



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

25 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, 17 October 2025**.

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Thursday, 25 September 2025

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Legislation—Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—petition 44-25

By Mr Emerson, from 352 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT call on Members of the Legislative Assembly to take genuine action to implement the ACT Government's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by passing the Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

Both the Productivity Commission review and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of progress on Closing the Gap found that governments have failed to deliver the systemic reforms needed – and promised – to improve life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Here in the ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to disproportionately bear the burden of working toward reconciliation and Closing the Gap. This bill is an opportunity for the ACT to be the first state or territory to bring about the transformative change needed to Close the Gap. Almost two years after the ACT voted 'YES' on the Voice to Parliament referendum, now is the time for our community and our government to make a firm commitment to right historic and ongoing wrongs, not only in word but in action.

This bill will embed the Government's Closing the Gap commitments into law. 'Business as usual' isn't working, and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans won't change without the systemic transformation brought about by this bill.

Your petitioners therefore request that all Members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of the Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

Business—Garema Place outdoor dining rules—petitions 47-25 and 64-25

By Mr Parton, from 1703 and 1214 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 that: The ACT government's extraordinary changes to the outdoor dining guidelines for Garema Place are contradictory to the lived experience of stakeholders, both businesses and clients. Winters in Canberra are inhospitable to unprotected outdoor dining, even with heaters.

The Garema Place Outdoor Dining Toolkit was seemingly developed without any awareness of Canberra's climate. Whilst businesses are supportive of the upgrades to Garema Place, and the Government's attempts to make Garema Place a desirable place to visit, the changes to outdoor dining rules will have a detrimental impact on Garema Place traders.

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

- Accept that small businesses are at the heart of the CBD experience for Canberrans and visitors and stop making life harder for those businesses;
- Change the guidelines for outdoor dining in Garema Place to allow shelters that are more suitable to Canberra's climate;
- Genuinely consult with traders drawing on their lived experience when creating future outdoor dining related guidelines; and
- Discuss protocols for the implementation of future regulatory changes with businesses before significant investments are approved.

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws the attention of the Assembly that: the ACT government's extraordinary changes to the outdoor dining guidelines for Garema Place are contradictory to the lived experience of stakeholders, both businesses and clients. Winters in Canberra are inhospitable to unprotected outdoor dining, even with heaters. The Garema Place Outdoor Dining Toolkit was seemingly developed without any awareness of Canberra's climate. Whilst businesses are supportive of the upgrades to Garema Place, and the Government's attempts to make Garema Place a desirable place to visit, the changes to outdoor dining rules will have a detrimental impact on Garema Place traders.

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

- Accept that small businesses are at the heart of the CBD experience for

Canberrans and visitors and stop making life harder for those businesses.

- Change the guidelines for outdoor dining in Garema Place to allow shelters that are more suitable to Canberra's climate.
- To genuinely consult with traders drawing on their lived experience when creating future outdoor dining related guidelines.
- To discuss protocols for the implementation of future regulatory changes with businesses before significant investments are approved.

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

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

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Gungahlin town centre—secure bike storage—petition 14-25

Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 23 September 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Braddock concerning the installation of secure digital bike storage for Gungahlin Town Centre.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 25 June 2025 concerning petition E-PET 014-25, lodged by Mr Andrew Braddock MLA, regarding the installation of a secure digital bike storage for Gungahlin Town Centre.

The City and Environment Directorate (CED) currently provides 'Bike & Ride' facilities at many locations across its rapid transit network, including 6 digital bike cages at light rail and rapid bus stops. These secure parking facilities are accessible using a MyWay card and are currently in the process of transitioning to MyWay+ capability.

As noted within the petition, improving amenity for active travel participants is a key priority for the ACT Government. Investigations such as the Gungahlin Active Travel Feasibility Study have specifically focused on identifying accessibility and security upgrades for bicycle and other Personal Mobility Device users in the Town Centre, helping to progress this priority throughout the region.

Secure bicycle parking in Gungahlin Place was one of multiple options proposed by the study but not assessed in detail. CED will undertake a site assessment for locations near the light rail terminus and investigate options for a secure bike parking facility.

This will be further discussed with the Gungahlin community, noting that future

construction works would be subject to competing priorities.

I trust the information provided above has been helpful.

Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25

Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 23 September 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Braddock concerning bus lanes for Molonglo.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning petition E-PET 022-25, lodged by Mr Andrew Braddock MLA regarding bus lanes for Molonglo.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of the inter-town public transport corridor between the Molonglo Valley and the City. This is highlighted in the District Strategy for the Molonglo Valley.

John Gorton Drive and Cotter Road include public transport queue jumps at key intersections along the corridor. However, I recognise the congestion along Cotter Road between Streeton Drive and the Tuggeranong Parkway. As such, the ACT Government has committed to undertake an investigation to explore options to improve public transport and traffic flow on Cotter Road from Streeton Drive to the Tuggeranong Parkway.

I'm pleased to advise that the investigation for Cotter Road is underway and is testing options that support public transport movements (includes consideration of bus lanes amongst other treatments). Future improvements for Cotter Road will be informed from this study, which is anticipated to be completed this year.

In relation to the request for bus lanes for Bindubi Street Extension, the Suburban Land Agency plans to progressively design and construct the Bindubi Street extension between John Gorton Drive and William Hovell Drive as it develops the suburbs of Bandler and Sulman.

The development of Bandler and Sulman will be staged to align with the ACT Government's Indicative Land Release Program, and the Bindubi Street extension will also progress in a staged manner as the suburbs are developed.

The Bindubi Street extension will be designed as a major collector road, to support traffic movement into and out of Bandler and Sulman and will operate as the intertown public transport route, initially for buses but with capability to be upgraded to Light Rail in the future. The design of Bindubi Street extension will consider options to support public transport priority.

I trust the information provided above has been helpful.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Business—Garema Place outdoor dining rules—petitions 47-25 and 64-25

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.02): Support for this petition around small business and outdoor dining regulations in the city centre has been remarkable—absolutely remarkable. We have nearly 3,000 signatures from ACT residents who have signed in the name of common sense.

But I think we have to mention that if we were to count every person who signed this petition, it would be well over 4,000. There are so many non-ACT residents who signed this petition over the last few months, and although they cannot be officially recorded for the purposes of this Assembly, I think it is so important that we recognise their support for common sense.

It is also so important because this petition is about the picture that we present to the rest of Australia, to the rest of New South Wales and to the region. The thoughts of those who come into Canberra and participate in our economy, to some extent, are even more important than those of us that live here. I understand that the signatures of those from out of town cannot be officially counted, but I want to note their importance.

At its core, this petition is about government overreach; that is what it is about. It bemoans the fact that this government, more than any other government in the country, tries to push its way into every aspect of our lives and that so many people are sick of it. They are sick of it. We do not want the government telling us what car we should drive. We do not want them telling us what food we should eat; exactly what we should do with our dogs and cats and what time of the day we should do it; how we can warm our lounge rooms; and, basically, how to live our lives.

This petition was inspired by a government decision to force one of our iconic inner-city restaurants to permanently remove an approved structure because of a change of heart from the government in regard to how we should dine, externally, in the city. I would note the presence in the gallery of the Pelle family, who are at the core of Via Dolce, and I applaud their work as small business people in this town.

I grew up in the storeroom of a seven-day supermarket, and I understand the sacrifices that small business families make to pay their workers, to participate in the economy and to get their businesses to a point where they can actually get a return. And it is pretty hard in this town.

The City Renewal Authority in their great wisdom has declared that there are to be no external structures in Garema Place—that dining outdoors under an umbrella in Canberra’s winter is just fine!

The government will say that the Garema Place outdoor dining gazebo was non-compliant, but I think we all know, Madam Assistant Speaker, that they are grabbing at straws to find a reason to remove it, because you could walk into most buildings in Civic, or indeed across the entire city, and you could find something in those buildings that is non-compliant, technically, with the original DA, or that would fall foul of some of this government’s strange and bizarre regulations. That does not mean that we tear

the building down. It just does not.

This petition calls for the government to genuinely consult traders, drawing on their lived experience, when creating future outdoor dining-related guidelines. But more than anything else, it calls for this government to get the hell out of our lives and trust the citizens of the ACT to make the right choices. I fully support it.

Gungahlin town centre—secure bike storage—petition 14-25
Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.06): I would like to thank the Minister for City and Government Services for the responses to the two petitions that I sponsored. Firstly, on the Bus Lanes for Molonglo petition, I welcome the update on investigations for Cotter Road and look forward to seeing the outcomes of this study when it is completed.

The response for the Bindubi Street extension looks a little bit more complicated. The response describes plans to build the extension in a staged manner as the suburbs of Bandler and Sulman are developed. Whilst I welcome the government's consideration of options to support public transport priority on the Bindubi Street extension as it is built, I worry this is evading the call in the petition. So let's revisit the original petition wording:

Residents are facing significant congestion along John Gorton Drive and the Cotter Road, leading to increased commuting times and dangerous rat-running through suburban streets. Buses are competing with cars in these congested roads. This leads to disruptions in public transport journeys, as it limits the speed and reliability of bus services servicing the Molonglo Valley. This congestion will worsen as the district develops. The benefits of the recent bus frequency improvements, as delivered in the latest timetable changes, cannot be fully realised so long as the buses continue to get stuck in the very traffic they are intended to relieve.

Dedicated bus lanes are necessary to ensure public transport is a reliable, genuine option for Molonglo Valley's current and future residents to get to and from work, school and appointments.

A plan for reducing congestion through dedicated bus lanes is the central core of the petition, and I back this call, for the Molonglo Valley commuters who are stuck in traffic.

It is probably also worth mentioning that I am glad to hear that the Bindubi Street extension will have the capability to be upgraded to light rail in the future. I encourage members to think about what could have been if Molonglo Valley had been built with light rail connections from the very beginning and the benefits that would be realised by the valley's commuters right now.

Now moving onto the second petition, being the secured, sheltered bike storage for the Gungahlin town centre, again, I thank the minister for her response, which acknowledges the sense of having secure bicycle parking and promises to look into it. I am interested in what timeframe these assessments and consultations will occur, so the minister can expect a request for an update from me in due course on that.

The response gives a very familiar qualifier of works being subject to “competing priorities”. As noted in the government’s response, improving amenity for active travel participants is a key priority for the ACT government, so I hope this key priority is reflected in those same budget decisions.

As a side note, I also welcome the continuing work involved in the Gungahlin active travel feasibility study, identifying accessibility and security upgrades for bicycle and other personal mobility device users in the town centre. I will note this work only covers links one, six and eight, which means this work is only covering a proportion of the active travel path needs of the growing Gungahlin population.

Accessibility of bike paths is an important part of the active travel puzzle. Secure, sheltered bike storage is another important puzzle piece. I will continue to advocate for more and better active travel in the Gungahlin district.

Legislation—Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—petition 44-25

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.10): I wish to speak briefly on the petition that I have sponsored on supporting the Closing the Gap bill. I want to acknowledge and thank Natalie Brown, who has brought this petition to the Assembly and is also the chair of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, as well as being a member of the inner north First Nations community group, Aunty Time.

This bill and this petition comes on the back of the signing of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in July 2020 and particularly relates to Priority Reform Three in that agreement, which is about transforming government organisations and includes “... a commitment to systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people”. In the agreement, this includes elements like identifying and eliminating racism, embedding and practising meaningful cultural safety, working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, increasing accountability and improving engagement with the First Nations community.

In February 2024, the Productivity Commission published its first review of the implementation progress of the national agreement. And among its recommendations, it recommended essential action 3.5:

Embed responsibility for improving cultural capability and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into public sector employment requirements

...

These requirements should flow through into the performance agreements and KPIs of CEOs, executives and employees, with the strongest requirements placed on CEOs and executives.

It is that wording that has formed the main part of this bill that is before the Assembly. On 5 March this year, Minister Orr reaffirmed the commitment to this recommendation,

noting that it has not been implemented yet and that, “The ACT government has agreed to this essential action, consistent with the details identified by the Productivity Commission.”

Since then, and since this bill was introduced, the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of the National Agreement was published. That came out in June 2025, led by the Jumbunna Institute. Among its recommendations was a similar recommendation. Recommendation 2 is to “Drive genuine transformation within governments through systemic and structural changes,” including by embedding “systemic change into leadership contracts and KPIs”. It is a very similar recommendation to the recommendation on which this bill has been developed.

Then in July of 2025, also, the Jumbunna Institute published—and we have spoken about it multiple times in this Assembly—their review into the overrepresentation of First Nations people in the ACT justice system. That review also contains a recommendation, recommendation 2.3b:

Legislative measures should be established by the ACT Government for incorporation within performance agreements and KPIs for more senior JACS staff that demonstrate:

- i. How these staff have sought to improve cultural capability and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and eliminate systemic racism across the Directorate ...

Multiple reports have criticised governments, not just ours but across the country, for failing to implement their Closing the Gap commitments and have called for greater accountability and transparency. Multiple reviews have identified the same recommendations for how the government can and should respond. I feel frustrated reading them. Imagine the frustration, though, of people like Natalie Brown who have boots on the ground, who are working every day to close the gap, seeing these recommendations come forward repeatedly, yet not seeing them actioned in a timely way.

The leadership of our local First Nations community—and we all see it in the march toward reconciliation and their relentless work on the ground in attempting to close the gap—is remarkable, but I think we do have to ask ourselves why these efforts always seem to be led by those who have been most harmed by the wrongdoings of government institutions, particularly historically. It is time for government institutions to step up and do their part.

Every First Nations community member with whom I have engaged about this bill has been incredibly supportive of it, and I would like to thank and acknowledge them for their immense advocacy in supporting the development of these reforms.

The bill offers a path towards shared responsibility, genuine accountability and real action for First Nations people in the ACT. While I had hoped to have the opportunity to debate this bill today, I look forward to it being debated and hopefully supported by this Assembly next month so that people like Natalie Brown, who has brought this forward, and many others in our First Nations community, can see the government step up to the commitments that it has made together with them.

Out-of-order petition

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.14), by leave: I table:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Curtin Shops—Support for upgrade—Mr Steel (404 signatures).

I am pleased to present a petition calling for the renewal of Curtin shops in my electorate of Murrumbidgee, on behalf of the owner of Two Blind Mice restaurant at Curtin Shops, Sam Carlini. I thank the many community members, 404, who have put their name to this petition on change.org.

We know that Curtin, particularly Curtin Square, is a vibrant place. Curtin itself is a close-knit community. Its local shops are an important community hub, the heart of the suburb. It is a place where neighbours meet, where students meet after school and where families gather, and it is also an important place for small businesses. I want to acknowledge the role that Two Blind Mice has played in making the square an even more vibrant place since it tendered to the relatively new mixed-use development, which at the time, when proposed, was very controversial, but I think is providing benefits to the square, in particular.

Mr Carlini has operated now for a number of years. It has been a very popular restaurant, but he is raising some issues on the functionality of Curtin Shops and calling for renewal. The petition calls for improvements to issues such as aging infrastructure and accessibility, and for communal facilities that encourage connection, safety and inclusivity.

I was pleased to meet with Mr Carlini in July and had a very positive and constructive discussion about some of the issues he has seen and observed in the square, particularly around safety, the paving, how the street furniture is arranged, the opportunities for more seating for the public in the square and the opportunities to improve the outdoor dining experience for people patronising his restaurant, and other improvements as well.

The petition calls for well-planned, community-informed upgrades to the Curtin shops, ensuring that the precinct can continue to serve residents, families and businesses as a welcoming and inclusive hub. I look forward to seeing this petition responded to by the City and Environment Directorate, and I was pleased to have a discussion about this with Minister Cheyne.

Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.17): I wish to speak to the Bus Lanes for Molonglo petition. Reliable public transport is not a luxury; it is a necessity. As our city grows, so too does congestion, and without action, this congestion will steadily erode the reliability of our services. To safeguard reliability, we must invest in dedicated bus lanes, not just along John Gorton Drive and the Cotter Road but, critically, along

Adelaide Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue to connect the north and the south through this important transport link. These are key corridors that serve thousands of commuters daily, and without dedicated infrastructure, buses will be stuck in the same traffic as everyone else.

But reliability is not just about infrastructure; it is also about connectivity. We must also connect the west of our town with the east, where the employment services are in Parkes and Barton. These people deserve fast, efficient and dependable transport options to the employment hubs in the east. We need to build a transport network that is not only reliable today but resilient for tomorrow.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Disability Justice Strategy—annual progress report Ministerial statement

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) (10.19): I thank members for the opportunity to present the Disability Justice Strategy annual progress report for 2025, pursuant to section 13 of the Disability Inclusion Act 2024, which provides an update on the important work being undertaken through the government's Disability Justice Strategy.

This report marks the first year of implementation under the second action plan for the Disability Justice Strategy, with the second action plan being a critical phase in our journey towards a justice system that is inclusive, accessible and equitable for all. The Disability Justice Strategy is not just a policy framework; it is a commitment to uphold the rights, dignity and safety of people with disability in the ACT. It is a reflection of our values as a community and as a government.

I would like to thank the Minister for Disability for her ongoing support, including the Disability Inclusion Act, which was a bill that she brought in this place in the last term. I would also like to acknowledge the ongoing contributions of many justice agencies across ACT government and our non-government partners reflected in the strategy. The progress and cultural change that has been achieved since the launch of the strategy in 2019 would not have been possible without this collaborative approach.

The strategy outlines a 10-year plan with the goal of achieving equal access and inclusion for people with disability in the justice system. The strategy forms part of this government's vision to ensure people with disability in the ACT have equal access to justice. It is part of this government's vision for an inclusive society that gives everyone the chance to participate in community life and leaves no-one behind. Addressing barriers to justice faced by people with disability is key to achieving that vision.

The Disability Justice Strategy provides an overarching plan designed to inform and guide how more detailed work is formulated and acted on. There are five focus areas to ensure the strategy meets the goals of ensuring people with disability are safe and respected and ensuring that the ACT has a disability responsive justice system and that positive change is achieved. These five focus areas are information and communication; education and guidance; identification, screening and assessment; better service

delivery; and data research and review.

The second action plan, which was released in August of last year, takes us on to the next stage of the strategy until 2028. As the progress report shows, over the past year, we have seen meaningful and wide-ranging progress across all five focus areas of the strategy. Justice agencies have collaborated with people with disability to co-design accessible resources, such as easy English guides, wallet cards, videos and culturally appropriate materials.

Legal Aid, the Restorative Justice Unit and the ACT Courts and Tribunal have led efforts to make justice information more inclusive. The ACT Disability, Age and Carer Advocacy Service, ADACAS, and ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability have delivered workshops and supported decision-making initiatives, empowering individuals to understand and exercise their rights. Disability awareness training is now embedded across the justice sector.

Legal Aid, Domestic Violence Crisis Service, ACT Policing and ACT Corrective Services have implemented tailored programs addressing neurodiversity, trauma-informed practice and communication strategies. The ACT Human Rights Commission and Advocacy for Inclusion have expanded outreach and systemic advocacy, while the ACT Courts and Tribunal has mandated disability training for staff. Mechanisms, such as the needs identification tool, are now in use across many agencies, helping to identify and to respond to clients' adjustment needs early.

ACT Policing has introduced disability screening at the Watch House, and ACT Corrective Services is developing a dashboard to capture disability data during induction. ACT Corrective Services is also preparing to implement the Hayes Ability Screening Index tool at the Alexander Maconochie Centre to enhance screening for cognitive impairment.

The ACT Courts and Tribunals has expanded therapeutic programs and, in partnership with the Public Advocate, has launched a duty advocate initiative, significantly improving access to advocacy services for vulnerable court users. The ACT Intermediary Program, which recently expanded to work with vulnerable accused, has also seen a 33 per cent increase in referrals, supporting people with communication barriers. Many justice agencies already have or are progressing disability action and inclusion plans, placing them in a good position to meet new obligations brought about by the commencement of the Disability Inclusion Act earlier in this year.

The 2025 annual progress report under the second action plan provides members of the Assembly, the disability community and the broader Canberra community visibility of the ongoing progress towards ensuring equitable access for people with disability in the ACT. As we continue to implement the second action plan, we remain conscious of the importance of working alongside people with disability who engage with our justice system and their families and carers to ensure their voices are reflected in this critical work. We must continue to challenge structural barriers and ableism within our systems. We must ensure that people with disability are not only consulted but also empowered to lead change.

The Disability Justice Strategy is a long-term commitment. As Attorney-General, I am

deeply committed to this work and ensuring that our justice system reflects the values of fairness, inclusion and respect. With brief indulgence, Mr Speaker, just recently, in meeting with the Public Trustee and Guardian—who I said I would be speaking about a lot more in this place—she was able to outline quite a number of areas where in the guardian role they have facilitated access to justice and, again, assisted so many other parts of government in doing so. I think it would be remiss of me if I did not comment on that, but I appreciate that was not part of the speech circulated. So thank you, Members.

Finally I thank all government agencies, community organisations and individuals with lived experience who have contributed to the progress made over the 2024-25 financial year. It is your leadership, energy and advocacy that are driving meaningful change. Together, I truly believe that we will continue to build a justice system that is inclusive, accessible and equitable for all. I present the following papers:

Disability Inclusion Act, pursuant to section 13—Disability Justice Strategy—Annual Progress Report 2025—Justice and Community Safety Directorate and Health and Community Service Directorate, dated September 2025.

Disability Justice Strategy—Annual Progress Report 2025—Ministerial statement, 25 September 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.26): I would like to thank the Attorney for the update on this work. It is a very important area of work, and I am pleased to see the progress that is being made under this program. It is helping some of the most vulnerable in our community ensure they get both access to justice and are well treated by the justice system. There are two separate sides to this work, and they are both important objectives.

I was interested to note in the Attorney's statement that the ACT Intermediary Program, which recently expanded to work with vulnerable accused has also seen a 33 per cent increase in referrals, supporting people with communication barriers. This is great news. It follows on from the discussion that we had in the budget process about the status of this program. I was pleased to see the Attorney's comments in the budget debate on Tuesday about this, where she spoke very highly of it and said:

I am grateful for those who provide intermediary services. It is a pretty incredible job and connection and the nexus that they provide, and I do not think the value of this is doubted in anybody's mind.

The Attorney then went on to update us on the status of the program.

As people will recall from the estimates process, the estimates committee specifically identified this, because there is only funding until 31 December. This was identified in the context of programs finding out quite late whether or not they have money to continue. The Attorney's observation was an interesting one. She said, "The budget papers give an impression that this is a service that will cease at the end of this calendar

year.” I think what the estimates committee actually found was that there is only funding until 31 December. It was not an impression. The Attorney then went on to say, “I want to assure the Assembly that the service is not in question. So this is good news.” I was then given the obligatory lecture—as many ministers have want—that I understand the process and I should know better. It is a common theme of this Assembly. Ministers, I do recall how many of these processes work, but the point is that it is not a very good process and we should do better.

A key concern that came up in the estimates process was that there is actually no finding point between now and 31 December for this program to continue. There is no midyear budget review. I guess there are opportunities, and I think the Treasurer in estimates talked about the fact that it could be cash managed through an agency or funded out of the Treasurer’s Advance. They are potentially pathways. So that is good news, but I think it is just worth reflecting on. I was pleased to be reassured by the Attorney yesterday, and I look forward to seeing that announcement as soon as possible. Having observed how able the staff are in the program, they are also staff who have mortgages and have obligations and the like. The sooner we can get them a formal confirmation that the program will continue beyond 31 December, the better, so that we do not lose highly capable people who are delivering an important service.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Domestic and family violence—coercive control—update Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.29): I rise today to deliver the government response to the Assembly motion on coercive control passed in March 2025. At the outset, I would like to thank members of this Assembly and members of the public for their interest and commitment to addressing this important issue. I particularly acknowledge the courage of victim-survivors of coercive control in our community and thank those who have bravely shared their experiences. Your voices are at the heart of this reform, and I am deeply committed to walking with you every step of this reform process.

Coercive control is an insidious form of violence. It most often occurs behind closed doors, masked by silence and hidden out of sight. To those who have experienced it and all those who are still living through it, you are not alone. What we know about coercive control is that it can be lethal. The horrific deaths of Hannah Clarke and her children brought national attention to this danger, even in circumstances where there had been no prior physical violence. The inaugural ACT Death Review report found a pattern of coercive control existed in at least 75 per cent of the homicides reviewed. This is consistent with findings from New South Wales, where the Domestic Violence Death Review Team found the presence of coercive controlling behaviours towards the victim in every case bar one between 2008 and 2016.

Today I outline the government’s intent to introduce legislation by mid-2026 that will establish coercive control as a standalone criminal offence in the ACT, subject to future budget processes and cabinet agreement. This will add to our existing legal frameworks.

Importantly, the ACT recognises coercive and controlling behaviours as family violence in the Family Violence Act 2016. Currently, victim-survivors can apply for a family violence order if they are experiencing coercion from a family member or any other behaviour that controls them or makes them fear for their safety and wellbeing or that of others. The Crimes Act also already criminalises individual acts of coercion and controlling behaviour, such as threats to inflict grievous bodily harm, forcible confinement and stalking, to name a few.

The advantage of a standalone offence for coercive control will allow the criminal justice system to respond to patterns of abusive behaviour, rather than specific acts. This allows action to be taken when individual incidents occur on their own may not be sufficient to warrant a criminal justice response.

