perhaps get the climate target out first, because the national assessment is dire. The national assessment shows us we can expect climate change to impact every aspect of life. It will impact our health, the cost of living will go up, as supply chains and critical infrastructure are disrupted by disasters, and, tragically, we face the loss of precious irreplaceable ecosystems and irreparable damage to our natural environment.

This budget is disappointing when it comes to climate action. Without Greens in cabinet it is clear that there is not the forward momentum we used to see to address the challenges posed by climate change. We had quite some discussion in the estimates process, and one of the clear-cut examples was the Climate Change Strategy for the ACT. This strategy expires during 2025. One might argue that could be as late as the 31 December 2025. But what we learnt during the estimates process is that the work is not significantly underway to replace it. A strategy like this will take the better part of 12 months to put together. By the time you perhaps get the initial run through cabinet to get approval and go to consultation, then go to consultation and have meaningful

engagement with our community and then get all that back, analyse it, write it up and you are back in the cabinet, that is a full year of work.

Obviously, the ACT election provided some awkward timing, coming as it did around October and having the caretaker period—so September through to November. But this is work that needed to be got underway straightaway. We now find ourselves 11 months down the road from the election, and what we got from the minister was, “Preparations are underway.” But we will not have a new climate strategy—not if there is decent community consultation and engagement—by the end of 2025, and that is incredibly disappointing. The new strategy should be almost ready to launch, but we do not really have a clear sense of what the timeline is going to be. Canberrans expect their government to take climate change seriously and this is one example that is disappointing. There is still time to redeem it, I suppose. It is going to be late, but it might still be a good one, and that is certainly what we will be hoping for.

Looking at the budget, there has been no significant uplift in funding for our decarbonisation agenda. As I touched on earlier, the ACT has been a leader on decarbonisation, but there is still a lot of work to be done and we simply cannot take our foot off the pedal. We have been asking questions about how the tax system can best support our decarbonisation agenda. There was quite some discussion in estimates about the new stamp duty fees. We are concerned that, currently, a Canberran buying a used hybrid RAV4 now pays more in stamp duty than if they were buying a more polluting new Mazda CX-5. This sends the wrong signals.

The car stamp duty and registration system should help us ensure that the least polluting option is the most affordable option. That is the signal we want to send. We want to encourage those people who are looking for a more fuel efficient vehicle and the least polluting options, and have those positive decisions reflected in the way the tax system is structured. It is beneficial overall. The more efficient and less polluting vehicles can, of course, have lower running costs as well. But the government can certainly provide some clear incentives and clear signals. I know the Chief Minister is a fan of behavioural economics, and our tax measures should reflect that.

I am concerned about the agenda generally during this term. We saw the government, the Labor Party, take really only two climate statements to the election. One was to maintain the loan scheme, the Sustainable Household Scheme. What we have seen since the election—and this was not taken to the election—an imposition of a three per cent interest rate. One can have that debate but, given that it was not actually taken to the election, it is a little bit surprising. They only had two things. The second thing was “no backward steps”, which is not particularly inspiring and does not give me a whole lot of encouragement for this term. But the positive thing is that a lot of work was set in train last term—issues around a pathway to electrification and gas phase-out. There is tonnes of work to be done, and I am hopeful that “no backwards steps” mean we will at least take forward steps on the things that have been identified and the plans that were set in place last term. That is certainly what we will be looking for. We did not see any of that in this budget. Probably their one saving grace is that a lot of work was already in train.

But future investment needs to be made. More steps need to be taken. Resting on the laurels and taking the foot off the pedal is not good enough. Whilst there is a lack of

confidence in this budget, that is the agenda. There is still time to redeem it, and I hope to see over the coming months, and certainly in next year's budget, better steps forward to make sure that this agenda continues to be one that the ACT can be proud of and that we can continue to make a claim of being a globally leading jurisdiction on climate action.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.02): We all know that our budget is tight. We pay our rates and levies, expecting services in return, but there is only so much money in the bucket. Like everyone here, I have my priorities and I will get to them. But first, let's acknowledge the reality, the government needs money to meet its election commitments, both services and infrastructure and the essentials that keep our city running. We can ask the commonwealth for help and while we hope for support, we must be honest, it is unlikely to be the silver bullet to our debt problem. Right now, we are using taxes from ACT residents to pay interest on debt instead of investing in the services we all want and need.

Most of our revenue comes from property and business taxes, but that does not mean we should cram our town centres with small apartments just to boost government income. Woden is a prime example. We now have 35 residential towers either built or in the development pipeline. Many of these developments take up entire blocks leaving nothing for the public realm. Pavements are too narrow for alfresco dining or street trees because of underground parking. This is not good planning. It is short-term thinking.

Take Geocon's proposed development on the Phillip pool site. It includes 50 per cent one-bedroom apartments, well above the 40 per cent maximum allowed under the planning guidelines. Only eight per cent are three-bedroom units, below the 10 per cent minimum. This is not just a technical breach, it is a failure to meet community needs. Then there is WOVA, which is around 70 per cent one-bedroom apartments.

Let us look at the data. SQM Research for August 2025 for postcode 2606, which includes the Woden town centre, shows that 73 per cent of the 316 properties listed are apartments. Nearly half have been on the market for over three months and 30 per cent remain unsold after six months. If we are in a housing crisis, why are these homes not selling? We need to ask, who is this housing for? Geocon says the market demands more one-bedroom apartments. But demand from whom? Local families and down-sizers want two- and three-bedroom homes. Entry level buyers and investors may be interested in smaller units but that does not mean we should flood the market with them.

For years we have called for holistic town planning. One that balances housing, commercial areas and jobs, health and education services, cultural and recreation facilities and great public spaces that support community connection. The town planning needs to move to construction in a timely way for our communities, for example, the need to build the Molonglo town centre and its access roads, which will need dedicated busways to provide reliable services. This expenditure is a priority. The Molonglo town centre needs to be built with people in mind—not like the unexplainable zoning for 28-storey buildings around the Woden town square. I am still waiting for someone to tell me why it is a good outcome to overshadow our public space. We need to activate the area and create a destination to connect people.

On community connections, Woden has lost so much; the basketball stadium, pitch and putt, bowling greens, tennis courts, YMCA and now the 50-metre pool and ice rink. Please do not sell off our land. We need space for community facilities. Yes, they cost money, but they are vital. They support preventative health and physical and mental wellbeing. With the social media ban for under 16s starting in December we need to think about how our communities can support young people offline.

Zoning is a problem. Sites for community facilities have not been identified, leaving it up to the private sector to provide facilities that do not usually make money. Geocon will provide Woden's growing population with a 25-metre pool and Westfield is looking at indoor sports.

I would like to thank Minister Cheyne's office for coming to see Woden. Miraculously, before they appeared, the place was cleaned up and was looking pretty good when they got there. So thank you for that. The clean-up was good. With the new CIT providing very limited café hours, maybe around six a week, and that is during the school term, and the youth foyer providing us with blank walls, my discussion with Minister Cheyne's office and planning officials was about bringing in food vans and putting in power in the new west plaza, which is a public space with the potential for markets and events. Now we have to spend money on fixing it up for activity when it was just built. Active fronts should have been included in the planning. I am speechless.

In our suburbs many local shops need upgrading and Fisher is definitely a priority. Playgrounds need attention, particularly in Weston Creek. Paths and streetlights must be maintained. Street art is terrific, but tagging needs to be removed. This all costs money and is a priority. In our suburbs the missing middle must be done well, with minimal overshadowing and overlooking of neighbours. We must keep our trees and still be the bush capital in 50 years.

The deregulation of the planning system is also deeply concerning. We need compliance, checks and balances and appeal rights when poor outcomes slip through the cracks. A planning minister must make decisions that benefit the people, not just developers. There is a lack of communication with the NCA. The access to Amberfield on the Cotter Road should have been planned and built before the people moved in there and faced safety risks accessing an 80 kilometre an hour road.

Decisions are made with no analysis, for example, the loss of the 50-metre Phillip pool. I think the site for the ice rink is in this category too. DAs are submitted, the developer builds something else and then seeks retrospective approval. A good example is the Manuka Hotel which had five cinemas approved and then did not build them. How did the certifiers sign this building off? Where are the Access Canberra compliance officers? When poor outcomes slip through the cracks, people need to be able to access ACAT to ensure their rights are heard and there are checks and balances in the system. Investing in our communities cost money and it is a priority for me.

Turning to transport, the primary reason for public transport is to connect people to jobs and services and to family and friends. Because of the convenience of these connections, over many decades, people have congregated around public transport corridors. However, many people live in the suburbs and need access to a great public transport network. I am pleased the minister is going to provide options for the design

of the bus network that could be in place when light rail is delivered. We can then see if the network will provide reliable services with a reasonable travel time that will encourage people to use public transport. It is also terrific that buses will still run along Adelaide Avenue. I urge the minister to talk to the NCA about bus lanes on Commonwealth Avenue to avoid people being stuck in congested traffic as the population grows, for example, people coming from Weston Creek and the south of Molonglo.

If we want to encourage people to cycle, including cycling to and from work, which is a very good habit, then we need to connect the city with Woden with a dedicated off-road cycleway. People currently feel unsafe riding with traffic moving at 80 kilometres an hour. This is an important connection through the centre of the city and it should be done now. We do not need to wait for light rail. There are also many missing links, for example, around Coombs and Molonglo and in Woden the C4 crosses many bus movements. This is dangerous and needs a well identified crossing for safety.

Moving to the environment, we must look after our environment and the biodiversity it supports. The blue-green network, the biodiversity network and projects like Healthy Waterways along Yarralumla Creek, which is in Woden, are essential. We need to plan this project before the road, the light rail and high-density housing eliminates any opportunities to naturalise the concrete creek. We might not invest in the naturalisation now but we must plan to ensure it is possible in the future. The Yarralumla Wetlands, which is in Yarralumla by the lake, is another great project which will help to reduce nutrients flowing into the lake and improve water quality. More funding is required.

With respect to our Landcare groups, which do a fantastic job, during estimates we asked many questions about the procurement of services provided by catchment groups. We asked, "What criteria would be used to assess tenders? Would stewardship and the decades of local knowledge from volunteers in Park Care areas be considered?" These are people who know our land best. Their voices should be heard, but they were left frustrated and feeling undervalued by the process. Now I am shocked to find out the funding is being cut. We must protect our environment, we must plan for people, not just profit, and we must build all our communities across Canberra.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (11.11): I rise today to speak to the City and Environment Directorate on the topic of city services. I would like to start with what it means to the community when city services are done well. When the government is committed to delivering the basics right it builds trust within the community. City services are one of the most direct ways that Canberrans can see the benefits from the taxes that they pay.

When city services are properly maintained, it means that parents can take their kids to the local playground because it is being kept in a good condition, the grass has been cut and the footpath leading to the playground is safe and intact. This means being able to call Access Canberra about a dangerous tree and having it inspected within a reasonable timeframe and removed if it poses a risk to human life or property. This means graffiti can be cleaned up so that Canberrans can take pride in their city, illegal dumping is removed shortly after being reported and the streetlights are fixed so residents can feel safe. When city services are done well, Canberrans feel safe. They are protected from potential physical harm caused by broken footpaths, overgrown grass, deteriorating playground equipment or dangerous trees, just to name a few.

Lastly, Canberrans feel proud of their home because their government is not just reacting to complaints but actively maintaining and improving public spaces and amenities without needing to be prompted by Fix My Street requests. However, this reality is not the case entirely. Canberrans are actively advocating for better, more efficient services. This sentiment was clearly reflected in the recent Fix My Street inquiry which received over 50 submissions. These submissions raised issues with not only the Fix My Street tool but also highlighted a lack of follow-up and resolution for local problems once they were reported. On top of this, there is a steady inflow of emails from residents, both from my electorate and others, who write to me asking me to raise their issues with the minister as problems have remained unresolved for weeks, months, or even years.

The government should not be waiting for residents to point out every issue. City Services should be proactive, fixing problems when they see them, monitoring hotspots once an issue has been raised and ensuring that the basic city services are always covered. Because city services are not being done well here, Canberrans are losing confidence in this government's ability to deliver. This was evident during the budget estimates, where multiple projects were due to be completed last financial year but were delayed.

What is more concerning is the lack of alignment between the current program of City Services and Labor's 2024 election commitments. These commitments, many of which were key reasons why people voted for Labor, are not being delivered. Managing City Services includes fulfilling these promises and ensuring the directorate is equipped with the resources it needs to meet the promised deadlines and stay within budget.

Canberrans need to know the government has their local interests at heart. It may seem like just another broken streetlight or a cracked community path, but to a resident who has stopped their daily walks due to unmaintained footpaths or to the student walking home in the dark after a late night shift, these small fixes make a big difference. They restore safety, they restore confidence and they restore pride in our city.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.15): I rise today to speak on the City and Environment Directorate part of the appropriation bill. City and Environment is a broad directorate, with many wonderful people doing incredible jobs keeping our city thriving. Sadly I cannot cover all of them today: the people who keep our transport network running, who run our parks and conservation services, look after injured wildlife, remove dead animals from the sides of the road in what could be quite dangerous situations, who mow the vast expanses of grass across the ACT, sweep our streets, fix our footpaths, maintain our local playgrounds, run Access Canberra and do an absolutely incredible job running our brilliant libraries.

It is also the incredible people who run our cemeteries and crematoria who are doing such an incredible job supporting people at their most vulnerable. As part of the estimates committee I had the pleasure of asking questions of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority. I wanted to give them a special shout out today. I do not think the work they do is recognised enough, so I want to put my gratitude for them on the record. At the Cemeteries and Crematoria Association New South Wales Awards earlier this year, the Canberra Memorial Parks Team won the Award for Excellence,

recognising:

...what a passionate and collaborative team can achieve when they place community at the heart of their work.

The creation of:

...Sanctuary Creek — a stunning ash memorialisation garden which reflects the spirit, landscape and culture of the Canberra region...The result is more than a memorial park. Sanctuary Creek is a space for reflection, connection and celebration.

I know the team are really proud of it. I want to express my appreciation to the team, acknowledge the amazing work in creating Sanctuary Creek and all the work they do, and put on the record that they won a huge award for this work. So, well done.

I particularly now want to talk about playgrounds. In last year's ACT Labor's 2024 Plan for Tuggeranong, we promised playground renewals and upgrades across six Tuggeranong suburbs. In this year's budget, we have funded these Tuggeranong playgrounds and we have also funded some other playgrounds in McKellar and Amaroo. The plan for Tuggeranong was a well-constructed plan taken by ACT Labor to last year's election. It was built on the tens of thousands of doors knocked, phones called and the interactions the Tuggeranong Labor team had across Brindabella, including my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins and I.

Playgrounds were one of the most common things raised with me and my team and I continue to talk to people about playgrounds. Last sitting week, Minister Cheyne announced the locations in the Tuggeranong suburbs for playground upgrades and renewals. In total, there are three new renewed playgrounds in Bonython on Morice Place, Hussey Cove and Marquet Retreat, which is also known by some people as Bottrill Street. There is a new playground in Gilmore on Henry Melville Crescent, a new playground in Wanniasa on Sternberg Crescent West and upgrades in Conder at Cremorne Place and Isabella Plains at Yabtree Place.

I want to just reflect on a few of these locations which I have advocated for in the last few months on behalf of residents, both young and old, who believed their local playgrounds deserved better. Many of you will remember our special 10-year-old boy from Isabella Plains, Mr Archie Brown, who along with his friends, Beau and Xavier, petitioned for upgrades to the playground in Yabtree Place. Their petition called for significant upgrades to the playgrounds, including a pump track for their bikes after the one they created themselves kept being removed.

Though this petition was technically out of order with our standing orders, their campaign had a significant impact. Between the three of them they achieved 99 signatures. They doorknocked their local area. They took the petition to school. They got really actively engaged in their community. So after speaking on Archie's petition in the chamber back in June and writing to Minister Cheyne, it was announced that not only would Yabtree Place receive a significant upgrade, but it would also see installation of the pump track. I am really proud to have contributed to the delivery of such a positive outcome for Isabella Plains, especially one that rewards and acknowledges the initiative and ambition of Archie, Beau and Xavier.

A few months ago federal member for Bean, David Smith, and I received some correspondence from a Bonython mum, Stacy Otero, a lifelong Brindabellian who had grown up playing at the Bottrill Street-Marquet Retreat playground in Bonython. Stacy is now a mum herself, living in the same area she grew up in. She was shocked to see that the playground equipment had not really changed that much since she last played there over 25 years ago.

When David and I visited about a month or so ago, maybe a bit over, we were greeted by Stacy and many of the other local families who were eager to discuss the potential for Bottrill Street and to highlight that the playground was just feeling a bit unloved. After advocating on behalf of Stacy and the Bonython families, it was great to see that Marquet Retreat-Bottrill Street will be one of the three playgrounds renewed in Bonython. I can definitely say that calling Archie and his mum, and calling Stacy, to let them know the good news about their playgrounds has definitely been a highlight of this job.

I wanted to mention a playground near my home, south of Conder on Cremorne Place. The playground is located fairly close to Charles Conder Primary School and I know a lot of families stop in on the way to and from school every day. While doorknocking in Conder last year playgrounds were a really hot topic. The small playground on Montefiore Crescent, for example, not too far from my family, which my son loves to play at, was very popular in the streets near it. The slide had been damaged by some vandalism over the years but we managed to get it fixed through Fix My Street, writing to Minister Cheyne and getting all the neighbours on board so local families can continue to enjoy it.

This year's budget shows significant upgrades to community-level infrastructure across Tuggeranong. I am pleased to not only see these promises delivered but to be involved in their delivery. I thank Minister Cheyne for recognising the needs of our community and delivering these outcomes so quickly.

I also wanted to touch on the Monaro Highway works. I drive the Monaro Highway pretty much every day. Of all the members in this chamber, I probably live the furthest away from the Assembly. Slightly further than Mr Milligan, coming from the far north—we discussed this the other night to work out which one of us is further—and a bit further than the Speaker, who is also in the deep south.

It means I am pretty familiar with our road network in the south and public transport from Tuggeranong to the city. I have lived in Tuggeranong for over a decade and during that time, except for all of about two years over the COVID period when I was either based at home on maternity leave or in Barton, I have worked in various parts of Civic. I am familiar with the sequencing of traffic lights on Drakeford Drive. I know the Isabella Drive-Athllon Drive roundabout in peak hour. I know Athllon Drive very well and I welcome the delivery of its duplication.

I am also familiar with the Monaro Highway and how dangerous the intersection at Lanyon Drive is. Lanyon Drive is the major road from Hume out to Jerrabomberra and Queanbeyan. It is a busy road. Hume is also a busy area with lots of trucks and the Monaro Highway is a very busy road. I spoke to someone just yesterday who knows

someone who is lucky to be alive after an accident at the Lanyon Drive-Monaro Highway intersection. She had the back of her car completely ripped off by a concrete truck.

For those unfamiliar, if you are travelling south along the Monaro Highway, it is an 80 kilometre an hour road on a corner coming down a hill to traffic lights. It is just a bad intersection. The Monaro Highway roadworks are welcome and needed. It is not a duplication, as some in this chamber have characterised it this week. It is already a duplicated and triplicated road. It is necessary for safety. We are building a flyover. It is the first part of a long-term series of road improvements being undertaken in conjunction with the federal government. Planning works are in the pipeline for other intersections along the Monaro Highway: Mugga Lane, Tralee Street and Isabella Drive. Yes, there has been other work going on the Monaro Highway recently, with eight kilometres of road being rehabilitated from the Jerrabomberra Creek intersection at Hindmarsh Drive to David Warren Road. As a frequent user these have been very welcome even if it has added a bit of time to the drive and slowed down traffic.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention Richardson shops. It has been empty for years now since the supermarket and hairdresser left. The playground and the skate park are still well loved, but many families have told me how they choose to drive somewhere else with a café when they go to the playground with the kids, rather than stay in Richardson.

I welcome the work of the City and Environment Directorate to look at releasing the three unleased blocks at Richardson shops. I hope that Richardson is one of those sites—although I am pretty confident it probably is—being investigated under the Planning Act 2023 changes given it has been empty, and so in breach of its lease, for well over 12 months. It is such a perfect site for revitalisation and redevelopment with shops, community spaces and even hopefully some housing or shop-top housing. I can see my colleague, Miss Nuttall, crossing her fingers for that shop-top housing to come to Richardson one day. It is on the bus route. It is next to a school and next to early childhood and education centres. It is just such a good location in such a lovely suburb.

While I have touched on a few aspects of the City and Environment Directorate, not everything because there is just so much that the wonderful people there do, I welcome that this budget is delivering for Tuggeranong and for Canberra. I commend this budget to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (11.25): As the shadow Treasurer said in this chamber earlier this week, budgets are about priorities. We have seen so many examples of where this government has failed when it comes to the priorities, the priorities for the needs of all Canberrans. We see it in the bigger items like health, education and infrastructure, but the area that is very, very clear to the naked eye—and there is no clearer demonstration of this government's priorities, or the lack of—is when you look around our city.

Our neighbourhoods are suffering from years and years of neglect and our basic, basic municipal services not being maintained. Our footpaths are cracked, uneven and in many places missing altogether. Parents pushing prams, older Canberrans with mobility aids and children walking to school are many times forced onto roads because the ACT government has neglected the basics of footpath maintenance.

Of course, it is not just limited to footpaths. Our local amenities, our parks, our community spaces and our playgrounds have all been left to deteriorate. Our local shops have been forgotten and residents are getting very sick and tired of asking for what you would think would be bread and butter, what you would think would be a given for any local government, only to see their concerns either pushed aside altogether or taken on as just another election promise yet to be delivered, again and again.

I see it all the time in my electorate. At every mobile office that I have been to, it is the one consistent issue that comes up. Obviously, we get such a variety of issues that are raised with us from so many people, but the one consistent issue that I am guaranteed to get when I am at a mobile office is about basic municipal services. Whether it is graffiti at the Lyneham and Dickson shops, broken footpaths and neglected community facilities at Griffith, unsuitable seating and traffic congestion issues in Narrabundah, issues raised about even the streetlamps at Narrabundah, basic maintenance at the Kingston foreshore, streetlights and road safety in Manuka, issues at the Downer playing fields, overgrown grass and weeds in Lyneham, lack of public rubbish bins and adequate footpaths in Ainslie, lack of well-maintained community spaces in Hackett, dangerous trees in O'Connor—I mean, the list goes on and on.

I acknowledge Mr Milligan who has outlined many of these issues and it seems that it is clearly not unique to Kurrajong. These might seem like they are minor but they are not just minor inconveniences. They impact the way that we live, how safe we feel and how connected we are to one another and to our community.

As a result of this latest budget, Kurrajong residents received some of the highest rate increases across Canberra. Rates in Kingston and Barton are up seven per cent, rates in Reid and Turner are up nine per cent and rates in Griffith are up a whopping 10 per cent. These are rates that, at least a portion of, should be invested back into our local community. But when Kurrajong residents step outside their front doors, they do see the neglect in their neighbourhoods as a result of this long-term government that has forgotten them. They see the neglect at their local shops and they see the neglect around the city.

And in speaking of the city, the feedback that I have had, especially over the last couple of months, has been, of course, about the state of our city area. I mean, this is the nation's capital! Of course, with Floriade now having kicked off, they have finally been able to make some headway in relation to the incredible issues that we have had raised with us about the state of our city, especially around Garema Place. That is a very clear example of where this government has allowed these priorities to be.

So what does that say about the government's priorities? It says that the Labor government does not prioritise walkable neighbourhoods, it does not prioritise well maintained shared community spaces and it does not prioritise the basic amenities that make daily life easier and more enjoyable for all Canberrans. It is clear from this budget, and frankly the many before it, that this Labor government has forgotten that communities are built from the ground up. It is clear that they have forgotten that it is our local neighbourhoods and our local communities where we live, where we play, where we raise our families, where we go to school and where we gather together. When a government turns its back on the very basics, it turns its back on every Canberran.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.31): Over this debate, it has been fantastic to hear ministers outline what this budget means for the ACT, and I am looking forward to hearing their summary of the City and Environment Directorate's role in the progress of our city.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I am going to frame my contribution to this debate by supporting something the Speaker posted to his tens of thousands of avid followers during one of his rare ventures into the bright and positive world of social media. It was something that really resonated with me on the weekend—something to the effect that 90 per cent of the conversations he has with Tuggeranong citizens are not about big picture ideology; they are about the small, everyday things that shape people's lives and their communities.

I agree with the Speaker. A key focus of every government must be on getting those little things done—the unsexy things. Consistently doing the one percenters for their community in return for their community giving their governments the licence to go after the big things, the vision things. That is exactly what this budget does. It is getting the small things right. It is getting them done.

It is about listening to the people of Tuggeranong and the ACT, and acting on what we have heard matters most. It strikes a balance and delivers for our community. This budget says loud and clear that Tuggeranong's turn is now; Tuggeranong is back on the map. We are seeing millions of dollars in investment for the south side—projects that will make a real difference to how people live, work and play every single day.

Let me take you through what that means on the ground. We have committed \$2.5 million for lighting upgrades across Tuggeranong. This means better visibility, safer streets and more confidence for people being outside after dark. We are also investing more than \$5 million to improve and connect footpaths. This is not just a line in the budget. It is happening right now. While delivering my winter newsletter over recent weeks, I have seen it everywhere with my own eyes: works are underway across Tuggeranong, and they are making a tangible difference. Just over the weekend in Gowrie, I counted more than 10 sections of footpath fenced off, dug up, ready for fresh concrete. That is what delivery looks like.

This budget also tackles the big ticket infrastructure that is keeping Tuggeranong moving. It funds the duplication of Athllon Drive and upgrades the Monaro Highway—projects that will cut travel times, provide more transport options and improve safety for tens of thousands of commuters every day.

There is also funding of around \$2.5 million for upgrades to public spaces at the Erindale group centre. While the scope of those upgrades is still being determined, the area around the main centre could certainly do with a refresh, and I look forward to seeing more detail and community consultation.