We are closely watching the experience of existing legislative frameworks in New South Wales and Queensland, in particular. In both jurisdictions, as well as Scotland, the introduction of a standalone coercive control offence was accompanied by lengthy preparation and delayed commencement to provide time for implementation work to occur. In August, the New South Wales Coercive Control Implementation and Evaluation Taskforce tabled their July 2025 Statutory Report. The ACT will consider the findings of this report and recommendations to inform the development of our offence. This will ensure that the offence that we introduce in the ACT is as robust and effective as possible.

As well as considering what we can learn from other jurisdictions, I will be working closely with local stakeholders on the development of legislation and hearing their perspectives on what is required to ensure effective implementation. I have considered previous input from the Domestic Violence Prevention Council from 2022 and 2024. I have also been engaging with the wider domestic and family violence sector. Recently, I held a targeted roundtable on criminalisation of coercive control. I heard directly from key specialist domestic, family and sexual violence sector stakeholders and intersecting services, reflecting communities most marginalised by our systems. The overarching message which came out of the discussion was about ensuring the legislation is designed to reflect the diversity of experiences and to not present additional risks for victim-survivors, particularly those with intersectional experience.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and victim-survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse communities are much more likely to be misidentified as the primary perpetrator. Particular complexity also exists in relation to the experiences of women with disability and members of the LGBTIQ+ communities. We must avoid causing unintended harm by allowing perpetrators to weaponise the system to increase their control and coercion of victim-survivors.

I am establishing a steering committee of key stakeholders to provide guidance on this critical reform. We will be listening and embedding victim-survivors' views about coercive control through the Victim-Survivor Voices Pilot program, which will inform the legislation. I am so grateful to victim-survivors who have shared their expertise and insight to inform this reform, and thank you to Women's Health Matters for coordinating the input.

There is significant work already underway to support the introduction of a criminal

offence. These activities will collectively deliver a capability uplift through increased frontline capability, enhanced support for victim-survivors, improved awareness of coercive control and training for police and other justice agencies. Between May and July this year, the ACT government ran a public education campaign on coercive control to support members of the community to understand coercive control, recognise the signs and highlight the available support services. Targeting adults aged 18 to 59, with a focus on multicultural communities, the campaign included paid advertising, multilingual resources and promotion through government and community networks.

There has also been critical work commenced to train our non-specialist frontline services agencies. Dedicated training for ACT Policing and the courts has begun to ensure they are equipped with best-practice knowledge in relation to the nature and dynamic of coercive control. Training delivered by the National Judicial College of Australia will be delivered to ACT Magistrates Court staff, including judicial officers, commencing in November 2025. ACT Policing are integrating new modules in relation to coercive control into their training programs, with an initial focus on specialist roles, such as the Domestic Family Violence Investigations Program and the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse teams.

Other work underway which will improve awareness of and responses to coercive control include updates currently being made to the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework. Embedding this framework will create a shared language and understanding of domestic and family violence and risks across the ACT service system.

As is demonstrated through the budget this year, the ACT government has prioritised investment in frontline services. I encourage anyone to have a look at the recently published domestic, family and sexual violence budget factsheet for details on the government's \$30.5 million investment in frontline services, including our Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. I want to take this opportunity to thank our frontline services. While broad public awareness of coercive control is relatively recent, our frontline services have been supporting victim-survivors and responding to the impacts of coercive control for years. On behalf of our community: thank you for your unwavering dedication, your expertise and your relentless commitment to safety and justice.

There is also significant work underway on the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. This is anticipated to be delivered in mid-2026 and will set a long-term direction for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including coercive control, in the ACT.

Let me be clear: our community does not tolerate any form of domestic, family or sexual violence. Coercive control is one of the most insidious forms of abuse. It strips away freedom, dignity and hope. I want to share the words of a victim-survivor who summed up the experience:

When you strip a person of their independence, of their confidence and their life. It's being held captive. You feel like you're under house arrest, basically. It's taking someone's freedom away. It's basic human rights they take away from you. If I had a job and he was punching me, it would have been a lot easier to get over than having all my freedom taken away.

Legislative reform is one important way to address coercive control and support victim-survivors, but it cannot be our only strategy. We have to work together, with the specialist sector, the justice system stakeholders and, most importantly, victim-survivors and, more broadly, the whole community, to design robust and workable legislation to criminalise coercive control and ensure other settings are right to address this form of harm, through training, awareness raising and accessible support for victims.

I look forward to working with members of the Assembly, including Ms Castley, over the coming months to see support for the passage of this bill through the Assembly. I present the following papers:

The Coercive Control Criminalisation Assembly Resolution of 20 March 2025,
Government Response and a copy of the statement.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.39): I thank the minister for her statement—but, I have to say, it is not good enough. I have tried to get a briefing on this and, clearly, the reason that I have not been able to is that there is not much to see here.

Over 12 months ago, I raised this in the chamber, here in the Assembly, and I was shot down. We could have been so much further ahead by now. Six months ago, we sought the call for the government to introduce coercive control legislation and provide that protection and support for victims. The government watered it down, calling on itself to consult and develop a review and come back to us with a timeline for legislation—which she has done, but what a disappointment the result of this work has been.

I cannot believe that Labor thinks that we should wait at least another nine months for it to progress legislation that could have and should have already been in place. The minister has a story of someone who has said how insidious this is. Yet she is happy to say to that person, “You need to wait another nine months until we can do something.” It is a disappointment for the people who are already affected by coercive control and domestic and family violence. I understand that there are groups that need help and education with this. We could have been so much further along. As I said the last time I chatted about this, we must do hard things in this place. We cannot hide from difficult things.

It is disappointing for the people and organisations who invest their time, their money, energy, hearts and souls into supporting these people, and I thank those frontline workers for everything that they do. It is disappointing for the police, who want to help those at risk but do not have the powers to do so. It is disappointing for us and those that know what coercive control feels like. What it feels like to live in the situation of domestic and family violence is horrible. It is also a disappointment for those of us who know and believe that we can make a difference and cannot understand why this government is ignoring every opportunity to do the right thing.

Even last weekend, I spoke to a Labor MP from another jurisdiction, and she was shocked that that a progressive government like the ACT has dragged their heels on criminalising coercive control and that the ACT has not bothered to adopt one of the proven tools that helps protect people at risk of violence. They would be shocked by this statement, shocked by how little has been achieved in six months and shocked that Labor is happy to wait for another nine months before it acts—and I am sick of it!

I have heard coercive control described as intimate terrorism, when everything you love about that person and possibly everything you hate about yourself is used to control everything you do for someone else's pleasure. Coercive control breaks down a person until they no longer recognise themselves and they no longer know how to fight for themselves to get out of this situation. It is an insidious trauma—and the news today is that those living through this have another nine months to wait.

Well, I am sick of it. I am sick of waiting. I am sick of the grandstanding, the hypocrisy and the excuses. We have waited long enough for the minister to get her act together. We will not wait any longer. If you are unwilling to act, then step aside. I am willing to do the work. In the next sitting week, I will introduce coercive control legislation and I will take it to a vote in December. I will work with anyone, any party and any organisation, who wants to work with me on getting this done. It is too important for us to sit back and wait for this government to realise that protecting local families should be its number one priority. They have waited long enough. We will not keep them waiting any longer.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.43): I rise to speak briefly on this matter. I understand it is a sensitive issue for everybody—more than sensitive; it is diabolical—and people who are experiencing coercive control and domestic and family violence are in terrible situations. I do not think there would be a woman in this place who has not experienced or who does not have a friend or a family member who has not experienced the terrible attitudes and behaviours from people who they are supposed to love. It is coercive control and contributes to domestic and family violence, both physical and otherwise.

I want to congratulate Dr Marisa Paterson for the work that she has done in what is a particularly difficult area. This should be an area where we are on a unity ticket. I think we are, for the most part, in agreement that there is more that needs to be done with regards to coercive control. Dr Marisa Paterson has every step of the way used the expertise within the sector to drive the way forward to introduce coercive control into legislation but, importantly, educate and inform the community about coercive control. When you are going through it, you do not know that that is what it is. So it is important that people understand what coercive control is—that it is a form of domestic and family violence—and that there is a way out.

Law reform on its own is not going to improve the situation. If it were that simple, it would have been resolved by now. It is difficult. It is complex. But I have seen the work that Dr Marisa Paterson is doing to educate the community. I have heard from young people who are going out at night in Civic and are seeing the posters and the education campaign on the walls of clubs and pubs in our city. I have seen the sector embracing

the education and awareness campaign wholeheartedly as a more fulsome and wholesome response to coercive control in this town.

Again, I think it is appropriate that you take the time to get this right, because, if it is wrong, it will fail, and it will fail too many more people who are experiencing, living with and, right now, surviving domestic and family violence and control. I support the work that Dr Paterson is doing. I encourage the opposition, and particularly the opposition leader, to work with the government on a campaign of education and awareness of coercive control, rather than continuing to point the finger at another woman who is doing her very best. I commend Dr Paterson's work to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.46): I also rise to speak briefly in response to the minister's statement. I agree with her observation that coercive control is an insidious form of violence, and I share the sentiments expressed about the importance of listening to victim-survivors in the community, as well as advocates and organisations supporting those experiencing it. I acknowledge that there are people potentially watching the proceedings today who have experienced this form of abuse. It is unacceptable behaviour, and I welcome the minister's statement of commitment to progressing work on this.

It is right for the government to learn from the experiences of New South Wales and Queensland as their criminalisation frameworks mature, and the reports that flow from the experiences of other jurisdictions will be helpful for the government to make sure that we adopt the best possible framework for the ACT.

My concern with the ministerial statement lies in the fact that five months have passed since the motion was passed, and we have learned today that the minister is "establishing a steering committee of key stakeholders to provide guidance on this critical reform". While consultation is vital, and nothing should advance without working closely with the experts, particularly when dealing with such sensitive matters, I respectfully observe that five months is a long time for us to wait to be presented with an update that tells us that a steering community will be established sometime in the future.

In the same vein, I would like to believe that the sector received appropriate funding in the budget to enable them to do this consultation without diverting resources from their vital frontline services. I do not believe that was the case.

I also remain concerned about the capacity of police to respond with the required cultural awareness and sensitivity, and diligence in identifying complex patterns of behaviours. This is not intended as a slight on individual officers but reflects on the need for enhanced training and education of both new and rusted-on officers, as well as strengthening systems that are capable of tracking patterns of behaviour, not discrete incidents.

We have talked about the fact that other jurisdictions have already legislated for this, and I turn to a recent evaluation that showed that only nine people have been charged in New South Wales under the state's landmark coercive control laws, despite there being nearly 300 recorded incidents. The data, released on 19 September by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, more commonly known as BOCSAR, tracks the

impact of the legislation which criminalises coercive control in intimate partner relationships in the year since it was introduced last July—July 2024. Jackie Fitzgerald, the Executive Director of BOCSAR, commented:

The small number of charges highlights the complexity of investigating and prosecuting this form of abuse. With a median time of 131 days from the police report to charge, it is clear that building a prosecutable case under this new legislation requires time, evidence, and a deep understanding of the patterns of behaviour involved.

Ms Fitzgerald said that the true test of the legislation will come when a case that proceeds to trial for the first time allows “the courts to examine the evidence, interpret the law, and set important precedents for how coercive control is prosecuted in New South Wales”. She added:

In the first 12 months, only three coercive control charges were finalised in court. In two cases, the charges were withdrawn by prosecution. And in the third case, the defendant pleaded guilty, meaning no contested charges have yet been tested through the judicial process.

It is interesting to reflect on this experience in New South Wales. It goes to the comments that Minister Berry made about needing to think carefully about how to design this legislation and taking the opportunity to learn from other jurisdictions who have already implemented it.

It is vital that any future legislation introduced in the ACT does not cause unintended harm by enabling people who use coercively controlling behaviours to weaponise the legal system against their victims. This is particularly so for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities who, the statistics show, are much more likely to be identified as the primary perpetrators.

In closing, I thank the minister for the update. This is important work that needs to progress in conjunction with all of the sector, as well as those with lived experience.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.51): I will speak briefly. I welcome this statement today from the minister. I want to thank Ms Castley for her advocacy on this matter, including moving the motion earlier this year, as well as the one during the last term, before my time here. I thank both the opposition leader and Minister Paterson for their constructive, good faith engagement in relation to the motion earlier this year, including with me and my office, to ensure that, on that day, we did achieve a clear commitment from this Assembly, a unanimous commitment, and from the government, to criminalise coercive control.

We are all in agreement, as Minister Berry indicated, that Canberrans deserve to feel safe in their own homes and that action is needed on this front. I do see this as a step towards creating a legal system that can intervene before it is too late. This is the story that we hear far too often, and it is what the statistics show, as reflected in the minister’s statement.

I welcome today’s statement. I welcome the preparatory work that is underway and the

manner in which the minister has approached this, in working collaboratively and, I think, constructively, to achieve the outcome that we are all here aiming to achieve.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public housing—insourcing of repairs and maintenance—update

Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.53): I will not read my statement today. I am going to present—

Mr Hanson: Hear, hear.

MS BERRY: I will provide a special, signed copy for Jeremy Hanson, and he can read it later. It is a statement regarding the progress that we are making on insourcing public housing repairs and maintenance, which we committed to in 2024. I present the following paper:

Insourcing of public housing repairs and maintenance—Progress update—
Ministerial statement, 25 September 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Disability Strategy First Action Plan—annual report

Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.53): I will give our wonderful interpreter and local celebrity Mandy a minute to come into the chamber. I will be updating the Assembly on the ACT Disability Strategy, and Mandy will help with sign interpretation.

I rise to provide the first annual report on the ACT Disability Strategy 2024-33 First Action Plan 2024-26. Launched in 2024, the ACT Disability Strategy affirms the ACT government's long-term commitment to upholding the human rights of 80,000 Canberrans living with disability. The strategy aims to drive systemic and cultural changes, ensuring people with disability in the ACT can fully and equally participate in all aspects of community life.

The development of the 10-year strategy is an excellent example of community-led co-design with people with disability, advocates, carers and service providers. Nearly 1,000 Canberrans participated in consultations, utilising a range of inclusive and accessible approaches. Through this, we heard that change was needed.

Community members envisioned a city where people with disability are recognised, respected and listened to, where universal design is the norm, where adjustments are part of everyday life, and where everyone has fair and equitable access. The messages we heard have been echoed in national reports and recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the independent review of the NDIS. The ACT strategy is a key mechanism for us to drive and deliver on this needed change.

The first action plan 2024-26 sets out the initial two years of work under the strategy. It starts to address some of the systemic concerns identified during community consultations. Given the multifaceted nature of the identified issues, a whole-of-government collaborative approach has been essential throughout the first year of implementation.

It is important to note that the strategy and action plan operate within a landscape of significant disability reform at both federal and territory levels. They consolidate the ACT's commitment to the Australian Disability Strategy, while also providing a tool to implement key recommendations from the royal commission and the NDIS review. The strategy brings together and progresses work already happening across the ACT government, including the ACT Inclusive Education Strategy, the ACT Disability Health Strategy and the ACT Disability Justice Strategy.

At a territory level, 2025 has seen the commencement of the Disability Inclusion Act, which provides a legislative framework for the implementation of the strategy, associated plans and activities. We understand there is a strong need to ensure that the territory's disability reform agenda is strategic and integrated in its approach, and that it is delivered in partnership with people with disability and the wider ACT disability community through meaningful and impactful relationships and engagements.

I would like to provide the Assembly with an update on the progress of actions under the first action plan. The report, which includes updates against each action, will be made available on the ACT government website. Of the plan's 28 actions, I can report that four actions are complete, 19 are in progress and five actions are yet to commence.

In the first 12 months of implementation, the government made meaningful progress towards a more inclusive and equitable community. Some of the key achievements that I am proud to highlight include funding a community-led project focused on self-advocacy and supportive decision-making, designed by and for people with intellectual disability. This initiative provides opportunities for individuals to have greater control over their own lives. Another achievement is launching the supporting and strengthening LGBTIQ+ communities grant program, which is enabling peer-led support initiatives for LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities, ensuring that no-one is left behind.

Other achievements are purchasing a portable changing places facility to enhance the accessibility of major ACT festivals and events, and progressing a supported work experience pilot program for ACT students with disabilities, providing tailored student-centred opportunities that support young people with disability to build skills and confidence for the future. These are just a few examples of how we are turning

strategy into action, and action into meaningful impact.

While we have made strong progress, the government recognises that there is still more to do to ensure that Canberrans with disability can fully and equally participate in all aspects of community life. In the second half of the first action plan, our focus will include: partnering with community to support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver culturally safe and inclusive services supporting First Nations people with disability; developing and implementing a co-designed evaluation framework, alongside the establishment of a disability-led governance group, to guide the strategy's ongoing delivery; and improving accessibility across both the community sector and government agencies. This includes funding a range of initiatives such as establishing a disability liaison officer position at Access Canberra, investing in growing Easy English understanding and capability across the community sector to increase the availability of Easy English resources in the ACT, and reviewing the ACT Companion Card program to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our community. We will also develop the ACT's first neurodiversity strategy, in close partnership with neurodivergent people, their families and communities.

I look forward to continuing to deliver this important work with and for people with disabilities in the ACT, as we strive to build a more inclusive Canberra for everybody.

I present the following papers:

ACT Disability Strategy 2024-2033 and First Action Plan 2024-2026—Annual Report (2025)—

Report, dated September 2025.

Ministerial statement, 25 September 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Capital of Equality Strategy First Action Plan—annual report Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.01): I am advised that, in the interests of time, it would be good for me to table my second statement today. I present the following papers:

Capital of Equality Strategy—First Action Plan 2024-2026 Annual Report—

Report, undated.

Ministerial statement, 25 September 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Climate change mitigation—order to table documents

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.02): I move:

That, with reference to standing order 213A, the Assembly directs the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water and the Minister for City and Government Services to:

- (1) table the following documents:
 - (a) review of the ACT Environmental Offsets Policy and associated briefs to Ministers;
 - (b) analysis of land use change and biodiversity trends in the ACT (Contract PIEP0005637) and associated briefs to Ministers;
 - (c) AECOM Air Quality Assessment initiated in 2024 and associated briefs to Ministers;
 - (d) briefs to Ministers developed since January 2024 regarding the next Climate Change Strategy;
 - (e) investigations into the development and implementation of the ACT's Climate Adaptation for Nature Framework (Contract EP2222674)
 - (f) investigations into Biodiversity Financing Mechanisms for the ACT (Contract PIEP0004125) and associated briefs to Ministers;
 - (g) ACT Food Hub Feasibility Study (Contract PIEP0006734) and associated briefs to Ministers;
 - (h) investigations into agriculture and food in the ACT (Contract PIEP0002390) and associated Ministerial briefs;
 - (i) briefs to Ministers and other documents containing advice and cost estimates about the reconstruction of Demanding and Max and Bert Oldfields Huts;
 - (j) briefs to Ministers from the Tenth and Eleventh Assemblies regarding the Re-naturalisation of Sullivans Creek Options Paper and documents showing cost estimates for the projects;
 - (k) briefs to Ministers related to funding for Stage 2 and planning for future stages of the Healthy Waterways Program; and
 - (l) background analysis and briefs to Ministers since June 2024 relating to the review of Canberra City Farm, the lease for the site they occupy and the related "listening exercise", including documents relating to identifying the engagement of stakeholders;
- (2) for briefs included in (1)(a) to (l), provide signed and annotated versions of briefs where they are available;
- (3) agrees that any Member may move a motion to take note of any documents tabled under this motion on the next day of sitting after they are tabled;
- (4) provide a statement to the Clerk for Members when making any claims of privilege, stating the specific harm to the public interest resulting from the

publication of the document for which privilege is being claimed.

I will speak slowly in anticipation that there are good-faith amendments coming from the Labor minister on the topic, and we want to make sure that those are circulated to everyone in the process. I rise to speak to my motion that is an order for the production of documents from Minister Orr and Minister Cheyne. The documents requested in this motion fall within the environment and water portfolios. They include a number of pieces of work that this government has undertaken and that, despite our efforts in asking questions and engaging with government, require further transparency to fully understand the outcomes of investigations and the decisions that have been made by government.

This transparency, I believe, is beneficial for our environment, for our water and for our communities. In fact, many of the documents requested here are of keen interest to Canberrans.

The Healthy Waterways program has delivered some incredible water assets for our community, creating nice areas of natural amenity for the area, while providing natural filtration of our water along the way. It has been disappointing to see the Healthy Waterways program not topped up with funding in this budget, and that is before stage 2 is even complete. Reconnecting the old creek line at Tuggeranong Homestead in Richardson is still listed on the government website as part of stage 2, but the minister has confirmed that there is no funding to complete that project.

Similarly, I have asked the minister questions about the next steps on a number of agricultural projects that were in train. These include investigations into private stewardship payments for farmers, to recognise and value the conservation work that they do on rural properties, investigations into our local food supply chains, the first funded initiative in the local food strategy, and the government's prospectus for what a re-naturalised Sullivans Creek could look like if we turned it into a biodiversity haven for nature and for people.

Unfortunately, all of these projects appear to have stalled. I have asked questions, and I have asked for many of these documents to be tabled previously; unfortunately, that has not happened yet.

Regarding briefs and other information about the minister's decision not to reconstruct Demanderling and Max and Burt Oldfield's huts, we believe the government should be accountable for decisions taken previously and, where a policy or position is changed, that can be okay, where there is full transparency and accountability behind the decision-making. There is still discomfort amongst constituents around the reason for the changed decision and missing pieces of information that should have informed that decision.

Finally, I know we have had a lengthy debate in this place around what the future of wood heaters in the territory looks like. The AECOM air quality assessment has been completed to inform a regulatory impact statement. Canberrans deserve to know what a thorough investigation says about the air that we breathe. While this government consistently claims that our air quality in the ACT is good, we have a really strong suspicion that it is not good enough. Certainly, by World Health Organisation standards,

we have some improving to do, and the 65,000 Canberrans who suffer from a respiratory condition are at risk of great suffering from poor air quality.

I anticipate that we have an amendment coming from the minister to extend the timeframe on the order for the production of documents by an additional 10 days, and we are supportive of this extension. Obviously, this all goes towards the importance of having a healthy environment, and a healthy environment includes healthy environmentalists. That little bit of extra time that they need essentially to get all of the information together without causing undue stress is important, so we will be supporting the forthcoming amendment.

I hope that the Assembly can agree that the documents listed in this motion will be valuable in enabling accountability in government decisions and bringing the community along with the process of installing government initiatives. The scope of this motion has been carefully constructed to be specific and to not put undue strain on directorate resources, so I hope that there can be agreement from all members on the value of placing these documents on the public record. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.07): While the amendment is being circulated, I will put on the record that we will be seeking an extra 10 working days—inserting paragraph (5) into this motion, to allow officials to work through what is still quite an extensive list of items, and to do that in a way that means they do not have to unduly rush, or not progress other work that they currently have in train. I move:

Add:

“(5) all documents subject to this order be produced within 25 business days.”.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.08): I rise in support of Miss Nuttall’s motion and the minister’s amendment. The motion requests a range of targeted documents from government across water, environment and climate. It requests the tabling of the government’s review into environment offsets and accompanying briefs. That review was undertaken in 2023, as is indicated on the tenders register. It was a \$133,000 investigation by Rooftop Social.

It is the right time to be talking about environmental offsets. Since I was elected, I have seen countless development projects go ahead with accompanying environmental offsets to make up for the damage that they decide are unavoidable impacts.

At the same time the latest *State of the environment* report and the report of our former Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, the *Close to the edge* report, set out the devastating scale of environmental impacts as a result of development and how the flaws in our offset policy mean we are not fully compensating for them.

We are seeing biodiversity decline across ecosystems and across jurisdictions. We know that something has to change if we want to alter that trajectory. Our offsets policy is flawed and it is not sufficiently protecting our environment. I have asked the minister

what the offsets review says and what the next steps are, and we have not received a lot of information back.

The government say they are looking at the commonwealth nature law reforms, which are highly anticipated. They have been in the works for many years, and we almost had progress last year, before they were stalled by the Prime Minister to appease the Western Australian Labor Premier and his resources lobbyists. We are very hopeful of progress this year, but we cannot simply sit around hoping that this time it comes off.

The ACT has led the way on policy for decades and we need to keep doing it. The former federal environment minister committed Labor to no new extinctions and to a nature-positive future. That is not going to be delivered under our current offset policy here in the ACT. The community needs to know what the investigations to date have said and what government is going to do about it.

The motion also requests documents that will improve the transparency on what is happening with our Climate Change Strategy. The current one expires this year, and we do not yet have the next one. I am worried about the minister's sense of urgency on this. She has had two months in the portfolio, and she has not yet undertaken any public work to replace it. She has said that she wants to run consultation and suggested that it might happen in December this year. Of course, we need to consult, but it is taking a really long time to begin.

The minister said she needed to submit business cases for funding for consultation and development of the strategy. I would remind her that there is a midyear budget and that directorates have resources. I would imagine that, for something as urgent as our Climate Change Strategy, which addresses the climate crisis, some of these resources would be available.

We are also worried about the pace of this project if we are only starting consultation in December and then there is public service work. Will the minister be in a position to launch a new strategy in 2026 and seek 2026-27 funding to deliver it or will we lose another year and another budget cycle while the climate crisis unfolds around us?

The ACT has been a leader on climate change, but we will not remain a leader if we are moving so slowly to respond. Our emissions are high. Some are high and as yet untracked, like scope 3 emissions. Some are high and seem to be climbing, like transport emissions. We do need to prioritise urgent action, and we need a climate change strategy that is ambitious and that has funding to deliver it.

We are looking forward to seeing the documents tabled in the Assembly and for the community to have the chance to scrutinise action on these.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.11): On behalf of the opposition, I rise to speak in support of Miss Nuttall's motion. It is not only about the release of these documents, although I am sure we are all keen to have that information; it is also about the broader support for the use of 213A motions by the Assembly. I know the government is particularly pleased that these have spread, from opposition, across the Assembly.

On a more serious note, while I welcome and support more use of these motions, I still hope that the longer term impact of more 213As is that the government adopts a proactive approach towards the release of government documents and information. I recognise that this is probably an idle hope. I know there is a lot of work that goes into it, but we need to be sensible. It is a government that has thrived for many years on keeping members of the Assembly and the wider community in the dark on things, ignorant of the decisions it is making, the evidence it is relying on and the costs that it is imposing on the community.

It will take a significant transformation in culture and attitude to effect the change that I would like to see and that the community deserves. That level of change can only be realised with a change of government.

I thank Miss Nuttall and the Greens for moving this motion. I look forward to supporting it, and I am particularly keen to see a few of these documents.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Report 2

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.13): I present the following report:

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee—Report 2—Inquiry into insurance costs in the ACT, dated 25 September 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This report makes 21 recommendations which point the ACT government to policy opportunities across the breadth of the ACT insurance landscape. These are opportunities which aim to encourage, or could encourage, reductions in insurance premiums, to make insurance processes and decisions fairer and more transparent, and to make navigating and the handling of insurance requirements less burdensome.

I will let the report and what it finds stand for itself, and I will limit my comments to noting that this is a unanimous report from a committee made up of representatives of every party and independent member within the chamber. As such, I am grateful to my committee colleagues for their considered contributions and collaborative approach to our work. This was a first crack at a committee report for many of us and, for some, it was the first crack at a report for some time; I think, on that basis, we have done good.

Finally, I have spoken to many inside and outside this building, and they are all pretty clear that the economics, industry and recreation committee secretariat is the best such outfit in the Assembly. This excellent report stands testament to their quality and skill. On behalf of the committee, I express our extreme appreciation for and pride in the

work that they have done.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.15): I will speak briefly on this report. I very much thank my fellow committee members for pulling it together. It was an incredibly collaborative process. As Mr Werner-Gibbings indicated, it is impressive that we have landed on a unanimous position on such a difficult issue.

There are a range of meaningful recommendations in this report. Some people, when the committee was announced, asked whether there was anything that could be done at the territory level to change what was happening in the insurance industry. I think we have made it clear through the inquiry, not so much through our efforts as through the efforts of those who made submissions and appeared as witnesses, that in fact there is plenty that we can do to address some of the disparities between insurance premiums in our jurisdiction in the territory compared to what we see across the border.

I hope that the recommendations that we have pulled together as a committee are taken on board by the government. We have landed on some positions that can balance the rights of citizens to fair compensation with what we are hearing from multiple different sectors is a serious concern, which is that they are either unable to access insurance products; or, if they can, there are exorbitant costs which make it nearly impossible just to do the things that they want to do. This is true of community sector organisations, a range of different volunteer groups, small businesses, and even in the medical profession, where professional indemnity can be extremely expensive and contribute to high medical costs in the ACT.

Having an inquiry of this nature was something that I was really keen to see happen within this term. It was contained in the supply and confidence agreement that I signed with ACT Labor after the election, so I was very happy to see all committee members participate actively and broaden the inquiry beyond what I had originally hoped that we would focus on, which was the impact on small business. Because of that broadening, as a committee we have delivered a much more comprehensive and meaningful report that, again, makes clear that there is a need for reform to impact everyone in our community in a positive sense.

I look forward to seeing the government response to this committee report. Again, I thank all my committee colleagues and, of course, the fantastic secretariat for their work in preparing it.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (11.18): I echo the comments that have already been made by the chair and Mr Emerson. I was on the committee when we kicked off this inquiry. I was incredibly supportive of the need for this inquiry, but I was not on the committee when the deliberations started or when evidence was actually taken. Whilst I did miss out on that period, I have, of course, heard from many stakeholders and members of the community about the need for such an inquiry.

I thank my colleagues on the committee for such an incredibly collaborative and professional way that we engaged with each other. There are some recommendations that were a no-brainer; they were put up, they were passed and there was no comment. Of course, there are others where there was a lot more discussion. I think it is a hallmark of a good, collaborative effort and a good report when some of those recommendations

end up where no-one is 100 per cent happy with them. I think that is a good thing, in a way. It also indicates how complex this inquiry was.

I do not want to speak for the chair, but this is not to say that the committee believes that it will change the world immediately, but I do hope that the government take on the recommendations—21 of them have been outlined in the report—as meaningful recommendations that can be taken on board.

We were very careful to try and be realistic about the issues that could be looked at from an ACT level, taking into consideration the feedback that each of us had received from various members of the community, acknowledging that it is a complex issue and acknowledging that, of course, there are factors outside ACT control.

I thank all the stakeholders and members of the community who reached out to each of us in our capacity as an MLA or local member, as well as, of course, through the formal submission process, and for taking the time to be very honest with their feedback and experiences of navigating this complex issue. I thank my colleagues; I also thank the hardworking secretariat, who had to juggle the viewpoints of five committee members. That would not have been easy to do.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.21): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2) and the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3), which were both referred to the committee for consideration after presentation.

The committee was inclined to inquire into the first of the two bills. This bill would allow the executive to extend eligibility for the Default Insurance Scheme to certain privately employed workers. The committee is concerned about the lack of transparency of this legislative amendment, as well as the fact that this determination would be made by notifiable instrument, not disallowable instrument. The committee also notes the comments from the scrutiny committee on the human rights implications of the bill.

However, as the Assembly has resolved to suspend standing orders to allow the bill to be debated during this sitting week, the committee did not have enough time to conduct an inquiry into the first bill. Nonetheless, the committee wishes to bring these issues to the attention of the Assembly and may wish to conduct a post-implementation inquiry into the issues at a future date. The committee will not be inquiring into either bill.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Debate resumed from Wednesday, 24 September.

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission—Part 1.21.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Total appropriated to territory entities.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.23): I move amendment No 3 circulated in my name.

Amendment No 3 agreed to.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

Treasurer's advance—Part 1.22.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.23): Labor's 2025-26 budget is delivered in the shadow of the ACT's worst deficit in history. The 2024-25 budget was not even nearly realised. The projections were wrong and I have no doubt the government knew it before we even went to an election. For 2024-25, the government predicted a deficit of \$624 million. \$624 million. But the actual result they delivered was, at last estimate, a deficit of \$1.138 billion. And that was on their preferred measure. If you look at the standard accounting approach that is supported by all of the other states and territories the estimate could be as high as \$1.4 billion. \$1.4 billion!

While Canberran's struggled to afford the day-to-day, Labor sent us backwards at a rate somewhere between \$21.8 million and \$26.9 million every single week. Every single week. These are astronomical figures that were not even predicted in the February budget update.

The Treasurer's advance, an emergency funds management tool, was the mechanism for the government to funnel a bunch of spending through to the health system when it was about to fall over because the government's spending assumptions were so far out of whack. A \$79 million emergency slush fund that was used up by the time we reached the budget update. It was replenished and increased and then they were using it again. Ultimately, at least \$118 million was funnelled through the Treasurer's advance to put out fires across the budget.

The government has not fixed its bad budgeting this year. I have no confidence in the predictions it makes and no confidence that they can possibly come to fruition. It is a budget that relies on supposedly temporary levies, higher fees and charges and on wishful thinking, wishful thinking about what might happen in the out years. Meanwhile, interest costs surge and the credit rating falls. They have failed to fully account for growing health costs and they have left out a bunch of their own election commitments. The government can call that prudent management if they wish. I am sure Canberrans can think of a better term.

The government's own budget papers tell the story. The deficit remains in the hundreds of millions of dollars this year with improvements once again pushed back into the never-never, now to supposedly eventuate sometime between 2027 and 2029. That is

the official forecast written in black and white in the budget outlook document. But it is not just the headline deficit that is broken, Mr Assistant Speaker. The estimates committee, which comprised representatives from across the parliament, as you were pointing out for your own committee, recorded its concern that the territory is now borrowing to pay for everyday operations, not just for infrastructure and assets like the government would like everyone to believe, everyday expenses. And the fastest growing expense, as I have said before, is the interest expense.

When interest is the fastest growing expense, every extra dollar taken from families in rates, fees and levies does less for hospitals, schools and police because more of it is simply lost to servicing debt. Before a single service is delivered, it goes to paying for interest on debt. Not paying it down, just paying interest. That is not a political line. It is the simple truth that there are consequences to spending more than you have available to spend.

Now, on top of this, the government has introduced a new health levy, \$100 on every residential rates notice for four years. While the budget calls it temporary, households know it is another bill that they will front year after year after year. The community reaction is clear. People on long surgery waiting lists were astounded to be told that they have to pay more. Patients who need specialists are frustrated to know that they will still have to travel to Sydney to get the care that they need. Even after the Treasurer scaled the levy back, the admission stands that this is a regressive tax and health costs are running hotter than the system can manage and the government has chosen to tax more rather than repair the cost base and fix the root cause that is making them charge more in taxes.

The price of this approach was made clear earlier this month. S&P Global Ratings cut the territory's credit rating to AA. This is the second cut in roughly as many years. The agency pointed to large-scale after-capital deficits, proportionally higher debt and rising health costs alongside a heavy capital program. You do not need a doctorate in finance to know what that means. Lower ratings equal higher borrowing costs and that means less money, again, for services. The downgrade will push up costs and it comes just when households can least afford more pressure.

For years the government has been warned that this was coming. And it is not just those of us on this side of the chamber. Former Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope has repeatedly highlighted the structural weakness in the budget and the habit of promising a return to balance that slips further away with each election and each review, each budget and every step that the government takes. He echoed my own concerns when he described the 2025-26 estimates as unrealistic and he warned that the credit rating would be at risk. We were right. The rating was cut and the bill is yet to be seen.

After years of denials and deflections, the government needs to be honest. They need to be honest about how we got here. The government has treated the budget and the forward estimates as a place where narratives trump reality: deliver a deficit this year, claim a wafer-thin surplus is coming and then pretend that is a balanced budget. That has been the pattern under Labor for years now. It is a play taken straight from the disastrous Wayne Swan book of mythological budgeting.

The ever-shifting rainbow surplus disappears every time you get close. The budget

update arrives and the numbers deteriorate again. The pot of gold is always just somewhere over the hill. But the odds are pretty heavily against a miracle on this front. The budget papers admit deep, deep deficits and an ACT net worth that is going backwards every year. The territory is borrowing money to cover daily costs and interest is the fastest growing line in the budget. None of that is sustainable. What makes it worse is the loss of credibility.

When the government tells people that a new levy is necessary and temporary, it should be a reminder of all of the other empty promises. The community is no longer surprised when the government says a project will cost one amount and it turns out to be another. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

No, the community is not surprised, but everyone is pretty disappointed. And it goes to trust. The community is no longer surprised when the government says that the rating is safe, that they have made it an explicit objective when they put together the budget and then it goes the other way. They are no longer surprised—the market is clearly no longer surprised because we found out that the market was already pricing in the credit downgrade before it even eventuated. We were already being charged more for our interest because everyone knew it was coming.

Trust is hard currency in finance and we are running a deficit in trust. Canberrans are intelligent. They know that you cannot keep putting more on the credit card and expect the bill to somehow magically shrink. They look at the *Canberra Times*, Region Media and the ABC and they see deficits now and a promised surplus later. They see debt rising. They see interest heading for a billion dollars and a quarter of own source revenue. They see a rating downgrade that will make all of those numbers worse.

Now as I have already pointed out, the budget papers make it clear that Labor is borrowing to pay for daily operations. That is a red line in public finance. It is a signal that the budget is not just stretched by the capital program it is being pulled apart by the day-to-day. The government has landed Canberrans in such a bad position at this point that they need to borrow money just to pay for our service costs and their debt servicing obligations. The budget position keeps going backwards with growing debt and a rising interest burden despite endless promises of balanced budgets and future surpluses.

There is another consequence of interest swallowing a bigger and bigger share and that is that it crowds out reform and improvements. Because so much is thrown away on debt servicing there is nothing left to invest for the future. Investments like supporting better patient flow in our hospitals, modernising our schools to take advantage of the latest evidence, or proactive policing—the sort of policing that builds relationships and actually prevents crime. This has a real effect. People feel the pressure across Canberra every day. They wait longer for appointments. They sit longer in traffic. They are told to be patient, all while the interest bill keeps stacking up and growing larger and larger.

The government's answer is to call levies temporary and to point to a surplus in three or four years. We have seen this time and time again. The latest estimate is always unrealistic and there is always another blowout, another unforeseen consequence around the corner. But we have seen the consequences of that behaviour, receiving another credit downgrade within two years. The lesson is simple. If the government would only learn it. You cannot talk your way out of a structural problem. You must

address it. Undoing over a decade of fiscal damage is going to be hard work but there are some simple principles that, if the government actually stuck to them, would help put the budget on a path to recovery.

First, there needs to be honesty about the state of the books. For too long the government has ignored the state of the budget, painting a picture of rainbows and daisies. But the budget outlook paints a very different picture, a picture of a deep operating deficit and record levels of borrowing for operations and interest. The budget position is weakening and the ratings agency has imposed a penalty and Canberrans are bearing the burden. Those are the facts. We need a government that is honest about the problems and use that as an anchor for every fiscal choice from here on. Spin will not fix the government's mistakes, nor will the repetition of narrative ad-nauseum. We are in a world where ignoring reality has a real impact.

The second principle is respect. Respect for Canberrans and respect for the taxpayer. When you introduce a levy, show a clear and credible line from the money raised to the measurable improvement delivered. When you talk about returning to surplus, explain how you are actually going to make it stick this time. When you approve a capital project, get on top of the scope and the risk ahead of time so we do not end up paying more for less down the track. These are not radical ideas. They are the basics.

The final principal I want to raise here is credibility. It is time to get serious about the drivers of the budget blow-out and demonstrate a credible path back, not just more excuses. Until the drivers of spending are under control the budget will never be under control and the interest bill will keep growing.

I have no doubt the Treasurer will keep on talking about austerity. It seems to be his latest spin. It is either his way or the austerity way. But that is all it is. It is just spin and deflection. Deflection from the state of the budget that he has signed off on, the budget that he has put together, the future that he has dictated for Canberra. He wants everyone to think now that the only way to get the budget back on track is to vote for his budget. But he knows that that is false.

The budget does not legislate a saving or a single cent of additional revenue. The budget only authorises spending money based on a series of assumptions. That is it. Nothing else. The additional revenue is already being locked in through other government legislation and regulation. They have already pushed up the cost of fees well above CPI. It is done and dusted. No, all this appropriation bill does is give the government permission to spend more money than they have with a promise to pass the burden on for someone else to clean up in the future.

There is a better way to do this. It does not start with pretending that there is not a problem or a promise that the out years will save us. It starts with telling the truth about where we are, working with the reality of the resources that the government have available to them, not what the Treasurer wishes was the case. The government must get a grip on the costs that are driving the deficit because expensive is not just better. The government must start with respecting people, businesses and households who are paying more and getting less. They must apply the discipline that any prudent family or business would.

The Treasurer had a choice when he started in this job. He had a choice to keep doing what his predecessor did, keep pushing the hard work of discipline into the future, keep relying on levies and bandaids or to do the hard work for Canberrans, choose to be honest with the community, put the books back on a sustainable path and rebuild the credibility that is essential to governing well. Now we know what choice he has made. The Treasurer's choice means the deficits will deepen and interest will crowd out services and the credit rating may well deteriorate again. It is a clear statement of this government's values. This one says tax more, spend more and hope someone will fix it down the line. The community deserves better than that.

The Assembly has a choice today. Every source points to the same conclusion, Labor's path is the wrong path. Every Canberran knows it. You cannot afford for the government to keep making the same mistakes. I am sure the Treasurer and every other minister will spend the next year claiming that a vote against this budget is somehow a vote against police, frontline workers, health services and so on, but it is not. Any claim on those lines would be false.

The Canberra Liberals opposed no line in this budget as we went through this debate, so the claim that we voted against any of those would be at best misleading and at worst an outright lie. But when you look at the track record and the outlook built into this budget, how could we possibly support handing that burden onto the very generations who are struggling most? We on this side of the chamber cannot support that trajectory. The government should do better and come back with a better option, and that is why we will vote against Labor's broken budget today.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.41): I move amendment No 4 circulated in my name.

Amendment No 4 agreed to.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

Capital works reserve—Part 1.23.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Total appropriations.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.42): I move amendment No 5 circulated in my name.

Amendment No 5 agreed to.

Total appropriations, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 5, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 6.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.43): I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 10, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Title.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.44): I will take the last opportunity. While much of the budget debate has, of course, revolved around flaws in this year's budget, the budget also offers glimpses of the kinds of things we need to prioritise to build the Canberra we want, for example, over \$38 million in funding over the next four years to maintain and enhance active travel infrastructure and \$27 million for improved chronic disease prevention and management, a signal, as the health minister has indicated, that the government wants to see more proposals for investment in this area.

These kinds of investments show that we are willing to look ahead and start addressing the root causes of the systemic issues that have resulted in many of the budgetary challenges we face. Compared to total spending on transport and health though they are very small slices of the pie. Compared to \$2.9 billion in total spending on health this financial year, just \$3 million has been allocated for the chronic disease prevention and management measure, 0.1 per cent, and out of \$341 million worth of transport spending, \$8.875 million is allocated to the active travel measure, 2.6 per cent. These are small proportions, but they are welcome.

I want to take this opportunity to say to the government and to my Assembly colleagues, "Yes, good, more of this please," because we literally cannot afford to stop at relatively small signals like these. We need ongoing, concerted effort to build momentum. Momentum grounded in being more creative about how to address problems before they reach a crisis point. If our approach to a fiscal crisis is reactive, prioritising quick fixes that only give the appearance of solutions, we risk entrenching ourselves in further problems with very real human consequences. It is now both a moral imperative and a budgetary necessity to think and invest more upstream and to look at how we might better distribute resources across whole-of-government initiatives before we end up with tough budgets like this one.

Importantly, this approach does not necessarily require more expenditure. Instead, it requires that we go back to first principles and show courage in looking at how we spend. We already have all the evidence we need to know that intervening too late has dire consequences across critical areas like child and youth development, health, housing and many more.

The Minderoo Foundation found late intervention in health and development issues in young Australians now costs tens of billions of dollars per year, \$838 per Australian every year. The same report found spending on late intervention is also

disproportionately shouldered by state and territory governments. The Centre for Policy Development estimates the cost of potentially avoidable health risk factors at almost \$29 billion across Australia each year.

Research from Housing All Australians indicates the annual cost of failing to act on the housing crisis is \$25 billion. Of course, action is not free, but inaction on the crisis we are facing entails a far greater cost, both financial and human. Contrast the cost of late intervention or no intervention with the return on investment from measures that seek to prevent crises before they occur. The Front Project estimates that for every dollar invested in early childhood education, Australia received \$2 back.

Housing All Australians have found every dollar of taxpayer money invested in the delivery of social and affordable housing for young people returns \$2.60 to the community. Return on investment through prevention is also relevant, perhaps none more so anywhere else than in health, as we know. Assessments from the National Mental Health Commission found measures to prevent depression and anxiety had a return on investment of up to \$3 for each dollar invested. According to an Australian Sports Commission report from 2018, community sport infrastructure supports an estimated \$16.2 billion in value annually across the country, with \$4.9 billion of that delivered in health benefits. These kinds of figures represent massive possible savings for the ACT government.

As shown in a recent report from March, the ACT government's own life-saving package of drug harm reduction interventions, for example, have already returned an immense \$10.80 for every dollar invested. One of the comparably lower ROIs in the list of possible investments is projected for establishing a safe injecting room, only anticipated to generate a 1:3 cost-to-benefit ratio. With a cost of \$13.6 million it is still anticipated to generate economic benefits amounting to \$39.6 million, a fantastic investment which I would strongly support in a future budget.

An openness to these kinds of harm reduction policies, which might be contentious in other jurisdictions, shows that the government does have the capacity and willingness to think upstream. I think it is incumbent on all of us in this place to encourage more human-centric investment of this kind. Seeing these very human issues as calculations may seem cold and of course, investing in areas like child development, health and housing is about a lot more than economic ROI.

Improving decision-making in these areas is fundamentally about giving people a better chance in life, about looking at our society as if from behind the veil of ignorance and deciding on what kind of a place we would want Canberra to be if we did not know the place we ourselves would occupy within it or where the people we love would find themselves in the hierarchy. Building a society that serves the kind of people who are not listening to today's debate and probably never will.

Budgets are moral statements that cannot be viewed separately from our community's social fabric. Who we take revenue from, how we take that money and how those funds are distributed sends a message to our community about who and what we value. Tragically, many vulnerable Canberrans are feeling devalued, left behind, ignored and forgotten.

As we discuss often in this place, the ACT is a small jurisdiction operating in a fiscally constrained environment. But what if the solution to the moral problem of disadvantage in our city also contains within it a solution to some of our budgetary problems. We cannot afford from a human perspective or an economic one to continue to be reactive to crises. It is time for a new approach. We need to start thinking beyond crisis points and move to addressing problems upstream and we need to have the courage to do that now.

I know this kind of rhetoric about financial decision-making processes might feel radical, or perhaps airy-fairy, but even the hardest-nosed economist cannot deny the evidence such as that which I have included in these remarks. It is not without precedent and it need not be without rigor. Places like Victoria have already started doing it. Not that we want a budget like theirs, but in recognition of a continuing growth in expenditure on acute services and their own budgetary challenges, Victoria acknowledged that the status quo was not working and they started doing something about it, introducing an early investment framework in 2021.

Importantly, this framework requires that cost savings be identified not only within the portfolio in which budget proposals are developed, but also in other portfolios. This is an attempt to address the disastrous siloing of government decision-making, which can reduce people and their challenges to isolated parts of people and isolated parts of their challenges. As we all know, this often simply does not work. It does not solve those challenges. The Victorian government embedded this framework in their budget processes. In this year's budget they invested \$1.1 billion over five years for 28 early intervention initiatives. They also calculated the costs they would avoid with this investment, up to \$770 million saved from reduced demand for government services, including hospitals, family violence services and prisons, and up to another \$560 million in broader economic benefits.

Imagine what we could do with those kinds of savings in the ACT: better funding for community service; fulltime salaries perhaps for members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body; more investment to meaningfully give effect to housing as a human right for those in our community experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity; and perhaps a pathway to lasting budget repair. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

If there is anywhere that can do this well, it is the ACT. We also already have some of the critical starting points to do this. We have innovations like the Wellbeing Framework in place which is already used to help guide budget decisions. We could give this framework more meaning, more teeth and more rigour if we added something like this approach to early investment into the Wellbeing Framework, acknowledging that our community's wellbeing is fundamentally tied to how we distribute our resources and to the costs borne downstream by acute services like hospitals, and family, sexual and domestic violence crisis support providers.

This is something my team and I have been focusing on in consultation with experts and community members in the development of an intergenerational wellbeing bill—which is not about wellness, yoga, walking bare feet or meditation—although I am not averse to those things, so if there is a way that we can invest in them I am up for it—but it is about the wellbeing of current and future generations of Canberrans, about how

we empower people in our community to be well, to live the lives they want to live because the tragic reality is that so many of us are not well.

Nearly 50 per cent of Canberrans suffer from a chronic illness, 40 per cent of Canberrans suffer from loneliness, the highest rate in the country and 25.5 per cent of Canberrans suffer from a mental disorder, the second highest rate in the country. This level of suffering fundamentally cannot be addressed by hospitals and other acute service providers. There will never be enough clinicians. It needs to be addressed through a more holistic whole-of-government approach.

Taking a wellbeing approach is about asking how we tie government decision-making processes more closely to the fundamental needs and aspirations of the people we are here to serve; how we provide people in our territory of all different backgrounds with the tools, systems and policy settings that they need to thrive; how we break down silos; overcome the dehumanising widgetisation of government services; and build a public service system that works for people and that gives the Canberrans working within it the clear feeling that it is their job to serve the wellbeing of Canberrans and that it is something that they can do. It gives them a mandate to take a more holistic approach to carrying out their job.

It will be impossible for our healthcare system to keep up for as long as it is set up primarily to treat people as if their health starts when they come into contact with the healthcare system, rather than taking a preventative approach grounded in the immense amount of evidence we already have about how the way we live day-to-day forms the basis of our health and wellbeing. As Victoria University health economist Professor Rosemary Calder puts it, “30% of the burden of disease in the country is preventable, and we’re not preventing it, so we’re paying for it.”

Imagine the impact of a 30 per cent reduction in the burden of disease, not only on the lives of Canberrans but also on our health system. That could amount to an \$870 million saving this financial year alone. So I do want to take this opportunity to encourage the government to look toward how we might better leverage the Wellbeing Framework to give it greater rigour and influence, noting that the Auditor-General indicated during estimates hearings that he had seen no evidence of the Wellbeing Framework influencing budget decision-making processes to date.