The government is delivering new or upgraded playgrounds at seven locations across Tuggeranong. For our young people, and the young at heart, we are investing in safety improvements and renewal at the Tuggeranong skatepark, along with planning for its full upgrade.

Mr Assistant Speaker, community sport is the heartbeat of Tuggeranong. When I doorknocked in Wanniasa last year, residents told me about the overwhelming number of cars parked for weekend soccer at the Wanniasa playing fields. That is why this budget funds a feasibility study for expanding car parking at those playing fields. Prior to last weekend when soccer had finished, families like mine—and anyone who has tried to park there on a Saturday morning—know that finding a spot is like winning the lottery.

The government has also upgraded facilities across this city to make them more accessible and inclusive, so everyone can get involved in the sports they love. In Tuggeranong, that includes new cricket nets at Gowrie, a portable tiered grandstand at Gordon, new lighting for the Gordon rectangular field, and female-friendly upgrades to change rooms at Calwell and Chisholm ovals.

The 2025-26 budget includes new initiatives worth more than \$190 million over four years to support the environment and climate action. We are working to improve Lake Tuggeranong's water quality. We are also protecting local biodiversity, with funding for the Canberra grassland earless dragon and other critical environmental programs. These programs are not just "nice to haves"; they are essential for keeping Tuggeranong and the ACT beautiful and livable, not just for people, for generations to come.

The budget includes the implementation of several key initiatives to support the transition of electrification, including: the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme, the Home Energy Efficiency Program, the Sustainable Business Program, the First Nations home energy support program and the commencement of the commercial building electrification pilot program. The Sustainable Household Scheme provides low interest loans for battery storage, zero emissions vehicles and chargers, ceiling insulation and energy-efficient electric appliances. The catalyst for every one of these projects was a conversation with a Tuggeranong resident. At the shops, at community meetings, on the sidelines of a footy game, they told us what matters—what they needed—and this budget delivers on that. It is proof that when people speak, this government listens and delivers.

Before I finish, I just want to be clear about the alternative. Despite the care with which I listened to the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech, if it contained any substance, I missed it. For those in the chamber left guessing what the Canberra Liberals would have done if they delivered this budget, here is a hint. Just last week, the Brindabella branch of the Canberra Liberals debated a motion to back away from net zero policies and support Barnaby Joyce's bill in the federal parliament. You heard me right! Last week the Brindabella branch of the Canberra Liberals debated a motion to abandon net zero by 2050. While ACT Labor is investing in Canberra's now and tomorrow, the Canberra Liberals are stuck in the past, still arguing about whether climate change is real, going back to saying: one, "Global warming is not so bad," until, two, "It is so bad we cannot do anything." The choice is clear: a government that listens, delivers and invests in the future, or an opposition that has jammed itself in the past.

This budget contains a long-term commitment to making the southside the best place in Canberra to live, work and raise a family. Labor's 2024 Plan for Tuggeranong was a comprehensive start, and I will continue relentlessly annoying my colleagues in front

of me, extremely constructively, to make it happen.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.38): The 2025-26 budget outlines several initiatives within the climate change, environment, energy and water portfolio. The government has committed \$10.789 million under the continuing climate change action and environmental protection initiative, to ensure the government continues to meet its mitigation and adaptation commitments, including support for the ACT Climate Change Council and development of a new climate change strategy. Our ongoing energy policy work includes ensuring energy network resilience; effectively maintaining 100 per cent renewable electricity; developing a regulatory framework to support the gas transition policy; and measures to support the timely and cost-effective installation and operation of consumer energy resources.

We are also continuing work on unit titles reforms, to facilitate electrification and to support the necessary preparation activities to deliver future restoration commitments for environmental offsets required under the Gungahlin Strategic Assessment.

Under the Integrated Energy Plan—public housing electrification initiative, we have expedited \$21.776 million of previously provisioned funding to upgrade gas appliances to appropriate electric alternatives in 1,600 public housing properties ahead of schedule. Funding will cover make-good requirements, ancillary electrical work, gas connection abolition by 2028, and staffing, as well as auditing, compliance and evaluation work.

ACT residents living in public housing properties will reap the benefits of the transition to clean energy through improved thermal comfort and reduced energy bills with this initiative. All upgrades are fully funded at no cost to the tenant, and the early allocation of funding will provide long-term savings to the ACT government and its tenants.

The government will also deliver programs for low-income households and small businesses through the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme initiative. As part of this initiative, we will continue delivering the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme; the Home Energy Efficiency Program, which delivers free in-home energy assessments; the Sustainable Business Program, offering free energy assessment and rebates for small businesses; the First Nations Home Energy Support Program, to provide free support to First Nations households; and support for apartment buildings to electrify. This funding will also see the commencement of the Commercial Landlords Electrification pilot, supporting commercial landlords and tenants to electrify.

Over the next two years, the government will deliver the community outreach program for household energy support, to assist low-income and vulnerable households in understanding how to reduce their energy bills and in accessing energy efficiency supports to help mitigate cost-of-living pressures. The program will be delivered by a contracted community organisation with strong sector relationships, ensuring trusted engagement with hard-to-reach communities.

The program will include community outreach activities to improve energy literacy and referral pathways to existing support services; 1,785 annual energy wallet payments to provide immediate bill relief and incentivise engagement with the program and its wider

assistance; and strong collaboration between community organisations and government programs to improve coordination and outcomes. A full evaluation of the program will be completed at the end of the first two years to assess the outcomes and inform future support models.

Mr Assistant Speaker, ground transport now contributes around two-thirds of the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions, and our government is committed to action to reduce the impact of transport on our environment. The government will continue to deliver a range of actions under the ACT's Zero Emissions Vehicles Strategy 2022-2030 to promote the uptake of electric vehicles across the ACT. The ZEV Action Plan, to continue to deliver on the ZEV Strategy initiative, provides \$3.65 million to further the rollout of charging infrastructure for the government's commercial EV fleet and to investigate the feasibility of direct current fast-charging hubs across the ACT.

This budget also delivers on our election commitment to establish an ACT government landscape architect, who will develop the ACT's first landscape plan. The landscape plan will be a long-term strategic approach to improve outcomes, taking into consideration urban growth, climate adaptation and nature conservation objectives across the territory's landscape.

This work will be informed by design, biodiversity, science and spatial data expertise and evidence. It will link continuing work on living infrastructure and urban heat mitigation and work already underway to map ecological values of the ACT landscape. Delivery of the ACT's first landscape plan will also include support to undertake critical conservation action, to enhance natural and urban climate adaptation developments, and to develop environmental and urban adaptation policy.

To support the landscape plan's development, the budget includes \$1.4 million for mapping of critical habitat for threatened species and priority conservation areas for key biodiversity values, including essential connectivity corridors, and continuation of living infrastructure and urban heat island climate adaptation policy work.

The budget also includes support for on-ground works, with the priority in the first year for habitat restoration and protecting our landscape through direct intervention to combat invasive pests, both animals and weeds, to reduce their impact on our environment.

Over the next four years, the government will spend \$4 million in new funding to support the Canberra grassland earless dragon. This money will support breeding programs to sustain the genetic diversity of this critically endangered species. We will also continue our ongoing program of land restoration and work with landholders to preserve the natural temperate grasslands that sustains the dragons and other threatened species.

The ACT government continues to monitor and respond to biosecurity risks and outbreaks. Over the coming year, almost \$1 million in new funds is allocated to protecting Canberra's biosecurity, including strengthening response plans for high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1 and other new and emerging biosecurity risks.

The safeguarding the territory's water resources initiative includes funding to support

the work of the Office of Water to continue to preserve and enhance the quality and sustainability of our water resources.

The government's continued investment in First Nations initiatives will support increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in water management and promote their stronger access to water for cultural use and economic opportunities, consistent with our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The 2025-26 funding will support targeted engagement with First Nations people to amplify their participation in water planning and management, including consultation on a refreshed ACT Water Strategy; a refreshed ACT and Region Catchment Strategy; the ACT environmental flow guidelines; the ACT Long-term Watering Plan; and Healthy Waterways catchment planning.

In addition, the ACT and Region Catchment Strategy refresh will be completed. So \$420,000 is being invested to evaluate and enhance groundwater monitoring in the ACT, and this work will strengthen our understanding of groundwater systems and support long-term sustainability. And \$300,000 has been allocated to enhance waterway health monitoring, alongside an additional \$100,000 to build scientific knowledge. These investments will support the ACT's delivery of the Restoring the Upper Murrumbidgee River Program by addressing key knowledge and monitoring gaps. The data and insights generated will guide efforts to improve the health of the Murrumbidgee River, inform future reviews of the ACT's environmental flow guidelines and inform broader monitoring programs across the territory.

There has been \$3.16 million committed to the Water Efficiency Program initiative to support the ACT's long-term water security and resilience to droughts and climate change. This budget measure will support design and planning of water efficiency initiatives for households, businesses and schools, both public and private; community engagement and education in water efficiency; and regulatory upgrades to improve water efficiency in the design, construction and use of dwellings and other buildings in the ACT. The program will also consider water efficiency upgrades of ACT sportsgrounds, city parks and government facilities.

Through the Healthy Waterways initiative, the government continues to invest in programs working with Tuggeranong residents to reduce the quantity of leaves, grass clippings and fertilisers entering drains. This investment is enabling the development of the next Lake Tuggeranong catchment plan to improve Lake Tuggeranong.

Work to restore and improve our regional water systems also continues under the Murray-Darling Basin and Upper Murrumbidgee agreements with the federal government.

Mr Assistant Speaker, our community faces challenges in a changing environment: from mitigating and adapting to climate change to protecting the health of our waterways and native ecosystems. In addressing these challenges, the government must act to bring the community with us through a shared understanding of the problems and real consultation on proposed solutions. The ACT government will continue to act for a just and equitable transition to net zero, ensuring that everybody shares the benefits of the new clean energy economy.

Moving to a few of the matters that have been raised throughout this debate and consistently through estimates and the budget reply speech, I would like to address some of the comments that have come up. It has been implied that the ACT government's funding for the environment portfolio has reduced. In fact, the 2025-26 budget invests a significant \$238 million for our environment, sustainable development and climate change. The environment, sustainable development and climate change budget has increased each year since 2023, and it has increased from 2024-25 budget by \$9 million, with new investments in the breeding program for the Canberra grassland earless dragon and delivering the ACT's first landscape plan with the future appointment of a government landscape architect.

While the rounded percentage for the environment is listed as two per cent of the 2025-26 budget, the percentage is actually 2.71 per cent, a small decrease in proportion from 2.82 per cent of the budget last year. I note again that this is due to more rapid increases in other areas of the budget, but environmental spending has increased in its quantum.

In addition to the 2.71 per cent, this is before taking into account other climate-positive initiatives that fall into non-environmentally led outputs such as housing, education, health, and community services. It was also suggested during the debate that the government has not provided any meaningful response to the former Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's recommendation to increase spending on the environment, nor the estimates report recommendation citing the commissioner's recommendation.

For the record, the government response to the estimates report recommendation noted the recommendation and stated:

The *Close to the Edge* report's findings and recommendations remain under consideration by the Government.

While some might say this is not meaningful, others might say it is respectful of due process.

Mr Assistant Speaker, there was also quite a bit of commentary on funding of environmental groups, and I appreciate there was a particular question on notice that took quite a long time to come back to the person who asked it. The question was relating to environmental organisations' funding. It was incredibly broad, meaning it was complex to collate, calculate and answer. It was important that directorate officials took the appropriate care to ensure the information was clear, factual and responded to the question in full. My office let the relevant MLA's office know of the expected delay, noting the complexity of pulling together information on various funding sources, and as soon as it was finalised it was sent directly to the relevant MLA and their office. The delay was by no means intentional, and I reject any commentary to that effect.

While officials drafted responses to many questions within the timeframe, this was one of very few, across government, that ultimately required additional time. I hope all members of this place will be understanding when, from time to time, despite best endeavours, delays do occur. I would also really appreciate the scope of questions to be more considered in future to ensure that the task can fit within the timeframes that we have to work within.

I would like to acknowledge the effort that was undertaken to respond to the QoN. I understand there were several versions which were assessed and reassessed for accuracy, completeness and readability, with revisions undertaken to simplify presentation and further context provided in attempts to avoid exactly what has occurred, a misunderstanding of the information.

Comments were made referencing that organisations have had their funding reduced in this current financial year. This is not the case. Where there have been funding changes from previous financial years, these are related to one-off or non-ongoing funding provisions, such as through grants, separate from existing funding agreements, or service level agreements that we have in place with various organisations. Where figures were reduced to \$0 amounts, this was attributed in forward estimates as \$0 because we cannot include information on funding that is yet to be determined or awarded, and this is made clear in the details of the response.

To continue on the topic of funding arrangements and, in particular, the processes around agreements with our environment groups, there has been discussion, I think it is fair to say, relating to the tender process, for a range of environmental groups in the ACT. The ACT government has provided re-occurring funding to environmental organisations for several years; some of these arrangements commenced prior to self-government and transferred to the ACT. Advice from the directorate to me recommended an open and competitive process for the procurement of the identified environmental services, given the amount of time they have been in place. And we want to make sure that we are keeping them up to date and focused. It was viewed that this would strengthen accountability and also provide an opportunity for innovation. I am aware that the process caused some uncertainty; however, I did endeavour to minimise that by meeting with impacted groups and requesting the directorate engage further to address any questions where they were able to.

In wanting the chamber to know that I took advice from the directorate on best practice procurement for these programs, I am aiming to provide the ACT community with confidence that these programs will continue to deliver on community priorities, and funding will be allocated in a transparent way.

There is quite a bit of discussion on the Canberra earless dragons too, and I think there has been a few points raised. Even though I have unlimited time, I will not take all day, but I probably could on this topic because it is quite involved. There has been reference made to the \$1 million funding from the airport. That is not actually part of the budget. It was a condition applied by the federal government to the airport's application for a variation to their approved building application. We are currently working through what it would take for the government to receive that funding and what that funding would be applied to.

It has also been stated that 38 dragons from the captive breeding program died. While it is true that 38 dragons died, they were not part of the captive breeding program. These 38 dragons were, as it was put to me, not of special enough DNA to make it into the breeding program; however, they were held in breeding tanks down in Tidbinbilla and were studied to get a better understanding of the dragon in a more natural environment so that we could learn more about what kind of habitat it actually does like and how it interacts with other dragons, because it is quite a cryptic little species, and we do not

know a lot about it. The information we are learning through that process, and have been for a number of years now, will help inform the release programs from the captive breeding program—as we release dragons back into wild areas hoping that the knowledge we gain from that sets us up for releasing dragons with the best chance of survival in the wild.

I think it is really important to note that while 38 of the dragons did die as a result of intrusion from antechinus and praying mantises, the area they had been held in they had been in for three years or more without any incident or event. And there were a number of safety precautions, including having barriers down into the ground, which, unfortunately, in this instance, proved not to be deep enough.

I have received comment to my office, not necessarily from people in the chamber but from community members, making quite disparaging remarks about the Parks and Conservation rangers who look after this program and why they did not do more to protect the dragons. I think it is important to acknowledge that the rangers who work on these programs are heavily invested and do everything they can. They have taken the learnings from this. As I mentioned before, it was a number of years that there were no issues at all. But they have certainly, in this instance, taken these learnings and applied them to the future, as we continue to work through learning more about this creature and recovering it. I do not think we need to be disparaging of our rangers who are working very, very hard on making sure that this creature does survive.

I think it has also been suggested that we are not doing any restoration work. I do not think that is quite fair. Certainly, the budget commitment that we have is very much focused on the captive breeding program. However, we do have a range of ongoing work and initiatives that would go exactly to this.

Lastly, it was also suggested that the only reason I was able to secure this money was because Labor wanted the northern road to get built. I am happy to put on the record that is not the case. The budget process started prior to the announcement that the airport had started construction on the road. I was not aware that they were starting construction on the road. It did not form part of my decision to take forward this business case. So we can put that one to bed.

In regard to the landscape plan, it has been suggested that there was a tug of war over who actually decided on this policy and who put it forward. But I would note the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects ACT Chapter, along with other stakeholders, has been advocating for a government landscape architect for as long as I can remember.

In the Ninth Assembly—that is, 2016-2020—the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services, in their 2020 *Inquiry into nature in our city* report made three recommendations. The first recommendation was:

... that the ACT Government re-commit to the concept of the City in a Landscape.

The second recommendation was:

... that the ACT Government develop a City in a Landscape Strategy reflecting

the ACT's current and anticipated future needs.

The third recommendation was:

... that the ACT Government work with the Traditional Custodians of the ACT and region to ensure the City in a Landscape Strategy incorporates cultural knowledge and traditional practices.

I was the chair of that committee when the inquiry began, and Minister Cheyne was the chair when the report was handed up. The committee did not at any time have any members from the Greens party. It was made up of Liberal and Labor members. And at the 2024 election the ACT Labor Party, as one of their key environment policies, committed to the appointment of a government landscape architect to develop an ACT landscape plan. One can draw the line: the inquiry primarily chaired by me and completed by another Labor member recommended a landscape plan for the ACT; other committees I have been a member of have recommended appointing a government landscape architect; the 2024 Labor election commitments that I wrote included both the appointment of a government landscape architect and the development of a landscape plan. And now here we are.

Under this budget, we now have the funding to commence with appointing a government landscape architect and establishing an office of the government landscape architect. As I have said many times on the public record, we will not be getting ahead of ourselves, and we will provide details for each step as appropriate, starting with the appointment of the landscape architect. Further details for different components of this broad project will follow in due course as we progress through those different stages.

I think there has also been some commentary around adoption of the Conservation Council's Biodiversity Network. As I noted in the estimates hearings, the biodiversity network is not the government's policy; it is the Conservation Council's policy. Government has its own processes for developing its policy, and we will continue to do just that.

I dare say, however, that in developing the landscape plan, we will be more than happy to have input from the Conservation Council and their members who have developed their biodiversity network plan. However, what I really do not want to do is give the impression that we have adopted a policy that we have not. The development of the landscape plan will have many components which will all require careful consideration and engagement across government and with the community. I want to be clear: I will not be rushed or rush my officials to deliver on any of this.

Wood heaters—Mr Assistant Speaker, dare I go there! In the 2023 response to the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's investigation into wood heater policy in the ACT, the ACT government agreed in principle to phase out wood heaters from the ACT through the establishment of a target date for the replacement of wood heaters with electrification alternatives, subject to air quality and regulatory impact assessments and community consultation. In fact, the government's exact recommendation response was "agree in principle".

The ACT is on a journey to electrify the city and transition away from the use of fossil

fuel gas by 2045. It is timely and appropriate that the ACT government analyse the options, costs and timeframes to transition households away from using wood heaters and onto sustainable forms of electric alternatives. This will help guide and inform development of policies to help achieve this outcome.

In the debate we had in the chamber that set off quite an extraordinary series of events, I moved an amendment to the motion. It stated:

... the ACT Government has agreed in principle to establish a target date for the replacement of wood heaters in Canberra suburbs, noting the ACT is on a journey to electrify the city and transition away from the use of fossil fuel gas by 2045 ...

I was a bit surprised that I then received a lot of commentary that this was backing down on the commitment. And I believe it was put forward that the then minister, in a 2023 media release, had said the government endorsed a position to phase-out wood heaters in the ACT by 2045. However, that former minister, who released the media release, recently said in a statement to the *Canberra Times* that in 2023 the ACT government agreed “in principle”. So I dare say the only walking back that has occurred is in the phrasing of those terms.

The ACT government has not changed the policy from 2023 that we continue to work through. Air quality assessments have been completed, and work is progressing by the City and Environment Directorate on a regulatory impact assessment to continue to progress the phase-out of wood heaters. But rather than rushing to an arbitrary, forced deadline, as we would have needed to do in that motion, this government will get on with the job of progressing considered regulatory advice and engaging with community and stakeholder feedback to ensure we bring along as many people as possible in this journey.

We cannot achieve our environmental goals and undertake a just transition for households to suitable heating alternatives without strong community collaboration and participation. This requires significant work, and that work continues in a timely and considered manner.

I think we have also heard the claim that the Healthy Waterways Program has, effectively, ended. I would like to assure the Assembly and everyone listening that the program does in fact continue. At the 2024 election, Labor committed to continue improving our lakes and waterways. In line with that commitment, the 2025-26 budget includes funding for delivery of the ACT Healthy Waterways Program, with a focus on preparing catchment plans and delivering a 10-year plan to improve water quality in Lake Tuggeranong. Again, it all continues.

During the scrutiny part of the estimates process there was also a little bit of a conversation around Sullivans Creek and the re-naturalisation. There was a Sullivans Creek re-naturalisation options report released in August 2024. This report identified opportunities for re-naturalisation initiatives that could be applied to Sullivans Creek. In releasing the report, it was stated that it is an aspirational report, and the government continued to explore opportunities.

Since that time, it has been presented that the report was, perhaps, a little bit more than

options and that it was actually a commitment from government that, again, we have walked away from. It is not the case. The report was never a clear commitment and an agreed course of action. The report was always there to inform and to provide options for ways that we can enhance future works, connectivity and cultural values.

While the government is not actively planning a major re-naturalisation at this time, the options report will continue to guide initiatives as they come up within the catchment—for example, the recently completed upper Sullivans Creek connectivity project, which was informed by some of the work that was identified in this report. The implementation of all the options provided in the report would be quite a significant infrastructure project, and the costs at this point in time are not something that we could justify diverting funding away from other priorities to.

There has also been quite a bit of commentary on the need to have a new climate change strategy before the current one ends. And it has been suggested, I think, paraphrasing, that I am somewhat stalling, or I am not putting enough oomph into getting on with it. It has also been suggested that there is no reason why I would not be able to move faster, because, as I learnt in a media statement put out by the former minister, prior to the election, he:

“... instructed the Directorate to prepare options for the development of the new Climate Change Strategy for consideration by the incoming Minister in November 2024.”

I think similar commentary has been made since that statement went out.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I can confirm for the record that when I came into this portfolio I was not presented with a range of options for the development of a new climate change strategy. I was, however, advised that a new strategy would be needed and that the development of that would be subject to budgetary considerations because the current funding to support development of a new strategy would end in the 2024-25 financial year. This meant I would first have to go through the budget process so that I had the people and the resources to deliver that strategy. That funding has been secured in this budget, and we are getting on with the work to develop a new climate change strategy.

In closing—it might possibly be the longest speech I have ever given in this place—during the estimates hearings it was put to me that I have no vision in this portfolio. Now, it may come as a shock to others in this place and in this chamber today, but I do dispute that view! The first protest I ever attended was an environmental one. I was in primary school, and the French government had decided to test nuclear bombs in Moruroa Atoll in the South Pacific. I got my dad to write me a note so I did not get in trouble for skipping school, and I went and joined people much older than me to collectively demonstrate our concern for the environmental impacts these tests would have.

The protests and the discussions that surrounded the testing went on for months. And anger towards the French government turned to anger towards anything associated with France, leading to boycotts of French products, among other actions. Canberrans partook of boycotts, and media outlets provided ongoing coverage of those impacts. One example, which I stumbled upon when reminiscing on this to write the speech, was

found in the *Canberra Times*, which on 11 August 1995 reported in relation to the boycotts that legendary local wine merchant, Jim Murphy, said of the protest sentiment among buyers:

“It is there, and it’s on a lot of people’s minds and we’ve noticed it more in French liqueur than anything else.”

On a more personal note, I remember seeing a local news report on the TV one evening when they interviewed the baker at Croissant D’Or, who spoke of having to limit their trade, having their store graffitied and receiving insults and abusive comments from people angry with the French government. In February 1996, due to mounting international pressure applied through protest and diplomatic channels, and after six of the planned eight tests had been carried out, France ceased its program.

What I learned through this whole process, this expression of democracy, was that you can come together to make your point and your action can draw attention to your cause and provoke discussion. At the same time, the discussion that is provoked can lead to unintended consequences and potentially cause harm that was never intended. I also learnt that protest creates a space for the discussion, and diplomacy is what resolves the issues at hand. The experience has shaped my approach to environmentalism and, more widely, my political ethos ever since. And while I firmly believe in the benefit of collective action and the right to protest when standing up for a cause, I also firmly believe this needs to be balanced with a willingness to come to the table and negotiate, and a concern for not doing harm or alienating people along the way.

Mr Assistant Speaker, that is my vision for the environment portfolio: that it is a portfolio that prioritises a balanced approach to ensuring our environment thrives. To this end, across this term, I will continue to pursue an agenda which includes: appointing a government landscape architect; developing a Canberra-wide landscape plan; supporting local biodiversity and environmental conservation and protection; improving local waterways; reducing emissions and helping more households and businesses transition to a more energy-efficient future; and developing the next climate change strategy, as well as new responses to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate.

I might also attend a peaceful protest or two; it is far from unprecedented. But it is unlikely I will be using large sweeping statements in every speech or making comments that instigate divisive discussion or forgetting that there is a myriad of views on any one issue. Rather than seeking to silence or disengage those views, I will continue to find ways to work together to achieve real and sustained outcomes across the portfolio.

Balance is essential, because the commitment of a passionate minority will not be enough to get the social licence needed to address the challenges we must address, and over the coming term we will have some pretty big and critical challenges to address. We must involve the community in our climate and environment efforts, continuing to work with everyone to provide practical advice and information to help Canberrans and businesses to live and work more sustainably, and to support all people at different life stages and contexts to make these changes.

Mr Assistant Speaker, when I took over this portfolio in November 2024, I was advised there was a real risk we would not reach our 2025 greenhouse gas reduction target and,

if we stayed on the trajectory we were on, we would not reach net zero by 2045. In light of this advice, and since the start of the term, I have directed my officials to put everything back on the table: to have a good hard look at what we have been doing to reduce emissions; to look at what we have identified we need to do next; to imagine new things we have never thought of; and to reconsider things we might have written off as too difficult. This is the only way to ensure we do not stay on the trajectory we are currently on.

Until the greenhouse gas inventory is finalised, I will not know if we have or have not met our 2025 interim target. That finalisation is happening as I speak, and I anticipate receiving and tabling the results before the end of the year. With the work we have been doing over the last 11 months, I will also look to bring forward a balanced response to whatever challenge we are presented with.