With that in mind, I am encouraged by several of the government’s responses to the estimates committee’s report, signalling further work on the Wellbeing Framework to enhance its impact. If we are serious about budget repair, this work needs to include consideration of the calculation of costs that we can avoid by taking a cross-portfolio wellbeing approach and investing more upstream, because austerity is not the solution. Without change though the current budgetary strategy will, in the near future, put us in a situation of being unable to provide the services our community expects and relies upon. So I look forward to working collaboratively with all of my Assembly colleagues on smart, ambitious, holistic strategies to keep that from happening in the future.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.56): I did not intend to speak at some point but changed my mind sometime last week, I think, when really just reflecting on, I think as

I have banged on repeatedly, the cognitive dissonance in this place, which I think has been no more stark than in the budget debate. I have already had a discussion with Mr Rattenbury about whether I am lecturing too much or not, and this is not intended to be a lecture, but I cannot let this debate conclude without pointing out the realities of what we are facing and the inherent hypocrisy and contradictions in some of the contributions in this place.

Mr Cocks has made some great observations in the last few weeks and I mean that not facetiously. One of his final speeches today was that you cannot keep putting more on the credit card and expect the interest to shrink. Everyone knows that, that if we are not servicing the debt then we will not have any funds available to invest in the future. We are genuinely working on servicing the debt. I would note that there are plenty of things that the government have been required to negotiate on since the handing down of the budget, without necessarily—and I appreciate the Greens, this is not about you because you came with a different approach—but without necessarily finding another way or another mechanism to fund what we are then being asked to backflip on.

It is more than what has happened over the last few months. It is actually that there have been requests constantly throughout this first year of this term for the government to spend more now. Even though the budget situation has been known to all members for a considerable time and has been subject to motions and plenty of hearings and inquiries in this place, the requests have been made for us to spend money now.

Throughout the budget debate I think every single non-government member asked the government to spend more. This is not a reflection on whether these are worthy or not. It is a reflection that you cannot have both. More housing, more policing, more investment, different infrastructure, more infrastructure, improve the maintenance, whatever it might be, again, all very valid.

It is not about servicing the debt so that we can invest in the future, as Mr Cocks was putting it. We are being asked to add to the debt burden right now. It is not just in the budget debate, as much as this has been very stark, it has been throughout this term in the motions brought in this place. The board of inquiry is coming at a cost. There is a motion that we are debating this afternoon, which in its original form on the notice paper was requesting the government spend an extra \$1.5 billion over the next four years. The 213A requests, as much as everyone seems to love them, come at a cost. Burrangiri came at a cost.

This is no reflection on their value. It is not about that. It is just about being eyes wide open that these are not without costs. So, while I expect this will fall on deaf ears, my request to this chamber is that—I appreciate you do have many great ideas, and again, I do not mean that facetiously. I am genuine about it. I know that many of you take great delight in the new make-up of the parliament and there has been plenty of crowing about some of the wins with the government. But we are the government and we do have a mandate. Yes, we are in minority government but the community expects us to deliver on our commitments and we are not going to shy away from that.

Non-government members might not love our infrastructure pipeline. In fact, I think each non-government member seems to have some project that they personally despise. What I would say is that you might not like particular projects or directions that we are

taking, you might think it is not worthwhile and you can make that case here, sure, and you can make that case at the next election and see how you go. But plenty of requests of the government in this place are additional and are adding to our debt burden, if not taking staff away from areas that the community expects to be priorities or that the community expects us to deliver on. You can blame the government but the reality is, for the first year of this term, this parliament has been complicit. This parliament has contributed to the debt burden.

Mr Emerson asked us not to be reactive and I take him at his word. My approach to motions in my portfolio is not to be reactive, to not just drop everything to do something that is presented as a good idea, and to consider whether we actually can in the context of everything else.

Resources are stretched. We are at capacity across the public service. Every new thing that someone comes up with—and I am definitely one of those people, guilty as—but every new thing has to be accommodated somewhere and when you are already at capacity that is a real stretch and it is a real strain. I reflect often on the moral injury that well-intended actions in this place ultimately cause for our public service. So, to each and every person, and to my government colleagues the same, we need to consider the costs of the things that we are doing because otherwise the debt burden will not decrease.

I really do want to commend Minister Stephen-Smith and Minister Steel in their first ERC process, dealing with probably what I would describe as horror conditions—but I am a fan of hyperbole I suppose—but it must have been rough. It was rough being in the room for my items. I think they have done an extraordinary job. I think the public service has done an extraordinary job. I particularly want to thank Mr Greenwood, who is in the chamber today, and especially Brittany Atkins, who has done an extraordinary job over many years now. She has more hours in the day than most it seems but I know that is actually because she is not sleeping. It is incredible how we have been able to get to this point.

I think this has been, by-and-large, a very respectful debate and I appreciate that. I am sorry for taking up more time when we are keen to go to lunch. But just—I found it quite breathtaking last week, Mr Assistant Speaker, about the cognitive dissonance. Perhaps in debate contributions going forward, sure, you might not like what we are doing, but please consider what you are asking us to do extra and how you might be making it worse.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (12.06): I acknowledge the contributions of all members of the Legislative Assembly who have added to the debate on the ACT budget. The 2025-26 budget invests in our growing city and delivers on the commitments that the government made to all Canberrans at the election last year. As members will be aware, Labor took an ambitious plan to the election. The budget is a key step in delivering on the commitments we have made to ensure that our city remains a great place to live.

We have seen in recent population projections from Treasury that Canberra will continue to experience population growth. The budget makes crucial investments for

the territory to ensure that we have better health care, better infrastructure, more homes, more jobs, and targeted support for the most vulnerable members of our community.

Before members of the Legislative Assembly vote on the Appropriation Bill, I would like to take a final opportunity to highlight the key aspects of the bill and remind members how this budget will deliver for the Canberra community.

Labor governments invest in strong public healthcare systems, and this budget delivers the biggest investment in the public health system in our city's history, with an investment of \$1.196 billion to support a healthcare system that responds to demand, expands health services, demonstrates our commitment to delivering 70,000 elective surgeries over four years, and makes an important investment in a transformation program to support the efficient delivery of care.

Housing is a key priority for our government, and the budget invests more than \$145 million to support our goal of 30,000 homes by 2030. As Canberra continues to grow, our government will make the necessary investments to ensure our city remains a great place to live.

A developed city requires infrastructure, and targeted and achievable infrastructure projects are funded to ensure that Canberrans have the infrastructure they need to support a high quality of life. The budget contains a commitment from government to make investments in major infrastructure projects. These are both realistic and achievable, and they underpin a program right across government of \$8.1 billion.

Education is, of course, a priority for our government, and we are making important investments in it by investing in young children and young adults. We are providing opportunities for growth and development, and we are ensuring that the territory has the skills and workforce that our economy needs. The budget will invest \$138 million to ensure that Canberrans have greater opportunities to access education and training. This covers investment in schools and training programs, and in ensuring that we have a skilled workforce.

As this is the final opportunity to speak on the bill before it is put to a vote, I would like to thank members, again, for their contributions to the budget debate. I acknowledge that there are ideological differences among us in relation to budgeting and government generally. We have clearly put forward our views in the most transparent way through the budget process, as indeed we did at the election.

It has been quite interesting to see the differences in views about government priorities. It has been revealing; in fact, with respect to some of the comments that we have heard today in the budget debate from the Canberra Liberals, the opposition who want to form government, they have said that no further infrastructure should be built in Canberra that would add a cent to net debt or borrowings and interest costs. They have also put forward a long shopping list of infrastructure projects that they would like to build, at the same time. Some may call that cognitive dissonance. Of course, that infrastructure cannot be funded at present unless borrowing occurs.

At the same time, they have opposed our revenue measures in the budget—responsible measures and difficult decisions which are critical to funding healthcare services and

ensuring that we return the budget to balance. They have even criticised the increased natural growth in rates revenue, which reflects the increase in the number of rateable properties, as our city's population and housing stock grow.

While some have described it as cognitive dissonance, I describe it as something else. It is the same old magic pudding economics that we have seen from the Canberra Liberals for years and years, proposing massive increases in expenditure, but at the same time actively opposing both current own-source revenue and any new revenue measures.

Who could forget that their continuing policy is to abolish payroll tax entirely—something that is completely irresponsible? But we all know that their real agenda is to make deep cuts to the public services that Canberrans rely on. It is always the Liberals' agenda, self-described by Mr Cocks today as an austerity agenda. Really, it is the Dutton-Castley agenda that was firmly rejected by the community at the election in May.

If they actually supported our community and responsible budget management, they would support the budget and this Appropriation Bill, which includes responsible savings measures that we have taken whilst supporting Canberrans to access the healthcare services that they need when they need them.

The government has been responsibly managing a very significant increase in activity in our healthcare system, particularly in our hospitals. We have made a major investment to support that in the budget, criticised by the opposition throughout this debate—firstly, by denying the very significant increase in funding that we have provided in this budget, an increase of 11.7 per cent over the year. They then denied the transformation work that the government is investing in through this Appropriation Bill in future years to improve the efficient delivery of care.

Of course, throughout the debate they have criticised the broad impact of this expenditure on the budget, when it was necessary to support Canberrans to access critical healthcare services. As I have previously mentioned, they have also fundamentally opposed the revenue measures necessary to fund those critical healthcare services. This budget delivers the investment that our community expects, so that, when they go to a hospital, they receive the care that they need to treat their injury or illness at a time when their need is greatest.

If the Canberra Liberals vote against this budget, they are voting against every person in our community who will use our hospitals and health system over the next four years. They have no credibility.

We will continue to invest in healthcare services. We will continue to invest in education and community services, transport and a whole range of other services that our community expects, and the infrastructure that is required to support our growing population.

I would like to take the opportunity now to thank and acknowledge a range of people who have contributed to this budget process. I particularly want to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues, including Chief Minister Andrew Barr, Deputy Chief

Minister Yvette Berry, and the finance minister and health minister, Rachel Stephen-Smith, as well as my other ministerial colleagues and non-executive Labor members. Their efforts and contributions have been crucial to ensuring this government continues to deliver on the commitments that we have made for all Canberrans.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the ACT public service, especially Under Treasurer Russ Campbell, and his equally capable deputies, Scott Austin and Mitch Pirie. Special thanks go to the directorate liaison officer, Carolina Ross. I know that they are ably supported by many public servants under them, whose contributions are also invaluable to the budget process. Their analysis and expertise in the public service provide us with critical advice to be able to support sound decision-making, and I am very grateful for that.

I would like to note my appreciation for the hard work done after the budget was handed down, and those officials who have worked incredibly hard—during weekends, often—to be able to make sure this budget could be delivered in the way that it has. I would also like to thank the staff in my office—David Ferguson, Martin Greenwood and James Eveille, in particular, who have supported the budget process directly.

The 2025-26 budget reflects our vision for our growing community. It will ensure that Canberra continues to be the best place in the country and the world to live, making sure that we have the high quality of life that Canberrans expect.

I commend the 2025-26 budget, and the Appropriation Bill, to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (12.15): I want briefly to add my thanks to those of the Treasurer and Minister Cheyne to both the officials and our staff, who have worked so hard to pull this budget together and, since the budget was delivered, to respond to estimates and questions in this place, to ensure that this debate could proceed as smoothly as possible.

I will not name everybody again, especially as I do not have it all written down. I would be bound to forget someone. I will add to the Treasurer's list, and thank my office, the Barr office, the Deputy Chief Minister's office and, of course, the Treasurer's office, for all the work that they do to get us through the expenditure review committee process. It has been very interesting, being a member of the ERC for the budget review and then for the first full budget.

I particularly want to thank Ben and Kahlia in my office, who have done a fantastic job in preparing me for the ERC conversations as finance minister and for the very challenging work around health budget preparation, which, of course, was the main thing in my other portfolio. Thank you to everybody involved and to everyone in this place who has had their say on the budget over the last couple of weeks.

Mr Hanson: I was not going to speak, but we just heard the Treasurer—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibblings): Mr Hanson, Minister Steel has closed the debate.

Mr Hanson: You did not raise that, Mr Acting Clerk, when Ms Stephen-Smith spoke.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, sit down for a moment.

Mr Hanson: Make your mind up.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We are debating the title, not the debate in principle.

Mr Cocks: Mr Assistant Speaker, on a point of order—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Is the Assembly happy—

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: Firstly, no point of order was raised around this, before now, by any member on the floor. It is fairly extraordinary to hear this sort of intervention at this stage. Also, I point out that the Treasurer did not say that he was closing the debate, and the debate continued thereafter.

Ms Cheyne: We can grant leave and just—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Is leave granted?

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (12.18): I do not need leave, Mr Assistant Speaker, but I will speak, anyway. I will be brief. I know that the three contenders for Mr Barr's throne have all got up and had a go. I need to correct the record regarding Mr Steel, who spent more time talking about the opposition than he did about his own budget, which is not surprising, given that the poor fellow lost his credit rating on the way to delivering record debt, deficit and surpluses that no-one here believes in. He also misled this Assembly. Do you want me to come back with a substantive motion? He said—

Ms Cheyne: Mr Assistant Speaker—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: A point of order?

Ms Cheyne: “Misled” is unparliamentary, and I would note—I was going to let it go, but I will not do so now—that Mr Hanson also, throughout Mr Steel's speech, used the words, “That's a lie,” “You're lying,” and “That's untrue.” All of those words are unparliamentary and I ask that he withdraw all of them.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I heard that, and I would like you to withdraw.

MR HANSON: I withdraw it. But—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: All of them?

MR HANSON: Sure. The substantive point I am making is that there is no position from the Canberra Liberals to abolish payroll tax. That is not true. Mr Steel said it. If

he is going to keep saying things that are untrue, he is going to invite substantive motions that will call on him to correct the record.

We have seen, just in a couple of portfolios, boasting about this budget. Education is now being reviewed because the budget that was presented is not worth the paper it was written on. The minister came in here and started to accuse all the schools that have blown their budget, with cuts in staff, which the union said would be about 470 teachers and 720 support staff, and we had to collectively stop that happening. That budget is being reviewed.

Ms Cheyne, in the justice space, has acknowledged that they got it wrong. They got it wrong with funding for the DPP, Legal Aid and others. She said, “Yes, we’ll go back and we’ll fix that.” You have lost your credit rating, you have delivered record debt, you have blown the budget, and you have had to go back and do your homework on those areas. And what does Mr Steel do? He spends his time criticising Ms Castley and Mr Cocks for their excellent critique of this budget.

There is an excellent estimates process. I commend Mr Cocks and the members of the committee for the hard work that they did. They exposed a lot of problems. If it was not for the work that Ms Castley and Mr Cocks have been doing, all those issues in the DPP, in Legal Aid, in Education and in other areas would not have been identified and would not have been corrected. Do you know what would have been happening? Teachers would be being sacked right now, because that was the plan. The DPP would not be able to do their job, nor would Legal Aid, because that would not be rectified, as the Attorney-General said that she has had to do.

I suggest this to Mr Steel: stop spreading untruths, as you did here just a little while ago, spend less time focusing on what the opposition say, which is an accurate critique of a lot of your budget, and spend a little bit more time on trying to reduce debt, reduce your deficits and restore your credit rating.

Title agreed to.

Question put:

That the bill, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson
Fiona Carrick	Shane Rattenbury
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Suzanne Orr	

Noes 8

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
Elizabeth Lee
James Milligan
Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026

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

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (12.27): Without our democratic institutions, we would not be a democracy. Over the approximately five years that I have been here, there have been two things that I can say with some certainty. The principles underlying our democracy are strong, but the resources to apply them are thin. The ACT government was and is set up with a view to efficiency. We have no upper house, no local councils and no electorate offices. Canberrans are amongst those with the least amount of political representation in the country.

Our public institutions, such as the Integrity Commission and the Auditor-General, operate with small teams, meaning they can readily find themselves having critical points of failure in human resources or be lacking the ideal tools for the job. As one example, our Electoral Commission do not have their own legal expert and have to rely upon the Solicitor-General's office for legal advice. That is certainly efficient, but it means they are only getting legal advice when they actually ask for it.

This design for efficiency is itself premised on the confidence that things will continue to go well, with good-faith actors involved. As is increasingly becoming apparent overseas, we cannot assume that this will always happen. It would not take much for things to unravel. Our resources are delicately balanced.

I am glad to see this budget provisions the funds for the Integrity Commission to run the desired inquiry into lobbying. The part that leaves me concerned is how much work it took to secure those funds, plus the feeling I got from the commissioner that, even with those funds, he is struggling to prioritise his core work.

Democracy is not cheap. We need to get out of the mindset that our democratic institutions need to be cost-effective. They exist for a very good reason—to ensure people can have confidence that everyone in our society has been served by our government in a good and equitable way. If you just wanted government to be efficient, you would run a fascist dictatorship. We do not, and for good reason. We need to be wary of the traps that lead us down that route—traps which other countries have been walking into in front of our very eyes.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (12.30): I rise very briefly to express the gratitude of the Canberra Liberals for everything that happens in this place, and to express the absolute value of the ACT democracy. The ACT was deprived of a great voice recently, having regard to the value of the ACT and this place, in Greg Cornwell. I think he would observe that the growth in the ACT parliament over time and the ability to contend on the issues, to stand up for the important things and to work through the important, on-the-ground measures, has been a great achievement of this place over an extended

period of time. I would also like to add our great gratitude for all the work that goes on behind the scenes of the Assembly to make that happen.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.31 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Housing—National Housing Accord

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The National Housing Accord sets out an ambitious target of 1.2 million new, well-located homes over five years, from 1 July 2024. What are the ACT's annual targets for each of these five years?

MS BERRY: I have provided information in answer to similar questions in previous sitting periods. Our land release programs indicate the housing forecasts for the ACT, and the ACT government has made a commitment of 30,000 homes, as part of our agreement to the accord.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how many homes in each year's target is the ACT government directly responsible for building, and is the government currently on track to achieve its targets for the contributions?

MS BERRY: I will probably have to take the detail of that question on notice, see what information is available and bring that back to the Assembly. At this very early stage, I could say that we are on target.

MR COCKS: Minister, given the need for these homes to be well located, where does the government intend for them to be built, and how does it determine whether a home is well located?

MS BERRY: Well, not at Kowen Forest. That is one area where they will not be provided. The ACT government, through its land release program, has identified a range of different areas. We have talked in this place about additional land being purchased from CSIRO, in the eastern part of Belconnen. There is also a range of different housing releases in the Molonglo Valley, with aspirational targets for light rail stage 2ish heading into Woden and areas through there. Again, I can probably provide some more detail on that. A lot of it is already available in the land release program. I will use some of the information that I will seek for Ms Castley's first question and bring that back to the Assembly.

Gambling and Racing Commission

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. An Auditor-General's report provided to the Assembly in June on gaming machine regulation indicated the Gambling and Racing Commission could not provide assurance as to its compliance with 66 of its 129 statutory obligations. Does the minister think the commission's non-compliance with more than half of its obligations is acceptable?

DR PATERSON: I will take that question on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when can we expect the commission to be fully compliant with its obligations?

DR PATERSON: I will take that question on notice, but there is a response to the audit report that the government will be tabling. I do not have the exact timeframe.

MR HANSON: Minister, what are you going to do to ensure that the commission improves its compliance?

DR PATERSON: We will be addressing these issues through the government's response to the audit report.

Drugs—drug consumption

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Police. Minister, the ACT government's decriminalisation of hard drugs came into effect in October 2023. The National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program shows substantial increases hard drug consumption since its introduction, with cocaine use increasing appropriately 72 per cent; heroin, 35 per cent; and meth, 33 per cent. Minister, has decriminalisation resulted in an increase or decrease in drug use in Canberra?

DR PATERSON: The purpose of decriminalisation was to provide a health response to people who use drugs. That is what the ACT government has been focused, in supporting amazing services that work with people who have alcohol and—

Mr Hanson: On relevance. The question, Mr Speaker, was not about the purpose of the legislation; it is about the effect in terms of whether it has seen an increase or a decrease in drug use.

MR SPEAKER: The minister has a minute and a half remaining. Dr Paterson?

DR PATERSON: We are currently reviewing the legislation. So there will be more to provide back to the Assembly in terms of the effectiveness of the legislation.

MR HANSON: Minister, what is the impact of this significant increase in hard drug consumption on our Canberra community?

DR PATERSON: I think what is important is the response to people who may use drugs. What we saw with that wastewater report is that this is very consistent across Australia; there were significant increases in all jurisdictions. What is really important, and what the government takes very seriously, is how we respond to people who use drugs.

We have seen the success of the CanTEST program. Just this week, they identified that there is a substance within drugs that were tested that is highly toxic, and we are seeing the fentanyl-opioid issues with drugs coming through being tested by CanTEST. So I think more and more the risk is of overdose to people who are using drugs, and so accessibility of naloxone and things like that are really point. We will continue to work as a government to provide a health response to people who may use drugs.

MR COCKS: Minister, what monitoring is in use by the government to assess the impact of drugs following decriminalisation?

DR PATERSON: The wastewater analysis is one aspect. Obviously, the drugs that are coming through CanTEST is one way that the ACT government has strongly led in Australia in terms of understanding. It is not just about the overarching name of, for example, cocaine and methamphetamine; it is about what is actually in those drugs and what people think they are taking compared to what they are actually taking and the risks associated with that.

Crime—supply of drugs

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, when hard drugs were decriminalised in the ACT, the ACT government said that because the police would no longer be prosecuting users extra resources could be allocated to targeting, apprehending and prosecuting drug dealers. However, in the ACT Policing's most recent annual report, the actual number of deal and supply drug offences has fallen from 69 in 2019-20 to 37 in 2023-24. This is nearly half. It is exactly the opposite of what was promised by this government. At the same time, consumption of hard drugs like cocaine, meth and heroin are close to all-time highs. Minister, why has the number of drug dealers being convicted in the ACT halved?

DR PATERSON: We strongly support ACT police in the work that they do to address those who traffic drugs into the ACT. They have extensive intelligence teams and intervention teams that work on this issue every single day. They will continue to do that. They have multiple operations that are underway consistently. So, yes, I strongly support the work that they do and however many they convict is a matter of what evidence they have against people.

MR HANSON: Minister, again, given this government promised to increase prosecution of drug dealers and action against drug dealers, why has the number of actual drug offences for supply halved?

DR PATERSON: It is absolutely a priority of ACT police to take action against drug traffickers and that is what they do. We have strongly resourced ACT police over the last couple of budgets to see an ultimate move towards more ACT police of 150 extra police officers. So it is all these officers that do the work on the ground to gather the intelligence and to gather the evidence to address drug trafficking in the ACT.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how does the government measure the success of

enforcement against drug supply?

DR PATERSON: Well, I guess the number of their actions against drug traffickers in the ACT is a good measure of success for ACT police operations.

Gambling—cashless gaming

MR RATTENBURY: My question is the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister, on Tuesday when asked about the cost of your cashless gaming model, you were unable to provide an answer, stating that the cost is “a matter for the clubs” and that “it is a matter for the clubs in terms of which provider they go with”. Does this second response mean that, if clubs use different providers, patrons will need to have a different account for every venue—or at least for every provider?

DR PATERSON: Yes, it does mean that. The ACT government is working towards a framework that will be legislated for account-based gaming. This means that clubs will work out who the provider of their account-based system will be. In the ACT that may likely mean—it could mean—that all the clubs are joined together and go through one provider. Or it could mean that they go through different providers. But it will mean that in every club or every club group in the ACT an individual will have to set up an account to play a poker machine. They will have to use their ID or be ID verified. They will have to set up a range of different measures in terms of pre-commitment levels on their account. We are also working with a whole range of stakeholders through the cashless gaming working group, in terms of understanding what other measures may be part of this framework.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, why are you unable to even provide an estimate of the likely cost of this project? Is it really credible for the government to implement a strategy they have no idea about the costs of?

DR PATERSON: It is not a cost that the government will bear. This is a cost that clubs will be required to pay to operate poker machines in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK: Has the club industry provided you with any feedback or estimate of what they think the cost is likely to be?

DR PATERSON: You would have to ask the clubs what the cost is. As I said, the government will be legislating a framework for account-based gaming. The cost is a matter for the clubs, and that will be a cost that they bear to operate gaming machines in the ACT.

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Speaker, I have a point of order. Mr Braddock’s question was: Have you been provided with any information? It was not an invite to go and talk to the clubs.

MR SPEAKER: Dr Paterson was continuing her answer. I do not have a full recollection of what the question was. Perhaps Dr Paterson does not either. Would you like to repeat the question?

MR BRADDOCK: With pleasure, Mr Speaker. It was:

Has the club industry provided you with any feedback or estimate of what they think the cost is likely to be?

DR PATERSON: As I said, that is not a matter for government. The cost will be borne by clubs to implement this system. We have been through and seen the costings of previous systems, which the Greens attempted to move to implement last term. That was in excess of \$170 million. We know that is not a viable pathway.

Regarding operating a poker machine in the ACT, the pathway that the ACT government is going down is that we will implement an account-based gaming framework, which we are working towards. It will be a matter for the clubs to implement that framework in their venues if they want to operate a poker machine in the ACT.

Mr Braddock: I have a point of order, Mr Speaker. Under 118AA, the minister has not answered the question as to whether she has been provided any feedback or estimate.

DR PATERSON: I will not be, because I am not asking the clubs for a cost.

MR SPEAKER: Dr Paterson, I appreciate your feedback on that point of order. We will make an assessment on it after question time.

City services—mowing

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, with the 2025-26 mowing program underway, can you please share with the Assembly what is involved in this program of work?

Mr Rattenbury: Cutting grass!

MS CHEYNE: I did hear Mr Rattenbury's interjection. Very witty—"cutting grass"—for *Hansard*. Despite the humour in that, I would note that this is a very serious area, and based on the correspondence that my office receives, an area of great interest to members in the chamber. If they are not listening, I hope that perhaps they can read the *Hansard* later, and they can use the information I am about to provide in their response to constituents.

The mowing season has officially begun. It commenced on 1 September. It will run through until about March next year, but there is always some flexibility there. Each pass of the program covers more than 5,000 hectares of urban land, with most areas receiving five to seven passes over the season. About 90 per cent of this work is carried out by our experienced in-house crews, many with more than a decade of service, supported by contractors where needed.

Crews begin each pass with litter collection, and then they mow each area two to four times to achieve a consistent, high standard. You will recall that we have had some pretty terrible years due to the weather and the way that the grass grew, and ultimately that extended the amount of time that our mowing crews had to spend in cutting through the thickness of the grass. After mowing, clippings are dispersed with blowers to avoid

clumps or windrows, and whipper snippers are used to tidy areas around trees, bollards, gutters and signs.

This is an intensive program for our operators, but it ensures our suburbs are well maintained and safe for the community to enjoy throughout spring and summer.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how has the ACT government invested in improving the program this year?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question, and for the first question too. Throughout the budget process, we have been working to meet community demand by supporting our valuable mowing experts and their resources. We have an investment of an additional 10 staff members, eight additional machines and improvements, ultimately, to 21 of our mowers. This will see an initial boost to our arterial road mowing, which is of great importance to us in the ACT, often because that is what our visitors are first seeing. Again, I acknowledge some of the representations we have received in that area over time. Later in the season, it will enhance suburban mowing operations by providing targeted maintenance in areas of greatest need. Mower improvements include ensuring we are leasing machines with proven performance standards, modernising the types of machines leased and replacing machines with ones that include operator cabins.

Targeted cross-directorate consultation pre-season also occurred to ensure we have a united, well-prepared and considered mowing program, because, of course, the Parks and Conservation Service undertakes mowing too, as does Cemeteries and the CRA, through services offered by City Services. There has been consultation in this process with the sports and recreation facility teams to identify field specifications and to work with our environmental counterparts to ensure we support effective fire management and delivery of our Bushfire Operations Plan. A full review of conservation and “no mow” areas has also occurred, with updated mapping and site tours to ensure we are protecting and maintaining these areas of ecological value.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what does the ACT government do to support our crews during this season?

MS CHEYNE: I think we all would recognise that our operators mow in a range of conditions, from our cool and frosty early mornings to hot or windy Canberra days. Ensuring their comfort in these conditions is a paramount consideration for us, and I am pleased to say that there has been an investment in additional cabins to nine of our mowers. I have heard firsthand from our operators that having an enclosed cabin space makes a huge impact and significantly improves their working conditions and comfort.

The ACT government has also invested widely in staff training to include not only new staff and mowing operators but backup staff and supervisors. This training is ongoing and ensures we further prepare our confident crews and strengthen the entire city presentation team.

I implore all members in this place, and indeed the entire Canberra community to back our crews. We give our skilled, hardworking crews autonomy to use their best judgement and experience to deliver a prepared and considered mowing program.

Consistent with what Mr Emerson was imploring in the conclusion of the budget debate earlier today—reactive requests are largely inefficient. They hinder the ability for the teams to keep to a program, and keeping to a program is the best way to ensure that management of areas stays even.

Of course, Mr Speaker, some areas have different soil conditions and grow differently to others, so that is why there is that flexibility there as well. And, of course, if an area is genuinely missed, we do want to know about that. But seeking to step outside the program is not something that we look to prioritise. With weather predictions already indicating that it is going to be a wet and warm summer, we can expect vigorous grass growth across our city—hopefully not like the mowing crisis of 2023-24. *(Time expired.)*

Water—ACT water strategy

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. The government's consultation on refreshing the ACT water strategy has dragged on for almost 18 months so far, and I understand the final consultation report will not be published for another six months or more. Minister, why isn't the ACT's water security a priority?

MS ORR: I reject the premise of Ms Castley's question that it is not a priority. It is. Water is complex. There is a range of matters that have been considered in the development of this, and we will continue to work through those.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why is this consultation taking so long, given the Your Say survey only received around 100 submissions?

MS ORR: My understanding, and the advice to me, is that the ongoing part of the consultation is with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of the ACT, and goes to considerations of caring for country, and things that we do not want to rush. We want to make sure that we work through it thoroughly.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why have 42 per cent of respondents rated their engagement experience with the water strategy as "poor" or "very poor"?

MS ORR: I will have to take that one on notice, as the listening report for that was done prior to my appointment to this role.

Animals—grassland earless dragon

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for the environment, about dragons. Minister, the northern road has been given a final green light to build over critical habitat for the endangered earless—

Mr Barr: That is an incorrect ministerial title and is really abusing the forms of the house.

MR SPEAKER: I must confess: I did not even hear it.

MS CLAY: I withdraw anything that I said incorrectly. I believe my question is to the minister for the environment—the minister for climate change, water and the environment—about dragons.

Mr Barr: I am sorry. I thought you said “without dragons”.

MS CLAY: I will start again. My question is to the minister for the environment about dragons. Minister, the northern road has been given a final green light to build over critical habitat for the critically endangered earless dragon. There are 12 remaining sites that are crucial to dragon survival and two that you have flagged to reintroduce dragons to from the captive breeding program. One site is commonwealth land, one is a rural lease and four are unleased territory land. Minister, what legal protection status do the areas outside reserves have to ensure protection for the habitat?

MS ORR: I will take the question on notice to identify the relevant areas and will come back with the correct answer.

MS CLAY: Will you rule out development on all remaining areas that have earless dragon habitat?

MS ORR: I will take that on notice with the first question.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, have you assessed the impact of the death of 38 earless dragons on the overall viability of the population? And, if so, what did that assessment show?

MS ORR: I will also take the detail of that on notice. I will take this opportunity to address the deaths and the way they have been presented by some of the members publicly, saying that they were part of the captive breeding program. The dragons that passed away were not part of the captive breeding program, which is there to bring up the viability of the number of dragons. While I can get the detail of what the ecologists who run the program have been doing in working through that particular event, I would say that, given the love for the species and wanting to see them survive, it is important to get the facts correct when presenting our arguments and our points of view so that we are not creating unnecessary alarm.

Woden—schools

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Education and it is about education planning. Recently, the Treasury released updated population forecasts which show significantly higher population growth in Canberra’s south, particularly Woden, due to the inclusion of the government’s own densification policies. Of the six primary schools on the west side of Woden, three have closed and one goes to year 2, leaving two public primary schools.

Chifley Primary School is a large centrally located school with direct access from the towers—that is, no roads have to be crossed due to underpasses. The in-area school is Torrens. So many children from Chifley have to walk over three kilometres in each direction. So parents drive them or try to get them into Curtin Primary School. Minister,

what assessment have you done to determine the primary school requirements in Woden and whether the school closure should be reassessed to determine if the Chifley Primary School should reopen?

MS BERRY: There is quite a lot in that question, but I will say that the Education Directorate does population growth forecasts for our education system every year. A lot of that is based on births, information from the ABS, information from the planning system and enrolments in our school system. All of that is taken into account in making sure that we have schools in every part of Canberra, so that students in their local area can go to their local public school.

On the specifics of the area that Ms Carrick is talking about, I will take that part of the question on notice. But this is work that the Education Directorate does as a matter of course in building schools and ensuring that, in some of our older suburbs, the schools are suitable and have the spaces for children in those local areas.

MS CARRICK: Minister, do you use the Treasury forecasts, and is the assessment that you use about which schools are open publicly available?

MS BERRY: The Education Directorate uses a range of data. During my time as education minister and my time in the government, there have been no school closures. So there have been no decisions to make about closing schools.

Ms Carrick: Point of order: it was not about decisions to close schools; it was about decisions to reopen schools that were previously closed.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Berry, you are free to give more of answer or free to finish up there.

MR EMERSON: Minister, have you considered co-locating a not-for-profit early learning centre at the old Chifley Primary School?

MS BERRY: No, we have not, although members in this place will know that ACT government schools have, as a matter of course throughout history, operated preschools adjacent to their schools, which is unique in the country as well, and more recently, have added early childhood education and care services to our newer school builds. In some of our older schools that were closed and are now used by community operated services, some of those settings still include playschools and the like. So they are still being used for different kinds of educational purposes. But, on the question of Chifley, no; there has been no consideration of putting an early childhood education and care service at that school.

Youth justice—throughcare

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. The government response to recommendation 4 of the *Healthy centre review of Bimberi youth justice centre 2024* states:

Funding for a dedicated Youth Justice Throughcare Program is subject to future consideration as part of the whole of government budget process.

In the 2023-24 budget the government provided the Community Services Directorate with \$200,000 for the purposes of developing a throughcare program for youth justice. A consultant was engaged in the 2023-24 financial year to do this work. Minister, what was the outcome of this work and is the information publicly available?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. The consultant did produce a body of work. I am almost certain that that work is not publicly available.

MR EMERSON: Minister, per the first question, what was the outcome of this work, and then why was funding for a youth justice throughcare program not considered as part of this year's budget process, given that preparatory work had already been done?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Emerson for the question. The consultant did prepare a report for government, which provided, I guess, an analysis of the current system and the potential pathway forward. I cannot speak to decisions prior to my time. In my time in the portfolio I have sought to action a range of reforms in this space, which is evidenced by a commitment to develop a youth justice strategic plan. I am hopeful that that plan, in consultation with oversight and community stakeholders, will be able to respond to what was raised by that consultant's report.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will another consultant now have to be engaged to develop another throughcare program for youth justice informed by the Healthy Centre Review?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Carrick for the supplementary. I hope not. I don't necessarily think procuring consultants is always the best way to achieve outcomes. There is a body of work that will need to be done to develop the youth justice strategic plan. There are many elements to that plan that I intend to respond to the range of issues that have been raised in the youth justice space in several reports over several years.

Gungahlin—economic activity and employment

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Chief Minister, as Minister for Economic Development. Chief Minister, the Gungahlin Community Survey has once again demonstrated that the majority of Gungahlin residents have to commute out of the district in order to undertake work. What is the government doing to foster employment and economic activity in the Gungahlin district?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. There is, obviously, development of the Gungahlin town centre east, which will present more opportunity for both commercial and mixed-use development. There are a number of new employers seeking to locate business in Gungahlin as the population grows, but it is a reality that the commonwealth government continues to move its agencies seemingly closer and closer to Parliament House.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, what, if any, outcomes arose out of the prospectus that you developed last term as a result of my motion in this place?

MR BARR: There has been some commercial interest in land release opportunities that will be part of both the existing land release program and future elements, particularly

in the eastern part of the Gungahlin town centre. There are some large employers, particularly in retail, who are looking at opportunities in Gungahlin. But the reality is that the single largest employer in the ACT, which accounts for one in four employees, is the Australian government, and it has not located many jobs in Gungahlin.

The biggest single employer in Gungahlin is the ACT government, through our own office buildings in the town centre and our staff associated with health and education facilities as well as all of the local government functions that we perform. So we would be the largest employer in Gungahlin. I suspect the commonwealth might be second and the private sector would be the third largest provider of employment.

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, can you inform the Assembly who the employers that are moving to Gungahlin are, as referred to in your earlier answers?

MR BARR: I understand that some of the larger retail-of-bulky-goods operators who have taken up commercial space are also reasonably significant employers. There has been expansion in a number of the retail facilities in the area. There are also, of course, smaller private businesses. Most of the employment growth in the Gungahlin Town Centre—outside of ACT government—has been smaller, private sector entities.

University of New South Wales—Canberra campus

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Chief Minister as Minister for Economic Development. Chief Minister, what is the current status of the University of New South Wales plans for a new campus in Canberra?

MR BARR: Approved. Works approval has been secured, and I will be turning the first sod, with the university, inside four weeks, I believe.

MISS NUTTALL: Cool. Minister, what plans have the University of New South Wales provided on the amount of student housing they intend to build?

MR BARR: Certainly, as part of their overall campus development, which is over many years, there are student accommodation requirements. Not all the student accommodation needs to be built on the campus itself, and there are many examples, including in the CBD, of student accommodation that is, in fact, shared across our higher education providers. It is not institution specific. A student living in that accommodation can be attending any of the higher education institutions in the city. That tends to be a way that the universities can reduce some of the risk, and private sector student accommodation providers can also reduce their risk by accepting students from across any institution in the territory.

MS CLAY: Where are the details for the student accommodation, if somebody wanted to get more information on the numbers?

MR BARR: At the moment, the ACT has the highest proportion of student accommodation per student of any Australian city, so we have a surplus of student accommodation at the moment across all of our higher education institutions. There will be information in relation to the works approval for the UNSW Canberra campus on, I imagine, the National Capital Authority website, as they are the approving entity,

as the campus is on designated land. But I might also suggest Ms Clay may find further information on the UNSW Canberra website.

Economy—credit rating

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, during the recent extra estimates committee process and hearings, officials revealed that the market was already pricing in a credit rating downgrade. Treasurer, when did the market start pricing this in?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I think that would have been informed by commentary from S&P. The market, of course, will use a range of different inputs to inform decisions by institutional investors. I cannot speak for the institutional investors, but presumably they would be working on the basis of publicly available information, which may include commentary from S&P; it may include a range of other factors as well, including public information that the government also publishes through our budget reviews and budgets.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, can you guarantee that there will be no further increase to the interest rate on borrowings due to the credit rating downgrade?

MR STEEL: No. Mr Cocks well knows that there is a range of different market factors that go into borrowing costs, and ratings are only one part of that. The timing that you go to market is important, the volume that is going to market is important, what other players are in the bond market at the same time, what type of bond or note you are issuing and over what maturity timeframe—there are a range of different factors. I will continue to be advised by Treasury about the best time that they should go to market.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will the ACT be in a position to recover its AAA credit rating?

MR STEEL: S&P has outlined that in their ratings assessment. But the government will continue to invest in our community, as we have done in the budget, whilst also charting a pathway back to surplus, as we have done in the budget through the responsible measures that we have outlined and that have been opposed by the opposition.

Sport and recreation—Erindale Leisure Centre

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Prior to the last election, ACT Labor committed to upgrading facilities at the Erindale Active Leisure Centre after years of grassroots campaigning. Since the election, we have seen no announcements made about the proposed upgrades. Given ACT Labor's previous flaky commitments to the people of Brindabella, there is understandably a lot of doubt about the likelihood of these upgrades actually happening. Minister when will the full scope of the upgrades be made available to the public?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Milligan for his question. I would not agree with his description of ACT Labor Party's commitments to Brindabella being "flaky". We have been working with the Erindale Leisure Centre, the P&C, the school, the pool user

group and the exercise area user groups as well. The contract for maintenance and management of the pool has now been provided to Belgravia, who have been working with the community as well to make sure that there is a smooth transition. As far as I have been advised, the transition from operation by the P&C to Belgravia has been relatively smooth, and they are now working with iCBR, through the school, on the upgrades that might be required to that facility. There is no announcement to be made yet, because no upgrades have been identified to be announced. However, the commitment from the ACT government is to make sure that the school, the community and the broader Erindale Leisure Centre user groups are advised of the maintenance changes and upgrades as soon as they become available.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when will these upgrades actually take place and be completed?

MS BERRY: Once they have been identified, we will work through a project plan. At this stage, there is no start or end date, but, as information becomes available, that will be provided to the community.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you table in the Assembly any communication you have had with Infrastructure Canberra about upgrades to the centre since the election?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

Chief Minister

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. On 9 October 2024, you were asked if you would commit to serving the full four years of this term as Chief Minister and you responded “yes”. Do you stand by that commitment?

MR BARR: Yes.

Crime—domestic, family and sexual violence

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Minister, what is the ACT government doing to support victims of domestic, family and sexual violence?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question. I welcome the opportunity to draw attention to the important work happening every day to support victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. Firstly, I want to acknowledge that domestic, family and sexual violence responses emerged from grassroots collectives of women who supported each other at a time when governments took no interest in the issue, and this is within living memory, only a generation ago. Many of our local community sector organisations have their origins in this movement and this was demonstrated through the Beryl Refuge’s 50-year birthday celebration this year. Happily, we have made significant progress over the last 50 years, and the ACT government is firmly committed to addressing this.

As I said yesterday, in this budget we have prioritised investment into frontline domestic family sexual violence services including specialised support for children and

young people. Over the next four years, \$30.5 million will be invested in our frontline services. This investment provides funding for the critical Family Violence Safety Action Program to continue, which provides intensive case coordination between government and non-government agencies to address high-risk domestic family violence perpetration in the ACT. It also includes funding for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, YWCA and PCYC. Women's Health Matters will receive funding to continue their Victim Survivor Voice program, which provides a mechanism to incorporate lived experience expertise into decision-making about policies and programs. Additional funding was provided for the Safer Families Assistance Grants, which was increased to ensure financial assistance is available to victim-survivors when they need it most.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what guides funding decisions in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence?

DR PATERSON: In deciding how best to address the unacceptable rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in our community, the ACT government is governed by evidence, including a range of independent reviews over the last decade. This includes the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal report*, the Sexual Assault (Police) Review, *The long yarn* and the ACT family and domestic violence crisis Specialist Services Review.

The Safer Families Levy principles, which were developed in response to the Auditor-General's report, provide important guidance about how revenue raised by the Safer Families Levies is spent. We are also guided by the priorities articulated in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and the work of the academic experts and peak bodies like ANROWS and Our Watch. Importantly, the expert input of our community sector partners here in the ACT who are working on the ground with individuals every day, observing trends and changing risk profiles, gaps and other issues with the system are a critical source of information, and I am so grateful for their ongoing support and contribution to this work.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you support my bill to criminalise coercive control by the end of the year?

DR PATERSON: That is a question of government policy, and we have announced this morning in the Assembly that we will be introducing legislation in 2026 to criminalise coercive control.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Tuggeranong ice sports facility—site choice

MS BERRY: Yesterday I was asked a question by Ms Carrick regarding an ice sports facility. I may have it got it back to front, regarding where the land was identified in Tuggeranong. I said that it was identified as part of the EOI process. What actually happened was that the EOI was broader and simply specified the preferred location as south of the lake. After identifying the successful proponent through that EOI process, the government did further due diligence on the Greenway site, which was then agreed

as the site for a twin-sheet ice rink facility by the proponent in their detailed proposal to the government. That is the site that the ACT government is still working towards.

Gambling and Racing Commission—compliance

DR PATERSON: To answer to Ms Castley's question regarding the ACT Audit Office's findings in relation to the Gambling and Racing Commission, the response will be tabled by the legislative timeframe of 25 October.

Roads safety—self-driving vehicle technology

MS CHEYNE: In response to Mr Rattenbury and Miss Nuttall's questions yesterday about Tesla, the ACT government is aware that Tesla has turned on Full Self-Driving, Supervised, capability in Australia. The person in the driver's seat remains responsible for ensuring safe driving and will be subject to penalties if any offences are committed. That is in section 297 of the Road Transport (Road Rules) Regulation 2017. Additionally, in 2022, national infrastructure and transport ministers agreed to develop a national and automated vehicle safety law and a national regulator. This work is well underway. I look forward to receiving an update at the next Infrastructure and Transport Ministers' Meeting, which will occur in November. In addition to our road safety laws, Tesla themselves, through their operating manual, require drivers to be ready to take over at all times while Full Self-Driving, Supervised, is turned on.

Arts—funding

MR PETTERSSON: In relation to Mr Milligan's question yesterday about arts funding, I believe Mr Milligan may have been talking about the transfer of some funding relating to the Kingston Arts Precinct, from artsACT to the Suburban Land Agency. For the avoidance of doubt, we have not reduced funding to the arts or artists in this budget, but I thank Mr Milligan for his keen interest in the arts.

Gambling—cashless gaming—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: Members, during question time, a point of order was raised on standing order 118AA. It was in relation to a supplementary question to Dr Paterson regarding the cost of the cashless gaming model. The question specifically was:

Has the club industry provided you with any feedback or estimate of what they think the cost is likely to be?

I rule that the minister was not responsive to the question. I rule that a written response is to come forward in 24 hours.

Dr Paterson: Can I respond now?

MR SPEAKER: If you want to save the trouble, Dr Paterson. I do not know whether we are setting a precedent by doing that.

Dr Paterson: I have a one-sentence answer. Mr Speaker, I have a statement relating to question time.

MR SPEAKER: Dr Paterson, I have made the ruling on that and the standing order does state that there has to be a written response in 24 hours.

Dr Paterson: Can I provide a response now and a written one?

MR SPEAKER: Okay. Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: To be really clear: no, the club industry has not provided a costing and I do not expect them to. I will not be seeking a costing from the clubs for account-based gaming.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for that clarification. I look forward to the written response.

Papers

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

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act, pursuant to subsection 4.56(3) of Schedule 4—Professional Standards Councils—Annual report 2024-2025—Protecting Consumers by improving professional standards, dated September 2025.

Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act, pursuant to section 38—Annual report—Australian Crime Commission Assumed Identities—2024-25, dated 27 August 2025.

Registry weddings—Proposed establishment—Assembly resolution of 10 April 2025—Government response—Attachment A, dated September 2025.

School safety order laws—Proposed—Assembly resolution of 10 April 2025—Government response—Attachment A, dated 25 September 2025.

The Jumbunna Review—ACT Government Interim Response—Final Report of the Independent Review into the Over-representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System, dated September 2025, together with a tabling statement dated September 2025.

Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility development—Assembly resolution of 26 June 2025—Government response, dated 25 September 2025.

Transport—active travel

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (2.53): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) in 2024, the ACT Government released its Active Travel Plan which outlined key actions to “create safe, accessible and walkable streets – designed for people first, not cars”;
- (b) quality active travel infrastructure creates accessible, inclusive and safe neighbourhoods; and

- (c) investing in active travel infrastructure creates significant cross-portfolio benefits: improving accessibility for all Canberrans supports community participation and connectedness; increasing incidental exercise is a preventative health measure and benefits overall community wellbeing; and boosting active travel uptake reduces carbon emissions;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) the state of active travel infrastructure in the ACT, particularly footpaths, is a significant concern raised frequently by constituents;
 - (b) issues include a lack of connection between paths, poor maintenance of paths, inaccessibility of paths, certain streets lacking any footpaths, safety issues due to damaged paths, and path closures due to construction activities;
 - (c) the Government paid out \$1,722,578 for personal injury claims associated with community paths over 2024-2025;
 - (d) the 2010 Roads ACT Asset Management Operational Plan estimated that 60 percent of the asphalt and concrete paths network would reach or exceed the expected life span of 50 years by 2030;
 - (e) as of August 2025, 34 percent of the community path network has been identified for renewal by 2030; and
 - (f) annual reports and budget papers include a pavement condition index (PCI) to maintain all roads in fair or better overall condition, but the same is not done for the community path network;
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) publish a comprehensive list of all residential streets in the ACT that do not currently have a complete footpath on at least one side of the street;
 - (b) use this list to develop a full costing for addressing all current gaps in the ACT's community path network;
 - (c) include in future budget papers specific line items showing funding for community path maintenance and upgrades;
 - (d) include a community path network condition indicator in future annual reports and budget papers;
 - (e) set a target for the community path network condition indicator that matches or exceeds the condition expected for road quality; and
 - (f) consider legislative options to require developers and builders to maintain safe and convenient pedestrian access around their construction sites;
- (4) further calls on the Government to:
 - (a) fully cost the delivery of all future network links identified in the Cycling Network Map in the Active Travel Plan, and publish an indicative timeline for the construction of these links;
 - (b) fully cost the delivery of all potential future priorities identified in the Cycling Network Map in the Active Travel Plan; and
 - (c) separate to the Active Transport Fund, advocate to the Commonwealth Government for investment in completing the Cycling Network; and
- (5) additionally calls on the Government to report back to the Assembly on these actions in the last sitting week of September 2026.

I believe this motion asks us important questions about the city we want: do we want to continue to invest in car dependency or do we want to create a city that incentivises walking, cycling and other forms of active travel? In its Active Travel Plan, the government has already done the critical work of looking at how we can create an environment that enables that kind of behaviour and stated that this is a priority—that we want a city that prioritises the needs of people over cars. But bringing that to fruition requires that it is reflected in the decisions made by the government and by the Assembly in a persistent and ongoing way. If it is not, we will keep the city we currently have, and the city we have right now is heavily car dependent.

Canberra's walk score is 40 out of 100, which is categorised as a car-dependent city where most errands require a car. It is the least walkable major city in the country. Of course, this overall ranking is based on an aggregate of the wide range of walkability scores across our city. The city centre has an incredible walk score of 95. Meanwhile, areas like Holt and Curtin have walk scores in the 40s, and Oaks Estate has a walk score of just 34. Part of this is obviously due to Canberra's sprawl. The proportion of trips taken by foot among people walking in central Canberra, where the walkability score is higher, is roughly 50 per cent more than in outer suburbs.