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) (12.12): I thank the Assembly for its indulgence, as we go well into the lunch break. I know that you are here as duty members across the chamber. Don't worry; I will not do anything outrageous.

Where do I begin on this? I will start perhaps by addressing some of the errors, odd statements, that we have heard, particularly from the Greens. Perhaps I will also give a very short, potted history of maintenance in the ACT and the challenges that we are currently facing. First of all, Mr Braddock said yesterday:

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.

Okay, so do we want maintenance, or do we not want maintenance? I do not actually understand what that was about. He also said:

The ACT already has its city-wide map which shows where we need to invest but there is no plan to make it happen.

Yes, there is. Active travel infrastructure and maintenance initiatives see a total of \$38.2 million of investment over four years. Mr Assistant Speaker, you do not just have to believe me; you can look on the website that accompanies the active travel page, which shows the stages of development of the upgrades, where we are connecting paths with new paths, upgrading or whatever it may be. You can see whether they are at the feasibility or early design stage, whether construction has started, or whether it has recently been completed. I hope Mr Braddock reads that before the next budget, at the very least.

Mr Braddock also said, with regard to libraries, that “there is no getting around the fact that staffing levels per population are under the national benchmarks”. That is not true, and that has become very clear through the excellent work that the independent working group undertook with regard to libraries, the recommendations of which we are currently working through. Mr Braddock has had this report for a little bit of time now; it is publicly available.

On pages 33 and 34, in particular, with respect to the number of opening hours per week under the national standards, the goal, for a population catchment of 100,000 or more people, is 64 hours. The Libraries ACT result is 82.3 hours per week. Based on this goal, and even against a forecast estimated population of 500,000, Libraries ACT would be required to provide 320 hours of opening time per week. Libraries ACT currently provides 411.5 hours per week, which is almost 30 per cent above the standard to which Mr Braddock was referring.

I would note that the report identifies that it is not even across the ACT. We do know that, on an individual basis, there are some areas that are overserviced and there are some areas that are underserviced. With respect to the opening hours for Gungahlin library, on an individual level, it is below the standard by about six hours per week. Woden library is also below that goal by the same amount. But there will be a Molonglo library, of course, which will address that shortfall. On a population basis, we are actually doing great.

With respect to where the issues are, as has become well known now, and where I hope the focus of the conversation can go, it is about culture in Libraries ACT, and working through and addressing that, so that it is a healthy, happy workplace, and that we are not seeing unplanned absences at the rate that we have been seeing them. We have already seen such terrific engagement from staff at all levels, and I look forward to that continuing, because the reforms in this area need to be driven by staff. I hope Mr Braddock stops referring to that, because he is wrong.

Ms Clay talked about the funding of the urban wood waste strategy, that it is shaping up well and she is pleased to see it, which is great. She said the former minister was pretty passionate about it. I do not know who she is talking about because I was the former minister. I would assume she was talking about the Greens, but I cannot see any evidence that it was a Greens policy. I do not think it was a Greens election commitment. It was an ACT Labor election commitment. I think it is in our parliamentary agreement. I am proud to deliver on it. I know that the community is very much looking forward to seeing the positive outcomes of that and how that contributes to our circular economy.

Going to a potted history, when we talk about cracked footpaths and maintenance, it is absolutely not true that this government does not care for or invest in maintenance, Mr Assistant Speaker. I appreciated your own contribution earlier, when you talked about everything that you can see going on, wherever you go.

I would note that the ACT's transition to self-government was a blessing and a burden. It is not just me that says that. I am quoting from a document that Mr Stanhope put his name to, from 2008, which notes that we inherited infrastructure befitting of a national capital, of an incredibly high standard, and a very fortunate legacy; also, investment, on a per capita basis, well above the national standard. Inheriting these facilities meant that we knew we had to maintain these high-quality public assets. At the same time, we have far smaller financial reserves to draw on than the commonwealth.

Immediately, we inherited essentially a structural budget issue. This was, of course, compounded in the late 1990s, when outsourcing was the name of the game and, as a result, with the competitive approach to the provision of services, effectively it was a

matter of looking at who could do it the cheapest. Doing it cheaply is not always best, as we know, and that really started to hit the maintenance of services. Mr Assistant Speaker, you can see, going back to that time—and that was the Carnell era, I might add—that deferred maintenance was already a problem. Totalcare became totally dysfunctional, and it was rolled back into the ACT public service in 2004, I think.

It is very difficult to get on top of deferred maintenance. Effectively, the issues that stemmed from that time have been a legacy that we have been trying to catch up on ever since. In the meantime, we are growing as a city. People want to live here because it is beautiful, because of the lifestyle, because of the planning, because of our environment, and because of the facilities, both ones that we have inherited and ones that the ACT government has embarked on developing.

We are going through that period of renewal, whether it is playgrounds, footpaths or whatever it might be. I would note that we have gone through a period of significant investment in new infrastructure over the last decade or 15 years. We also need to make sure that we are investing properly in the maintenance of the asset, over its entire life cycle. I will keep referring to this cognitive dissonance. Across the chamber, excluding those on the back bench—Mr Assistant Speaker, you and Ms Tough—there is this sense of “do more, create more, build more”. That is great, but everything more that we add means there are more things that we need to maintain, and that means there needs to be a budget for that as well.

I appreciated Ms Carrick’s contribution earlier, when she noted that we are in a tricky situation with our budget. We are; absolutely. We do need to make some pretty judicious decisions about maintenance, ensuring that the assets that we have are fit for purpose, and to give really thoughtful consideration to new things that we are going to do.

With respect to the budget, as it currently stands, there is actually huge investment across the City and Environment Directorate. I am pleased to see just how much of our election commitments we have been able to deliver in this budget and over the forward estimates. I will particularly highlight some things. The Lake Ginninderra shared path, and upgrading that so that it is wider around the entire lake, is something that I have been passionate about for about five-plus years, officially. We are going to get that done. That has been on the to-do list for some time.

We are delivering improvements to our road networks, and that includes a signalised pedestrian crossing on Canberra Avenue. I know that a signalised pedestrian crossing is a disappointment for some, and that they would prefer an overpass. An overpass simply is not possible, but we will deliver the signalised pedestrian crossing, and it will deliver safety improvements as a result. We have also introduced and amended a range of existing transport-related fees and charges to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of vehicle inspections, impound services and vehicle registrations.

With respect to shop upgrades, Charnwood, Mawson, Erindale, Palmerston and Griffith are getting improvements that will ensure their ongoing vitality, safety and accessibility, and ensure that they are welcoming places for our community, and they create jobs, too.

Playgrounds and parks are something that I know you, Mr Assistant Speaker, and Ms Tough are particularly passionate about. You covered extensively the investments that we are making in Tuggeranong. I would note the investments in the Belconnen town centre, one of the fastest growing areas in the ACT—Emu Bank foreshore, with the addition of water play, an all-abilities playground nearby in Florey, and a new playground with barbecues and picnic tables at Margaret Timpson Park. There will be a toilet there, too.

Yes, Lennon Wicks, I am singling you out. Please tell your clients to stop emailing me. We will be building an accessible ramp on the northern approach. That is an election commitment. It will be delivered through this. Mr Assistant Speaker, I absolutely appreciate the lobbying from Mr Wicks. It will happen, and he should see that very soon.

With respect to public toilets, there will be new public toilets at Downer shops, Red Hill shops, and at Dunlop. We are continuing to support mowing and horticultural crews. With the changing climate, we see it nearly every day, when it comes to these municipal services, whether it is maintaining our trees, dealing with the responses to storm events, or mowing. We all keenly recall what I would describe as the mowing crisis of the summer of 2023-24, when it rained, then it was really warm and sunny, then it rained again; then it was warm and sunny, on repeat, ad nauseam, forevermore.

That was a really difficult period for our staff because the ground was damp all the time; if not, it was pouring with rain. All those conditions meant that the grass was growing like crazy. I really do appreciate the support that our crews have received since then, and that we are really on top of mowing, as well as our efforts with edging. All of that has assisted, as we have headed into our new mowing season, which began at the beginning of this month.

The one thing that I do want to stress is the additional green bin. We will provide every Canberra household with an option for an additional household green bin. This is an election commitment. It is probably the one that I have received the most emails about, asking, “When is it going to come into place?” I am glad to deliver it for the community. It will provide the opportunity for households to dispose of greater amounts of green waste, and I expect it to be in place before the end of the year.

There is a lot of investment in Access Canberra, which has merged with the City and Environment Directorate but is still very much in its own stream and with its own identity. There has been a huge amount of work that is coming to its conclusion, which is exciting. That includes modernising occupational licensing systems and updating our traffic and parking systems to best meet community need. Again, it is not sexy, but the more time you spend learning about it, the more exciting it becomes, I can assure you.

I refer also to the automatic liquor fee reductions of 50 per cent for our smaller venues. Eligible venues with occupancies of between 151 and 350 people that showcase artists, musicians and other cultural activities are getting that 50 per cent reduction as well. We have seen a great uptake of that since it came into force in July.

I cannot conclude without acknowledging the amazing work of Parks and Conservation. I am pleased to have visited all the depots there. I have met the staff, talked to the

rangers, seen the programs of work, and seen the incredible knowledge bases and investment that they have made as people, and that this government has made. I think our bush capital is something that we are very proud to have and to maintain. The work that we have put in, especially in the last few years, regarding vertebrate pests has been incredible. It is something that keeps me awake at night. I never thought I would think about goats as much as I do—but I do—and how we can stay on top of that. We are doing a pretty incredible job, despite how much these pests like to breed.

There is plenty more that I could talk about, but the most important thing for me is to acknowledge that the biggest investment for us, in many ways, is in our staff, not just in the dollar sense but in the sense of their development and ensuring that they have a healthy workplace and a place where they enjoy getting on with the job. The frontline staff that we have across all these areas, as well as the policy officers and the people who are doing a lot of the grunt work behind the scenes, are just amazing. I am really proud of this workforce and proud to be the minister. I commend this part of the budget to the chamber.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.31 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

ACT population projections 2025-2065

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the minister for housing. Hall is one of the most loved and historic parts of the ACT, with committed long-term residents. Demand to move into the village is high. But the government's new population projection forecasts that the population of Hall will fall to zero. Why is the government forcing the depopulation of Hall village?

MR STEEL: I will take that question, as the minister for planning. We are not.

MS CASTLEY: I am wondering if the minister can explain what consultation has been undertaken with the local residents about the future of Hall village, based on the projection?

MR STEEL: I will need some further context from the member. If she would not mind providing me with some more information—perhaps outside of question time—I am happy to come back to her on that. I do not have any information to provide her in relation to that, other than what is in the current Planning Strategy for the ACT in relation to future development that may be envisaged in that area.

MR MILLIGAN: Why has the government not updated its master plan for Hall since 2002?

MR STEEL: The government will be refreshing the Planning Strategy, which is, of course, the key foundational document that looks at where future development may

occur in the ACT—particularly with a housing focus. We will do that in accordance with the timeframes in the Planning Act, which set out that it should be reviewed every five years. So, over the next two years we will be undertaking that work. At the moment, of course, the focus of that strategy is to have 70 per cent of urban infill occurring within the existing urban footprint of the ACT, with 30 per cent occurring in new greenfield areas. Of course, if there were different views about how the development of more rural areas of the ACT should occur—indeed in relation to the township of Hall—then those views can be put forward as part of the refresh and consultation on that strategy.

ACT population projections 2025-2065

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, did you review the population forecasts before they were published and what advice did you provide, with your housing hat on?

Mr Barr: It is a Treasury document.

Ms Castley: It still affects housing and homes in the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The population projection methodology simply acknowledges that we are going to have a distribution of our population in the territory based on a dynamic housing model. That takes into account existing houses and how people might move into existing residences. People coming from outside the ACT, through interstate migration or, indeed, migration from overseas, may move into existing residences, and not just new residences that are built in greenfield areas.

Ms Castley: Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Do you have a point of order, Ms Castley? Can we stop the clock, please?

Ms Castley: I asked the minister whether she had reviewed the forecasts, not whether the Treasurer had reviewed the forecasts.

MR SPEAKER: We have a minute on the clock. Obviously, the minister can choose whether he continues to answer or not. I cannot determine which minister answers the question. I would suggest that the question was originally to the minister for housing and it was: did you review the population forecasts before they were published? I would say that the minister for planning is free to answer whether the minister for housing did review those. I will leave it up to you, Minister Steel.

MR STEEL: This is a publication of Treasury that I have released, but I know that Minister Berry is aware of the population forecasts that have been released.

MS CASTLEY: Minister—whichever would like to answer, I suppose, but I would like the housing minister to answer—what are the impacts of unreliable population forecasts on the development of housing targets and land release programs?

MR STEEL: I will take the question again, as planning for the land release program fits into my portfolio, which was referenced in the question. Of course, the population figures take into account our Planning Strategy and work on planning reform. The updated methodology, which I presented to the Assembly, talked at length about there having been a change in methodology to a dynamic model, which recognises that people who are moving into the ACT are not just living in new greenfield areas but will also live in existing residences within existing suburbs.

That is the methodology change that we think has in fact made the forecasting more reliable about the distribution of the population around the territory for the future, and that is then used to help inform the provision of services and infrastructure to both existing residents in those areas and any new residents that may move in. But they are just forecasts, and there is a range of different inputs into decision-making, of course, around the territory and the services that we provide. That is just one input, but it is a useful one, and it has been refined over time, based on methodology that has been developed with the ANU.

MS BARRY: Minister, do you have confidence in the reliability of the rest of the government's population projections?

MR STEEL: Yes, I do; but they will be refined over time. They are just projections, and there are assumptions in those projections, and those have been outlined in detail in the population report itself. Of course, it is only one input into the decisions that the government will make about a range of things, whether it is in relation to housing or in relation to the infrastructure and services that we deliver.

ACT population projections 2025-2065

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, how were your population forecasts reviewed prior to publication? Are you aware that the forecast for Hall reduces to zero by 2065?

MR STEEL: I will take that question on notice and provide some information for the Assembly about Hall specifically.

The projections are useful in providing us with a much better understanding, based on the updated methodology, about how net interstate migration and net international migration will fit into suburbs—particularly existing suburbs—over the decades ahead. That can then be used to inform our decision-making processes. But I will come back with the specific detail on that.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, how will the government improve its approach to forecasting following a significant error? And please answer: did you realise Hall was reducing to zero by 2065?

MR STEEL: I do not necessarily accept the premise of the question, but I am already taking the previous question on notice, so I will come back in relation to the previous question.

MS BARRY: Treasurer, is the government confident that its other estimates of population growth, which it has used to challenge the ABS population data, are accurate?

MR STEEL: Yes, because we have a range of different data sets in ACT government—not just population projections, but driver licence data, hospital presentation data. We have a whole range of different data sets that we can use to show the commonwealth that our true population is higher than what is currently being forecast, particularly in the ABS's net interstate migration figures. The driver licence data shows that there has been consistent positive net interstate migration—now over a number of years—that is not being reflected in the ABS's net interstate migration figures. When a census occurs, that is then adjusted upwards to reflect our true population at the census time. The problem is in between censuses. We have data sets that clearly show that we have continued strong net interstate migration. In fact, a report was just released in the last week or so based on removalist data—so removalist companies that are assisting people to move between states and territories, including to and from the ACT—showing that we have continued strong positive movements into the ACT on a net basis.

Horseracing industry—workplace health and safety

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for workplace health and safety. Minister, yesterday in question time, when explaining your proposed insurance bailout for the horseracing industry, you said the horseracing industry is “the most dangerous industry in the ACT” and WorkSafe has a particular focus on them. The government has shut down other unsafe industries, like the engineered stone and loose-fill asbestos industries. That often happens after worker deaths and accidents and industry noncompliance with safety orders. Minister, has the horseracing industry implemented every safety order made by WorkSafe?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I will have to take that on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: Is the horseracing industry fully compliant with the Work Health and Safety Act and the Workers Compensation Act?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. Advice to me by officials causes a sense of alarm about rising rates of noncompliance with workers compensation. As to the other matters, I will need to take that on notice. I will take the whole question on notice.

MS CLAY: Has the horseracing industry told you that, if the ACT government does not provide insurance for them, they will cease to operate in the ACT?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the member for the question. What we are witnessing already is a large number of horse trainers undertaking their training activity across the border in New South Wales. This is separate to horseracing. Horseracing continues in the ACT and, as I understand, will continue to exist within the ACT. This is a question of where that training activity occurs.

ACT population projections 2025-2065

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for business. Major businesses rely on Treasury's population forecasts for evaluating future investments in the ACT and for other business decisions. Minister, are you concerned that unreliable forecasts will damage the Treasury's reputation with the businesses and investors we want to attract to the ACT?

MR PETTERSSON: Mr Speaker, a point of order. Is that asking for an opinion?

MR SPEAKER: I would suggest that it is. Are you raising a point of order in the hope that I will rule the question out of order?

MR PETTERSSON: That is what I am doing.

MR SPEAKER: I am going to rule it out of order.

Planning and Development—CSIRO Ginninderra

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. Minister, yesterday during question time you indicated that the anticipated yield for the CSIRO Ginninderra site—as disclosed through estimates—of just 2,984 dwellings was not for the entire site but was only for CSIRO Ginninderra east. Is the sale that is now being negotiated for the entire site or just for CSIRO Ginninderra east?

MS BERRY: It is just for the east end of Ginninderra.

MR EMERSON: Minister, why is the government not negotiating to purchase the entire site—to address the territory's housing crisis—given that just yesterday this Assembly agreed to legislate the human right to housing?

MS BERRY: This does not preclude future negotiations with the federal government for the second part of that site. It is quite a big area to be providing more homes on, and there is quite a significant amount of work. We could not do it all at once. This is the negotiation that is happening for the east part of the site. I probably cannot go into more detail than that until it is finalised.

MS CARRICK: Does the government expect the sale to be agreed before the end of the year?

MR SPEAKER: Ms Berry? Do you need the question repeated?

MS BERRY: No, I was just wondering whether the question was also asking me for an opinion. I think I have already said that we are in negotiations, and as soon as I have something more to say I will let the Assembly know.

Phillip—Callam Street design and feasibility study

MS CARRICK: My question is to Minister Stephen-Smith as minister responsible for Places and Spaces within Infrastructure Canberra. The question is about the precinct

design and feasibility study for Callum Offices and surrounding sites in Phillip. Minister, what is the purpose of this study?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I will take the question on notice to provide some further detail in relation to that matter. This is a joint project across a couple of agencies, and I will need to get some advice about what we are saying around this. As Ms Carrick would be aware, Callum Offices is currently vacant. It has been vacated by ACT government agencies as a result of not being fit for purpose for those agencies to continue to occupy. So, there has been some consideration around what the future of Callum Offices looks like and how we manage that precinct as a whole, in the context of the wider Woden area. This study is around supporting those considerations around the future of Callum Offices and that precinct.

MS CARRICK: Minister, is the intention to sell the site? Have there been any recent discussions with potential purchasers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. As far as I am aware, there have not been any conversations with any potential purchasers of the site. This study is really about informing next steps. So, again, I will take the detail of the question on notice.

MR EMERSON: Minister, is there an opportunity in this study to look at planning the site for places and spaces for the community sector?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Ms Carrick would be well aware, one of the sites adjacent to Callum Offices has been the site previously identified for the Woden community centre development. So, part of the work that we are doing is to understand whether that remains the best location for the new Woden community centre, which will include places and spaces for community sector organisations and community activities—including our partnership with Woden Community Services.

So, yes, absolutely, this work is looking at what is needed for community services and community activities in Woden, but that is also a broader piece of work.. As I said to Ms Carrick before, given that the tender responses came back in relation to detailed design of the Woden community centre above budget, we are now having another look at that. But the money for the Woden community centre development remains in the budget, so that is exactly part of the work that is being undertaken in relation to Woden.

Free school camps

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, can you please provide the Assembly with an update on the ACT government's free school camps program at Birrigai Outdoor School?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. Free camps at Birrigai is one of the ACT government's equity initiatives, along with free three-year-old preschool, a Chromebook for every public secondary school student, and the Future of Education fund.

The free camps initiative was set up after we learnt from feedback and data that cost

was posing a barrier to some children being able to have the valuable experience of joining their friends and attending school camps. The ACT government has invested more than \$3 million to ensure that all ACT public primary school students can attend at least one free camp at Birrigai during their primary school years.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, why are school camps important?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. I think everybody can describe their own experiences at camp, why it is important and the memories they have of when they have attended a school camp. School camps provide a formative part of the educational experience for children in their primary school years, and no child should have to miss out because of cost. There is probably not a week that goes by when I do not hear from a number of parents about their children's experiences of going out to Birrigai. Indeed, I have my own memories of going out to Birrigai.

Birrigai is part of our public school system, and it is located near Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park. It is an ideal venue for primary-school-age children to be inspired to view the world differently, as well as, importantly, connecting to country in the ACT.

Birrigai offers curriculum-aligned programs that include First Nations cultures, outdoor adventures and science, technology, engineering and mathematics activities. When I attended end-of-year celebrations and assemblies at primary schools last year, I was not surprised to hear year 6 students talking about school camps as being part of some of their most favourite memories during their years at primary school.

MS CARRICK: Minister, can you guarantee that there is enough money in the budget for every child to attend a school camp, or is there a risk that you will have to top it up?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. Our commitment is that every child will have the chance of attending at least one free camp. What I would say is that, of course, if there is an increased number of students, as population growth changes, it will have to be topped up, as more students enter into our public school system. But I am pleased to report that, so far, more than 1,700 students have attended a free camp, since this initiative was announced in February, and that 25 schools had participated by the end of last week. By the end of the 2025 school year, we will have delivered 58 camps for around 4,100 students.

Horseracing industry—workplace health and safety

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for workplace health and safety.

Minister, yesterday, when talking about your proposed insurance slush fund for the horseracing industry, you said:

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.

Are you proposing an ACT taxpayer funded insurance scheme that covers accidents occurring in New South Wales?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Clay for the question. No.

MS CLAY: Have you discussed this issue with your counterparts in New South Wales in order to get a different solution?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Clay for the question. There have been a range of interactions between the ACT and New South Wales at government and at insurer level as well. This is the best solution to address the issue we are seeing unfold before us.

For work that occurs in New South Wales, you are covered by New South Wales laws. It is not in the power of this Assembly to change the laws of New South Wales.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, are we seeing the same issues affecting the industry in New South Wales as you are needing to respond to here in the ACT?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. No. We are seeing employers proactively make the choice to conduct their horse-training activities in New South Wales because New South Wales has remarkably low premiums for workers compensation for the New South Wales horse-training industry. That is due to a range of mechanisms, largely due to decisions of the New South Wales government. That ensures the structure of insurance products across racing in New South Wales means that horse-training activities in New South Wales attract a particularly low premium rate, which is why we are seeing people proactively moving to New South Wales. As a result of that, those working people are subject to a workers compensation scheme that provides less protections and less compensation.

ACT population projections 2025-2065

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, will you reduce future coverage for police and emergency services assets over the long term when Treasury's projections show an area of Canberra depopulating?

DR PATERSON: There are no plans to reduce police infrastructure across Canberra. Currently we have plans, as the member notes, to look at the new city police station and a new city headquarters. There are budget processes that will be undertaken to look at those new facilities. There is also exploration and money in the budget to look at Molonglo Valley and a police station there. Work will be done to understand the place that Woden Police Station will have in the future in that patrol zone once Molonglo comes on board

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how will long-term resourcing decisions be properly informed if the population projections are not reliable?

DR PATERSON: We are focused on recruiting more police. We have a commitment to see 150 new police officers to 2029. We are focused on recruiting police to do the very important work that they are doing. We are also seeing in this budget funding for

a new child and sexual abuse team and continuing to resource policing. The development of a new digital firearms register is also a focus. These are all focuses in terms of expanding our police—

Ms Castley: I raise a point of order.

MR SPEAKER: A point of order on relevance, I am assuming.

Ms Castley: Yes, relevance; correct. I did not ask about the great work that the minister was doing; I asked how long-term resourcing decisions can be properly informed if the population projections are not reliable.

MR SPEAKER: I think your point of order on relevance is relevant.

Mr Steel: On the point of order, the minister mentioned the election commitments that the government has made as being one of the references for future resourcing of police. I think that is entirely relevant.

MR SPEAKER: I am not sure that it is, Mr Steel. Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: On the point of order, the question was very clearly in the context of population projections which are not reliable.

Mr Steel: On the point of order: the question was about what other things, other than the population projections, and the minister has mentioned the election commitments as being another input into service provision in the policing area.

MR SPEAKER: I am just going to say that the question was very specifically: how will long-term resourcing decisions be properly informed if the population projections are not reliable? So I am just going to suggest that that was the question. Minister, you have a minute to conclude the answer.

DR PATERSON: I would just reiterate that we have a commitment to increase the number of police in the territory. We are committed to supporting police to address crime. Crime has been decreasing over the past 10 years and crime types have been changing. In terms of how we resource police, we will be looking at where there are particular challenges, like domestic, family and sexual violence and, as I mentioned, the firearms register. It is another priority for the government and nationally to introduce a digital firearms register here in the ACT. So we will continue to resource police as they require.

MS BARRY: Minister, if areas of Canberra are under-resourced due to unreliable population forecasts, does responsibility for this rest with you or the Treasurer?

DR PATERSON: I would just like to state that ACT police are consistently resourced across the territory to be able to respond to crime at consistent rates. If someone calls police in the territory who has a priority 1 issue, police will get to that person within the same amount of time wherever they are based in the territory. So we will continue to resource police to be able to do the job and respond to crime as quickly and promptly as possible.

Mitchell—parking and lighting

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Businesses in Mitchell have reached out to my office regarding parking and lighting in Mitchell. One of these issues is that parking on the verges is now banned in Mitchell. Minister, when did parking on the verges become banned in Mitchell?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. My guess, which I will check, is that it perhaps has never been legal. Parking on verges, as we discussed a little earlier today, is problematic because it limits the ability of people to be able to walk, or move, however else they might be travelling, in a safe way and in a way that is visible for them and for other users. So I suspect that it has always been illegal and perhaps there has recently been an uptick in compliance enforcement due to complaints. If I am wrong, I will come back and correct the record.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, will the government be providing additional parking spaces in Mitchell to meet the current demand?

MS CHEYNE: Not that I am aware of, Mr Speaker.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will the ACT government fulfill its promise to Mitchell business owners about the improved lighting on Brookes Street, Buckland Street, parts of Vicars Street and parts of Hoskins Street in Mitchell?

MS CHEYNE: That is a good question. I will take that on notice. I know we have made those commitments and, again, my guess is that it is probably funded in the street lighting upgrades program that we have for this coming financial year. But let me see if I can get a firmer timeline for members.

Schools—out-of-area enrolment applications

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, one of the most common issues I hear about from parents is the—frankly—frustrating and sometimes traumatic process many have to go through to apply for their children to go to an out-of-catchment area school.

We have heard assurances that processes have been changed for next year, but I am still getting emails about how category B schools do not appear to be always accepting students with mental health or wellbeing reasons to go to those schools. What are you actively doing to make sure this whole process is easier for families?

MS BERRY: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. I strongly recommend to Miss Nuttall that, if she is receiving constituent enquiries, she pass them onto my office so that I can follow up for her and for those parents and families. If I know what is going on in our schools then I can do something about it, but if it is kept until question time then it is difficult for me to take any action for families who are having those experiences.

It is the intention for families to be able to access out-of-area schools on welfare and

other grounds. There is a process to go through for that, and the Education Directorate team works very closely with those families to try to work out an outcome that is satisfactory. Sometimes there are circumstances where it does not completely work out for families, and they have an appeal process. I make sure that I am aware that those processes are available and in place. I also am aware that, if there are issues where families have not been successful going through the process of going to an out-of-area school, that can be followed up as well. It may not always be agreed, and there might be a range of reasons for that. But, again, I need to know the specific circumstances of the constituents you are referring to, Miss Nuttall—through you, Mr Speaker—and then I can follow up for them.

MISS NUTTALL: In that case, what support does the government provide for families and parents who wish to escalate an out-of-catchment application after that initial rejection?

MS BERRY: There is a process in place—and most parents are advised of that at their application—to go through and understand what the needs of the child and the family are. Then there is also a review of that process, and there is an appeal process as well. If the family is unhappy or not satisfied with the decision that has been made, they can appeal that decision.

But, again, I cannot do anything for individuals that I do not know about. There may be good reasons for why they cannot be accepted into an out-of-area school. I am, nonetheless, very happy to take on any of those situations and follow up with the Education Directorate.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will there be further changes made to the out-of-catchment application process this year?

MS BERRY: No, I do not believe so. I think we have already made some changes, and we have already provided notification of changes to priority-area enrolment. We usually do that before enrolment starts, to give families that information before they make those decisions.

There will not be late changes to enrolment areas, if that is the question that Mr Braddock is asking. The policy for enrolment in priority-area schools or non-priority-area schools is in place. We will work through those with families through the review and through the appeals process.

Heritage—national park huts

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Government and City Services. During the budget estimates, the minister stated that she had reversed the government's decision to rebuild Demanderling Hut and Max and Bert Oldfield's Hut, which were burned down during the Black Summer bushfires in 2020. I will note that a government survey found that 90 per cent of respondents were in favour of restoring these huts. Minister, what were the reasons for reversing the government's position on the rebuilding of these huts and going against overwhelming community sentiment?

MS CHEYNE: I actually canvassed this at length in estimates—about the reasons

why—and I can table that response that I gave to Miss Nuttall, perhaps at the next sitting.

In relation to the survey, I would suggest that Mr Milligan look at the survey and what it was asking. Effectively, the question was not “should we, or shouldn’t we?” It was: “Do you like the designs of these huts that we are putting forward?”

My review of the background to all of this, and the decisions that were being taken, suggested that this never went through cabinet and that a proper risk assessment was not undertaken. That would have taken into account the ACT’s responsibilities to our staff who would be required to be defending those huts, should a bushfire occur in that area again—and I think we can all note that the likelihood, regrettably, at some point, is high. Equally, there are obligations under the Heritage Act to our remaining huts—of which there are many that we wish to maintain to a particular level. We require funding to do that, and funding is already stretched. Insurance funding could be used for those huts that remain, rather than rebuilding huts. Particularly, one of them is in an extremely remote location, so its utility is low, and the other one is right near another hut that is more popular.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why is it that Parks NSW have already restored 10 of the huts that were burned down in the same fire, but it has taken this government five years to decide not to restore its huts?

MS CHEYNE: I cannot speak for New South Wales. I can only speak to our own circumstances here. As the incoming minister with this portfolio, and getting out and speaking to staff, my understanding of the incredible role that staff play in protecting the ACT and areas of New South Wales when it comes to bushfires is that there is a huge role for them, and they undertake it in a very remarkable way. I appreciate that work is about to start again in terms of training and getting ready for the season. The 2020 bushfires have had a toll on staff too, and I have really got an understanding of just how dangerous it is to be protecting our assets.

Ultimately, the risk assessment that had been applied and the decision-making processes, I found wanting. As a result, given my own obligations and my legislative obligations together with my obligations to staff, I made the decision to reverse what, effectively, was not a clearly made decision in the first place.

MS BARRY: Minister, does this decision indicate that hut restoration and maintenance is no longer a priority for this government?

MS CHEYNE: No. It does not. I have explained in the previous answers and during the estimates round, and, I understand, in some questions-on-notice that the acting minister took in my absence in August. What I would say it does reflect is that these huts are, absolutely, valuable as part of our history.

I acknowledge the families, who are probably quite surprised at the change in the decision. But, ultimately, we need to consider the entire environment that we have got. We still have many remaining huts that we want to be caring for and ensuring that they will last well into the future. Spending that effort on the existing huts for which we have legislative obligations is critical. Equally, our heritage obligations when a structure has

been fundamentally changed—as is the case with these two huts—are not necessarily to rebuild. In fact, often the heritage advice is not to rebuild. Instead, we will be acknowledging appropriately the role that these huts played in the ACT's history, and we look forward to working with the Huts Association and the families to ensure they are commemorated appropriately.

Nursing and midwifery—staff-to-patient ratios

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the rollout of the second phase of nurse and midwife ratios has commenced. How is it progressing?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for her question. As members would be aware, in February 2022, the government commenced our first phase of nurse-to-patient ratios. The addition of 90 full-time equivalent nurses across our health service is delivering safer, higher quality care.

Building on phase 1, in August last year, phase 2 of nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios commenced across Canberra Health Services. The second phase committed to a two-year implementation timeframe, delivering an additional 137.2 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives across our health service. Since August last year, the earlier stages of phase 2 have seen the successful introduction of ratios in maternity, intensive care unit, coronary care unit and emergency department at North Canberra Hospital, and in paediatric, oncology, emergency and coronary care services at Canberra Hospital.

I am pleased to advise members that the latest stage of nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios implementation commenced on 1 August this year, and saw the expansion of ratios to peri-operative services, maternity services, the neonatal intensive care unit, and the special care nursery at Canberra Hospital, as well as peri-operative services, including endoscopy, at North Canberra Hospital. This stage also included Clare Holland House, meaning that North Canberra Hospital and Clare Holland House have now completed phase 1 and phase 2 of ratios implementation.

The last tranche of phase 2 will be implemented at the University of Canberra Hospital and in subacute mental health services across the ACT. This final tranche will be implemented from 1 February 2026, marking the completion of ratios implementation across Canberra's public hospitals—more nurses and more midwives delivering better, safer, high-quality care for Canberrans when and where they need it.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how do nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios improve patient care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary and for her obvious interest in our ongoing commitment to improving patient care and the wellbeing of our fabulous nurses and midwives.

I am proud to highlight that the ACT remains one of the leading jurisdictions in Australia in terms of recognising the importance of maternity ratios by counting both the baby and mother or birth person when calculating midwife ratios. This ensures safer care for mothers and newborns.

Evidence tells us that nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios contribute to better patient outcomes through decreased length of stay, fewer cardiac arrests and fewer adverse outcomes, such as falls, hospital-acquired pneumonia and medication errors. They also improve patient satisfaction through increased numbers of staff being required to perform patient-centred care per shift.

Canberra Health Services has commenced data collection to inform an evaluation of the impact that nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios have had across CHS, and I look forward to being briefed on the outcome and sharing that with the Assembly. We also know that those opposite, of course, have never supported ratios. They have never supported the better outcomes for patients that the Barr Labor government's investment has delivered for Canberrans when they need care across our public hospital system.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how does the government's investment in nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios improve working conditions for nurses and midwives?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question, which highlights his interest in the right to work for all Canberrans. Phase 2 of nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios is supported by an \$86 million investment over four years in the 2024-25 ACT budget to recruit additional nurses and midwives across ACT public health services, contributing, of course, to our commitment of 800 additional healthcare workers prior to the 2024-25 budget and over the next five years. Again, it is a commitment that the Canberra Liberals did not match in the last election.

The ongoing investment in phase 2 of ratios across CHS has supported the recruitment of an additional 137 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives in the public health system, as I said before. Nurses and midwives have told us what they need to provide the best care possible, and we have listened.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredibly important work of our nursing and midwifery workforce and their contribution to the care and treatment of those who engage with each of our services. We know that nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios means there are mandated minimum staffing levels to care for patients in Canberra Health Services facilities. The additional staffing resources support nurses and midwives to deliver high-quality and patient-centred care to those accessing our public health services from the ACT community and the surrounding region.

We know from decades of research that ratios improve the wellbeing of nursing and midwifery staff, including their psychosocial wellbeing, by ensuring that they know that they can deliver the services they want to deliver, increasing job satisfaction and reducing rates of attrition and absenteeism.

Planning—Gungahlin cinema

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for planning.

Minister, the residents of Gungahlin continue to ask where the cinema that they were promised is. The Crown lease for Block 2, Section 12, included a building covenant clause to complete the development within 24 months of the date of the lease—

28 February 2022. DA-201936502 could be extended as well—up to April 2025, if approved by the authority. Are you able to provide an update as to when residents of Gungahlin can expect to see a cinema?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Let me echo the frustration of the Gungahlin community, which I have heard through our Labor local members, particularly Minister Pettersson over the past few years, particularly given that, of course, there was a Crown lease granted for Block 2, Section 12 with a purpose clause of an indoor entertainment facility that must include a cinema and—as Mr Braddock alluded to—also a building a covenant clause to complete the development within 24 months from the date of lease.

I understand that under the Planning Act the lessee is taken to comply with the building and development provision if they pay a noncompliance fee as required. Then the Planning (General) Regulation sets out how noncompliance fees are calculated, with the first four years from the day the completion was required in the Crown lease being nil. So the lessee of this block is still within that fee-free period. The lessee of the site does have an option to apply for a lease variation to remove a cinema under the DA process, but the planning authority would then be required to assess the DA against the Planning Act. So the answer is no, I do not have an update in relation to that specific site.

However, I am aware—and I am sure Mr Braddock is aware as well—that there is a proposal that is currently being developed for a mixed use development on another block, that being Block 2, Section 11 Gungahlin, which I believe intends to incorporate a cinema as part of that. I understand they have been undertaking some preliminary consultation with the community on that. That is certainly welcome, because I know that Gungahlin residents want to have a cinema in their community. So we will certainly be monitoring that proposal closely.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what is the point of building covenant clauses on leases if they are not actually enforced or have no ability to incentivise the actual building?

MR STEEL: I do not agree with the premise of the question. There is the possibility of further enforcement in relation to the covenant clause, which remains on that site and will remain on that site into the foreseeable future.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, why can't the government seem to get a cinema built in this city?

MR STEEL: Well, the government does not build cinemas; we just do not. We are not involved in that. That is a commercial development, and that land use is proposed by private businesses. And that is, as I understand, what is currently being developed on another site in Gungahlin. We look forward to seeing that being brought forward.

I understand that discussions have been occurring between the Territory's planning authority and the proponent, which is Englobo Group, to discuss the proposed design and lodgement of a development application. So I look forward to seeing that come forward and, of course, the community will be able to have their say on that process. But the government is involved in assessing development proposals put forward by the

private sector in relation to cinemas. We do not build them ourselves.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, I think that is the end of this scene. I will ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice ACT population projections 2025-2065—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: I apologise; I have a bit of a list, under standing order 118AA. Firstly, Ms Castley's question to the minister for housing, that the minister for planning chose to take regarding population forecasts, was very specific and asked whether the minister for housing had reviewed those population forecasts before they were published, and what advice the minister provided. I do not believe that, even after your suggestion, Mr Speaker, that question was addressed.

MR STEEL: I will have to review the *Hansard*, of course, but I understand I said that the minister for housing had not seen it. I did answer the question. It was produced by Treasury. Of course, I saw it prior to release. I then released it, and I said that the minister for housing was aware of it, after the release. I did answer the question.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, that is my memory of the answer.

MR COCKS: I only heard the second half; I certainly did not hear the first bit of it, so if that is the outcome—

MR SPEAKER: We will go away and have a look.

ACT population projections 2025-2065—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: With respect to Ms Castley's question to the Treasurer, regarding how the government would improve its approach, this was the following question—the first supplementary. The Treasurer chose to respond by saying that he would take the previous question on notice. I do not believe that is answering that question. In particular, that question included issues like awareness of the population forecast for Hall.

MR SPEAKER: Your point of order on 118AA relates to the second supp to the third Liberal question?

MR COCKS: The first supplementary to the third Liberal question.

MR SPEAKER: “Treasurer, how will the government improve its approach to forecasting following yet another significant error?”

MR COCKS: Correct.

MR SPEAKER: We will go away and have a look. Mr Steel, do you have anything to add to that or not?

MR STEEL: Because the premise of the first question was disputed, therefore the

second question can only be answered on the basis of an answer for the first question, which I had taken on notice. The point is that I am trying to provide more information to the Assembly. I think that should be taken in good faith, given that I have taken it on notice and will provide some information. I am happy to address it in answer to the second question, after looking into the answer to the first question taken on notice.

MR SPEAKER: We will take that input on board when making an assessment.

ACT population projections 2025-2065—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: In regard to Ms Castley's question, the first supplementary to the fifth Liberal question, even after your suggestion that the minister be relevant, I do not believe that she went to the question of population projections in forming resourcing.

MR STEEL: I put my case on this one previously, in the point of order.

MR SPEAKER: This was not a question to you, though; this was a question to Dr Paterson.

MR STEEL: Yes, to Dr Paterson, which I stood up and gave a point of order on, and clearly outlined the fact that she was referencing things other than the population projections in her answer, which makes it relevant, including the election commitments. She then went on and talked about criminal statistics in helping to inform the provision of policing resources.

MR SPEAKER: We will take on board your information, and we will make an assessment. Do you want to jump into the fray, Dr Paterson, or not?

DR PATERSON: No.

MR SPEAKER: Is there anything else arising from question time?

Phillip—Callam Offices

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In relation to Ms Carrick's questions about Callam Offices, Infrastructure Canberra has advised that the study was undertaken to inform future government decisions on the future of the building and surrounding area. No part of the site has been released to market, and no discussions have taken place with any potential purchasers.

ACT population projections 2025-2065

MR STEEL: Earlier, in question time, I was asked a number of questions, as were other ministers, in relation to Treasury's population projections. I have some further information to provide as it relates to the township of Hall. These population projections are not intended to present predictions of the demographic future to any degree of reliability or precision. That was provided in the disclaimer attached to the work group which was being referred to.

In addition to that, the population projections contained in the spreadsheet are projected

populations resulting from certain assumptions, which I referenced in my answer to Ms Castley, that are outlined in the population projections report in the workbook disclaimer.

The projected populations resulting from certain assumptions about future trends in fertility, mortality and migration trends are included. Hall has declined by about 25 per cent in the last 25 years—one per cent per year. The historic population driver for Hall and similar suburbs showed zero or negative migration into areas. The model is largely data driven, which is reflected in the outcomes.

Treasury is investigating this particular matter and will consider whether any refinements to modelling are required. Modelling, as I mentioned, is based on sound frameworks initially developed in consultation with the Australian National University.

Horseracing industry—workplace health and safety

MR PETTERSSON: Yesterday, I was asked by Ms Clay about the projected total financial liability for the government if the WLA 2 passes the Assembly in relation to the determined indemnity pathway. The Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2) creates an executive power to determine indemnity for certain workers and employers. This reform is designed to provide the ACT government with a targeted ability to intervene in situations where the workers compensation scheme is not operating as intended.

The creation of this power does not, in and of itself, have a financial cost to government. It is a tool that ensures there is a structured pathway through which we can protect the coverage of workers, whilst ensuring the government has a level of direct oversight of compensation in that sector. This power does not have a direct financial impact on the ACT budget.

The determined indemnity pathway is managed through the Default Insurance Fund's Uninsured Employer Fund. The Default Insurance Fund's Uninsured Employer Fund provides a safety net for workers who are injured at work without adequate workers compensation policy coverage, ensuring that they do not miss out on compensation.

This reform, in essence, provides us with an ability to pre-emptively engage the fund's purpose through the determined indemnity pathway. Money to this fund does not come from the ACT government appropriation. Instead, it is funded through a general levy on the relevant insurance providers. The levy amount varies each year, and it is based on actuarial advice and the fund's experience in previous years. The fees collected from determined employers will go towards meeting the costs of claims arising from covered employers. Where these fees are insufficient, the Default Insurance Fund would meet the balance of claims made.

The ACT government has identified that the horse training sector, as discussed in previous questions and through briefings to MLAs in this place, is currently experiencing premium conditions that are expected to be upwards of 30 per cent of wages for their coming coverage period, and is the ACT's most high-risk sector.

There are approximately 17 employers with around 40 workers who are anticipated to

be in scope. The sector is small and represents 0.005 per cent of the wages pool in the ACT scheme. Given this, it is not expected that the application of this tool to the horse training industry will have a material impact on the Default Insurance Fund's liabilities or wider market implications for the ACT scheme. Participation is not automatic. Employers who would qualify will still need to go through an application process and pay determined fees. The cost of this fee will be determined following a closer assessment of each entity and will likely be double the ACT's average workers compensation premium rate.

Mitchell—car parking and lighting

MS CHEYNE: In relation to Mr Milligan's question about parking on verges, the rule against parking on verges or nature strips was established with the introduction of the Australian Road Rules 1999, and they were implemented nationwide in December 1999. So the guess that I put in response to the first question is accurate.

National parks—huts—restoration

MS CHEYNE: In relation to the questions about the huts in addition to or perhaps instead of the transcript that Mr Milligan would also have access to, Miss Nuttall put on notice further questions, and there is a pretty lengthy, comprehensive and accurate response. None of it corrects what I said earlier, but it does provide more information. If Mr Milligan is looking for that, it is question on notice 302.

In particular, it notes that the considerations regarding my decision to reverse the rebuild was based on a brief that I received which detailed Heritage Act obligations, remoteness, fire risks, financial priorities and the total cost of the proposed rebuild, excluding staff time and, only for the rebuild, not for the asset, life-cycle cost, which, as we talked about earlier today, is a major gap in much of our maintenance funding. In comparison, the costs of repairing and maintaining our existing heritage sites and huts in Namadgi is significantly more. So, on the basis of financial priorities, that is where it is being directed.

Active travel—William Hovell Drive

MS CHEYNE: Yesterday, Mr Braddock asked me about William Hovell Drive duplication and the shared off-road path and whether the off-road path between Coulter Drive and Bindubi Street is within the scope of works or not. The response to that is that, as I said in response to Ms Clay, we are committed to delivering a seven kilometre walking and cycling path along William Hovell Drive, which will be connecting Drake-Brockman Drive to Bindubi Street.

As part of this project, a 4.5 kilometre, three metre wide shared path will be constructed between Drake-Brockman Drive and John Gorton Drive. In addition, there are preliminary designs that have been developed to extend the path by an additional 2.5 kilometres from John Gorton Drive to Bindubi Street. However, construction of this section is not included within the current scope of the William Hovell Drive construction contract.

It is expected that the extension to Bindubi Street will be progressed as a standalone

project at a later date once planning approvals are progressed and government considers the future business case for the works. Again I refer to the additional information I provided yesterday, that there is a lot still to occur in that area between William Hovell and, effectively, the Aranda bushlands and the Arboretum and then into Bandler and Sulman. It is all related. We are certainly committed to it, but I think there is good reason why it is not part of this construction contract.

Standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: I just wanted to make mention while we are all here—to save me from tramping around from office to office—that the intent of new standing order 118 AA was to make the parliament better. So the—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: I am of the belief that it is and it will. The intent, to make question time more transparent, was to get more actual answers from question time. It is my genuine belief that that is what will occur. But it does bring into play the fine art of pedantics, and I just wanted to mention a few things to members. I ruled out of order a question from Mr Milligan earlier because, technically, it asked for an opinion from a minister. In past times, prior to 118AA, that point of order may not have even been raised by the minister. But I think when pedantics are being played in the other direction, it is easy to understand why they also come from this direction. So I would just say to the opposition to be mindful of that when you are framing questions because, if you are asking for an opinion, they are likely to knock it on the head.

In regards to 118AA, it is no secret that I have the questions that are supplied to me just before question time from both the Liberal Party and the Greens. I do not read them until they get read out in this chamber, but it means that I can see what the question is. I understand that ministers cannot see what the question is. I understand that there are sometimes large preambles to questions and that sometimes that will cloud when you are listening to it. I would just urge ministers to focus on what the actual question is at the end, because we do not want to be doing this every day.

We will endeavour to make a ruling on those three claims on 118AA by the end of the day. I think one of them will be quite simple, and we will look at the other two.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mr Speaker, may I seek a clarification of your advice, not ruling, in relation to preambles? Does this mean that ministers should completely ignore the preamble as context for the question, or can we still respond to the preamble and refute things that have been said as context for the question that was asked?

MR SPEAKER: I believe that it is a very good point that you make. My answer would be no and that, technically, if you do respond to the preamble, we will have to make a decision as to whether the question has been answered, even if it has avoided the question at the end. I guess that gets back to the opposition framing the question in such a way that—anyway.

Mr Barr: And there are no preambles on supplementary questions, is there?

MR SPEAKER: No; there is not. That is correct.

Mr Barr: It is not always strictly adhered to, I would note.

MR SPEAKER: Well, it has been great; let's move on.

Papers

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

ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan—

2025-2030, dated September 2025.

2025-2030—Implementation Plan, dated September 2025.

Bus frequency improvement—Assembly resolution of 5 December 2024—September 2025 Update—Government response, dated September 2025.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 1—Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24—Government response, dated September 2025.

Light Rail Stage 2A—Business Engagement Report—April to June 2025.

Remuneration Tribunal Act, pursuant to section 10—

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal—Determination 8 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

ACT Magistrates Court Judicial Positions—Determination 7 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

ACT Supreme Court Judicial Positions—Determination 6 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Chief Executive Officer of ACT Courts and Tribunal—Determination 11 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Director of Public Prosecutions—Determination 12 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Full-time Statutory Office Holder—Chair, Therapeutic Support Panel—Determination 14 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Full-time Statutory Office Holder—Chief Executive Officer, ACT Integrity Commission—Determination 10 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Part-time Public Office Holders—Determination 13 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Part-time Statutory Office Holder—Integrity Commissioner—Determination 9 of 2025, dated 1 September 2025.

Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act—Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Fees) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-93 (LR, 26 June 2025)—Revised explanatory statement, undated.

Child care—early childhood education and care incident reports—order to table documents—variation request

Debate resumed.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that the request, as reported by the Acting Clerk, to vary the terms of the order be agreed.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.10): I want to start by acknowledging the concerns raised in the Chief Minister's letter regarding the scope of the original order. I am sympathetic to his concerns, and I appreciate the Chief Minister's office having arranged an urgent briefing to share them and discuss them yesterday so that we could debate this matter today.

I understand the resourcing required to increase transparency around what is happening in the early childhood sector, as indicated by the letter. I am sympathetic to that and acknowledge the public servants who have been working on this and will continue to work on this motion on fulfilling this order.

I would also note a communique coming out of a recent education ministers' meeting on 22 August this year, which includes a commitment to "improved transparency for parents". It says:

The Starting Blocks website will be upgraded to display information about conditions imposed on centres and regulator visits from September. The website will also be updated to show compliance breaches and enforcement actions from November.

It details the commonwealth investment in this and also says:

Services will also be required to physically display meaningful information, including in other languages where appropriate, on compliance and enforcement breaches. Work will commence immediately to determine what information, as well as what legislative changes will be required to implement this, with a progress update to be provided to Education Ministers in October 2025.

I note that, despite the proposed reduce scope in this letter, some of these documents, according to this commitment of all education ministers, will become published in an ongoing way moving forward. This order pre-empts that decision and is aligned with that decision, which I think reflects well on this Assembly.

In preparing the original motion, calling for the release of these documents, I took onboard feedback from the minister regarding the scope of an earlier version, which had included all incidents that had happened in the last five years—all incident reports—which would have been a lot of documents. I understand in other parliaments that was the nature of the orders that they moved successfully through their parliaments. So there are a lot more documents being released out of other parliaments because they capture all of those incident reports. It was not my intent to do that, but instead to capture issues that had been raised and investigated by the regulator.

The purpose of the original order was to gauge the effectiveness of our regulatory system in keeping our children safe in the early childhood and education sector and to gauge the level of interagency communication as well as communication with families and with communities about what is happening within the sector. My proposed amendments to the proposed reduce scope create an opportunity for us to do that. The reduced scope would release only the formal documents held by the regulator. That is my read. So, essentially, what is the regulator doing?

The revised amendment that I have circulated aims to retain the evidence that was used to make those decisions. This is the purpose of the motion. The purpose of the motion is to release decisions made by the regulator and to release the evidence that was used in making those decisions, so that we can determine as an Assembly and as a community whether the regulator

is making the right decisions. That is the entire purpose of the motion. So, if we amend the scope of this order to remove all of the evidence used in making those decisions, we are completely undermining the order and wasting the resources, I would say, that have been used on fulfilling that order and will continue to be used on fulfilling that order.