Equally, I am sure all members have received regular correspondence about the lack of proper connections in our footpath and cycling network across the ACT. I am certainly aware of the experience of riding along a bike path that suddenly disappears on a major road. I know the ACT government is moving slowly—perhaps frustratingly slowly—towards addressing those gaps. I have to say that I am a huge fan of the Garden City Cycle Route, which is a regular part of my commute. But, like many Canberrans who want a more sustainable, healthier and more active future for our community, I am convinced that there is a lot more we could do, and a lot more urgently, to make Canberra a real leader when it comes to active travel infrastructure.

I hope I have shown some restraint with today's motion. It does not call for anything to be constructed. Instead, I am calling for clear next steps, information and clarity about the plan for actually implementing the Active Travel Plan. This motion calls for information regarding gaps in our footpath network, costings for addressing those gaps, costings and an indicative timeline for constructing the cycling network contained in the Active Travel Plan, a rigorous community path condition indicator, figures showing expenditure on path maintenance and upgrades each year, and legislative options for requiring pedestrian access to be maintained around construction sites. This is so that we in the Assembly have the information we need to make decisions now aimed at creating the city we want for our future—one that is walkable, cyclable and, perhaps most importantly, accessible for all, including women, children, people with disabilities and more elderly community members, rather than falling into decisions that perpetuate the city we already have. We should have a clear goal. Let's make Canberra the most walkable city in Australia. I do not think this is unrealistic.

Examples of what it looks like to meaningfully prioritise people over cars in a cityscape like ours already exist. In 2021, the Labor-led Welsh government established a Roads Review Panel which brought together transport, climate, mobility and logistics experts to review all transport projects under development. During that review, they looked at all the transport infrastructure projects in their pipeline and asked two key questions of

each project: will this project lead to a reduction in carbon emissions, and will this project lead to modal shift—will it encourage people to use public and active transport rather than travelling by car? In 2023, the panel handed down their report. Of the 59 projects they assessed using these questions, the panel advised that only 17 should go ahead. Here is the kicker: the government actually listened to the panel. The Welsh government moved forward with only 15 of the projects and rejected or revised the rest. Just 15 of the 59 proposed projects would reduce carbon emissions and encourage a modal shift, and they are the projects that they did.

Not only did the government there give close consideration to the Wales they wanted for current and future generations—which in some ways the ACT's Active Travel Plan does—but they also followed through with action. They made active travel a centrepiece of their transport infrastructure decision-making processes. The Labor-led Welsh government decided it was going to prioritise people over cars, so they implemented policy and distributed resources in a way that actually did this. Of course, they copped it from some quarters, including the conservative opposition there—I am not sure whether I am going to cop it today; we will see—but they did it anyway. The Welsh Deputy Minister for Climate Change said of the changes: “None of this is easy, but neither is the alternative.”

I am responding to Ms Cheyne's concern raised earlier today about constant calls for the government to spend more now. What I think is important about the Welsh policy approach is that it did not require more investment. It chose not to proceed with projects that did not match its values and to instead invest in those that did. So this does not need to be about finding more money; it is about spending it better. To pre-empt one of the criticisms I imagine we will hear during today's debate, the costings called for in this motion do not need to be just hypothetical. I understand that they might be now, but they do not need to be. We could do this all at once or at least a lot more quickly if we follow the model set by the Welsh and choose different priorities that serve to create the future city we want.

In its response to the release of the Active Travel Plan last February, Pedal Power ACT noted that, in the 18 months it had taken to develop the plan, the Spanish city of Seville had built an 80-kilometre separated bike network which boosted its population's cycling rate from close to zero up to 10 per cent. Seville could do it and Wales could do it, so surely, in a place like Canberra, we can do it too.

While we are talking about costs, poor-quality paths also have hidden costs. Since 2020, the ACT government has paid out almost \$6 million in personal injury liability claims related to community path issues. At the same time, high-quality, complete active travel networks generate hidden economic benefits. Research from the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads found the full delivery of 550 kilometres of highest priority principal cycle network routes delivered \$5 worth of economic benefits for every \$1 invested, mostly from the health benefits of encouraging a more active lifestyle among residents.

Modelling from the UK has suggested that converting car journeys to active travel there could save their NHS, their National Health Service, 17 billion pounds over 20 years. We already know that dementia risks decrease with physical activity. As little as 70 minutes of physical activity per week is associated with a 60 per cent reduced risk

of dementia. High-quality, well-connected active travel infrastructure could easily encourage large numbers of Canberrans to reach this target incidentally as part of their regular daily life.

Despite these obvious health benefits and cost savings, research out of UNSW shows that, as a country, Australia spends \$714 per person on roads every year, but just 90 cents on walking, wheeling and cycling. As a couple of examples, here in the ACT we have poured \$107.25 million into the William Hovell Drive duplication, jointly funded by the commonwealth and ACT governments, \$98.55 million into the Athllon Drive duplication, also jointly funded by the commonwealth and ACT governments. What kind of city would we have if we funded active travel in the same way? What kinds of wellbeing improvements would we see? What kinds of avoidable health costs could we eliminate if we funded active travel infrastructure like this? And what level of congestion reductions would emerge as a consequence? It is important that we ask these questions.

Road duplications temporarily reduce congestion, but, of course, they incentivise car use, which ultimately increases congestion. Meanwhile, active travel reduces congestion permanently. More roads get more people on roads, but bike and community paths get people off roads. If we are serious about keeping Canberra as a relatively low-congestion city as we grow, we have to act urgently and we have to act now in alignment with the priorities laid out in the ACT Active Travel Plan. Our population is growing. We cannot continue to road-duplicate our way out of increasing congestion.

With all of that said, I drive a car too. I am also sympathetic to community complaints about lowering speed limits, the introduction of new traffic signals and the removal of car parks. Sticks need to be accompanied with carrots. It is understandably frustrating for some people when these measures are brought in without doing the work of giving people viable active travel and also public transport alternatives. Nobody wins when we disincentivise driving without sufficiently incentivising something else. Instead, everyone feels punished. That is why we need to complete the cycling network and create a fully linked system of community paths.

We have a community that wants to use active travel infrastructure. According to the 2022 ACT and Queanbeyan Household Travel Survey, about one-fifth of total trips in the ACT and Queanbeyan involve active transport. This is not equally distributed across the city, as mentioned earlier. In more central North Canberra, 4.6 per cent of the population walks and 5.4 per cent cycles, while in areas like Tuggeranong only 1.1 per cent of people walk and 0.6 per cent cycle. I think these figures show in part that Canberrans want to use active travel infrastructure and, if it is readily available, they will switch their transport modes. Of course, densification is part of this, and I acknowledge the work that is going on in that area. What is key is that, whenever we can, we give people the opportunity to make these decisions.

Today we are setting a clear timeline for when the cycling network will be completed, establishing a community path condition indicator, and providing full costings that we can use for our own purposes here in the Assembly and also to take to the commonwealth and advocate for more investment in active travel as a key part of our transport infrastructure mix. These are the things that we can do to make a difference for people who want to spend more time walking, cycling and rolling through our city.

Of course, this is only part of the work that is obviously ongoing. Again, I applaud the government for the plan that they have developed. I believe it is an important step towards building the Canberra that many of us in this place want. I look forward to members' contributions.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.04): I have circulated, in my name, amendments to the motion, but I will first address the motion presented by Mr Emerson and then talk through my amendments.

I appreciate Mr Emerson for raising this matter of footpaths and the concerns that have been raised across all of the electorates regarding broken, not fully repaired or non-existent footpaths for residents across Canberra. From young parents with prams to older Canberrans who are more cautious when walking, we trust footpaths to get us from point A to point B and only notice when they prohibit or disrupt our ability to get there.

As stated, the ACT government released its Active Travel Plan, in which one of the key actions was to create safe, accessible and walkable streets—which I agree with. I agree with the increased benefits of active travel that go beyond getting in more exercise and its overall impact on physical, mental and emotional health, which contributes positively back into the wider community.

In further notes, I agree that the state of active travel infrastructure in the ACT, particularly footpaths, is a significant concern raised by many constituents in the electorate. This issue is one of the most common concerns raised with me from residents in the electorate of Yerrabi and which come across my desk constantly. As I am now the shadow for city services, we get concerns from residents coming from right across the ACT. One example is from a constituent who lives in Ngunnawal, who stated in an email: "Having a safer route to cross from Ngunnawal to the Casey area when we walk right to the shopping centre would truly be appreciated."

I will now speak to the "calls-ons" in Mr Emerson's motion. In Mr Emerson's motion, the first two "calls-ons", (3)(a) and (3)(b), publish a comprehensive list of all residential streets in the ACT that do not currently have a complete footpath on at least one side of the street and to use this to develop a full costing for addressing all current gaps in the ACT's community path network. This would be extremely time-consuming and no doubt costly for ACT taxpayers.

We are all aware that the ACT government is already in a lot of debt, and there needs to be an understanding that the "calls-ons" have to be feasible within the current constraint of resources that the ACT government has. In doing so, "calls-on" 3(c) is to include in future budget papers a specific line item showing funding for community path maintenance and upgrades. According to the government that information is not specifically available due to resources not being allocated solely for footpath maintenance but to road and other forms of maintenance as well.

"Calls-ons" 3(d) and 3(e) of Mr Emerson's motion are vague, lacking any explanation of the community path network condition indicator or what targets it would entail. "Calls-on" 3(f), however, appears targeted, likely in response to last week's disallowable instrument motion. The suggestion to legislate developer obligations for

pedestrian access during construction is ironic, considering Mr. Emerson's earlier push to identify and develop costings for streets lacking footpaths. If the government acts on this and begins construction, it will ironically require more pedestrian access management, which, as Mr. Emerson is aware, will be required for all future construction next financial year.

Mr Emerson's further "calls-ons" 4(a) and 4(b) are extremely vague "calls-ons". Due to the long-term nature of the Active Travel Plan, and keeping in mind that some of these projects will only start in 2029, there are many variables that need to be considered, and a costing of all these projects would likely be inaccurate or unhelpful, resulting in a misuse of resources that could have been better allocated to fixing some of the problems that have been lodged through Fix My Street. I cannot support the current "calls-ons" in this motion, and so I now seek leave to move my amendments together

Leave granted.

MR MILLIGAN, by leave: I move:

1. Omit all text in paragraph (3), substitute:

"(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) publish and regularly update a register of all path network projects led by; the City and Environment Directorate (e.g. capital works), including:
 - (i) a description of the area the project will cover;
 - (ii) a current status for the project; and
 - (iii) an indicative timeline for the project;
- (b) make this register available on the City Services website;
- (c) maintain a pathway for the public to lodge submissions for path network improvements; 474 No 34—25 September 2025
- (d) investigate an appropriate pavement condition target for all community paths in the ACT, and if appropriate, include this target as an Accountability Indicator in future annual reports and budget papers; and
- (e) include in future City and Environment Directorate annual reports a specific section detailing expenditure for community path maintenance and upgrades."

2. Omit all text in paragraph (4), substitute:

"(4) further calls on the Government to:

- (a) provide a list of all Future Network Links identified in the Cycling Network Map as part of the Active Travel Plan 2024;
- (b) provide a list of all Potential Future Priority Routes identified in the Cycling Network Map as part of the Active Travel Plan 2024;
- (c) ensure that the Cycling Network Map is regularly updated to reflect current and future investment prioritisation;
- (d) separate to the Active Transport Fund, advocate to the Commonwealth Government for investment in delivering the Cycling Network Map; and

- (e) review the Municipal Infrastructure Standards 05 (Active Travel Facilities) and associated technical specifications and standard drawings to reflect national best practice;”.

3. In paragraph (5), omit “September 2026” and replace with “April 2026”.

I will now speak on the amendments that I have moved, as circulated in my name. The “calls-ons” were written after discussion with Minister Cheyne’s office. “Calls-ons” 3(a) and 3(b) were added to better understand and increase transparency on what programs the City and Environment Directorate are working on. “Calls-on” (c) ensures that the public can continue to lodge submissions for path network improvements. This would reassure the public that these submissions have been identified and are in the process of being assessed. “Calls-on” (d) ensures that the government sets a standard for community path maintenance and be held accountable to it.

The further “calls-on” to the government are to provide transparency for future cycling network plans. “Calls-ons” 4(a) and 4(b) is to ensure that there is full transparency within the Active Travel Plan 2024, specifically on the Future Network Links and the potential future priority routes identified in the Cycling Network Map. “Calls-on” 4(c) is to ensure that the Cycling Network Map is dynamic and responding with the times, rather than a mandatory inflexible scheduling without any wiggle room for urgent repairs and such.

“Calls-on” 4(d) is forward-focused, looking at reviewing the current city service standards to reflect national best practice. The government is right to review their municipal infrastructure standards and to better reflect what is best practice, in order to provide efficient and quality city services infrastructure for all Canberrans. Additionally, “calls-on” 5 has been amended to “call on government to report back to the Assembly in April 2026. This should provide the government and appropriate directorates sufficient time to ensure that these “calls-ons” are enforced, if the amendments are agreed to.

These amendments are practical, common-sense based and provide the detail required for effective “calls-ons” in a motion. I appreciate the constructive discussions that I had with the minister’s office earlier in the week as well as the constructive conversations that I have had with Mr Bate, on behalf of the Greens, and, of course, Mr Emerson.

The amendments that I have put forward in the chamber are practical, tangible and beneficial, and I call on everyone in this chamber to support them.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.14): Madam Assistant Speaker, there is a lot in this motion, and I would like to thank Mr Emerson for bringing it forward. There is a lot that mirrors previous calls made by the Greens, or work that we have already done, but I will come back to that.

Firstly, I would like to talk a little bit about sharing. If you have ever had a three-year-old in your life, you will know there are a lot of conversations to be had about sharing. We all need to learn to do it. Children who resist the idea find themselves increasingly frowned upon as they get older. But do you know what element of our modern world is really bad at sharing and, specifically, sharing their space as they go about their day? They are called “private vehicles”. This is a key principle we need to keep in mind when

we are talking about reducing traffic, whether it is by approving public transport or facilitating active travel.

Roads are built for cars and trucks, and they really only work for cars and trucks. The best way, really, and the only way, to get more people to take public transport, walk, scoot or cycle, is to make sure they do not have to share their space with cars and trucks, or that, if they have to, they can do so safely. When that condition is met, when we have a city-wide network of well-maintained off-road paths, and measures to protect people where these cannot be built, I think most of us would agree that walking, scooting and cycling are just great, fun things to do, in a city that has truly wonderful, urban and green spaces to do them in. The benefits are multidimensional: to individuals, our community as a whole and even globally.

Active travel is cheaper than driving: cheaper for households, cheaper for the government, especially when you factor in some of the indirect savings—for example, having a healthier population, because it is good for both physical and mental health. It lowers carbon emissions. It facilitates social connection and connects us more closely to the spaces as we move through. Shaded footpaths and cycleways do more to cool our city than ever-widening lanes of asphalt. With all of these benefits, why would we not want to invest in this valuable infrastructure?

The Greens know it is possible. The Greens took a comprehensive transport plan to the territory election last year, covering all modes from walking to driving. Our platform included the following, which are relevant to today's motion, and I should stress that this is not an exhaustive list. The Greens wanted to increase the ACT's path maintenance budget by \$12 million per year—with fully insourced maintenance crews to do the work to the standards that Canberrans expect—proactively and alongside an ongoing program of audits, sweeping and cleaning. The Greens wanted to cut path repair deadlines from 18 months down to six months, recognising that an audit in 2021 showed that in half of all cases, the 18-month deadline was not even being met. The Greens wanted to fully implement the Active Travel Plan and Design Guide by 2030. That would include changing how we design paths, in conjunction with roads, and fully building out the path network contained within the Active Travel Plan. The Greens wanted to add 65 school crossing supervisors. We also wanted to reprioritise pedestrian signals, particularly for busy roads like Northbourne Avenue.

The Greens costed all of this. We worked out what it would probably take to build out the cycling network map in the Active Travel Plan, as is called for in today's motion, and to also bolster the city's path maintenance budget. We submitted this to Treasury, during the election campaign, and they landed on a cost pretty close to our own estimates for the full package.

Importantly, Treasury's costing of the bicycle path network identified that the total capital cost of 135 kilometres of separated bike paths could be estimated at \$216 million, based on a cost of \$1.6 million per kilometre. So there is your ballpark estimate. Do not let anyone tell you the Greens did not do their homework. Although, having said this, I would still be interested to see how the government's estimates might vary from that which was provided in our initial costing.

That costing compares to \$107 million for the 4.5-kilometre William Hovell Drive

duplication and to \$99 million for the 2.4-kilometre Athllon Drive duplication. Therefore, an entire city-wide cycle network comes in at the cost of approximately two major road projects. It can be done, especially if you get commonwealth funding. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had more marginal federal seats to help attract those federal dollars!

On 1 June 2023, Ms Clay moved a motion which included the following calls on the ACT government:

... within the next five years, to:

- (a) build a connected, safe, and convenient cycle network, as proposed as priority two of the ACT Government's draft Active Travel Plan;
- (b) set a new accountability indicator target for path maintenance;
- (c) increase government investment in the construction, repair and maintenance of the ACT's path network to meet this new accountability indicator ...

Ms Clay also called on all parties in the Assembly to:

... write to their Federal counterparts urging them to support greater Commonwealth investment in active travel infrastructure in the ACT ...

So most of us have been through these motions before, and I should point out, that the Canberra Liberals did not oppose any of these calls in Ms Clay's motion, which was passed without amendments. That was consensus support for completing the cycle network by 2028.

Mind you, Mr Parton predicted that the calls, other than the letter-writing, would simply not be met by the ACT Labor government. That prophecy has not come entirely true, but the magnitude and speed with which the government responded certainly has not met the Greens' expectations and nor, it would seem, has it met Mr Emerson's expectations.

The government's formal response to Ms Clay's motion came through the last sitting day of the Tenth Assembly. We were told what the new accountability indicators would cover, and, yes, they do appear in this year's budget papers. We have a target for the annual active travel renewal coverage across the off-road network set at 35,000 square metres for 2025-26, the same as what was achieved last financial year. We also have a target for the annual percentage of off-road active travel renewal works undertaken on asphalt paths set at greater than 15 per cent for 2025-26, the same as the previous year. By how much it exceeded 15 per cent last year, we do not know. What I am seeing is business as usual. What I want to see is those numbers rising.

What Mr Emerson wants is an additional indicator for the condition of the community path network, which is something I entirely support in principle, although it may just need some finessing to figure out that indicator. The directorate currently appears to operate for a community satisfaction survey rating of 75 per cent. It sucks to be the other 25 per cent—particularly if they happen to rely upon mobility devices or have other issues.

Madam Assistant Speaker, this is a long way of saying that the Greens have spent a lot of time looking at this topic, and the Greens will be supporting Mr Emerson's motion today.

There are some amendments before us from Mr Milligan, who has been involved as part of the negotiations with other parties. It has been interesting to watch the old parties negotiate together, but I suppose fair is fair.

Mr Milligan's amendments improve the motion in some regards but diminish it in others. I support the improved scope in publishing information on the path network projects and offering transparency on plans for the cycling network. I struggle with the articulation of the path expenditure levels going into just annual reports rather than budget papers but understand the reasons why.

I am just—no, actually, scrap that one. It has been a dynamic space in this motion today, and my speech has not quite kept up.

Ms Cheyne: Are we redacting that?

MR BRADDOCK: In live time, right in front of you, whilst you happen to finish writing your speech!

Ms Cheyne: I know. Guilty as charged!

MR BRADDOCK: On balance, these amendments are a net positive, so we can support them, even though we believe the government can do better. Because of the way the amendments are structured, we will first move through Mr Emerson's amendments, and then I will, at a later stage, look to move my amendments.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.23): Guess what? We have still not finished, so we are in for a ride!

I do appreciate this motion today and the different perspectives that we are able to bring to it. Where I think we are all united is that we share the goal of safer, more walkable streets, and communities that ultimately are better connected. Of course, active travel delivers real benefits—I do not think that has ever been in contention—such as health and wellbeing, accessibility and reducing emissions.

As it was originally drafted, this was not a motion that I felt I could support. I felt that it was completely impractical and would have carried some significant unintended consequences. This version—and I do appreciate the attempts to improve it—in my view is marginally better.

Why I have arrived at that is multifaceted, and it may require a bit of a history lesson. You have probably all been wondering, all week, what this book on my desk is. You are about to find out.

At its heart—it is why I have struggled with this motion as a whole—it ignores the planning history of our city. We do not want to talk about it all day, but there have been quite a few different schools of thought that have been applied to how we design our city over the years.

In many cases, while we might not necessarily agree with the decisions that were taken at the time, they do reflect Canberra as a unique city, a designed city, and that there were different influences involved in the designing of the city over time. There are many people who really value what they have in the different areas that they live in, which I will get to in a moment.

By characterising the footpath network in our city as deficient because we do not have at least one footpath adjacent to every suburban road ignores a whole lot of planning decisions and a whole lot of off-road, pedestrian and cycleways that were designed deliberately to keep us away from the road.

Before that, there was, of course, Walter Burley Griffin and his plan for Canberra. It is worth stressing here that we have not just become known as a garden city by accident or by having some good gardeners and people who really care about their frontage. “Garden city” is a formal movement that dates back to the 19th century. It started in England, and it is something that Walter Burley Griffin adopted. We were deliberately designed to be a garden city. It is not that we became a garden city by accident; it was by design. It was deliberate, in order to align with this movement.

What does a garden city mean? It means generous avenues, parklands, picturesque verges and nature strips, not urban sidewalks. It set a real street character that prized landscape and open space. When we talk about, “Why do we have hedges?” and “Why do we not have front fences?” this is all related, as is why some of these older suburbs do not have footpaths.

I will quote from *Tomorrow’s Canberra*, an NCDC publication from 1970, of which I have an original. There was an influence. I quote:

... the Garden City influence is evident in the screening of residential areas from major highways by the use of parks, and in the use of street patterns which change direction so as to discourage through-traffic in settlements of dwellings.

It was very deliberate, Madam Assistant Speaker, and you can see that if you travel around. You will see that wherever you happen to go. Equally, there was a real sense that, by the 1970s—and I quote:

... the most attractive streets have dominant plantings of eucalypts that are now in their prime and have wide, grassed nature strips which are flanked by unfenced or hedged gardens containing the more ornamental exotics. The result is a landscaped city which attracts tourists in great numbers in spring and autumn to see the beauty of its trees. Another effect is that the residential areas are covered by a canopy of green and the rooftops all but disappear. In terms of the spatial structure, the residential areas give the city a low and predominantly green texture.

That was the design of our garden city. It was a very deliberate decision not to have footpaths but instead to have nature strips—and, indeed, for people to be able to walk

on nature strips. I understand that how nature strips have been used over time varies. I would reflect that Mr Emerson, I think on Tuesday, was talking about whether we can work to enhance people's nature strips more. But we cannot have both. We cannot have a footpath and an enhanced nature strip in the same area.

That takes us to my favourite time, the NCDC era, which we have all heard plenty about, if you are a politician in this place, because it is referred to as the halcyon days. This is where we see Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong. These were the areas that were planned around open space and "greenways", with off-road pedestrian and cycle paths threading parks and schools.

Verge-side footpaths, again, were not provided because walking was meant to occur on the separated paths through green space, with road crossings handled at the nodes. The NCDC loved pedestrian underpasses—if you are in Woden, Tuggeranong or Belco, you will have plenty—especially because they were about keeping people off the arterial roads and reducing the emphasis on kerbside footways.

In the 60s and 70s, we had the Radburn influenced neighbourhoods—Curtin, Garran, Hughes, Fisher, and parts of Charnwood, where houses fronted paths and green courts rather than streets. These are very confusing suburbs to doorknock, but I think we can understand why people like them. Indeed, page 94 of *Tomorrow's Canberra*, talking about Weston Creek, states:

It will consist of eight neighbourhoods around a large group centre. The road system will facilitate access to the group centre. A continuous system of pedestrian ways will connect the neighbourhoods with the open spaces, the high schools and the group centre through underpasses.

Underpasses were certainly revered by the NCDC. Especially in our electorate, Madam Assistant Speaker, there are plenty of paths that snake between suburbs, and that also can be quite helpful when doorknocking.

The motion in its original form—I do not think I can go past this, Madam Assistant Speaker—was effectively seeking to have the government commit to what we have estimated to be a \$1.8 billion unfunded plan, and to deliver on it in four years. There was not any credible fiscal framework that was offered for how that level of expenditure could be delivered in just four years, not to mention the consideration of workforce capacity, significant community disruption, and plenty of other factors.

Importantly, I think, it comes to this: is it required and is it welcome? Perhaps there could be a more holistic motion that reflects that we do have different planning outcomes, as our city has developed, and that while there might be footpaths that are not adjacent to the street, there are still plenty of ways to move through a suburb. That might have been a better place to start.