I have prepared an amendment that attempts to address the concerns that I think are raised reasonably in this letter that we have before us: child enrolment records, attendance records, family violence or family court orders, provided policies, procedures, supervision plans, medical management plans and behaviour support plans and documents related to child protection reports—I can understand not wanting to release these documents, and I do not think it would be of value to do so; I agree with that assessment—and also to explicitly exclude documents relating to the 50 or 60 open investigations that would otherwise be captured by this order. I can also understand that exclusion. I have circulated here a revised amendment, because I understand the opposition have concerns about witness statements. So I have added witness statements to the list of excluded documents.

The solution that I propose, working in collaboration with Miss Nuttall, with the Greens—and I appreciate that—over the last 24 hours, is to reduce the scope by reducing the timeframe that is captured by this motion from five years to three. I understand that many of the cases that occurred during those first two years was during the COVID period. That is an outlier, and that is not what we are attempting to investigate here. So it would make sense for me to reduce the scope, to save public resources, to cut off the first two years of the order. That is the proposal that is put forward by my amendment.

The Chief Minister has requested three months to fulfil the order with the proposed reduced scope. I have propose two months instead—otherwise, it is going to be due on Christmas Day. I think that the reduced scope proposed in my amendment would be fulfilled within two months. That is the assessment.

I want to call on members to really consider the vote the way that we have decided to vote today. My concern is that supporting the Chief Minister's proposed reduced scope unamended completely undermines the purpose of the motion. I think I have made that clear. This can be a really helpful and productive exercise. Reducing from the public record the evidence used to make these decisions is not helpful. If there are concerns about privacy, they will be addressed through the privilege process. They will also be addressed through the redactions that were permitted per the original order. So those matters will still be addressed. I can understand them and appreciate them, but please let's not reduce the scope of this motion to where it is rendered redundant.

What I have attempted to do with this proposed amendment is provide a reasonable middle ground that balances genuine concerns the government has raised—and, again, I respect and understand them—with our community's concerns about what is happening in the sector. I am concerned—and this issue has been raised by the government and by the sector—that, just by releasing notices, we will be sharing a lot of information about good providers and what has been found and the practices of good providers. But, without releasing the evidence, we will not be able to figure out what is going on with the poorer providers, where their records of what has happened and their internal investigations do not accord with evidence or statements of fact from ACT Policing with witness statements or with correspondence between seeker and complainants. So that is the justification.

I hope that members will see reason and support this revised amendment, rather than supporting the larger reduction and scope proposed by the Chief Minister's letter. I move the revised amendment circulated in my name:

Omit everything after “that the”, substitute:

“terms of the early childhood education and care order of 24 June 2025 be amended as follows:

only documents from the past three years must be produced through this order;

the following documents are excluded from being produced through this order:

- (a) child enrolment records;
- (b) attendance records;
- (c) family violence and family court orders;
- (d) provider policy/procedures;
- (e) supervision plans, medical management plans, and behaviour support plans;
- (f) documents related to child protection reports; and
- (g) documents relating to open investigations (either by CECA or ACT Policing);
- (h) witness statements; and the documents must be produced by 25 November 2025.”.

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) (3.18): Not dissimilar to some reflections that we have just had on 118AA, to quote Mr Werner-Gibbings, “road to hell”. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and I would love to talk to the original authors of 213A, because I am not sure about a cost of \$74,000 per fortnight and 18 to 20 FTE diverted for this information grab.

I appreciate the intentions—but road to hell. I appreciate the intentions, but this is ridiculous. We already know that this is an area that is under pressure, working extremely hard to ensure that there is the safety of the sector, of the workforce and of the children in care, and we are diverting 18 to 20 FTE for thousands of pages of documents that how many people in this place are actually going to read? We already know from other 213As and even FOIs, that there is a lot of effort put in to working out what can be provided, getting that done in time and then nothing. The scrutiny that was sought, the documents are not even read, and this is just perverse, Mr Speaker.

I think I am just going to be banging on about this for the next four days, but the cognitive dissonance in this place is breathtaking. We hear from people in this place that we should be doing more, that we should be doing better, that the directorate needs to do more and that the sector needs to be funded better. There was a period—I will happily remind people—where there was \$74,000 a fortnight and 18 to 20 FTE having to work through documents that might never be read.

I do not think that the Chief Minister in his letter is seeking to restrict transparency at all. I think that there is very clear information and considered information in here. Again, I acknowledge the public service who has provided this advice to us—and it would not have been without extraordinary consternation, I suspect, because the public service serves. When they are asked to do something, they do it. To then come to us and say, “This is breaking us”—that is my interpretation, but 18 to 20 FTE is enormous, and they are saying that is how many people are having to work on this—that was probably not a particularly well thought out request in the first place.

I commend them for their frank and fearless advice to us, which we are providing to the Assembly. We are a small workforce. We are a small jurisdiction. Constantly

demanding that we build more, do more, find more, better resource things more, and then having 18 to 20 FTE on a document search, working through some pretty difficult material, I would expect, and potentially putting people through vicarious trauma, probably unnecessarily in many cases, really does not sit well with me. Again, I find the dissonance in this place breathtaking, especially this week—and I suspect we will see it next week as well. I find it breathtaking.

Yes, in three months, it might be Christmas. But, honestly, I cannot see a world where the independent member knows better about how much time it is going to take for something based on his world of reduced scope. I am just gobsmacked, really, that this is the approach being taken.

It is an exciting new parliament and there is a different dynamic—and we welcome it all. The government is genuinely trying to work with this new focus, new scrutiny and additional use of 213As. But I think we are going to have to start reporting, in addition to what we do with our questions on notice, about the diversion of resources to produce these documents. This is just one example, but it is taking staff away from other work to do. If this Assembly wants to set this precedent and to continue to do this, the people who will suffer are our constituents.

I ask that members really think about what they are doing here, what they are actually requesting, and acknowledge that there is nothing untoward about what the Chief Minister has put forward. We are trying to do what we can with what we have, without absolutely causing pain to our workforce, in every sense. We have taken their advice and we have presented it in good faith. But there are people here, many of whom have never been a public servant, who apparently know better.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.25): The government will not be supporting the amendment to the motion. I am speaking in support of the motion before the Assembly to vary the scope of the order under 213A and extend the timeframe to provide the documents to the Assembly.

I cannot think of an issue that is more important for this Assembly to be discussing than the safety of children in the ACT. I would like to thank Mr Emerson, Miss Nuttall, Mr Hanson, and Ms Castley in Mr Hanson's absence—and I did have a conversation with Mr Hanson on his way out last night—for their respectful engagement this week.

I had hoped that the briefing in my office might change Miss Nuttall and Mr Emerson's mind, when they heard from two of the people who have been working on these documents. They were provided with quite detailed information on the process that has been embarked on within Education to comply with the request, and the potential consequence of some of the information that would be provided under the original motion, having regard to the damage that it could cause, and is causing right now, as Ms Cheyne has so eloquently pointed out, to the members of the public service who are doing that work. I was hoping that, through all of that, they would be able to support the motion that is before the Assembly today.

When I read back over the *Hansard* from when we debated Mr Emerson's motion in

June, it is fair to say that there is consensus in this chamber about putting child safety at the forefront of what we do here; absolutely. We debated this in June, and it was clear that the Assembly wanted to assure itself of safety in the early childhood education and care sector, and that is only right. We wanted to better understand the high rates of reporting here in the ACT and how the regulator is working to ensure safety across our systems.

I absolutely understand that the Assembly wants more transparency for parents; and the community should have that transparency, and the sector more broadly. I want that, too. It is within that spirit that we are proposing a way forward for Mr Emerson's motion.

The original motion inadvertently captured documents that were related to investigations that are occurring right now. The release of these documents would have undermined the integrity of the investigations, ultimately putting children at risk, and identifying individuals unnecessarily in some of those cases. At the same time, it would put them in a very difficult situation, being identified as part of a request by a member of this Assembly, without carefully thinking through the collateral damage of that request on our community.

Similarly, I do not believe that this Assembly anticipated that there would be up to 20 public servants spending months sifting through 1,900 documents. It is causing trauma for those individuals, and EAP is being offered on a regular basis. It is a very challenging circumstance.

I think that the Chief Minister's proposal is pragmatic. It is respectful of the intent of the Assembly going forward. It does not just call for an end to the 213A; it adjusts it to ensure that people are protected—people in our community, human beings, children, public servants—but that we still get the job done and we still provide that transparency that Mr Emerson is so desperate for.

I said that these documents would re-traumatise families, stigmatise educators and ultimately put children and young people at risk. I am sorry to say that I have been hearing from early childhood education services that, after the terrible events that have been happening over the last 12 months or so within the early childhood space, and having to adjust to those circumstances, we are hearing of families pulling their children out of services, and male early childhood educators being stigmatised and not being able to come to work.

Mr Emerson will recall the conversations that we had during the roundtable that was held recently with the community-run early childhood sector in the ACT, who talked about the experiences of early childhood educators in their services. There is this rolling on of pointing the finger at such a vital service, and the early childhood educators that are working for them, undermining what is already such a strong reporting culture and which does not necessarily mean wrongdoing. We want to keep that going because we have worked hard in the ACT to do that, and we are proud of it.

I must make it clear that, even if the Assembly supports this change of scope of Mr Emerson's motion, as I said, I have already heard that, unfortunately, that behaviour is changing. In the conversations that I have been having, I have heard that people are fearful. They are starting to become worried about reporting. That is the last thing that

we need. We need people to report so that we can respond and work with services to be the best possible services and keep our children safe. Educators are scared, and they are leaving the sector. Despite my warnings, dangerously, trust in the sector has been eroded because of the question that has been asked in the Assembly previously.

I know that is not what the Assembly intended. However, I fear, unfortunately, that what I predicted is happening. This motion today gives us all a chance to use the power we have to minimise any further unintended harm and risk to children and the sector. It is our shared responsibility to do so.

Again, we will not be supporting Mr Emerson's amendment, and we will support the motion that has been put to the Assembly in full.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.32): I would like to start by thanking Mr Emerson and Ms Berry's offices, in particular, for engaging with us during this process. The release of these documents is an ambitious project which, at its core, we do fundamentally support, having regard to what the documents are intended to do. As part of that, we are absolutely open to good-faith adjustments. We want a timeline that permits a reasonable work level for the staff who have been moved to this project, and we do not want their time to be used on documents that are not relevant to the intent of this request.

We also wish to be reasonable about the expense incurred by this request. We completely understand that any request for information to be released has a cost attached. The government diligently includes the cost of every question taken on notice, and we are aware of that factor. However, since the order for the production of documents was first passed, the budget situation within the Education Directorate has changed significantly. At the time the Assembly approved the release of this information, we were under the impression that schools were fully funded. That appears to not quite be the full picture, now that the majority of public schools are expected to be over budget this year.

Considering that the budget for the staff processing all of this information and working through these documents is coming from the Education Directorate, more than ever, we do not want to have them working on documentation that is irrelevant to the public good.

Eighteen to 20 full-time equivalents, 18 to 20 human beings, is a significant number of people, especially when they are being paid for by a directorate that is not necessarily in a robust budgetary situation. We are happy for the scope to be reduced to ease the size of that team or the workload on them.

The government has made a very reasonable argument that some of these documents are not relevant to giving the public a snapshot of early childhood education and care in the ACT. We do not need to see enrolment or attendance records. We do not think it is particularly appropriate for documents related to family violence or Family Court decisions to come up. Those are not related meaningfully to the documents that we and the public would like to see.

Similarly, we do not believe that it is appropriate for currently open cases to be released.

I have full faith in the ACT public service, but a single document not appropriately redacted could put an ongoing process in the justice system at risk. As Minister Berry and Minister Cheyne have observed, the vicarious traumas from going through some of those documents should absolutely be taken into account. Those processes do need to happen behind closed doors for the time being for a reason.

Specifically, what the ACT Greens want to see, from this order for the production of documents, is transparency for the community. We want to know what is happening in ACT early childhood education and care centres. We strongly believe that the vast majority of centres are well intentioned and are doing their best to prioritise the wellbeing of children in their care.

However, we do not have enough staff for the number of centres we have here in the ACT, and there are situations where things fall through the gaps. We want to find those gaps. We want to see where more support and more transparency can help the sector to thrive, and identify and address trends emerging from the information we receive.

In New South Wales, the Greens, specifically Abigail Boyd MLC, undertook a similar request for information in the New South Wales parliament. What she found was shocking, and exposed systemic cases of neglect and breaches of child safety at Affinity, G8 and other large for-profit providers in the early childhood education and care space. This has led to action, including an ongoing inquiry into early childhood education and care in the New South Wales parliament. Hopefully, the recommendations from that inquiry will be implemented and embraced by the New South Wales government.

As with all information, we need to balance the requirement for what is worth being released for the public good and what is too sensitive, and we take that question very seriously. That is exactly why things like family violence or Family Court orders and currently open cases should be excluded from the scope of the order for the production of documents. We support that entirely.

Briefly, on a couple of process points, it is important to reflect that those of us who are not in the ministry have known about this particular 213B request for about 28 hours at this point. Until yesterday morning, we did not know that this was coming at the cost to the territory of about \$74,000 a fortnight and 18 to 20 people working through some very intense subject matter. It is possibly a bit frustrating that we were not told earlier, given that the government has clearly been working through these documents for a while now. It would help all of us here in the Assembly to understand the impact of these orders for the production of documents earlier, so that we might make informed decisions ahead of time.

Finally, while I have a platform on this topic, I want to acknowledge the impact that this is having on the sector. There have been a handful of tragic and deeply upsetting incidents in centres across Australia. This has had a real impact on children and parents, and no-one could fault parents for being genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of their precious humans. At the same time we need to acknowledge that the media and public reaction and, indeed, some of the policy conversations happening as a result of these horrific incidents, have not always been constructive.

A consequence of coverage of these incidents is that many early childhood educators who are doing the right thing have felt targeted and marginalised. The sector as a whole has felt a loss of trust from communities, and trust is the qualitative thing that enables educators to keep our children safe and educate them well. A system with high trust will be able to safeguard children to look after each other, and to look out for fellow educators. The Children First Alliance has been doing great work in the ACT, helping to connect the sector to politicians directly, and their recent roundtable was a deeply insightful snapshot of how educators are dealing with recent events.

On that topic, I absolutely acknowledge that this order for the production of documents and similar processes are difficult for the sector. When you request a pile of all the bad things that have happened in any sector, inevitably, it uncovers things that reflect poorly. I acknowledge that pain, and I sincerely wish that this process did not involve that. We are working closely with the sector to ensure that, as much as possible, this order for the production of documents causes as little pain as possible, and that it is taken in the spirit in which it is intended.

I truly believe that this transparency and the information that we will make public, albeit in an appropriately redacted and privileged way, can lead to long-term improvements for the entire sector and for the way government interacts with the sector. We can find a way forward together, and the more that is on the public record, the more data we will have to push for meaningful change.

I sincerely hope that this information will not just reveal centres that are struggling or inadequately handling the responsibilities put on them. I want to ensure that we celebrate the centres that are doing the right thing and going above and beyond their duties towards the emerging generation of Canberrans. I will work to make sure that this short-term discomfort lets us build a stronger and more resilient relationship across politics, the early childhood education and care sector and Canberra families.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.40): Mr Hanson would normally be responding to this motion, but he is absent due to some caring responsibilities. For the record, we were supportive of the initial motion that Mr Emerson put to the Assembly, and we remain supportive in principle. However, the government has briefed both my office and Mr Hanson's office on the practical implications of the motion, and we now have real concerns. Those concerns go to the scope of the motion and the resources which have had to be dedicated to compliance, and to the nature of some information which could become public.

We have no desire for certain information about individuals to be published—very private, very sensitive information about some of the youngest members of our community. It is a real concern that this may be the effect of Mr Emerson's motion. Of course, we have talked about the impact that this has had on the public service. It certainly was not what we expected to occur. We will therefore support the government's motion, as I believe it is the responsible thing to do.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.41): I want to respond very quickly to a couple of points made by Miss Nuttall in particular in relation to the process here. I appreciate, again, the goodwill that people have brought to this particular topic.

It is one that is very important. All the reporting around what has been seen in early childhood education and care is very distressing to all of us. I understand the Assembly's wish to understand better what is going on in the ACT.

Miss Nuttall expressed the view that it would have been nice to know earlier what the implications of this 213A were, but the reality is that no notice was provided to the government of the introduction of the 213A. At the time that it was moved, the Deputy Chief Minister made it clear that it did not need to be debated straightaway and that there was time for some further conversation about the potential implications of the scope of the 213A that Mr Emerson introduced. But he was unwilling to defer debate on that and insisted that it be handled straightaway.

It was very clear to everybody on this side of the chamber that this was going to be a mammoth piece of work. Going to one of Miss Nuttall's points, the first action that is taken in relation to an order for the production of documents, whether it is for a 213A or a freedom of information request, is to gather together the documents. It is not until all of those documents are gathered together that you know how many there are, how many pages it is and what the nature of those documents is.

We knew it was going to be a mammoth task, but the information that Miss Nuttall said she wished she had earlier would not have been available at the time of debating the 213A. What would have been able to be discussed was the very significant scope of the documents and the type of documents that would have come within that scope. I think there are lessons here for everyone in the Assembly, when you are considering requests for documents, in that there is an opportunity to talk to the government and to talk to ministers. We do not bite. We are perfectly happy to have those conversations about what is reasonable, so that the Assembly can meet its obligations to the community in seeking information and the government can meet its obligations to the Assembly in providing that information, and we do not end up in this situation.

I understand that both Mr Emerson and Miss Nuttall accepted offers of briefings from the Deputy Chief Minister, and that is great to hear. Finally, I would note that the 213B that we are using is also a new process, so we are all learning here. I think it is important that we all bring good faith to this conversation, and that we just take a little bit of a deep breath when we are starting to use these new processes, or using them in new ways. As Ms Cheyne said, 213A was never envisaged to be used in this particular way, where there had been no previous attempt to seek the information through another path.

We have been down that road before. I will not re-litigate that argument. We need to all take on face value that we are trying to do the things that we need to do for the community, while also trying to reduce the negative impact on public servants and the negative impact on the ACT government budget.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.45): I will speak very briefly to reiterate the minister's point that child safety is absolutely a priority for the ACT government, and to reiterate how distressing this process has been, not only for the public service but for ACT police, and having regard to the discussions that have had to go on, even to respond today, to demarcate areas where these problems exist

within this documentation.

I also reiterate that this is why we have a regulator. This is why we have an Ombudsman to do this job, so that this does not happen. I would ask Mr Emerson: what is the purpose of all this? What are you actually going to do with the work of 20 FTEs, and tens of thousands, potentially hundreds of thousands, of dollars that is going to the search of documents?

Where is your accountability, Mr Emerson? You talk about transparency all the time, but where is the accountability for your actions in this place? You could have come to ministers prior to the 213A and asked for documents, asked for briefings, asked for information. There are plenty of processes through the Assembly, through estimates; you could have done an inquiry. As Miss Nuttall said, the New South Wales parliament ended up doing an inquiry. There are plenty of avenues to access this information. As Ms Stephen-Smith said, the minister has offered and is very happy to discuss these issues with you.

We live in a small community. The documents that are being requested and released will potentially identify people. As Miss Nuttall said, unless the context in which every single document is framed is caught accurately, the risks to the community are high. We are talking about the most vulnerable in our community.

I think it is a real shame that this has unravelled in this way. As everyone said, I absolutely understand the calls for transparency, but there may be other ways to go about it.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.47): I want to bring things back towards the collegiate approach that we had been taking. I want to take a moment to thank the public servants that are working on these requests, both this one and every other 213 request that comes through. I have been part of teams working through unreasonable requests in unreasonable timeframes plenty of times in the public service, and it is almost always completely unrecognised and completely undervalued. I can only imagine that the timeframes and the content of this request make it far harder than any of the FOIs I was involved in, for example.

Importantly, I want to say to those public servants: your work does matter. Absolutely, your work matters, because the people here will read it. I promise you that. With respect to the other requests that have gone through, we are reading them; we are reviewing those documents. Your work does matter, those documents are important, your work is important, and we are absolutely grateful.

Amendment negatived.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.50), by leave: I want to touch on some of the matters that were raised by other members. First of all, I did share a draft of the motion the week before introducing it to the Assembly. I amended the draft based on feedback received from the minister's office. The minister offered a briefing on the matter. I accepted the briefing and took the briefing, and I appreciated it. We disagreed on whether or not the motion should proceed. People are going to disagree in this place. I think we can accept that. We do not need to reflect on people's intent and motives every

time there is a disagreement.

We have heard a lot of remarks about the resources being used on this order, which I spoke to as well. If the government opposed the order, I think they should have voted against it. We are rehashing a debate that happened. There was a vote; the government had the opportunity to vote in a different way, and they let it pass.

I did not claim in my remarks that the government's intent was to undermine the motion. I said I was sympathetic to their concerns, and I appreciated them being raised. I said the effect, though, would be to undermine the original order and, if there is a concern about the use of public resources, that should be reflected in whether or not we get out of this motion what was intended.

The main point I want to make, though, is that I would implore members who are intent on reflecting on my motives and apparent ignorance, or that of anyone else, to listen closely to the remarks. As I indicated, I am sympathetic to the concerns raised. I have sought in good faith to negotiate a constructive way forward. A shared position has not been landed, despite the best efforts of multiple members and their offices. I am not convinced that, in every disagreement, every time that happens, this debate is best served by making personal reflections on the character, motives and naivety of members, even those of us who are new in this place.

I wanted to make those remarks. I hope that we can continue to work together, and agree and disagree, without having to reflect so frequently on each other's personal character.

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) (3.52), by leave: I will be brief. I also want to reflect just a little on 213B. With all my ranting about our road to hell being paved with good intentions regarding 213A, I do acknowledge that 213B is new, and it is something that has been agreed to by the Assembly. If it had not been put, considered, adopted and agreed to in this place in the last sitting week, we would still be in a world of pain, so I recognise the work that has gone into that.

I also appreciate Miss Nuttall's frustration with having only 28-ish hours to consider the 213B. Reflecting on the 213B and how it is crafted, this is something that I expect we will refine over time, Mr Speaker. As you know, once it has been presented to you, you need to table it and move a motion yourself—it is also a bit weird—in order to have the Assembly consider it.

With Ms Berry giving notice to Mr Emerson, there was a sense that Mr Emerson wanted some time to consider this. Again, we took that in good faith, so he moved for the adjournment until today, and that is how we got to today. Again, it is not ideal; 28 hours is not great, but we were operating within the confines of the standing order as drafted.

I want to reflect a bit on what occurred with the 213A. I apologise for any insinuation of mal-intent from Mr Emerson. I appreciate that my patience wears thin sometimes, and sometimes I say and do things that I regret. On that, though, in this situation, I think we are all trying to approach this in a good-faith way. The sense that government does

not know itself is frustrating. I will stand up for the public service, and I will call out when there is hypocrisy in this place regarding what we are being asked to do. On one hand, do more; on the other hand, cripple us. You cannot have both.

Hopefully, it is okay with Minister Berry—she cannot stop me right now—to say that I was reviewing the *Hansard* from June, as my memory was genuinely hazy, and Ms Berry did offer that briefing, as we talked about, and Mr Emerson did accept it. In the *Hansard*—again, if I need to correct anything, of course, I will—Ms Berry said:

... I offered him a briefing to provide as much information as he needed, and then, if he was not satisfied, he could move a motion.

I do not know about the timing of the briefing, or whatever may have happened there, but this motion was moved on the Tuesday. Obviously, we could have adjourned it, just like we supported the adjournment of our 213B motion. Minister Berry also said at the time that she was hopeful that some more engagement could occur with the sector.

Again, this is not a reflection on intent or the purity of that intent. I think we all agree there is good intent here, but good intent can still have consequences. We do need to be honest in this place about what those consequences are. I think it is quite telling that it is the opposition who have shown a real fondness for 213A and have brought it to everyone's attention, writ large. The fact that even the opposition says, "Hold on; this is too far. This is too much. This is not even their intention," is telling.

It is not about how much time anyone has spent in this place, or who knows better than whom, even though I do think that the public service definitely knows better in this case. It is about the fact that we can all learn from each other and we are trying to approach this in good faith.

I am still really surprised about how this has all come about in the way that it has. We can talk about New South Wales. I appreciate what has happened there; that is terrific. It is awful, but it is great that it has started to expose issues and result in change. But we are tiny; we are really tiny. Sometimes I am shocked by just how small some of our teams are, given the work that they produce. We are not New South Wales. We do not have capacity. We do not have the same sort of redundancies built into our workforce. When someone is away or taken offline, everyone feels it.

As representatives here, and as ministers here, Minister Stephen-Smith, Minister Paterson, Minister Berry and I do have an obligation, as PCBUs as well, to staff in our directorates, especially when we know that harm is being caused. Again, I recognise that it is not intentional. I do not think anyone comes in here and says, "Can't wait to make that public servant's day hell." Politicians, maybe, but public servants, no. When we know that it is having really terrible consequences, it is incumbent on us to do something about it and say something about it.

Again, I apologise, and I withdraw any inference that I was insinuating, or intent.

MR SPEAKER: Members, very briefly, I would like to reiterate some of the words of Ms Cheyne, in her second statement, in defence of the admin and procedure committee and in defence of the Office of the Legislative Assembly. In her initial speech,

particularly in the “road to hell” section of her original speech, she seemed to infer that changes made recently by the admin and procedure committee to the standing orders were potentially not helpful.

Ms Cheyne: No; I meant 213A back in the day—way back.

MR SPEAKER: Right. I would point out that, without the changes that were made last week, as was mentioned by Ms Cheyne, there would not have been any mechanism to retrospectively change the scope of this order for the production of documents.

Ms Cheyne: No, I was talking about the original authors. Absolutely not, no. Mr Speaker, I withdraw any of that inference. I meant people back in the day, and that they would be rolling in their—wherever they are now.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Cheyne.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

Community and other events—support

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) community and private events, weddings, festivals, markets, and activations play a vital role in fostering social connection, cultural expression, and economic activity across the ACT;
- (b) event organisers face significant challenges navigating complex processes, identifying suitable sites, and understanding available services—such as access to electricity and water;
- (c) these challenges can lead to uncertainty, increased costs, delays and cancellations, particularly for small community groups and volunteer-led organisations; and
- (d) the ACT Government’s Tourism Strategy aims to grow the visitor economy to \$5 billion by 2030, with events playing a central role in achieving this target;

(2) acknowledges that comprehensive, publicly accessible guidance that identifies suitable sites for events, outlines available services, and explains approval requirements would reduce administrative burden and planning uncertainty, support equitable access to public spaces, and encourage more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community events; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) cooperate with event organisers, community groups and volunteer-led organisations to develop guidance that:
 - (i) clearly identifies sites which are suitable for community and private events, weddings, hawkers, busking, rallies and activations; and
 - (ii) provides information on any complexities with using sites, how to access them, their available services, and the approvals required;

and

- (b) report back to the Assembly on the progress of this guidance by the end of 2026.

I am delighted to be moving a motion this Thursday afternoon that is aimed at unlocking the potential of our public spaces and making it easier for the people of Canberra to do what they do best—bring our community together. This is a simple motion. Its driver is about making things simpler for people who want to do cool things in our public spaces. There are no hidden messages; there is no wedge. It does not add to or reduce the government’s cost burden, nor heave the government’s policy needle one way or the other. Having “distro-ed” my first media release on it yesterday, I can say unequivocally that it does not attract the majority of the media’s attention, although I was grateful for Mr Lindell’s endorsement of the new “Taimus.WG” graphic that I stuck on the top of it.

This motion does just what it says on the tin: it urges the ACT government to meet its 2024 election commitment to develop comprehensive guidance that identifies suitable sites for private and community events, as well as providing practical information on access, available services and approval requirements. It is not a controversial motion, but it will be very helpful for members of our community with ideas.

Events, big and small, professional and amateur, are a strong, vibrant and colourful thread of our city’s social fabric. They are the moments that connect us, that celebrate who we are, and that make Canberra such a great place to live.

Earlier this year, the Oxford Economics Global Cities Index crowned Canberra as the best city in the world for quality of life, much to the ire of some trolls from Queensland who stomped, harrumphed and heavy-breathed into the comments below my Facebook post. Of course, Facebook’s very effective “angerhythm” picked up the conflict and spread that post far and wide, so more people in Queensland were able to envy our good news.

I believe this recognition is something we should all be proud of, and this recognition is not a one-off. Time and time again, Canberra receives and wins similar nominations, justifiable recognition of our people and the experiences we share, deserved recognition of the wide variety of events on offer, events which entertain and build our community, that level up our quality of life.

Not only did Canberra top Oxford’s global rankings; we also emerged as the highest-ranking Australian city across the quality-of-life indicators of income per person, income equality, housing expenditure and life expectancy. Unfortunately, we placed second, behind Sydney, for access to recreation and cultural sites. This is the silver medal that my motion seeks to turn gold.

Events bring people together. They showcase our culture. They boost our economy. They give us reasons to get out of the house, to meet our neighbours, to celebrate milestones and to welcome visitors to our city. From large-scale events like Floriade, Summernats, Enlighten and Skyfire, which attract hundreds of thousands of visitors and put Canberra on the map, to smaller, more community-driven events like suburban markets, weddings in the park, busking, rallies and local activations, these are the things

that make our suburbs vibrant and our weekends, and sometimes our evenings, memorable.

However, the people who make these events happen—the organisers, the volunteers, the community groups—often find it more difficult than it should be, more convoluted than necessary, to deliver great experiences for our community. Whether you are running a major festival or a small community gathering, the challenges are often the same: navigating complex approval processes, figuring out which sites are suitable, if and where key services like water and electricity are available and how to access them, and what requirements need to be ticked off.

As this motion notes, these challenges bring uncertainty, increased costs, wasted time, delays, and sometimes even cancellations. For small community groups and volunteer-led organisations, that can be the difference between an event happening or not happening at all.

I know this firsthand. When I was thinking last week about how I could use my precious, rare private members' business opportunity to be helpful, what useful lever I might be able to pull with it, I recalled my own experience as a founder and then Executive Producer of Shakespeare by the Lakes.

In 2017, some friends and I had an idea that became a vision: ruthlessly adapt—not steal—the successful model of New York's Free Shakespeare in the Park and bring free Shakespeare performances to the parks beside Canberra's lakes. Our corporate knowledge about how to make something like this happen was less than zero. There was a lot of cold-calling and inbox-bombing. Even so, our expectations of what should have been a reasonably straightforward process were constantly confounded.

We spent more than a month working between a number of very patient staff at Access Canberra and Transport and City Services, trying to figure out which parks might be available to perform in, how many car parks they had, what road management approvals we needed, which parks had power boxes, how many, where were they, whether they were functioning, how to access them, what approvals we needed, who from, by when, and how much public liability insurance we might be in the hole for.

It was easier to get a financial grant to perform in Glebe Park than it was to get the keys to get into the park. It was exhaustive and exhausting, for us and the staff. It does not have to be that hard for people who are trying to bring the community together, in a private or public capacity, or for the government officials tasked with shepherding event ingénues through the rigmarole from initial idea to event clean-up.

In 2017, we would have loved the guidance that this motion calls for, which I feel should have followed closely Mr Rattenbury's introduction and passage of the Public Unleased Land Act in 2013—guidance that the ACT government has committed to developing. It is about having a road map: first this, then that, then this.

Tuggeranong Town Park has five power boxes, all of them three-phase, all of them functional, located at the stage and by the path. It has two adjacent car parks, with overflow capacity for up to Y cars at Lake Tuggeranong College. It has three toilets. "To use the park for an event, you need to put an application in to Access Canberra

through this portal.” “Your application will need a risk management plan—here is the template—a traffic management plan—here is the template”—et cetera, et cetera. “Here is the number to call the city rangers to arrange a site inspection.” “Here is the number to call to pick up the keys from TCCS at this location, which is open between now and then,” and so on, and so forth.

I know I am not alone in this experience. I have heard from other community groups and organisers who have faced similar challenges, such as the Tuggeranong Community Council’s SouthFest Committee, and the Salvation Army Tuggeranong Corps Carols in the Park Committee—people who are passionate, creative and willing to give their time and energy to make Canberra a better place, only to be met with challenges and uncertainty.

This motion is an opportunity. The ACT government’s Tourism Strategy aims to grow the ACT’s visitor economy to \$5 billion by 2030. That was updated from \$4 billion. It is an ambitious target, and rightly so. Events are central to achieving that target. They attract visitors, they fill our hotels and restaurants, and they showcase our city to the world.

If we want to reach that target, we need to make it easier for organisers to do what they do best. We need to arm them with the tools and information they need to plan and deliver great events. That is why the motion I have moved today calls for something simple, useful and powerful—guidance. It is about having guidance that clearly identifies where certain types of events can be held; guidance that tells organisers what services, like water and electricity, are available at those sites.

The ACT government is already reviewing—and buckle up, Minister Cheyne, because here comes another mention—the Public Unleased Land Act. That is a great opportunity to dig a little deeper and produce this guidance as an outcome of that work. I want to be clear: this motion is deliberately broad because I trust the experts in the public service to cooperate with the people who know these challenges best—organisers themselves—to develop guidance that is practical, accessible and user-friendly.

I envision it as a mix of written and interactive tools, something that can work for everyone, because we want to make it easier for people to come together, to celebrate, to create and to connect. We want to make it simpler to unlock the potential of our public spaces and say to the people of Canberra: “If you have an idea, if you want to make something happen, we will help you to make it happen.”

Imagine a Canberra where every park, every town centre, every open space feels like an opportunity, where the barriers to bringing people together are as low as possible, where our city is buzzing with life, not just during the big festivals but every weekend across the territory, making it much simpler and much easier for the people who make Canberra great—the organisers, the volunteers and the dreamers—to do their thing and show us a great time outside, giving them the tools they need to bring us together and make our city shine.

That is the Canberra I want to see. I think that is the Canberra we want to see. That is what this motion is about. Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend it to the

Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.11): I will not speak for long, because I know Mr Milligan is on his way down and will also address the motion. Actually, I was not going to speak, but I felt compelled to make the point that I believe this is one of the weakest motions that we have seen—and I have seen some doozies in my time here. It is the kind of thing that I believe could have been addressed with a quick word to the minister in the corridor. It does not justify the Assembly's time with a motion or a question. I am not even sure that it was worth a 90 second statement. With the festivals that go on, people do manage to make it work—and we love them. We love them, but surely a conversation with the minister would have been just as easy.

The fact that this member from Brindabella thinks that it is the most important issue, when he has a chance to bring a motion to the Assembly, is staggering. I know, from the times I have spent in Brindabella and from listening to Mark Parton and Deborah Morris—who are listening to the community—that their issues are significant and that this is hardly one of the most pressing issues that the community has raised. We hear a lot about people's cost-of-living concerns, especially the 25 new and increased taxes that Labor imposed with this year's budget. We hear a lot about community safety concerns and Labor's failure to ensure that our local suburbs and communities are safe and properly maintained. We hear a lot about congestion, particularly Athllon Drive and Labor's decade-long failure to deliver the long promised duplication. We hear a lot about access to health care, particularly the struggle of families to access local bulk-billing GPs.

Those are the issues that I know the people of Brindabella care about. Those are the issues that keep our locals up at night. They are the issues they should rightly expect their Labor member will advocate for. Instead of the big issues, we have a Labor backbencher worried about the lack of official government guidance, filibusters and hawkers. Although that is important, they are part of the government and surely, as I said earlier, these sorts of things could have been handled with a conversation. There are real local concerns for our community. It is no wonder Canberrans are coming to realise that the government are out of touch and that it might be time for change. They deserve better than what they are getting.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.13): This motion might be the first of its substance in this place—and I am happy to be corrected if it is not—but it is definitely not the first one tackling the underlying issue here in Canberra. It is well known and has been well aired that it is hard to find a venue to hold an event here in Canberra, particularly when you are talking about things of medium scale being organised by volunteers and community groups. More broadly, finding public unleased land that suits your purpose and working out if you can even touch it is well known to be difficult around our community.

Members from last term might recall a motion I moved on urban agriculture, which asked the government to investigate opportunities to promote agriculture activities on suitable and under-utilised public land within the urban environment. While I thank those members who were here last Assembly for supporting that motion, it has not gotten that far in practice. My understanding is that that is because getting information on what public land can be used for anything is not always a straightforward matter. If

my understanding is correct, this is now something that the review of the Public Unleased Land Act is looking at. If the minister is able to, I would invite her to provide an update if this correct and, if so, how that is going.

Outside of the act's review, there is still plenty the government can be doing and, dare I say, getting better at. The city is not particularly good at getting together a proper variety of venues to suit the needs of its community. The Gungahlin Community Centre is finally under construction, and I am very grateful to see that. I would have loved to have seen it started earlier, to meet the demands of the growing population of the Gungahlin district. I hope it will be well suited to meet the local community's needs in practice.

Other efforts that have missed the mark include the redevelopment of Belco Arts. It is a beautiful venue—do not get me wrong—but it is also outside the price range of a lot of community groups. The Fitzroy Pavillion, as articulated by multicultural community leaders during estimates, is also expensive to hire, with significantly insufficient kitchens and storage facilities for their purposes. I cannot help but wonder why we cannot hit the mark in this regard. When it can cost upwards of \$20,000 to hold a community event at the Fitzroy Pavillion, it makes sense that people looking for other options on public unleased land—though working out how to do that presents its own challenges, of the kind that Mr Werner-Gibblings has articulated. His motion will at least help; so I am happy to support it. But, again, it does not solve those underlying problems, and that is going to take more work.

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) (4.16): I understand that you may need me to speak slowly—as much as I have just spent a lot of time deleting my speech—because I do not think anyone really needs to hear me talk much more today. But I welcome Mr Milligan's sprinting through the door so that I can sit down.

Unlike the opposition leader, I think this is a terrific motion. I think we all recognise that event organising is hard. It takes a special skill and it takes a whole lot of patience. There are folks like Belinda Neame and Tim Bean of The Forage. I do not know how they do it. The amount of coordination that you need to do with the people that you are bringing together, let alone the approvals, is incredibly difficult. It is rough. They do it so well. I know every time The Forage is on, people put it in their calendar firmly and turn up in droves, no matter where it is or what time of year. That is a testament to event organisers like Belinda and Tim and plenty of other people in this town. Indeed, my chief of staff had a career previously as an event organiser. Again, it takes a special type of person, and he is terrific at bringing people together. It is one of his special skills, apart from keeping me alive, afloat and sane, mostly.

There are a whole lot of challenges when you are putting on an event. Whether you are a skilled event organiser or not, challenges can lead to delays, can lead to anxiety, can lead to worries about whether things are going to come through on time, can lead to extra costs and can lead to cancellations even. The more that we can do to remove challenges and remove barriers in this place, the better.

Mr Werner-Gibblings has rightly brought attention to the Public Unleased Land Act—

again, my most hated act that will become my most loved. That is my commitment. We are doing a big review of it, and I can give an update to the chamber today. As part of our commitment to growing the visitor economy to \$5 billion by 2030 and to supporting vibrant and inclusive events across the territory, we are developing a comprehensive guide for event organisers. This is being led in concert with the Public Unleased Land Act review. Effectively, we are looking at understanding the different locations of public unleased land in the ACT and, effectively, what each parcel of land's primary objective is—Is it conservation? Is it potentially development at some point? Is it that it does not really have much value but is really good for events?—and, working with that, highlighting to people through this guide the ones that are very good for events and also the ones that are a little bit more challenging, just so people know what they are getting into.

I recognise particularly the experience that The Forage organisers had last year when one part of government encouraged them to make use of a particular piece of land and thought it would be terrific to activate that—and they were not wrong, by any means. But it was not clear until Belinda and Tim were well into the process that there were a whole lot of complications with that site that made it much more difficult than anyone could anticipate. It was other levels of government, including the NCA, and different people who held different keys to locks and gates, power and water and whatever it might be.

Again, these things are not an issue in and of themselves, and we are not necessarily looking to change those—just making people aware of what they might be getting into if that is their preferred site to hold something. I can happily say that the guide will clearly identify sites across Canberra that are suitable for community and private events, weddings, hawkers, busking, rallies and other activations, and that practical information I was just talking about: what services are available, how to access them, any complexities to be aware of and what approvals are needed. We are working with our community groups, volunteer-led organisations and event organisers to make sure that this is actually useful—not just another document, but something that will really assist. An audit of all existing sites will begin by the end of 2025. That will be our foundation of the guide. It will help reduce red tape, it will support equitable access to public spaces and it will encourage more community-led events.

In the meantime, I am pleased to say that there have been improvements to the public land use event bookings webpages. There is now an interactive map where you can see what sites can be booked and the local services and amenities that are available. There are improved smart forms on these pages. I found it quite easy last week booking my mobile office schedule. Of course, they can be refined further, but it makes a big difference to the paper-based system that we had—certainly while I have been in this place; so perhaps 10 years ago.

Of course, a big shout-out goes to Access Canberra's event coordination and business assist team in addition to the public unleased land permit approvals team. Both teams work exceptionally hard at helping people understand what approvals are required and facilitating those. In particular, the event coordination and business assist team is about making that approval process as simple as possible for an event organiser. I am also pleased to say that there is a guide to holding an event in Canberra that Access Canberra has developed. It is called Access Canberra Event Coordination Guide. I am sure that

title surprised you. I would note that, while that is an excellent starting point, Access Canberra can do so much more, including facilitating discussion with land custodians that might be in different parts of government and with event organisers themselves to help find a suitable location based on their requirements.

We have come a long way and we are making good progress. I am very pleased that we continue to draw attention to this important act and its review that is 12 years overdue. It cannot come any sooner. I appreciate all the work that has gone in, especially by those team members who have worked within its confines to facilitate events in the ACT. It is incredibly difficult. I have nothing but admiration for them. We look forward to supporting them through resources like this but also through the software that I was talking about earlier today.

I said I would not talk for long—and I lied. Again, I apologise to the Assembly. You have all heard enough from me. I will sit down.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.25): Ms Cheyne, thank you for contributing to this motion. No doubt, what you have contributed has been amazing. I will go back through the *Hansard* and read your speech. Both you and I have been very productive this week and we have achieved some really good outcomes. Who knows what next week will bring.

I will get to the point of this motion. I thank Mr Werner-Gibbins for bringing this important motion forward. I speak in support of this motion as shadow minister for city services and also sport and recreation. I agree with the motion that community and private events, weddings, festivals, markets and activations play a vital role in fostering social cohesion, cultural expression and economic activity across the ACT. Gatherings like these bring Canberrans together, strengthen community bonds and create a deepening sense of belonging through shared experiences. Additionally, community events by various multicultural communities provide important platforms for continuing to celebrate culture and traditions, as well as sharing them with the wider community.

These types of events also stimulate the ACT economy by supporting small businesses, creating jobs and attracting interstate and overseas visitors, who contribute to many sectors of the economy. More than ever, we need to support our local small businesses, who are struggling to keep their doors open, as proven by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' most recent report on ACT business survival rate in comparison to other states and territories. Additionally, I am aware that some event organisers have faced significant challenges in navigating complex processes, identifying suitable sites and understanding available services, such as access to electricity and water.

The proposed motion notes that the ACT government's Tourism Strategy aims to grow the visitor economy by \$5 billion by 2030, with events playing a central role in achieving this target. Putting on my sport and recreation hat, there is significant potential to drive tourism through sporting events in Canberra and the surrounding region. The ACT not only boasts multiple national parks, grasslands and nature reserves but also is geographically positioned as a gateway to other attractive destinations in the broader region. Sporting events have a strong potential to boost the ACT's economy. However, this will require a coordinated approach, informed by relevant sporting

communities.

It is essential to encourage interstate and international visitors to support local businesses, while ensuring that Canberra businesses in the accommodation, hospitality and retail sectors actively promote these events, and vice versa. The ACT government must look beyond the more traditional, well-publicised events and continue to support and invest in local sporting communities when they host interstate, national and international competitions here in Canberra.

I agree with Mr Werner-Gibblings' call-ons in this motion. We, on this side of the chamber, are certainly looking forward to what the report presents when it is tabled.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.29), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to this debate. I will let the Leader of the Opposition's bleak statement, shot through with the Canberra Liberals' characteristic anxiety-fostering and hopeless futility, stand for itself in the *Hansard*. She and her team can keep describing Canberra as a war zone, while I thank Minister Cheyne, Mr Milligan and you, Mr Deputy Speaker Mr Braddock, for sharing the positive understanding that supporting events and making them easier to put on and attend goes to the heart of what makes Canberra such a great place to live. These events bring us together. They celebrate our culture and they strengthen our economy. This motion is about making it easier for those event to happen. It is about providing clarity, making things simpler and supporting the volunteers and organisers—the members of the community who give so much of their time and energy to bring sizzle to us.

I thank Minister Cheyne for her contribution and detail on how the guidelines are likely to look once developed, and I look forward to seeing the minister's report back to the Assembly.

Whilst I have the floor, I would like to thank all of the volunteers and community organisers from schools, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, suburban markets, sports clubs and community churches who give their time and money to selflessly put on events in our great city. I thank members of the Assembly for their support, and, once more with feeling, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economy—credit rating

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the *Financial Management Act 1996* requires that the proposed budget must be prepared taking into account:
 - (i) the principles of responsible fiscal management;
 - (ii) the object of providing a basis for sustainable social and economic services and infrastructure fairly to all ACT residents; and

- (iii) the object of ecologically sustainable development;
 - (b) the *Financial Management Act 1996* does not set out that the government must have a specific credit rating as a goal in preparing the Budget;
 - (c) the ACT Treasurer advised the Assembly that avoiding a credit rating downgrade was a specific objective in putting together the Budget;
 - (d) following the Budget, the ACT credit rating has again been downgraded and is now rated equal worst in Australia;
 - (e) ratings agency S&P Global cited the Government's large after-capital deficits and structurally higher debt as key reasons for the downgrade;
 - (f) the 2024-2025 financial year saw the headline operating balance deficit blow out to \$1.38 billion with the 2025–2026 ACT Budget forecasting a Headline Net Operating Balance deficit of \$424.9 million;
 - (g) lower credit ratings generally correspond with higher borrowing costs;
 - (h) before the credit downgrade to AA, the ACT's interest expenses were already on track to be greater than a quarter of ACT own source taxation within four years; and
 - (i) S&P Global has noted that an upgrade to the ACT's credit rating is unlikely; and
- (2) calls on the Government to table a credit rating recovery plan with the Budget Review in February 2026 that details a strategy and timeline to return the credit rating to its previous AA+ and AAA levels.

Today, I once again move a motion that goes to the question of budget honesty and responsible government. When you strip away the government's spin and talking points, there are important questions about the Treasurer's approach to financial management.

The budget handed down this year is the first for a very long time where the Greens have not been in cabinet. It is a purely Labor budget. They did not have to make compromises in cabinet. Labor hold all the levers, and Labor control both the ACT budget and the federal budget. It is the first budget in a long time where Labor have no-one else to blame. The Treasurer had a very important job with the budget: in the shadow of the worst budget blowout in the ACT's history, the Treasurer's job was to shore up the budget for future generations.

From a technical respect, three specific considerations must be taken into account: the principles of responsible fiscal management, the objective of providing a basis for sustainable social and economic services and infrastructure fairly to all ACT residents, and the objective of ecologically sustainable development. After we had some discussions during the week, I thought it was quite reasonable to include those objectives in the motion, because they provide some context to the way that the budget is put together. When I asked the Treasurer about an extra objective—that is, whether avoiding a credit rating downgrade was a specific objective of his in preparing the budget—he replied, “Yes.” It is there in black and white. It is unambiguous. There is no qualification. There is just one word: yes. So, clearly the credit rating matters.

It is not that long ago that the Chief Minister was shouting from the rooftops about the ACT's credit rating being a sign of the quality of the ACT's economic management,

but, almost immediately after the Treasurer's response on 5 September, S&P Global did exactly what the Treasurer said the budget was supposed to avoid: they downgraded the ACT's credit rating for the second time in just under two years. The Treasurer failed in what he said was his objective. The failure was a direct consequence of Labor's choices and the Treasurer's choices.

Labor were warned and warned about the impact of their fiscal management. In November 2022, S&P warned about the ACT's operating deficits and high service costs. Less than a year later, in September 2023, the ACT lost its AAA credit rating, meaning investors regarded the ACT with greater caution and applied higher interest rates than they would have previously. At that stage, S&P gave the ACT a stable outlook. The ratings agency looked at the budget and they said, in essence, "Things shouldn't get any worse if you stick to this." But the government did not stick to that. It did not stick to its projections and the budget got worse. In September last year, the outlook was moved to negative—a signal to the government, the market and investors that, if something was not done to fix the budget, there would be further downgrades.

Now we know that the government did not fix the budget. It was never fixed. In fact, any semblance of an honest, fiscally responsible position fell flat on its face straight after the election, with a massive black hole in structural and operating deficits. The budget is far worse than it was last year: a bigger deficit, more debt and a skyrocketing interest cost which, whether the government wants to recognise it or not, is headed for 26 per cent of own-source taxation, all at the same time as the government has massively increased taxes and revenue. So, with another downgrade, Canberrans are again left with the cost of Labor's economic mismanagement. S&P was clear: the downgrade reflects persistent operating deficits, rising health costs and a capital works program rooted in the Chief Minister's pet projects that, perhaps, the government cannot afford in the way it seems to think it can and chooses not to control.

The Treasurer set an objective of avoiding a credit rating downgrade and failed. Once again, Canberrans will pay the price. A lower credit rating means higher borrowing costs. That means even more interest expense, and that means even more of every dollar raised in taxes is poured down the debt servicing drain, and that means that repairing the budget just got harder. As I have touched on already, before the latest downgrade, interest costs were already on track to eat up more than 26 per cent of ACT own-source revenue within four years. More than a quarter of every dollar that the territory itself raises in taxes is gone, just to service debt, not pay it down. This is just what it costs to keep the debt collectors at bay, and, with a lower credit rating, that number will rise.

Of course, when we have to spend more on interest, it highlights that we are not just talking about a letter on a rating sheet; we are talking about less funding available for hospitals, less funding available for schools and less funding available for policing and public safety. This is not just bad luck; it is the direct and predictable result of choices that Labor has made. It is the choice to paper over deficits with more borrowing, the choice to constantly reach for emergency spending tools like the Treasurer's Advance, and the choice to keep throwing good money after bad with failed projects—projects like the failed HR system, which blew out from \$15 million to \$78 million on then Minister Steel's watch and was totally written off, requiring another \$30 million investment to get, essentially, a slightly upgraded version of the same system. The Auditor-General highlighted that the business case for this approach was estimated to

cost over \$65 million.

The choices have seen a succession of projects delivered at extraordinarily inflated costs when compared to what was promised or budgeted. There was the choice to blow over \$1.4 billion on a 1.7 kilometre stretch of light rail and its enabling works. That is more than five times the \$268 million cost estimate in the business case. The Woden bus depot blew out from \$25.7 million to \$90.5 million. It looks like the Calvary hospital takeover, which the government promised would be clean and simple, has cost at least \$150 million—to buy a bunch of buildings that the government intends to knock down. Every one of these moves puts more pressure on the bottom line and pushes the interest bill even higher.

Something has to change. The most recent downgrade leaves the outlook sitting at stable, but, when you dig deeper, that is qualified. If things keep deteriorating, agencies will lower the credit rating again. That is why this motion calls for the government to table a credit rating recovery plan by February 2026—a real plan with a strategy and a timeline to return the territory's credit rating to AA+ and ultimately to AAA, which is the same rating that the Chief Minister was so proud to tell people in the ACT was so important—so that the Assembly and the public can see clear targets and hold the government accountable. The motion does not set a timeline for the government to achieve that target and it does not say how the government needs to do so. That is the Treasurer's job. In the interest of giving officials the time they need, we have agreed to extend the deadline for the plan so that it aligns with the budget update.