Even with the quiet amendment that has occurred—and I still very much appreciate it being drawn to our attention—removing that almost \$2 billion call, the motion still asks for something that simply cannot be done. In good conscience, a detailed and fully costed plan for building a footpath on at least one side of every single residential street by 2030 is still going to cost us, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Firstly, it cannot be done, and even our best attempts to do it would take plenty of people offline—and for what? Why would we look at putting a footpath down cul-de-sacs that might otherwise be serviced by a green pathway that connects them? You can imagine what the community might say to us about this.

In addition to being incredibly disruptive, adding about 850 kilometres of new paths, thousands of driveway crossings, a significant relocation of underground and overhead services and the potential loss of many mature street trees, as well as trees that we have been planting recently as part of our Urban Forest Strategy, ultimately, we would be giving an impression to the community that we were prepared to go through a period of extraordinary residential suburban disruption and abortive works. I think we all recognise that we have enough going on with all the road improvements, upgrades and bridge strengthening, without having to further disrupt people's quiet enjoyment of their home.

The motion also overlooks the fact that there is already extensive information published about our path network. The open data portal and the active travel planning tool already show where paths exist, where projects are planned and where community suggestions can be made. You can use the open data portal, Madam Assistant Speaker. You can filter by the width of a community path as well. There is so much information already available, and I know that the teams that work very hard to keep that up to date would welcome more interest in that—perhaps not the level of interest that I have, and I appreciate the support they have given me this week, but it is there.

Effectively, this motion is about diverting scarce resources to duplicating what already exists rather than investing in priority upgrades. The amendments moved by Mr Milligan are very welcome. I appreciate his and his office's approach to us. I think these are practical, transparent and, ultimately, achievable outcomes. We will be supporting them today.

We can publish and update a register of community path network projects. We can maintain a pathway for the community to propose improvements. We can investigate a sensible pavement condition target for paths, and we can provide an easy mechanism to report recent expenditure. We can certainly emphasise the cycling network map and continue to advocate to our commonwealth colleagues about the importance of it. I know that the federal minister is very interested in active travel and always welcomes any suggestion that we put forward on how the government can support it.

Ultimately, Mr Milligan has put forward something that we can support, particularly in terms of the accountability and the communications on the delivery of our election commitments and updating the Canberra community on how we tangibly and effectively improve active travel infrastructure over this term.

We will keep delivering, as we promised, but perhaps not exactly in the way that Mr Emerson would like us to. At its heart, I still think that, while I found the motion problematic overall, we all want our footpaths to be well maintained and accessible, and to get the greatest benefit from them. I look forward to perhaps working more closely on the drafting of future motions so that we can achieve that going forward.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.38): I would like to talk about my support for cycle

infrastructure. I would like to start with the NCDC days, because I have spent many hours looking through their annual reports and other reports—and it was some of my favourite times, too. I think they did a really great job in the planning. Ms Cheyne would know that Woden and Weston Creek were one town. So she should support me in counting our population together. She has also talked about the underpasses which allow people to walk to their local shops and schools safely without having to cross a road. We should have a look now at how best to use those paths and whether those schools that closed 30 years ago could be reopened as the population grows.

Ms Cheyne: I love how you can connect everything. It is a skill.

Mr Cocks: I think someone upstairs is shouting “bingo” at this point.

MS CARRICK: Canberra already has some excellent active travel paths, but there are still too many glaring gaps in the network. One of the most significant is the missing link between Woden and Civic. This is a key intertown corridor connecting the north and the south. An off-road, dedicated path is required to provide safety, as riding with traffic going 80 km an hour does deter people from riding to the city. Its absence is a major barrier to active travel uptake in the south of Canberra. We cannot afford to wait for vague promises tied to future projects like light rail stage 2B. It is time this project was planned and included in the pipeline of projects for investment. There are also upgrades and missing links that need to be prioritised—for example, For example, upgrades to the C5 along Streeton Drive in Weston and Holder and missing links in Coombs, Mawson and other suburbs. If we are serious about active travel, we must start building the cycle infrastructure our city needs in the context of a responsible budget.

In response to Mr Braddock's idea that it would be handy to have more marginal seats to attract further funding, I can assure you that we are working on it. Independent Jessie Price lost the federal seat of Bean by only 700 votes and Bean is now a marginal seat. So perhaps we might get a commitment to cycle infrastructure before the next election.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.40): After nearly five years as a local member, as I have heard this afternoon from many others who have spoken—dealing with footpath issues is a very common part of the role, whether it is doorknocking, standing at the shops or responding to correspondence. Quite frequently, I am out with a constituent at a footpath and, in some cases, something of quite significance has occurred to them because of a broken footpath, a cracked footpath or poorly maintained area.

I support the motion that has been brought from Mr Emerson and the amendments moved by Mr Milligan, and thank the government and the Greens for, at this stage it seems, their support, because a more transparent approach and thorough oversight by government of our footpath network—such an important and yet simple part of our city infrastructure—is something I think the community would greatly appreciate.

I have spoken about some of the specific examples, but these also include a common walkway to a local primary school, where the children basically have no footpath to walk on to get close to a primary school—something that seems fairly obvious that should be looked at and rectified; and an area where there are a lot of older citizens, some with walkers, who in some cases have fallen over cracked footpaths on the way to a local shopping centre. They are trying to be active and are trying to use the

environment that is available to them and sometimes, unfortunately, it is just not safe enough for them.

Accessibility, broken footpaths, maintenance issues, absence of footpaths, connectivity gaps, obviously somehow linking up and making provision for a cycling network as well—all these comprehensive things—are the 101 of a municipal government approach, and I welcome, and I think the community welcomes, this Assembly focusing on something that affects them every single day. I want to again make myself available to our community in the electorate of Ginninderra. If you have a concern about infrastructure, such as a footpath, a bikeway or a park, please reach out. We will do what we can to have a constructive engagement with the government to see if we can get an improvement and an enhancement of this important city infrastructure.

In closing, I am saying some really obvious things here, which I do not think there is going to be any opposition to. It is not going to be a contentious discussion, I do not suspect. For a state-level government that also has council-level functions, it might be tempting just to look at those higher-level policy areas and those state administration areas, but, after nearly five years as a local member, what I hear about most from citizens is just those basic services—those things they need every single day. It is what affects most Canberrans and most of their time—and, gee, they like it being done well. So I want to thank Mr Emerson and other speakers for their endorsement of how important this topic is. Let's hope this afternoon we can get some real improvement and some greater transparency.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.44): I have jotted down a few notes here because I wanted to reflect on the amount of work that I know that Mr Milligan has gone to to try and get this to work. I am definitely grateful to Mr Emerson for bringing this motion. I love a costing. I love a good analysis. I certainly love a good footpath. I have certainly actively travelled on enough of them as I have been out doorknocking and wearing out pairs of shoes. I am no consultant or complexity and systems thinker but, even to me, the motion that was brought originally, in its original form, was needlessly complex and it contained a few things that were a bit problematic—starting, of course, with the cost. To bring a proposal to spend billions of dollars with no financial offsets is deeply concerning.

That said, footpaths are an important issue across every electorate in this place. Maybe not every street needs to have one. I am not sure the street with four houses on it needs to have a footpath at every occasion. But there are some definite gaps in our system and definite gaps in the map, and I think that the government needs to be paying attention to that. Many of us have been advocating for quite a long time. We have heard from Mr Cain and Mr Milligan today, and I am sure we are going to hear from Ms Lee. All of us have been advocating for extensive periods of time for our constituents around the footpaths that matter to them.

Again, I am grateful to Mr Emerson, because he gives me the opportunity to talk about a couple of the really key ones in my electorate—for example, take Yarralumla. Of course, you have the missing link that the Yarralumla Residents Association have been campaigning about for years in front of the Saudi Arabian Embassy. It needs to be fixed. It is not acceptable to have people stepping out into the middle of the street to try and get around an embassy fence. It needs to be dealt with. It needs to be fixed. Take, for

example, Woden's Phillip Business District. The condition of footpaths—so-called footpaths—in that area is just astounding. The number of humps and hollows you have to try and navigate to make it from business to business in that area is just unsafe. It is about time the government took some steps to make that area more conducive to customers and to staff of the area. It has been far too long neglected. It needs to be dealt with.

But you do not get there through just political rhetoric. It is going to take action. I want to take a moment to reflect on one of Mr Emerson's pieces of political rhetoric today. I think he showed his commitment to some political posturing when he talked about how we cannot afford to road-duplicate our way out of congestion. Given the government's commitment to ripping federal money out of road projects like the parkway and the decade-and-a-half-long fight to try and get Athllon Drive duplicated, I am not sure anyone can remotely argue that the government is prioritising road duplications and roads over active travel.

Active travel is important. My humanitarian engineer friend has talked to me for a long time about the impact of missing connections when you are in a wheelchair. They are the same impacts that you have if you are a parent trying to push a pram. Whether you are in Denman Prospect or if you are in Woden, it does not matter—the problem is the same. If you cannot get from your home to the shops without having to jump in your car, then you are not going to make your way there in any other way. So there are challenges for this government, but I am very pleased that Mr Milligan has brought forward a sensible amendment to try and get this dealt with in the right way.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (3.49): I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. As a fellow member for Kurrajong, I am sure that he has had the vast number of the same constituents who have raised issues about footpaths in the time that he has been here. As I said in the chamber this week during debate on the appropriations bills, our neighbourhoods are suffering from years and years of neglect and our basic services are not being maintained. Our footpaths are cracked, uneven or, in many places, missing altogether. This is something that has been identified and acknowledged by many members in this debate already.

Canberra is a city which prides itself on being liveable. We have large open spaces, an abundance of parks and playgrounds and we are surrounded by beautiful natural bushland. But we do hear time and time again from our constituents about cracked and broken footpaths, about incomplete footpaths and about a complete lack of footpaths in many neighbourhoods. This has a significant impact on the way many in our community live. As Mr Cocks pointed out, it has an impact on how they get around and even doing daily tasks like going from home to the local shops. It also has an impact on the way we interact with each other as a community.

We hear of Canberrans that are forced to walk along roads because there are no footpaths on their streets, and we, of course, talk about the parents pushing prams, or older Canberrans with mobility aids, and children walking to and from school that are forced onto the roads. But, of course, it affects so many more Canberrans than that. I hear all the time from my constituents about broken footpaths in Griffith, Dickson, O'Connor, Turner and throughout the city precinct; closed footpaths in Hackett and Narrabundah; and many suburbs around my electorate that have no footpaths at all. This

is just not good enough. We need a clear and long-term plan that prioritises our neighbourhoods, prioritises maintenance and prioritises the installation of footpaths that prioritise our community.

I thank Mr Milligan for bringing his amendments, which are very sensible and, I understand, have the support of the majority of the chamber. I also acknowledge his tireless advocacy on raising issues in this space including, of course, his role in getting the inquiry in relation to Fix My Street established, which I know has been an ongoing concern for so many Canberrans. The people in my electorate of Kurrajong have raised issues about footpaths with me. I want to put on the record that, every time I do a mobile office or even if I just run into constituents out and about, that one thing that comes up is basic maintenance, and footpaths of course make a very big part of that.

So, once again, I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this motion. I have no doubts that he will be out and about in our electorate spreading the good word about his motion. I also thank Mr Milligan for bringing his amendments, which I will support.

Mr Milligan's amendments agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.53), by leave: I move the amendments circulated in my name, together:

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

“(d) questions of safety and accessibility can arise where a pedestrian feels compelled to walk on a road”.

2. After paragraph (3)(e), insert:

“(f) consider implementing speed limits of 30 kilometres per hour in all suburban street areas where there is not a footpath on at least one side of all the streets in the area;”.

While the minister has spoken at length to the Garden City design, a gap has not been addressed so far in the debate. Whilst it is very good to have footpaths going through parklands, underpasses and at the back of cul-de-sacs—it is beautiful—the question is: how does someone get from their front door to that path network? That is the gap I am seeking to address, because the priority here is to actually ensure the back roads and cul-de-sacs remain safe for people to walk and play and get to the path network.

Living Streets Canberra quite recently called for a 30-kilometre-per-hour speed limit in areas where there are not, or cannot be, footpaths on both sides of roads or a convenient pedestrian crossing connecting paths across streets. Thirty-kilometre-per-hour back streets are extremely normal to see across Europe, because traffic experts understand that is the speed limit that keeps vulnerable road users safe. There is already an example right here in Canberra, with The Fair at Watson having 30-kilometre-per-hour limits. In the first instance, the cost would be limited to installing some road signs and conducting driver education, which is much cheaper than the major footpath build originally envisaged, and it could produce immediate results.

This amendment is important because it highlights: how do people get from their front door to the path network? At the end of the day, we are potentially talking about people on mobility scooters or pushing prams down streets, and we need to figure out a way to

make sure that it is a safe environment for them to do so.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.55): I will talk briefly to the proposed amendment that Mr Braddock has brought forward. I have a few questions in relation to it: what is the precedence for this, and what incident caused Mr Braddock to bring forward this amendment? I am not quite sure how reducing the speed limit on a road from 40 or 50 kilometres per hour down to 30 kilometres per hour has anything to do with a footpath, nor making it safer for anyone to walk.

The problem is that, if this amendment were passed and the government chose to implement this change—to have 30-kilometre-per-hour zones on streets where there are no footpaths—it potentially means a suburbs will have 30-kilometre-per-hour zones, 40-kilometre-per-hour zones, 50-kilometre-per-hour zones and 60-kilometre-per-hour zones. A lot of drivers would probably spend more time looking at whether there is a footpath beside the road to determine whether they have to do 30 kilometres per hour or 50 kilometres per hour. It could become even more of a distraction.

Also, there is the cost associated with this. To be honest, you would have to have speed zone signs on every street to indicate what the speed zone is. I would imagine that the cost of that would be astronomical, plus there is the cost of maintenance to update street signs. We see so many speed signs that have been knocked over already. Could you imagine how many more would be knocked over if we had them in every street of the ACT?

So we have concerns about Mr Braddock's amendment to the motion, although, as I understand it, the amendment will probably be passed anyway. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendment brought forward by Mr Braddock to the 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) (3.57): First of all, Mr Cocks has pointed out to me that I have not appropriately acknowledged Marion Mahony Griffin's contribution to the design of Canberra, so may I please correct the record. Secondly, I do not think I appropriate thanked Mr Braddock for allowing me to at least develop something slightly coherent in my speech, so, through you, Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank, Mr Braddock.

We have the same concerns as Mr Milligan, but we have arrived at a different conclusion. Ultimately, I appreciate that this is to be considered. Certainly, a 30-kilometre-per-hour zone is not new concept. Indeed, it is contemplated in some ACT government planning documents. It is certainly not for a specific timeframe, but we certainly appreciate that slower streets can only be a good thing. I have a lot of time for the comments Mr Milligan just made about 30-, 40-, 50- or 60-kilometre-per-hour streets or those that come off a 70- or 80-kilometre-per-hour arterial road. I acknowledge that I live on a 40-kilometre-per-hour street, and it is pretty much impossible to enforce, due to the camber of the street. I certainly support the intention of a 40-kilometre-per-hour street, but we need to ensure that whatever we do is well understood. People get used to what 30 kilometres per hour feels like and learn the

benefits of it, but we have quite a few challenges as it is.

That said, I am certainly happy to look at it, as long as we are doing it in a coherent way. There are some areas where we can naturally seek to implement this. I know that Mr Emerson likes the Sherbrooke Street active travel. That seems like a pretty obvious place to start. There have been requests for that in other suburbs, including in my own electorate. We can certainly see whether there are places that we can trial some slower streets, but, ultimately, I do not think that the undertaking of 30 kilometres per hour in an englobo way is something that we are quite ready to support at this stage. But I very much appreciate how Mr Braddock has drafted his amendment. We have come to a different conclusion to the Canberra Liberals. I really hope we are not dividing. I acknowledge the Canberra Liberals are not supporting it. We have the same concerns, but we will support it. Could we all just get on with it.

Amendments agreed to.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.01): I start by thanking all members for their contributions to the debate, and thank Mr Milligan for his work with the government on amendments to this motion.

I will quickly respond to some of the remarks in the debate. Mr Milligan said that the calls in 3(d) and 3(e) in the original motion, regarding a community path network condition indicator, were vague. Please see note 2 for some more explanation of the intention. Although I did not seek to vote against the amendment, understanding it would pass, it is disappointing to lose consideration of essential changes to keep our footpaths accessible around construction sites. It was not a commitment to legislate but just consider options. I think that would have been a contribution to what comes out of today's debate.

In the Labor and Liberal amendments, it is also disappointing to lose the costings calls. I think they would have been key pieces of information for this Assembly and our community. It is disappointing that 12 months—which is a long timeframe to prepare costings for delivery of the government's own Active Travel Plan—was seen as unreasonable. I note that the minister has been able to produce a costing for constructing a footpath on every residential street in the ACT in just three days. Many of her remarks—the parts that were not a history lesson, which was greatly appreciated—reflected on this call, which is not in the motion we are debating today—as did Mr Cocks in some of his friendly jabs—having been removed, not quietly but deliberately and constructively in response to feedback from both the government and the opposition. The aim was to get to a position on this motion that we could unite around. We have not quite landed that, but I accept that the Assembly is in some ways uniting around Mr Milligan's amendments, as well as Mr Braddock's amendments to an extent. Of course the key point with respect to footpaths on streets and pathways is, as reflected in Mr Braddock's remarks, that many members of our community do not have footpaths or a green pathway on their street. I think identifying and addressing those gaps would be of great value for informing our decisions about transport infrastructure in our city. We have lost a commitment to costing such an endeavour.

My concern with all these removals—although we have something of substance which I am looking forward to seeing pass, and I am looking forward to the government

reporting back in six months—is that we risk fulfilling Pedal Power’s original prophecy in February last year, when the Active Travel Plan was released. They said that, without timelines, a budget or targets, it is little more than a wish list the government does not seem committed to actually implementing. Mr Copland, who is now at the Conservation Council and was supportive of the original motion, said:

Sadly, in practice, without targets, an implementation plan or allocated funding, this document is more a wish list than an actual plan ... we fear it will end up sitting in a drawer gathering dust, making it potentially worth little more than the paper it is written on.

He also said:

... there is rightly a perception in the community that the Government is not committed to improving our clearly inadequate cycling infrastructure. It seems that for the ACT Government, producing the plan is the achievement, and delivering on it is secondary ...

I am not endorsing those comments today, because I do not think that is where we have landed with this motion. I think we have landed on some constructive steps forward. In that vein, I thank all members for their contributions and background work on developing a position in this motion in a very busy week. I thank Mr Braddock and the Greens for their ongoing work in this area, which he discussed, and I welcome their amendment. I see that as a positive addition to this motion and to the broader conversation about how we make our streets work for Canberrans. Again, I thank Ms Carrick, Mr Cain, Mr Cocks and Ms Lee for their contributions. I think I have touched on everyone who spoke. I look forward to working constructively and collaboratively with all members, and also with the minister and her office, on how we can continue reshaping our transport infrastructure priorities in an ambitious way to make the courageous forward-looking decisions today that will create the Canberra that we want for the future.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Schools—infrastructure and maintenance

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.06): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) ACT Labor promised \$50 million to undertake major expansion upgrades at Majura Primary School;
- (b) in handing down the 2025-2026 ACT Budget, the ACT Labor Government broke that promise and made clear they will instead provide \$20 million for Majura Primary School’s modernisation;
- (c) the Lyneham High School community has called on the ACT Government to replace the Lyneham School Gym which they claim was promised by ACT Labor; and
- (d) in handing down the 2024-2025 ACT Budget, the ACT Labor

Government chose not to replace the gym and changed their approach to instead refurbish the gym;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) in September 2022, the ACT Government tabled the Government response to report three of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, *Managing ACT school infrastructure*; and
- (b) in July 2024, the ACT Government tabled the Government response to report nine of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, *Inquiry into the future of school infrastructure in the ACT*; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) honour these promises which helped ACT Labor to be elected to government;
- (b) provide the Assembly with an update on the actions taken against each of the recommendations it accepted in the Government response to report three of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, *Managing ACT school infrastructure*;
- (c) provide the Assembly with an update on the actions taken against each of the recommendations it accepted in the Government response to report nine of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, *Inquiry into the future of school infrastructure in the ACT*; and
- (d) present to the Assembly a Forward Capital Works Program for all ACT public schools' maintenance and infrastructure for the remaining Assembly term.

Governments should keep their promises. If a government makes big promises for schools, they should be kept. This motion calls out this government for breaking their promises on schools and calls on them to honour these commitments that have helped elect them to government.

In the 2024 election, ACT Labor promised major expansion upgrades at Majura Primary School. The Lyneham High School community have called upon this government to replace their 65-year-old gym, which they say ACT Labor promised them. Both these major promises have now been broken.

There are plenty of promises on schools that this government has failed to deliver on time, but these two are particularly different. The Labor Party was happy to take them to the electorate; but, as we saw, once the votes came in, and the reality of Labor's budget mismanagement needed to be faced, the promises have been ripped up.

School infrastructure has long been a topic of debate in this place, and the subject of two inquiries in the past few years. This government should honour their promises and make it clear to this place exactly what they have been doing for school maintenance and infrastructure.

Turning first to the Majura school, in the 2024 election Labor promised a \$50 million expansion of Majura Primary School. In the first budget of the term, the Labor Party broke that promise. This government cut \$30 million out of the project and instead provided \$20 million worth of modernisation.

The convener of the Majura Primary School P&C expressed their disappointment. Speaking on ABC News on 18 August this year, they stated:

The school kitchen is closed because of mould. One of the bathrooms had to be renovated over the school break in a hurry because of mould. We've had flooding in the hall.

We were promised a significant investment by government, and we haven't seen the ground broken at all. What we have seen though is a lack of communication and a lack of consultation with our school community.

The justification used by the directorate for the breaking of this promise was that the school now had fewer projected enrolments. I quote from the ABC article on this topic from 15 August:

She said enrolment projections were revised down before the last election.

That is a pretty key point: the projections were put down before the last election. The minister knew full well, going into the election, that these enrolment statistics had been changed, but she did not change the announcement. She continued to hoodwink the community about what they were going to get, knowing full well that she was going to get through the election and say, "Aha! We already knew that the projections were down." They were very happy to spruik the project going into the election, basically conning the good people of Majura Primary School. They broke their promise.

With regard to Lyneham, a petition has been put before the Assembly calling on the ACT government to honour their promise to replace the Lyneham High School gym. Five hundred and sixty-two people have signed that petition, which outlines that Lyneham High School in its current state is not serving the needs of its community.

The education minister has been claiming that Labor never made such a commitment, but everybody else that you speak to, and certainly the FOI documents that I have seen, suggest differently. *Region Canberra* and a recent petition on this matter reference a new gym as a 2020 election commitment.

I accept that it is pretty inconvenient for the government now, and they are trying to step away from it. The reality is that this is a backflip. Again, it is a bit like the Majura one, where they hoodwinked the community into thinking they were going to get something; then they got through the election and changed the story.

They were going to get a new gym. Considerable work and assessment had been completed to make that a reality. It is pretty clear that a new gym is needed. On 20 May this year, records relating to Lyneham High School's new gym were released under FOI. Let me quote from some of those. Architecture firm SQC Group produced a scope change document for the new gym. It reads:

The existing gym building, which is not sufficient for sports, but will be repurposed for drama and visual arts tuition is perfectly located in close vicinity of the performing arts hall.

It goes on to say:

Furthermore, the repurposing of the existing gym building will allow the High School to create purpose-built highly customised spaces that are allowing the drama department and the visual arts cohort to grow to the next level.

I quote from the project brief, outlining the project background:

The Education Directorate has identified the current gymnasium as not fit for purpose. The gymnasium does not provide adequate amenities for covered physical education, which has limited most PE activities to take place on the school ovals.

That is from government documents released through FOI. There is also correspondence between the school principal and the directorate. These exchanges followed the decision not to build the gym. It reads:

The capacity challenge the school faces is now back on the table as the ministerial promise for a new gymnasium can no longer be our strategy.

The school is saying that the ministerial promise for a new gymnasium “can no longer be our strategy”. The minister was on the radio this morning saying, “Mr Hanson’s spreading furphies,” but her own school is saying that it was a ministerial promise, based on FOI documents. She is claiming that capacity is no longer a concern, but the principal clearly has a different view. I will continue to quote:

The school lacks spaces for us to meet together as a whole school community. The spaces we have can barely accommodate three year levels safely. This has an impact on school culture and the inability for us to hold a whole school assembly which are so important to building and maintaining a school spirit and culture.

This lack of facilities is impacting our students’ education. The letter goes on to say:

I am going to have significant trouble continuing a teaching and learning program during this time without the gym. I do not believe I have the capacity in the school to relocate staff/resources/equipment and classes.

It goes on to say:

It doesn’t have adequate roof height for volleyball nor the runoff space for other sports for it to be a competition standard facility in its current size ... The gym will never be a competition standard resource for school or community use.

It goes on to say:

We are cognisant of the safety concerns that will arise ...

The minister might try and say, “Look, there’s nothing that you can point to where we promised this.” I do not know whether she will or not, but the principal was hoodwinked and the community was hoodwinked. Everyone believed it was going to happen. The documents say that the ministerial commitment had been broken.

Just as with Majura, it is the same with Lyneham: you go to an election promising

something, making the school community believe that they are going to get something, at the end of the day; you get through to the other side of the election and you change it all. In the case of Majura, you changed it based on statistics that you knew about before the election. It is pretty disgraceful stuff.