The Treasurer believed that maintaining the credit rating was important enough to be a specific goal in formulating the budget. Surely it is important enough to try and recover. I would not be surprised if the Treasurer decides to bring up a comparison with other jurisdictions. Over time, “what-about-ism” seems to have been a favourite game of this Treasurer, and his predecessor for that matter. In fact, I recall the Chief Minister saying something along the lines of: “We're the same as every other state and territory.”

So, what about the other jurisdictions? Well, the only two jurisdictions, other than the ACT, to have a downgrade in the last five years are New South Wales, which lost its S&P AAA credit rating, and Victoria. Victoria's downgrade was particularly bad. It was a double drop. It was taken from AAA down to AA, the same rating the ACT has now achieved. What makes Canberra's case any different to those? There is important context, because those downgrades happened in the middle of the COVID fiscal shock. There is no global fiscal shock to blame this time. No other jurisdiction in Australia has had a downgrade since COVID.

There are real implications. Canberrans are doing it tough. Families have been hit with a health levy and more than 25 new or increased taxes, fees and charges. Rates keeping rising, costs keep climbing and the budget still keeps getting worse. Small businesses are doing it tough. It is hard for businesses in Canberra to stay in operation and it is increasingly hard for businesses to employ people, with more payroll taxes at a higher rate. People are being asked to pay more but are getting less. And now, because of Labor's failures, they are also being asked to pay even more just to service the debt. That is not a responsible government. Canberrans deserve better. They deserve a government that lives within its means, within the circumstances that it has, and focuses on delivering value for people across the territory. They deserve a government that puts

people and services ahead of spin and glossy announcements.

This motion is intended to prompt the government to find a path back to at least one fiscally responsible measure. It is about rebuilding confidence in the government's ability to pay its debts and it is about making sure that more of every tax dollar goes to the people who need it, and not to throw more money away on interest.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.44): I rise to support Mr Cock's motion about a credit rating plan. As discussed in this chamber on multiple occasions, the budget is in a difficult position with growing debt and interest payments. Mr Cocks has outlined the issues very well: pressure on the health budget and big infrastructure spends. The budget needs to be brought under control before it reaches \$22 billion in borrowings and \$1 billion in interest in 2028-29.

This is important and it needs ambition. All options to achieve a better fiscal position need to be considered. While spending being met by revenue is good—a balanced budget is good—it does not address the structural debt that is now embedded in the budget and its associated interest. I do not believe we should be constrained by budget spending being met by revenue. We need to look at all options to improve our fiscal position and release the money spent on interest back to the community.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.45): The government acknowledges the decision by Standard & Poor's Global Ratings of 5 September 2025 to lower the territory's long-term issuer credit rating from AA+ to AA and place us on a stable outlook.

I also acknowledge that it would have been my strong preference that the ACT had been in a position to retain a AA+ rating. However, the Financial Management Act places an obligation on me, as Treasurer, to consider more than just the credit rating in preparing the budget. I must, amongst other things, consider providing a basis for sustainable social and economic services and infrastructure fairly to all ACT residents, and the object of ecologically sustainable development.

I appreciate Mr Cocks's willingness to amend his motion to acknowledge these broader requirements and, in doing so, there is an acknowledgement that retaining the credit rating was not my only goal as Treasurer. In all our budget decisions, our primary focus will always be on improving the wellbeing of Canberrans. My primary responsibility is to the people of the Australian Capital Territory, supporting them to access health services, our hospitals, education services, and so many other services across the community that the government delivers. Our responsible fiscal strategy provides a pathway back to surplus, whilst ensuring quality services and infrastructure continue to be delivered for all Canberrans now and into the future.

The 2025-26 budget was delivered in exceptionally difficult circumstances. As we are all aware, our public hospital system saw significant and unexpected growth in demand, coupled with sustained increases in costs, including medical and surgical supplies, blood products, support services for patient care, and personal protective equipment,

amongst other pressures.

We do not apologise for investing to ensure that our health system continues to provide the services that Canberrans need, when they need them. In the 2025-26 budget, the government included record levels of investment, of over \$1.19 billion over four years to 2028-29, to support the public health system to respond to the challenges of rising demand and costs.

The ACT was not alone in this surge in demand and cost. These are costs that have been building for some years. Like other jurisdictions, the government has been shouldering the impact through additional investment and managing services demand. This includes investment to catch up on deferred care from the COVID-19 pandemic and to meet the community need to access affordable primary and aged care.

These challenges became particularly acute in the 2025-26 year, with states and territories experiencing significant cost, in some cases of more than 10 per cent, and even up to 14 per cent. These cost pressures would clearly render our public healthcare system unsustainable without additional funding. This point was acknowledged by S&P, who noted the impact of rising health costs on our fiscal position.

Of course, our health funding challenge was exacerbated by funding arrangements with the commonwealth. That is the subject of an ongoing negotiation with the commonwealth government on a five-year national health reform agreement. The government's investment in public health care has been made while facing a declining contribution rate from the commonwealth to the public healthcare system. This has significant financial impacts for the territory, as we experience one of the lowest commonwealth contribution rates, known as the CCR, of any state and territory, with a funding gap of approximately \$189 million.

This government has always prioritised our health system, a decision that meant we could navigate the territory through the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in the 2020-21 budget, the government invested over \$330 million to support the health response to COVID-19. This is in addition to the financial support provided to the community, particularly the most vulnerable, and businesses, to avoid the economic and social impacts of the dislocation caused by the pandemic.

This support was important to maintain community wellbeing and bolster our economy during a time when it needed it. The government's fiscal policy stabilised the economy in the face of the pandemic and associated high inflation. Increasing infrastructure investment and community support programs, required through the peak of the pandemic, provided much-needed economic stimulus, as did reducing or waiving a broad range of fees and charges.

These broad-based economic support measures ensured continued economic growth. As S&P noted, the ACT's economic fundamentals are strong. The economy continues to grow consistently, and we have a strong labour market. This provides the foundation to improve our fiscal position.

All of these necessary decisions, which provided vital community support through the pandemic, have had significant fiscal impacts. Our fiscal strategy will ensure that the

implications for debt can be managed without cutting the delivery of essential services or infrastructure.

Our fiscal strategy was adjusted in this budget, and it is outlined on page 31 of the 2025-26 budget outlook. It was developed in response to our challenging fiscal environment and is based on the following principles: a commitment to support economic growth and employment, which is No 1; returning the budget to operating cash surpluses over the forward estimates period; returning the headline net operating balance—HNOB—to surplus over the forward estimates period; ensuring net debt is at sustainable levels over time, while delivering once-in-a-generation infrastructure projects in health and transport; extinguishing the territory's unfunded defined benefit superannuation liability over the next decade; and delivering sustainable public finances through efficient expenditure, alongside revenue measures supporting critical services and the needs of our community.

Consistent with this strategy, the government made difficult decisions in the 2025-26 budget to maintain our strong financial position. On the revenue side, decisions taken by the government are estimated to raise \$722 million from 2025-26 to 2028-29, including \$521.3 million of new tax measures, and initiatives incorporating fees and charges amendments.

We adopted a responsible approach to managing expenditure growth, without undertaking deep cuts to the public service that would impact on service delivery or the capacity of the ACT public service to deliver for all Canberrans. Savings of \$282.2 million over four years to 2028-29 will be achieved by constraining the rate of growth in expenditure across a range of agencies and directorates—something that was acknowledged by S&P in their ratings decision commentary. This will be a multiyear exercise, supported by whole-of-government principles for the re-prioritisation and re-basing of expenditure and enhanced budgetary control processes. These prioritisation principles will ensure that there is a structured assessment approach to align expenditure with government priorities and maintain a sustainable trajectory into the future.

We remain unapologetic in ensuring that our public service is well supported to deliver the quality services that the community needs and expects. While the healthcare pressures, reflecting demand increases and cost increases, are largely beyond our control, we have taken steps in the 2025-26 budget, with a transformation program to support targeted interventions that enable more efficient delivery of care and improved revenue generation across the public health system.

In this way, we have responsibly met the fiscal challenges that we are facing, and we have not ignored the ongoing impact of the need for greater investment in health, which is fully accounted for in our expense estimates going forward. Despite this, as outlined in the 2025-26 budget, the HNOB will return to surplus in 2027-28, and the net operating cash balance will return to surplus in 2026-27.

Our fiscally responsible approach to these challenges has ensured that the territory's balance sheet remains strong. As outlined on page 45 of the budget outlook, the territory's net debt to gross state product is around the average for all states and territories. It is important to note that the HNOB to GSP ratio is also forecast to be similar to most other states and territories across the forward estimates period.

Mr Cocks likes to cherry-pick our ratings assessment because we have been effectively the second cab off the rank in the S&P ratings this year, after Victoria maintained a stable rating, after an assessment by S&P earlier than our assessment. But the other states and territories have not had their decisions announced. They will be coming in the next few weeks and months. It is not fair to say that we have been singled out by S&P. It is not fair to say that, when many of the other states have not made tough decisions in their budgets to be able to show a return to surplus over the forward estimates, and they will be assessed by the ratings agencies as well.

As outlined on page 224 of the 2025-26 budget, net worth, the broadest measure of financial strength, is expected to be 26.3 per cent of GSP by 2028-29. This reflects the prudent investment decisions made by the government on behalf of the people of the territory, and our current investment pipeline will add to our net worth, as these projects are delivered.

Consistent with our responsible management of the territory's balance sheet, we are also prudently managing our defined benefit superannuation liability that we have as a result of taking on liabilities from the commonwealth upon attaining self-government. We are on track to extinguish this liability over the next decade, as has been acknowledged by Pegasus, the independent reviewer of the budget for the estimates committee. This will provide the government with capacity to invest in other priorities and further strengthen our balance sheet next decade.

I want to put on record my ongoing concern with the political line that interest expenses will rise to a quarter of ACT own-source revenue. This is equivalent to saying interest expenses will rise to 100 per cent of all parking fine revenue. In 2028-29, ACT government revenue is forecast to be around \$10.2 billion and interest expenses are forecast to be around \$974 million. Interest expenses, which I again remind the chamber is paying off the cost of building new infrastructure, will be less than a tenth of expenditure.

Despite the downgrade by S&P in their ratings assessment, our AA credit rating signifies a very strong capacity to meet financial commitments and a very low risk of default. This is reinforced by S&P's assessment that the territory has strong financial management by global standards, a very high-income economy and exceptional liquidity. In addition, S&P noted the excellent institutional frameworks enjoyed by state and territory governments, which are amongst the strongest in the world.

While a credit rating downgrade can impact on our relative cost of borrowing, the outright cost of borrowing is impacted by many factors, including economic conditions like inflation, central bank monetary policies, and market supply and demand. Of course, it also needs to be noted that changes to these factors or to the credit rating do not impact on the borrowing cost for outstanding debt.

I thank Mr Cocks for bringing forward this motion and for his and his office's engagement in being open to reflect on the range of objectives that I must consider as the Treasurer in his substantive motion. I also note the collaborative approach of the ACT Greens on this motion. I hope and ask that this consideration be continued into the practical delivery of the intent behind Mr Cocks's motion.

The government needs the support of the Assembly in achieving the objectives of the Financial Management Act. In passing this motion today, it is incumbent on all members of this place to reflect on the responsibility that they have also to support responsible fiscal management when considering revenue, expenditure and savings measures in the Assembly.

Each individual call on the government for public expenditure will have merit. Every revenue measure must ultimately be paid for by someone. There are no easy savings measures. They will all have consequences. I ask members to consider their responsibility for the totality of their ask on the ACT government when they come into this place and oppose revenue measures or savings measures, or call on government, through motions of the Assembly or through legislation, to spend more or divert resources to collating thousands of documents.

We have had that discussion today, as well as motions over the last few sitting weeks calling on the government to spend more, without any offsets and without any savings measures attached. Everyone in this place has a responsibility, and soon everyone in this place will have to vote on the budget. S&P have recognised in their commentary the work that we have done in this budget, and the difficult choices, to limit expenditure growth and introduce new revenue measures to improve our operating accounts.

These are decisions that other states and territories have not made in response to the same pressures on their health systems. Our government have taken action and have made difficult but responsible decisions. It is important that they are recognised and supported by all members of this Legislative Assembly. All members have an opportunity to support these measures over the next two sitting weeks, because the 2025-26 budget is the foundation for putting the ACT's finances on a sustainable path, whilst at the same time we manage the pressures in the healthcare system, and I call on all members to support it.

In conclusion, the AA credit rating indicates that our financial position remains strong, and S&P has recognised that our economy remains strong. Our fiscal strategy will ensure that this remains the case, as we continue to deliver for our growing Canberra community.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.00): I rise to make a brief contribution in support of this motion, and I thank Mr Cocks for bringing it forward. I want to thank both Mr Cocks and Ms Carrick for their broader work on this issue, and the rest of the estimates committee as well, in doing a deep dive down into the weeds during estimates.

The ACT's recent credit rating downgrade may appear to be a small technical adjustment, not such a big deal, or distant from everyday life for many Canberrans, but we all know it will have real consequences for our community. Interest payments are projected to rise from \$514 million last year to almost \$1 billion by 2028-29. This represents hundreds of millions of dollars being poured out of services, infrastructure and investments that support Canberrans and into the pockets of banks.

I am not convinced that the answer is just to pull back on investment. It is not to cut down on essential spending and it is not to ignore the fact that governments, when

delivering their budgets, must, of course, consider more than just how to maintain their credit rating. They have to make decisions in the best interests of the people they serve. It highlights the need to direct our resources where they will have the greatest long-term impact, and to make evidence-based decisions in good faith that extend beyond the election cycle.

We know that much of the pressure on the ACT's finances stems from the growing demand on our health system. Instead of only pouring money into hospitals, crisis beds and unmanaged chronic health conditions, what if we invested earlier, before people reached crisis? Imagine what \$514 million last year or \$1 billion in 2028 could do if it was redirected into preventive health programs, social housing or family and youth services. What if it was redirected into ensuring that people have access to fresh, quality food and footpath and cycling infrastructure that makes it easy and safe to exercise? These are the kinds of investments that keep people well, that keep families stable and that reduce the need for costly emergency interventions down the track.

I acknowledge that this is difficult to do. We cannot just pull money out of hospitals and put it into providing fresh food. But it is a conversation that we need continually to have and ensure that we are striking that balance. The evidence abounds—we have all heard the numbers quoted over and over again—that every dollar we put into early intervention multiplies in value by easing the future burden on our critical services.

Having not made those investments to a sufficient extent, we are now seeing the impact of that burden not only on critical services, many of which we all know are under strain, but on our budget; and, because of that, on ambition and on our credit rating. By focusing more on prevention, we can avoid the much higher downstream costs that we are already seeing in health, justice and welfare across Canberra.

Some members in this chamber may roll their eyes at me for asking for forward-looking, future-proofed fiscal responsibility; but, at the same time, the government continue to spend significantly more on things like infrastructure projects than is spent on comparable private developments. With borrowing costs now higher, we cannot afford inefficiency. Every dollar, and particularly every borrowed dollar, must go further for our community.

I spoke recently with someone who works in construction, on government projects, and who says the government is consistently overcharged by huge amounts, particularly in the early consultancy and scoping phases, before work has actually commenced, compared to what happens in his experience in the private sector.

I spoke with someone else who works in digital marketing and who says they quote the government two times what they quote private sector clients, because the government always has so many edits. Each set of hands in the hierarchy wants their fingerprints on the finished product.

This credit rating downgrade is not a reason to retreat from ambition. I hope it is not interpreted in that way. It is a reminder of the choices that we face. Do we continue to let repayments climb while reactive services are stretched to breaking point, or do we shift as much as we possibly can towards upstream investment that reduces demand, improves efficiencies and delivers better outcomes for our community?

Do we need more dollars or do we need each dollar to go further? We can allow interest repayments to keep rising and projects to keep running over budget, or we can shift our focus, investing earlier, investing smarter and investing in ways that relieve long-term pressures, while improving the lives of people in our community. I think it is the job of members of this Assembly, non-government members, to focus on that closely as well, and to call out when that is not happening, and to encourage the government to have that happen more often, so that better decisions can be made for the long-term future of our city.

Again, I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this motion forward today. I hope that the credit rating recovery plan or stabilisation plan, as per Ms Clay's amendment that will be tabled in response to this motion, gives consideration to the other factors that have been discussed, as well as the factors that I have focused on in my remarks in this debate.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.05): I would like to thank Mr Cocks for moving this motion today, and I would like to thank him and the Treasurer for the really constructive negotiations with our office. It has been a pleasure working with both of them. I thank Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick for their really thoughtful contributions to the debate. A lot of us are increasingly concerned about these issues, having regard to the services that the Canberra community and the Canberra environment need.

It is important that we do not react to the wrong things or overreact. We cannot be ruled by credit rating agencies. They can force short-term decision-making; they do not always take into full account how healthy and happy we are, and they cannot always see what is not on the balance sheet.

We have seen how that plays out. In the wake of the global financial crisis, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain suffered mass youth unemployment, forced into austerity by neoliberal policies, underpinned by rating agency recommendations which saw cuts as the way out of rising debt burden, and it did not end well. Here in Australia, Joe Hockey and Campbell Newman showed us the poor results of ideologically driven austerity politics. The human cost of following the rating agencies blindly is too great.

A ratings downgrade does send a signal, and that signal should result in the consideration of how to get to a more sustainable position. Right now, the ACT is borrowing to meet its current spending needs. The ACT Greens believe that borrowing to invest in the future of our city is fine, but borrowing to meet current needs is not a sustainable or sensible position. The real cost of a ratings downgrade can be a higher cost of debt, and it means that money meant for delivering public services must instead be diverted into interest payments.

It is clear that Labor do not have a firm grip on our public spending and revenue, and we need to see more grit and creativity in facing that. That is why earlier this month I brought forward a motion to increase the commonwealth funding contribution to the ACT. We need that half a billion that is missing from our GST revenue population undercount. We need to ensure that revenue that we are unable to collect from the 25 per cent of our workforce who work for the commonwealth public service is properly compensated for. The last we heard, we were getting a \$51 million adjustment for a loss that is somewhere between half a billion and \$1.5 billion, depending on which

economist you listen to. It is not enough of an adjustment. That is not a good deal. We need to see the historic housing debt cancelled. That is what happened for Tasmania and South Australia. We should get that here, too.

Health is our most rapidly expanding area of ACT government expenditure, and we need to see that Treasury has the capacity to provide the check on and challenge to the Health Directorate. We need to see aged-care assessments and NDIS applications done as a matter of priority for eligible patients, at least within a week, and we need to be lobbying the commonwealth for sufficient home-care packages and residential places.

My office was pleased to meet with Katy Gallagher's team recently. We got a lot of great information from that. But I was concerned about the pace of these commonwealth negotiations. I am not convinced that we will see a different result in our budget next year or the year after. It is increasingly clear that, with that hole left by commonwealth revenue in a lot of places, we just cannot keep going with our budgets like that.

It is important that we hold Labor to account and ensure that they follow through on this. Labor agreed to that motion that was passed in the Assembly. Parliament has asked them to negotiate harder with the commonwealth on all these revenue items, including our infrastructure. We do get commonwealth funding for our infrastructure, but the vast majority of it comes for our roads, particularly when it is fifty-fifty funding. For a lot of our major projects, we are getting a really small proportion of the funding. Success in getting this commonwealth revenue would make an enormous contribution to the ACT finances. There are literally billion-dollar differences, when we are talking about those commonwealth revenue streams.

The ACT Greens have consistently raised concerns about the way in which Labor takes lessons from projects which could have gone better. We need to make sure that we are getting those ideas about how to put our finances into a more sustainable position factored into new projects. We have lost a lot of money on projects that have not been run well, and we need to make sure that we do not keep doing that.

I am seeking today a more balanced path than the path that has been put up by the Liberals. I thank Mr Cocks for the clear thinking that he has put into this, but I am concerned that the pathway he is setting out could lead to the kind of damaging austerity shock therapy that has damaged so many other places.

However, the Greens do not want to continue with the Labor lines in which this budget is fine and we do not need to do anything different. We do not think that is true. We think Labor needs a lot more help to get us to a more sustainable budgetary solution. I commend Mr Cocks on his problem identification, but we have suggested a different solution, and I will now move my amendment:

omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the Government to table a credit rating stabilisation plan by February 2026 that details a strategy and timeline to ensure current Budget spending is met by revenue.”.

That amendment will ensure that we see from government proper consideration of how we get the budget to a better position. We Greens will pour over the details of that, and

we will look forward to seeing Labor making all the calls they need to, to their federal friends and colleagues, ensuring that the right reforms are in place to make sure that the public service is learning lessons from past mistakes, and that any changes to our tax system are genuinely progressive for our people and our climate.

The Greens are proud to see that the government will adopt part of our big corporations tax and increase payroll tax on the largest corporations from 1 January. We are concerned, though, about Labor seeing in future budgets a choice regarding cutting programs for homelessness services, cutting funding for the community sector, or cutting or failing to increase funding for the environment. We do not think those are good choices. We would expect Labor instead to continue to bring in the big corporations tax or come up with some other measures that will deliver a better outcome for Canberrans.

I would remind everyone that business does better when people and the planet do better, and that a thriving city will be better for our economy all round. It is, I am sure, something that will be top of mind for the public accounts committee, when they are looking at that revenue measure.

Canberrans do have a choice, and we have a moment in time right now to help Labor get us to a better budget next time. We understand that the promise of stability that Labor set out at the last election was not quite accurate. Labor knew where the public finances were heading at that point, and it is clear in this budget that we are not where people thought we were, last October. We need to make sure that we are on a different track now. We also do not need to lock in failed austerity policies.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.12): I did not intend to speak today, but I want to respond to a couple of things that Ms Clay said. Ms Clay would be well aware that there have been Greens ministers in the ACT government for the last 12 years, until 2024, and there were three Greens ministers in the last term of government. She seems to believe that they were perfect and that no mistakes were ever made in portfolios under their watch—that mistakes are only made in Labor’s ministerial portfolios. The record would show that this is not the case.

I note Ms Clay’s commentary about what Labor knew about the state of the budget prior to the election. I refute her commentary. The Greens leader was a member of the Expenditure Review Committee for the entirety of the last term of government. As a member of the Expenditure Review Committee, he was responsible for working on putting together the 2024-25 budget, which was the basis for the pre-election budget update. The pre-election budget update, independently undertaken by the Treasury, reflected the outcomes of the 2024-25 budget, and the leader of the Greens was a member of the Expenditure Review Committee that put together and made decisions that led to the delivery of that budget. The Greens always had some level of criticism of the budget that we jointly put together when the Greens had ministers, and, indeed, in the last term when the Greens had a third of the ministry, but this level of amnesia cannot be without some rebuttal and some commentary.

I also note for Ms Clay’s benefit that, in fact, the Labor government introduced additional payroll tax surcharges for the largest businesses prior to the Greens putting

their additional measures on the table. So there was already a move in the direction of additional surcharges in payroll tax for larger businesses. But that was not the only measure that we took to increase revenue in the budget. Clearly, we negotiated with the Greens and we reduced the health levy that we introduced through the budget, because the Greens disagreed that we should ask homeowners in the ACT, in an already incredibly progressive rate system, to contribute \$5 a week towards what was clearly a significant increase in the cost of delivering health services for Canberrans. The day after the budget was delivered, a very unscientific poll on ABC Radio Canberra found that more than 50 per cent of the people who participated said the Liberals should not in fact oppose that levy. Canberrans understand that, if we are to receive services, we all have to pay for it.

The so-called big corporations tax is not costless for consumers and it is not costless for employees either. It has potential behavioural impacts that have not been modelled by the Greens and have not been modelled by the Australia Institute, on whom they rely. Obviously, we came to a compromise with the Greens in relation to the health levy and reduced it to \$100. We committed to them that we will continue to review that, but they cannot have it all ways. They cannot have this level of amnesia and they cannot argue that it is only their way or the highway.

The health levy was not going to be charged to people who are renters living in poverty. We have a lot of measures to protect tenants in the ACT. We also have, as I have pointed out to Ms Clay and her colleagues on multiple occasions, a lot of measures within the rate system to ensure that rates will never create financial hardship for older people, who are most likely to be in a position where they own their home but have an income that does not match the assessed value of their property. Anyone over the age of 65 can defer part or all of their rates payments. That attracts a very simple rate of interest. Anyone in hardship should talk to the Revenue Office about their rates and they can work out a deferral arrangement. Rates will never put a homeowner in financial hardship, because we have arrangements in place to ensure that is not the case. In addition, we introduced an additional threshold for rates to make the rate system even more progressive than it was.

The Greens have stood on political high ground in relation to a so-called regressive tax impost, but I need to say that Mr Rattenbury was a member of governments that introduced increases to the fixed charge as part of its rate settings over some years. We also increased the family safety levy and the fire and emergency services levy, which the Greens have not opposed. This is political grandstanding on the part of the Greens, and good on them—it is politics, right—but they cannot have it all ways and say that Labor did nothing and made no effort on the revenue side, while opposing everything we try to do in relation to both revenue and expenditure constraints.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.19): The government will be supporting Ms Clay's amendment. Mr Cocks's motion, in the section that calls on the government to take action, would see a quite significant impact on the ACT community. It would foreshadow extreme and deep cuts to our public services—either that or massive increases to revenue in the short term. They are the sorts of markers that we are seeing being laid down by the federal Leader of the Opposition, Susan Ley, in her most recent speeches, where she is effectively laying the

ground for deep cuts by a future coalition government. We cannot support something similar here in the ACT.

We are happy to support Ms Clay's amendment to table a credit rating stabilisation plan by February 2026 which would enable the government to further consider these matters as part of the budget review process, which we will be kicking off soon in consideration of the ratings decision and the commentary that has been made by S&P. Some of that has been quite positive about some of the actions that we are taking and will be debating this afternoon. There are also the further parameters that they have set out around the stabilisation of the credit rating going forward. I note their assessment is that the rating has a stable outlook in the ACT at the moment, but, of course, we need to make sure that continues to be the case. As Treasurer, one of my goals will always be to make sure that we have the highest credit rating possible. We have made clear that it is not in line with the expectations of the community and it is not in line with the values of the Labor Party to have deep cuts made to the public services that Canberrans rely on, in hospitals, education, community services, transport—a whole range of areas of government service delivery. This is a responsible amendment and we are happy to support it.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.21): I am not surprised to get an amendment like this from the Greens. The Greens have notoriously low interest in fiscal responsibility. It is not in their DNA. They do not aim for a surplus, and they are up-front about that. They do not mind a bit of debt and deficit. But it is deeply concerning to me that the Treasurer has given up. What we have put forward is the idea that the Treasurer would present a plan on recovering the credit rating, with no timeline on when he would have to do so. There is no timeline on how long he could take to recover the credit rating. He could have said it could take 20 years, 30 years or 50 years. He chose not to. Instead, the Treasurer has given up on the ACT's credit rating and he has given up on fiscal responsibility for the foreseeable future. He does not see a way in which the ACT can ever recover its credit rating.

If you listen to what the Treasurer just said, he was essentially telling us that the only way to ever recover the credit rating is through deep cuts to everything. I am not convinced that is the case. He also likes to bring up the idea that he will always be committed to the best possible credit rating. It seems that it would be the best possible credit rating given every other priority he would like to spend money on.

We will not support the amendment. The amendment undermines the intention to actually get the ACT on a better footing. It undermines the idea that it is going to be possible to achieve recovery in the credit rating. I am not willing to give up.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 6

Andrew Braddock
Tara Cheyne
Jo Clay

Marisa Paterson
Shane Rattenbury
Chris Steel

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain
Fiona Carrick

Thomas Emerson
Laura Nuttall

Suzanne Orr

Caitlin Tough
Taimus
Gibbings

Werner-

Ed Cocks
James Milligan

Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.29): We have a Treasurer who is focused on spin in his response to some of the issues that have been raised. Instead of being up-front, he seems to have been focused on half-truths, loopholes and pretending that everything is fine. There is the unanticipated health spending myth, for example. We know that, for years, the health spend ran above what was actually budgeted, and we know that this year the health budget sits just under last year's spend. The likelihood of having another unanticipated health spend seems fairly high to me.

Everything is not fine, despite what the government seems to want us to believe. This is why the Canberra Liberals and Canberra people seem to lose trust in the government. The spin was on full display today. The Treasurer's call to pass the budget so that all of the savings measures could be implemented is absolutely disingenuous. The appropriation bill that we are debating today is a spending bill. It is about spending. That is all it does. The appropriation does not give permission for the government to pursue savings and it does not contain the regulations or the legislation required to raise more revenue. Those are done through other things. Most of them have already been done. Fee increases have already been implemented through disallowable instruments. The rates increase is already there. That is straightforward; they are implementing that through a change to the way that they charge rates. The budget itself is not where you find those measures. That is not what enables those measures.

It is completely disingenuous of the Treasurer to claim that everyone must pass his budget so that we can have a fiscally responsible budget. Every one of the savings measures and every one of the revenue lines can be implemented without the extra spending that the budget permits, if that were the case. This motion tries to set the ACT on a better path, because people across the ACT deserve it. It has been some years since we have seen an outcome delivered in line with a budget. How can you trust a government that has a track record of under-delivery? How can you trust someone who introduces a so-called health levy in the same year that the budget goes backwards on health? Canberrans have a right to ask whether the government is simply papering over the issues with spin.

I am glad that we are going to get some progress and the government will tell us how on earth they will keep the credit rating stable, because there were absolutely cautionary notes in the judgement that the S&P delivered. It is important. It has a genuine impact. And I think it says something when even the Greens, despite their love of debt and deficit and despite their DNA, can genuinely see problems with the path that we are on. I am being somewhat facetious, but the discussions that I have had with the Greens have been incredibly productive. They can genuinely see where this is heading—that the more you spend on interest and the further backwards you go in the credit rating the less will be available to spend on everything that Canberrans deserve.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Transport Canberra—bus frequency—government response

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.34): I draw the Assembly's attention to the government response to the Assembly resolution of 5 December 2024, regarding bus frequency improvements, presented in today's papers.

The ACT government has already taken significant steps towards increasing the frequency of bus services, both on Rapid, local and weekend services this term, and we remain committed to increasing the level of frequency and adding new Rapid bus routes in future. These services have been delivered at a time of major construction works in the city. However, the most significant disruption to our road network is still yet to come, with construction over the next two years as part of the National Capital Authority's works to strengthen the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

This is a welcome project to ensure that this commonwealth asset can continue to support Canberra's transport network for decades to come. As outlined in the update, these works will likely see the full closure of one bridge span at a time, for a period of one year each. Essentially, where there are now currently three lanes in each direction across the bridge, both directions of traffic will need to fit into no more than three lanes. This will have significant impacts on the ACT road network throughout the two-year construction period.

As I update the Assembly on our progress towards increasing bus network frequency, it is important to provide an update on the period ahead and the reality of these construction impacts on the level of service expected on our bus network. During the temporary period of construction, the NCA bridgeworks will have a cascading and unavoidable impact across our entire bus network, particularly our ability to maintain current service frequencies.

Anyone who travels via Commonwealth Avenue Bridge knows just how many vehicles use that road during peak times. All of our Rapid routes and all but three of our local route services that connect Canberra's south to the north and vice versa, currently use Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. Some 1,380 Transport Canberra bus services cross the bridge every day during the week. All of those buses, including general traffic, will now be squeezing into half the road space once bridgeworks commence. This will mean significant congestion on the road network and buses stuck in traffic, directly reducing the number and frequency of buses being able to pass over the bridge every hour. A bus stuck in traffic is running late not just for its current timetabled service but also the next

service assigned to that bus. Where delays are great enough, that can mean the bus is unavailable to deliver the next service at all, reducing the overall efficiency and frequency of the network.

Our priority throughout this upcoming period of disruption has to be ensuring that services which can be delivered are reliable and that, when a bus is timetabled, it shows up. To deliver a reliable bus service that takes into account the impact of the NCA's bridgeworks, this unfortunately means the frequency of bus services on weekdays will need to be reduced temporarily during construction. This is planned to commence with a new network from the start of term 1 next year following the relatively quiet holiday period.

Transport Canberra has been working closely with the NCA to understand the impact of their works on the traffic network, and to determine the extent of increased journey times for affected bus routes. We are pursuing all options with the National Capital Authority and have requested that they prioritise public transport through the development of their temporary traffic arrangements. Transport Canberra is also exploring timetabling options and alternative routes as part of a new network and timetable design to mitigate the impacts as much as possible.

We are committed to updating the community early and often as we work towards mitigating the impact on Canberra's commuters, both on buses and the broader road network. I commit to updating the Assembly again as we work through this disruption planning.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.38): I welcome the ministers update provided today in response to my motion. I welcome improvements made to bus frequency so far over this term and I am grateful to see the Woden depot commence operations after such a long period of waiting for that. I do feel churlish—literally, just straight after the Woden depot was opened—to be calling for further depots. But it is important as part of the forward planning for the bus network that we continue to plan for and build further depots. I will particularly be calling for Mitchell but also West Belconnen. This will help address the growing need for an increase in local services available to the community. I am pleased to see in the update the planned decommissioning of the compressed natural buses, as these have reached the end of their life and are, unfortunately, prone to let us just call it, catastrophic failure.

I thank the minister for highlighting the impact the construction works on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge will have on the bus network as a whole, and appreciate the challenges this will create. This highlights the importance of improving the dedicated lanes to buses across the network to help improve the frequency across the entirety of the network. So I reiterate the call in terms of bus lanes to Belconnen, to Molonglo and through to Civic itself. Whilst these will not directly address the problems that arise out of the Commonwealth Avenue works, they will help improve the pace of buses going through the system and hence improve the bus frequency issue.

I remain concerned that the next phases seem to be predicated on detailed usage information. This is reliant on fully operational MyWay+ readers on the buses. Where the data is not complete there is a degree of uncertainty in the planning and operation of buses, which may cause issues going forward in the system.

In summary, I welcome the bus frequency updates to date. However, in order to provide an effective service that is able to meet the needs of Canberrans, where they can turn up and go, I will continue to exhort for greater frequency.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.41): I am pleased that the minister understands that a bus caught in congestion impacts not just the rideability of that service but also the next service and the rideability of the network. It is outrageous that the NCA works on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge are not providing a dedicated bus lane. This should be rectified and a bus lane provided in the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

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

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Debate resumed.

Infrastructure Canberra—Part 1.4.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.42): I am speaking this evening on the Governance Infrastructure Program and our commitment to the ongoing delivery of projects outlined in the 2019 infrastructure plan that was updated at the five-year mark through seven sector updates in 2024.

The plan is, in its totality, about creating a more connected, sustainable and inclusive Canberra, meeting the needs of the growing population, responding to the challenges of climate change and to support a thriving economy. The infrastructure program, at its heart, provides the facilities to deliver services to the community, provides investment in productivity enhancing transport projects and ensures that we are investing in areas that see both job and economic development opportunities.

We have a dedicated delivery agency, in Infrastructure Canberra, leading the work on the pipeline of transformative projects for our territory that will, upon completion, redefine how we live, move and connect and how we can further diversify the territory's economy. I will highlight a few of these projects this afternoon—firstly, the Canberra Lyric Theatre project. As members would be aware, design and construction planning is well underway for the new Lyric Theatre. This venue will allow us to host much bigger productions that have the capacity not only to support the arts in the territory but also to attract visitors from across the region. The new venue will be able to host the sorts of shows that otherwise have bypassed the ACT.

Infrastructure Canberra has appointed Multiplex as our early contractor involvement delivery partner. Early investigation works have been undertaken to support the development of the construction proposal that is due to government by the end of this calendar year. I advise the Assembly that early works will begin next month, with approvals being sought to commence construction in early 2026, with an expected

completion date of late 2028.

The Canberra Aquatic Centre is part of a vision shared between the National Capital Authority and the ACT government to further activate Commonwealth Park, which is currently an underutilised, but I think beautiful, feature of our city. The site features prominently in the National Capital Authority's Commonwealth Park Concept Vision, which envisions a high-quality landmark facility that strengthens the park's connection to water and landscape. The site is of course not only iconic but is also strategically located literally next door to a stage 2A light rail stop, making it even more accessible to residents and visitors.

We are making an investment to build this new aquatic centre jointly with the Australian government, and funding has been allocated to support the design and construction in this year's budget. Early investigations on the preferred location within Commonwealth Park began in the middle of this year, and concept design work will continue through the second half of 2025.

Planning is also underway for a convention and entertainment centre precinct to position Canberra firmly as Australia's meeting place and to have a venue that is capable of holding larger national and international events. The Convention and Entertainment Centre Precinct, which will follow the Aquatic Centre's delivery, will include a convention and exhibition centre with 8,000 to 10,000 square metres of flexible space, an entertainment venue for at least 7,500 people as well as multi-function spaces that would accommodate dinners, cultural celebrations and community events.

Members would be aware that light rail stage 2A construction is well underway, with the project due to be operational in January 2028. This project shapes our city centre and creates better connections to the Acton waterfront, to Commonwealth Park, as I have just discussed, and to the western part of the city. The three new stops are already promoting opportunities for urban renewal through land release and active travel through the improved pedestrian cycle infrastructure—the first stage of which has already opened with the raising London Circuit project completion.

We will continue to invest in partnership with the commonwealth in these sorts of projects. Of course, there are other areas of our infrastructure program where the burden of delivery and financing falls solely on the territory government. The north side hospital is an example there. With an investment of more than \$1 billion dollars will, on its completion, be the largest single health infrastructure project ever undertaken in the territory's history. We are using a very early contractor involvement procurement method to ensure the best technical advice is available to inform the next stages of planning and design. It is a collaborative process involving clinicians, operational staff, patient groups, local stakeholders and the community to ensure the facility will meet the diverse needs of north Canberra.

The Education Capital Program, which I am sure the minister will touch on during discussion, makes a series of generational investments in education infrastructure—Strathnairn, Whitlam, Nicholls, Narrabundah, Garran primary school modernisation, to name a few examples.

In terms of policing, Infrastructure Canberra has work underway to procure a delivery

partner to identify accommodation options to house a new city police station and headquarters, and ICBR approached potential delivery partners in July with a targeted EOI process. The Molonglo Emergency Service Station is also on track for completion by mid-2026.

In community health, there are investments in the South Tuggeranong Health Centre, the North Gungahlin Health Centre and the Inner South Health Centre as well as site investigation work and community consultation in relation to West Belconnen Health Centre.

I want to touch on the Big Battery. This is a project, the first stage of which is well advanced—a largescale energy storage system at Williamsdale, delivering 250 megawatts of storage, which is enough to power up to 250,000 homes or, indeed, around a third of Canberra for two hours during peak demand. The transformer has now been installed and operations are expected to begin in 2026. This is delivered in partnership with EQ Energy and is, in fact, probably the most significant largescale battery project in our region.

As I am sure other members will touch upon, the Molonglo River Bridge, the William Hovell Drive duplication, the new recycling facility and FOGO facility at Hume and the social housing program are all big components of what is an ambitious infrastructure program for our city. But the point of investing in this infrastructure is to allow for the delivery of more services and of improved services. Infrastructure is not just about building things; it is also about delivering services for the community from that new infrastructure. Investment and transport infrastructure improves the productive capacity of the economy and gives people back time. That allows our economy to grow and improves people's lives and wellbeing. That is why we make these investments.

Infrastructure has a purpose, and investing in infrastructure is a worthy part of our budget. Hence, I commend this section of the appropriation bill to the Assembly. In closing, I acknowledge that we also need to focus on how we deliver projects. The work on the culture and construction standard, the Infrastructure Canberra pathways hub—a social procurement initiative—the infrastructure pipeline, advisory to industry and improvements in procurement are all part of the work of Infrastructure Canberra that are funded through this line in the appropriation bill, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.52): The ACT government, as the Chief Minister said, continues to invest in modern, accessible health infrastructure to meet the growing needs of our community, reflecting our commitment to deliver high-quality care closer to home.

Having completed the largest health infrastructure investment delivered in the territory's history, with the final stage of the Canberra Hospital expansion recently opened, we are progressing on the new largest investment in health infrastructure, the north-side hospital. This state-of-the-art facility will be built on the existing North Canberra Hospital campus in Bruce and will be operated by Canberra Health Services. It will feature a new emergency department with improved access, modern inpatient services designed around patient and family-centred care, and facilities for teaching, training and research.

The hospital will also deliver improved car parking and public transport connections, and create hundreds of jobs during both construction and, of course, operation. The 2025-26 budget includes \$81.8 million specifically allocated to supporting early works and design.

As the Chief Minister mentioned, Multiplex has been appointed as the very early contractor involvement partner, and planning approval, site surveys and investigations are all underway. Stakeholder engagement has commenced with clinicians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the Health Care Consumers Association. The co-design of a new standalone birth centre is also underway.

Alongside the hospital, we are expanding our network of community-based health centres to bring care closer to home. These centres will provide services such as pathology, dental care and chronic disease management, and are designed to meet the needs of growing communities across the ACT.

For north Gungahlin, design work is underway for the centre in Casey. The Casey precinct has been prepared for future construction, and design consultant GHD was engaged in April 2025 to deliver a 100 per cent PSP design for both inner south and north Gungahlin, and to undertake feasibility work for west Belconnen.

The inner south health centre in Griffith is also progressing, with \$36.1 million committed over three years. In 2025-26, the project team will advance design, conduct community consultation, submit the development application and prepare the construction tender.

In south Tuggeranong, the new health centre in Conder is under construction, with \$15½ million allocated in this budget. The centre will offer appointment-based services, walk-in pathology, virtual care spaces and rooms for education and training. Construction commenced in May and is expected to be completed by mid-2026. Of course, planning is also underway for a new health centre in west Belconnen, with feasibility studies and site investigations ongoing.

The ACT government allocated funding in the 2025-26 budget for a new medical imaging outpatient service at the Belconnen Community Health Centre in Canberra's north. This was a key commitment that we took to the community last year and, through this budget, we are delivering on it.

We know that parking remains a key consideration under the Canberra Hospital master plan, and the government has allocated just over \$4.8 million to this in the 2025-26 budget, to deliver hundreds of additional car parks, while we continue to work on larger projects.

Infrastructure Canberra has also taken on a central role in managing property, projects, repairs and upgrades across the ACT government portfolio. This centralised approach provides consistent and high-quality maintenance services, ensures investment is coordinated and efficient, and delivers modern, safe and welcoming workplaces and community venues.

The budget initiative, Infrastructure Canberra's infrastructure enabling services and management of government places, establishes the centralised funding model for these services, streamlining resource allocation, enhancing coordination and improving the delivery of critical infrastructure projects, property maintenance and leasing across the ACT.

Infrastructure Canberra delivers a capital works and asset renewal program across a portfolio of 245 government-owned assets, including community centres, libraries, depots, offices, arts facilities and aquatic centres, not to mention, as recently came to public attention, the Civic merry-go-round. The program of maintenance and renewal ensures facilities remain safe, functional and sustainable by targeting high-priority refurbishments and upgrades.

Through this program, the ACT government is extending asset life, reducing risk, improving sustainability, and supporting community access to safe, modern facilities. Priorities are set in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure value for money, avoid unnecessary works and align upgrades with future needs.

Additionally, Infrastructure Canberra delivers new community centres, such as the recently completed Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation facility, and the new Gungahlin community centre, which is under construction and expected to be completed in 2026.

Infrastructure Canberra will manage ongoing maintenance of Gugan Gulwan, which is a purpose-built, culturally-led space to support expanded services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. I recently visited Gugan Gulwan and met with the staff in this new facility, which is beautiful. It is inviting, culturally safe and full of light. It is a perfect example of how well-designed, well-maintained community infrastructure can have a direct impact on the wellbeing of our community.

The government took a comprehensive infrastructure plan to the last election, a plan that would deliver new hospitals, health centres and community-based services to support our growing population. Through this budget we are getting on with delivering on these commitments and the commitments that Canberrans voted for.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.57): I am proud to stand today to provide an update on the ACT government's continued investment in emergency services infrastructure—an investment that reflects our unwavering commitment to the safety, well-being and resilience of our growing community.

As our city expands, particularly in high-growth areas like the Molonglo Valley, it is essential that we match this growth with the infrastructure and services that support and protect our community. That is why the government is investing in modern, purpose-built emergency services facilities, ensuring that our dedicated personnel have the tools and spaces they need to respond quickly and effectively when our community needs them most.

The Molonglo emergency services station is a cornerstone of our commitment to deliver modern infrastructure. Set to be the largest in the ACT, this station will provide vital access for emergency services for residents and visitors across the Molonglo Valley, Woden Valley and Western Creek. The 2025-26 budget has allocated an additional \$34.78 million to continue construction. This brings the total investment to \$65.95 million. This facility will deliver state-of-the-art facilities in accommodation, equipment and operational capability. Strategically located on Cotter Road, the station will enhance emergency response times not only for residential areas but also for those enjoying recreational activities in the surrounding natural landscapes. It will house a 4x4 all-terrain ambulance vehicle, enabling paramedics to reach remote and challenging terrain, and fire appliances suitable to protect the urban interface between houses that back onto or face bushland.

Importantly, the station will set a new benchmark in sustainability. It has been designed to achieve a five-star Green Star rating, and is the first of its kind of emergency services stations in the ACT, incorporating principles from the Green Building Council of Australia. The ACT government is proud that this project is on track to reduce construction waste to landfill by 90 per cent and will include electric vehicle charging facilities in line with the ESA's sustainability program. Construction is progressing well and remains on track for completion in mid-2026, with relocation and occupation by the ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Fire & Rescue to follow.

In addition to the Molonglo Valley, we are progressing plans for a new emergency services station in Casey. With a total commitment of \$1.93 million, the 2025-26 budget has allocated a million dollars to continue planning and design works at this new location. The Casey station will accommodate both the ACT Ambulance Service and Fire & Rescue, improving access to emergency services in the growing Gungahlin region. It will be fully electric, with infrastructure to support a future electric emergency services fleet.

The precinct is also proposed to include other government facilities, such as a health centre and sports and recreational amenities, creating a truly integrated community hub. We are committed to ensuring the community has a voice in the planning and design of the shared site and we look forward to engaging with residents and stakeholders through this process.

I was delighted to attend the official opening of the new Acton emergency services station in June this year. This \$40.32 million investment will improve access to emergency services for Central Canberra and support our first responders with a future-focused and well-being oriented facility. The station is fully operational and will help maintain our nation-leading emergency response times. Last month, ESA opened the doors to the public to this new facility and gave over 800 Canberrans an insight into the lives of our emergency services workers. I thank the team for putting on such a successful event.

Beyond our Emergency Services Agency, the ACT government is investing in critical infrastructure planning for ACT Policing. Last month, we issued a request for expressions of interest from third parties to explore property options to replace the City Police Station and headquarters. In this budget, over \$3.4 million has been allocated to support this planning work. We are investing an additional \$1.144 million in capital

funding to undertake design and planning for upgrades at the City Police Station and Winchester Police Centre, including the next steps to start the replacement of mechanical, electrical, fire and hydraulic infrastructure assets that have reached the end of their life.

This initiative builds on the previous investment of \$4 million in the last budget for remediation of water egress, office fit-out works and upgrade works to heating, ventilation and air conditioning at the City Police Station, and also to upgrade the end of life HVAC system at the Winchester Police Centre to ensure uninterrupted operations of the emergency call centre facility. While both the City Police Station and the Winchester Police Centre are being considered for replacement, this investment will ensure they continue to meet the needs of ACT Policing and the community while the existing facilities are still required.

As a member for Murrumbidgee, one project I am particularly excited to progress is the new police station at Molonglo Valley. The budget includes \$2.5 million to consider infrastructure needs for Molonglo Valley ACT police, including options for potential infrastructure. I look forward to continuing to work with Minister Steele as the government progresses the ACT's newest town centre. This will also include detailed analysis of police accommodation in the Woden patrol zone, as well as Molonglo Valley. These new facilities will enhance ACT Policing's operational efficiency, service levels and business continuity, ensuring Canberrans have access to modern policing services when they need them.

This investment represents significant progress and a strong commitment to supporting our police workforce. The new buildings will feature modern workplaces that prioritise health and well-being, alongside specialist facilities that enable best practice to support victims and effective responses to crime. The investment in infrastructure, whether it is in the Molonglo Valley, Casey, Acton or across ACT Policing infrastructure, demonstrates the ACT government's commitment to building a safer, more resilient community. We are investing in infrastructure that is transformative, future-focused and community-driven, ensuring our emergency services are well prepared to meet the needs of our growing city.

While I will not speak much longer, because I know we are nearing the end of the day, I want to briefly mention the significant investment by the government in the Murrumbidgee electorate, including progressing light rail stage 2A. We look forward to stage 2B and the works that will continue to progress that. CIT Woden is an outstanding facility. There is also new educational infrastructure for Murrumbidgee, including the new Whitlam Primary School and the expansion and modernisation of Garran Primary School, as well as the Molonglo River Bridge.

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

Legislative Assembly—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: Just before we get to 90-second statements, we had a couple of 118 or 118AAs to deal with, and they were all raised by Mr Cocks. The first one was in regards to a question from Ms Castley, which was originally intended for the housing minister but was taken by the planning minister. The original question to the housing

minister was: “Did you review the population forecast before they were published and what advice did you provide with your housing hat on?” Mr Steele, after a point of order, did answer that it was a publication of Treasury that he released and that he knows that Minister Berry was aware of the population forecasts that had been released, and we feel that that is a sufficient answer from Mr Steele.

Additionally, Ms Castley asked the Treasurer: “How will the government improve its approach to forecasting following a significant error? And please answer: did you realise Hall was reducing to zero by 2065?” Mr Steel answered by saying: “I do not necessarily accept the premise of the question, but I am already taking the previous question on notice, so I will come back in relation to the previous question. We think that that sufficiently answers the supplementary.

Dr Paterson was asked in a supplementary: “How will long-term resourcing decisions be properly informed if the population projections are not reliable?” As the Speaker, I formed a view that Dr Paterson did not sufficiently answer the question. But we are of the view that the question was a hypothetical: “How will long-term resourcing decisions be properly informed if the population projections are not reliable?” As such, there is no homework for Dr Paterson tonight.

That is all I have got. We look forward to more on that next week.

Statement by member **Sport and recreation—Hawker Tennis Centre**

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.07): I want to talk about the long-neglected Hawker Tennis Centre. I do appreciate the support and advocacy from Ms Barry, and even this week from Ms Clay. Once a thriving community facility, it now sits derelict and has done so for many years. The clubhouse has gone, vandalism has scarred the site and it continues to deteriorate. Since 2016, multiple development approvals have been granted, including for a childcare centre, but not a single project has broken ground. Residents are frustrated and so am I.

The land is zoned for community recreation, and yet it has delivered none of those for over a decade. It stands as an eyesore and as a symbol of inaction. Really, it is a dumping ground at the moment. The question is simple: Why should land zoned for public benefit be allowed to sit vacantly and in such a mess indefinitely? The people of Hawker and the surrounds deserve better than a decaying block of land, and I urge the government to do something about it.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australian War Memorial—expansion

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.09): I want to briefly speak about a visit I made a few months ago to the Australian War Memorial, particularly to the development that was happening within the Anzac Atrium, the Anzac Hall and the Charles Bean Research Centre and the wonderful oculus above the new southern entry. It was just a delight to see this facility develop and grow before “G for George” was moved into the centre a few weeks ago. I was grateful for the opportunity to tour the redevelopment and to again see, in its development and in some of its wonderful existing infrastructure, one of Australia’s most revered institutions.

It was also very touching to be invited to lay a wreath at the Last Post Ceremony on that day of visit to again acknowledge the sacrifice of those Australians who paid the ultimate price in defence of the liberty of this country and of a cause that this country believes in. I am very proud to see the War Memorial being developed and look forward to the official opening of these new facilities.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.10 pm until Tuesday, 23 September 2025 at 10 am.