Those two specific projects are an example of the way that the government is maintaining schools and developing infrastructure. Indeed, it has been so chronic that there have been two inquiries into school infrastructure by this Assembly over the last three or four years. The government has responded to those inquiries and recommendations. I think it is still pretty unclear as to where the government is at with regard to all the actions and recommendations, and the government responses to those inquiries.

That is why our “calls on” is to commit to those two projects that they have already said that they would—that is pretty reasonable—and to update the actions on those inquiries so that we know what the status is of all the work that has been done in the Assembly. We do not want to replicate it; we do not want to duplicate it. The work has been done. We just want an update on where all that work is at. There is also a call to provide a forward capital works program for ACT public schools for the remainder of the term.

I think it is reasonable that we get a clear picture and understanding of what the government is proposing and planning for schools moving forward. That is certainly what the union would like to see, and I know that is what school communities would like to see, so that they understand what is going to happen, or not going to happen, in their schools.

I have seen the government amendments, and I will not be supporting them—not surprisingly, because it is a complete rewrite and it just waters down all the “calls on”. It does not actually then have those three substantive elements, which is to do what they promised, to provide an update on the committee reports and to outline what the future infrastructure and maintenance program is. It just says “continue to make evidence-based and equitable decisions for the whole ACT public school system”.

If we trusted the government to do that, we probably would not need to be here. But as we have seen with the budget, and the motion that I moved a couple of weeks ago, if the Assembly does not get involved, we would have lost hundreds of jobs across our schools. Now we need to focus on the maintenance of our facilities.

I did hear Ms Berry on the radio this morning trying to debunk some of my assertions.

Ms Berry: You were debunking mine.

MR HANSON: We debunk each other's. In saying that she had never promised these upgrades at the school, I think it is pretty clear that that is not the case. She also said that she had never made any promise that there would never be any cuts. We debated that motion two weeks ago. We know that the government was planning to cut dozens and dozens of jobs. We were here; we heard that debate. But if you do not believe me, and I accept that some of you might sometimes question what I say, unfairly—

Members interjecting—

MR HANSON: I know; it is unfair. Let me quote from the union. What did the union say about that?

Ms Cheyne: You love quoting unions.

MR HANSON: Let the union adjudicate. The union said:

The government's intention is to achieve millions in savings by not re-engaging staff at the end of their temporary employment. There are more than 1500 casual and temporary staff in ACT Public Schools.

Coming back within budget would equate to slashing 470 teacher or 720 school assistant jobs ... over 77 schools ...

They described Ms Berry's statement that there would be no cuts in 2025 as "misleading". The head of the union said that Ms Berry's statement that there would be no cuts was "misleading". I will assert it here, and you can agree or disagree with me, but if the minister is going to say that there were no plans to cut, the union is calling those statements "misleading".

It is a pretty straightforward motion. The government promised some upgrades and, whether they did or not—the minister will say, "No, we never promised that;" I am sure she will say that—it is clear, from the school communities, the principals and the FOI documents, that those upgrades are desperately needed. It is clear with regard to Majura that she knew what was going on but she still hoodwinked the school. We know that we have had committee reports and a lot of work done in this place, and I think it is reasonable for us to ask: what is the status of the recommendations that the government has agreed to? It is a fair ask, isn't it? Lastly, give us an idea of what the forward maintenance and construction program is across our schools. That is a reasonable request for information.

It is a very reasonable motion. It is only calling on the government to do what, essentially, they have already committed to do, anyway, so they should be able to deliver on that. I look forward to the motion being supported.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.20): I thank Mr Hanson for his continued interest in our public schools and for his motion in the Assembly today. However, the government will not be supporting his motion today, and I am speaking today to set the record straight. I seek leave to move the amendments that have been circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MS BERRY: I move:

1. Omit all text in paragraph (1), substitute:

“(1) notes that:

(a) the ACT Government in the 2022-23 Budget announced a \$39.3 million

investment in Majura Primary School for an expansion of 300 places and modernisation. This was subsequently topped up to a total of \$51.9 million in the 2024-25 Budget to account for cost escalation;

- (b) prior to the 2024 ACT election, the Majura Primary School community expressed concern about the expansion plans, and the government placed the project on hold;
- (c) following 2024 ACT election, new enrolment projections showed that the growth previously anticipated was no longer forecast;
- (d) based on the new information, the ACT Government made the responsible decision to revise the project scope and budget. The project will now be focussed on modernisation, not expansion;
- (e) the ACT Government has consulted with the school community during terms two and three on their priorities for modernisation, and a listening report will be released early in term four. Government will then consider the community's priorities for modernisation before finalising the project scope and budget;
- (f) ACT Labor in the 2020 ACT election, promised to upgrade the Lyneham High School gym;
- (g) in the 2024-25 Budget the ACT Government honoured this commitment by investing \$5.7 million in refurbishing the Lyneham High School Gym; and 478 No 34—25 September 2025
- (h) the project is in the planning stage, with consultation occurring with the school on priorities.”.

2. Omit paragraph (3)(a), substitute:

“(a) continue to make evidence-based and equitable decisions for the whole ACT public school system.”.

The ACT government is committed to having inclusive, equitable and high-quality public schools in the ACT. Over the last five years, the ACT government has invested more than \$112 million in asset renewal projects across all of our public schools.

The ACT public school infrastructure portfolio is diverse, and it has both new and very old schools. Members may be aware that Canberra's oldest public school, Telopea Park School, celebrated its 100th birthday in 2023. Our newest school, which is set to open from the start of next year, will be starting its first year, as part of a strong and united public school system. Across our system, we have over 50,000 students learning every day across 92 public schools—93, when Strathnairn opens.

My amendments serve to set the record straight. I will provide important context to all the factual information in responding to Mr Hanson's motion. I know he has created his own truth on this matter, but I want to add the extra information, so that we can settle the ledger on that. He may not agree. That is okay; I do not agree with him. That is what my amendments seek to draw out in the Assembly, in order to put some factual information out there.

In the 2022-23 budget, the ACT government announced a \$39.3 million investment into the Majura Primary School for an expansion of 300 places—people will recall that commitment—as well as a modernisation. This was subsequently topped up to a total

of \$51.9 million in the 2024-25 budget, to account for cost escalation. Everybody will know that that is happening across the board, across all infrastructure projects.

Prior to the 2024 election, the Majura Primary School community expressed concerns about the expansion plans. I listened to the community. I attended a Majura P&C meeting. I responded to the P&C meeting and wrote a letter advising that the government would place a pause on that project.

Following the 2024 ACT election, new enrolment projections showed that the growth previously anticipated was no longer forecast. Based on the new information, the ACT government made the responsible decision to revise the project scope and the budget, so that it would now be focused on a modernisation project and not on an expansion project.

I absolutely understand that some community members were disappointed by this; I get it. There were also a number of members of the school community who were concerned about the expansion program for the school and who were not completely satisfied with that, either.

The government and the Education Directorate work hard to try and make sure that we meet the needs of every single school. I recognise that not every person will be happy all the time. We do our best to ensure that students in our public schools get the best possible education and that our school infrastructure meets the needs of every student, as well as teachers and school principals.

It would be irresponsible of the government, and of me, to not respond to a projected change in enrolments at Majura and proceed with an unneeded expansion. It was no longer required.

More recently, iCBR and the Education Directorate have been conducting consultations and listening sessions with the Majura Primary School community, and many of the Majura Primary School community have participated in these conversations. These have been attended by teachers, school students, parents, P&C members, board members and neighbours of the school grounds. A student workshop was held earlier this month which was attended by students from the school in years 2 to 5, and they have shared their own perspectives and ideas on the kinds of things that they would like to see as part of a modernisation project at Majura Primary School.

Some of the initial feedback has been to prioritise the upgrading of the school hall, upgrades to outdoor areas and green spaces, upgrades to learning spaces and bathrooms, and upgrades to heating and cooling. That is just the initial response, but I will take the opportunity now to thank the community for their engagement so far and the time that they have taken to be involved in these consultation sessions. I am looking forward to hearing about more of the ideas in the listening report that will be released early in term 4. I am happy to provide that to members of the Assembly for their interest at that point, although I imagine that it will be pretty much publicly available to everyone, anyway.

The government will then consider the community's priorities for the modernisation before finalising the project scope and budget. The ACT government is committed to investing in the modernisation of Majura Primary School to ensure that staff and

students have access to great facilities and that it supports high-quality teaching and learning.

I would now like to set the record straight about Lyneham High School. In 2020, in the ACT election, ACT Labor promised to upgrade the Lyneham High School gym—not to build a new gym, but to upgrade the existing gymnasium. I have heard Ms Lee say in this place that the Labor Party made this promise, and I have heard Mr Hanson say that as well. That is not true. Yes, it is true that a new gymnasium was discussed as part of an infrastructure project for Lyneham High School. The decision that was made in the 2024-25 budget was to invest \$5.1 million in refurbishing the existing gymnasium.

As I have said, in answer to questions in this place and in response to petitions and the like, I am very happy to meet with the Lyneham school community about their aspirations, as I am with every other school community about what they want to see in their school community, and work through the funding that goes into the public school system and perhaps future government decisions that might be made for those kinds of refurbishments.

The ACT government will make a submission to the inquiry that is responding to the petition that has now been handed down to a committee. I am very happy to participate in that inquiry in any way. As I said, the ACT government has committed to refurbish the Lyneham High School gymnasium and is working to deliver this outcome for the school and community.

I will reflect for a moment on the comments that Mr Hanson made around documents or expectations that individuals in the school might have had at a particular point in time, and I understand that. However, the commitment that was made by the government was to refurbish the existing gymnasium.

The investment will transform the existing gymnasium to support curriculum delivery through improvements within the gym footprint which will provide an upgraded facility for the school, which will also be available for the community to access outside school hours. The project is currently in the planning phase and consultation has already occurred with the school to identify different curriculum-driven priorities. The next step for the project will be bringing on board a specialist to develop the gym upgrade design.

The ACT government is looking forward to delivering this kind of infrastructure renewal project for the Lyneham High School community. As I said, I am absolutely happy to meet with the Lyneham High School community about their aspirations for their school going forward. I look forward to working with them on this particular project as well.

Finally, I want to address parts (3)(b) and (c) of Mr Hanson's motion, which call on the ACT government to provide an update on the recommendations accepted in two previous committee reports. Across those two inquiries, the ACT government agreed in full or in principle to 44 recommendations. For the record, members of the public and members of the Assembly can access status updates on each of these recommendations in the Education Directorate's annual reports every year—all publicly available. The next status update will be included in the 2024-25 annual report, which will be tabled next month.

Investment in public education infrastructure and infrastructure delivery is vital to providing great places for young people to learn. The ACT government has a significant pipeline of ACT public education infrastructure investment, both planned and currently being delivered. Major upgrades and new ACT public schools are being delivered by Infrastructure Canberra, while small to medium upgrades are being delivered by the Education Directorate through the asset renewal program. This program is already delivering a range of upgrades across our schools, with a strong focus on inclusivity.

Through the inclusive works program, making targeted upgrades is an important part of meeting the needs of individual students. These investments have increased significantly in recent years, noting that they are demand-driven and almost always prioritised to support young people and to meet their individual needs. Generally, this needs to occur at the start of the school year, once enrolment is known. For some of our older schools, which, unfortunately, were built without inclusion in mind, these adjustments at times are required to be bespoke, and may change having regard to the needs across different schools, depending on the needs of individual students.

Asset condition assessments are occurring at schools as part of a rolling program. The information gathered through these assessments informs strategic planning data, information on infrastructure investments, as well as maintenance to ensure that schools have safe and suitable facilities. All of this information is gathered through schools and school communities and will continue to inform the government's investment of \$150 million for all school infrastructure upgrades during this term of government. That also includes the \$30 million for heating and cooling upgrades, which will be prioritised by need.

Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to building and maintaining learning environments that are safe, inclusive and sustainable for every student today and into the future.

I recognise that the make-up of this Assembly means that there will be times when individuals and others will call on the government to deliver something at a specific place, perhaps a specific school, and that need might not be required at that school, but at another school in the system. That means we will need to divert resources that are needed across the system to a school, as directed by this Assembly. I think that would be unfortunate, and it would require me and the Education Directorate to make decisions that are not responsible and do not equitably meet the needs of public schools that are part of our public school system.

I recognise that MLAs in this place who represent different parts of the city will want to advocate for their own constituents, but I am the minister with responsibility for schools across all of our city, and I have to make sure that every school gets what they need based on the needs of every single student that attends those schools.

I would respectfully ask that MLAs take into consideration when we are debating these kinds of projects that these decisions are made to ensure that every school gets what they need. It will not be all at the same time or all at once, and it will not necessarily be in the timeframe that perhaps schools or members of this place might like. It is done based on informed data and expertise within the Education Directorate and iCBR, in

consultation with our school communities. That is where we make these commitments, and that is where the work goes to.

I will leave it there. I have used up more time than I usually would, when speaking to these motions. I hope that people will take my amendments as they are, that they will agree with them and that we can move on to get this work done.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.34): The ACT Greens will be supporting Mr Hanson's motion. As the ACT Greens education spokesperson, a lot of the issues this motion addresses have come directly through my office as well. Majura and Lyneham are very good examples of where better communication, consultation and follow-through from the government and Education Directorate are really needed.

I beg Mr Hanson's indulgence, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I promise the following rant is relevant to his motion. We definitely need a deep and meaningful discussion on aging school infrastructure, especially in my electorate of Brindabella. In Tuggeranong, we are facing a bit of a looming infrastructure crisis in our schools. Our schools are old. Even with good, regular maintenance, they are at the age where we need to start talking about the more in-depth retrofits of schools because they are no longer fit for purpose.

I have been approached by Tuggeranong public school parents, who are really concerned that there is not even really space in the corridors for kids to move around safely and comfortably. Some have had their libraries repurposed for classroom space. A big concern I hear all the time is that kids are boiling during summer. Either their aircon unit is busted and has not been fixed or the infrastructure for it was just not there in the first place, and natural ventilation is not a proper substitute. I will be the first to acknowledge that the ACT government has heeded some of these recommendations to fix heating and cooling units and audit school infrastructure against those standards. These were recommendations in the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion's two reports into school infrastructure. They have started that work, but I am also mindful that, for every bit of time that takes, a fair few kids are graduating under substandard infrastructure.

I believe I share some of Mr Hanson's frustration that has led to this motion. We do seem to do successive inquiries, producing report after report, and they more or less say similar things. Longer-term planning, better consultation and earlier identification of emerging issues, among other asks, return again and again. Even when the government might be taking action to address these areas as they come up, the issues seem to consistently re-emerge.

I would like to take this opportunity to bang on about the school capacity formula, in particular, because I think it is a fitting case study, especially for Majura Primary and Lyneham High. I draw members' attention to the former Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion's recommendation in the *Inquiry into the future of school infrastructure in the ACT* report—that is the second one—which says:

The committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a school capacity formula that more accurately represents usage of schools and responds to existing crowding issues accordingly.

The ACT Council of P&C Associations has expressed concerns with capacity issues. The Australian Education Union's submission discusses at length the problems with our current capacity formula, and their submission is still up on the ECI committee website. I really encourage anyone listening in to have a read of it.

The current school capacity formula appears to simply be classroom space x 25 students. What that means in practice is it excludes halls, libraries and other non-teaching spaces like staffrooms—and you can start to see why staffrooms are usually four desks stacked on top of one another. I agree that we need to re-examine the formula used to calculate school capacity. We need to understand, practically, what a crowded school feels like. I share the AEU's concern that schools that are currently not considered near capacity may actually feel and be far more crowded and congested than we might estimate from numbers due to the factors that are not being picked up in the current formula.

Page 23 of the AEU's submission to that inquiry lists a number of schools who are technically considered "under capacity" but are consistently reporting crowding issues. Interestingly enough, among them is Majura Primary. Capacity was one of the main reasons cited by the ACT government in their decision to walk back on their \$50 million school expansion. Quoting from an ABC article:

The government told Majura Primary School in Canberra's inner north it would instead get a \$20 million modernisation project owing to fewer projected enrolments.

Similarly, the petitioners behind the Lyneham High petition we saw earlier in the year were pretty clear that—and quoting petitioners directly:

The Lyneham High School student body (1061 students) is too large for the current school facility to adequately accommodate, harming the students' ability to learn. For instance, the existing gym, hall and Lyneham Performing Arts Centre all lack the capacity to hold full school assemblies.

I am really glad that Mr Hanson's motion asks the government to provide an update on progress against the recommendations in the two committee reports into school infrastructure last term, because the government did agree in principle to that recommendation to redesign our school capacity formula. Yet, since then, the government has made decisions to walk back commitments on school infrastructure based on this flawed capacity formula. I am sure there are plenty more recommendations from those two committee inquiries that, if honoured in spirit and actioned accordingly, would have led to better outcomes for school infrastructure across the ACT.

With respect to the Labor government's amendments, unfortunately, the ACT Greens will not be able to support them today. I appreciate that they provide some more detail on the timeline for the Majura Primary upgrades, and I am grateful that the minister was able to go to a few of those details in her speech. My main points of concern are with the new proposed 1(b), which would say that, prior to the 2024 ACT election, the Majura Primary School community expressed concerns about the expansion plans, and the government placed the project on hold. Relevant information that these amendments

have not provided is that the concerns expressed by the Majura community were that they had not actually been properly consulted on the upgrades. Mr Rattenbury and I spoke to them at the time and were grateful for a briefing from the minister's office, but the community's concerns were that they were handed a plan that did not look like it was going to meet their students' needs and this plan seemed to have been presented to them like it was a done deal.

These amendments also, somewhat problematically I think, remove Mr Hanson's reference to the fact that the roughly \$50 million committed to the expansion and modernisation at Majura was revised to just \$20 million. It is a fairly substantial reduction. The new 1(d) talks about the ACT government making a responsible decision to revise the scope of the project and budget. Whether that decision was responsible is clearly contested, because we are here debating it today, and the ACT Greens certainly continue to remain concerned that the government has walked back on a project that might actually be needed by the community and was in fact promised to them.

Similarly, the new 1(g) says the ACT government honoured their commitment to Lyneham High by investing \$5.7 million in refurbishing their gym. There is a live committee inquiry into a petition sponsored by my colleague Mr Rattenbury and lodged by Lyneham High students and the school community, at least 562 of them, who appear to strongly believe that Labor's election commitment was not honoured. I do not seek to pre-empt any findings made by the committee; I merely wish to make the point that the fulfillment of Labor's commitment is a contested point. Finally, the intent to take 3(a), in which this Assembly asks the government to honour their commitments to school communities, and replace it with a bit of a business-as-usual approach that ignores the lingering obligation of those promises is against the original spirit of the motion.

I thank Mr Hanson for bringing this motion forward. I thank all members for a productive debate. No matter the outcome, I hope that we secure better outcomes for Canberra students as a result.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.42): I am going to begin by noting the comment from Miss Nuttall just now of "just \$20 million". On what planet is \$20 million just a "just"? There is no public school in Tuggeranong that will cavil at receiving \$20 million worth of modernisation funding or a refurbished gym—not one. There is no public school in Tuggeranong that would be unhappy to receive \$500,000 in additional funding or even a new handball court. Wanniasa school's P&C and board have a list of urgent needs. A competition standard gym is not among them. Caroline Chisholm High School is the same. Erindale College is now the largest public school by enrolment in Tuggeranong but not in infrastructure footprint.

Be that as it may, part of what we are debating today is whether an investment in Majura Primary School over the next decade, which will amount to \$25,873 of investment per expected enrolled child in 2035, is enough or whether the school and its students in a decade's time could not and should not do without \$67,141 worth of investment per enrolled child in 2035. This is the part of Mr Hanson's motion that particularly exercises me, and that is why I am clambering up on the Werner-Gibbings high horse this afternoon.

In 2021, Majura Primary School was educating 718 students. In 2022, it was educating 723 students. That year, the ACT government committed \$39.3 million to expand Majura Primary School because the available pre-COVID data on Majura's enrolment trend suggested that it would be educating more than 1,000 students in 2035. At 25 kids a class, call it 12 more classrooms. This figure was updated in the 2024-25 budget to \$51.9 million due to increased construction costs. Where then were the howls of outrage when, based on a change in the data, the government adjusted its commitment and increased the funding allocation? If none, why now this disappointment when the government is following the same process of assessing new data, examining the evidence base and adjusting its commitment?

In 2025, Majuro Primary School is educating 692 fortunate students. This year's data, post-COVID, indicates that the primary school will be educating 773 students in 2035. It is 81 more students than this year. So the data has changed. The school's expansion requirements are much reduced and the government is adjusting its commitment. That sounds fair. Yet this motion dismisses the evidence base and demands—because \$20 million is just not enough—that \$51.9 million be spent on the school regardless of the new data and at the expense of other public schools in the ACT. I owe my place in this Assembly to my education in Canberra's public schools and even I think this demand is over the top. It sounds unfair.

There is an argument being made that the ACT government has reneged on its commitment. Technically, that is arguable, but governance is not a game of technicalities; it is a process of continuous adjustment. Commitments based on one set of facts should be revisited when those facts change. My less technical, more realistic, argument is that the ACT government's decision to reduce the amount of funding to be spent on Majura Primary School is not betrayal; it is a correction based on data. The original updated commitment of \$51.9 million to expand the school was made to meet expected circumstances that no longer apply. The revised investment, \$20 million for modernisation, is not a downgrade; it is a recalibration based on a cost-benefit analysis, fiscal responsibility, actual need and fairness. I will say again: there is no public school community in Tuggeranong that would be upset by just \$20 million worth of modernisation upgrades.

Start with the cost benefit. That is a concept familiar to our opponents. Needs must be measured, assessed and responded to sensibly. The original funding was for a physical expansion of Majura Primary School's facilities—more classrooms, more buildings, a bigger footprint—but the enrolment projections no longer justify the scale of that funding. Modernisation will deliver higher utility per dollar quicker. The \$20 million allocation targets infrastructure every student at Majura needs—heating, cooling, lighting, digital access, safety systems, getting rid of the mould and fixing the kitchen. These upgrades will improve Majura student learning outcomes immediately. They will reduce maintenance costs. They will increase energy efficiency. They will serve the entire school population in the short, medium and long terms.

There is another good news story along with these benefits. The \$31.9 million that will not be spent unnecessarily on Majura Primary School is not \$31.9 million that has been saved by the ACT government; it is \$31.9 million that will be spent on the ACT's education network. It is \$31.9 million that will be used to fund improvements to other ACT public schools, other schools facing equally acute pressures. Thankfully, this

evidence-based adjustment goes some way to preserving a sense of balance in the ACT government's education funding decisions, a sense of balance that would be fractured by spending \$51.9 million on one school that does not and will not need it all.

The ACT government has not abandoned Majura Primary; it has reengaged with it more intelligently, more efficiently and more fairly. The \$20 million investment is real and it is targeted. It is also more defensible to principals, teachers, students and parents of students at all the other ACT public schools not receiving \$20 million worth of modernisation and upgrades. It is an adjustment that better reflects the values of the ACT government—evidence-based decision-making, fiscal common sense and equitable service delivery.

The students at Majura Primary School will benefit more from modernised facilities than from an expansion; the community will benefit more from responsible education budgeting than from symbolic spending; and the ACT will benefit more from fairness in public schools, rather than favouritism.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.50): I rise today to speak on the urgent need for greater transparency in our school infrastructure planning processes. So I support Mr Hanson's motion which seeks a forward capital works program for all ACT school maintenance and infrastructure. Recommendation 26 of report No 9 recommends that:

... the ACT Government better publicise school infrastructure processes to ensure transparency around decision-making...

Our communities deserve clarity around how decisions are made, especially when those decision impact on our children's access to education and the liveability of our suburbs.

At present, there is a lack of publicly available information about the criteria used to determine school locations and upgrades and how it is applied—what assumptions are being made, are population forecasts accurate and up to date and, crucially, what consultation is occurring with the Planning Directorate to ensure that school development aligns with broader urban planning goals? How can we know whether Stromlo High School is in greater need of an upgrade than another school?

I am particularly concerned about the decision to build a "super school" near the hospital in Garran. This area already suffers from serious traffic congestion and expanding the school will only exacerbate the problem. Meanwhile, children on the other side of the valley still lack access to a local school they can walk to. This raises serious equity concerns. How do we ensure transparency and equity in these decisions? How can the public engage meaningfully when the process is unclear?

I call on the government to address recommendation 26 and publicise how they made their decisions, including the criteria used, the data relied upon and the agencies consulted. Our communities deserve to be informed and our children deserve schools that are accessible, safe and well planned.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.52): I am speaking now on behalf of Ms Lee. I thank my colleague Mr Hanson for bringing this important motion to the Assembly. School facilities need to provide space to learn, resources for specialist subjects and ongoing

maintenance programs, but the Labor government has never met this challenge. For years, issues have been raised by parents, teachers and school staff about the lack of suitable heating and cooling, substandard toilet facilities and toxic materials in our schools. School infrastructure in the ACT has been the subject of three inquiries in recent years: by the ACT Auditor-General in 2019 and by the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion in 2022 and 2024. The 2019 Auditor-General's report found that the majority of repairs and maintenance managed by schools is reactive maintenance rather than the preferred and more cost-effective planned maintenance. During the most recent Assembly committee inquiry, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations raised ongoing concerns about the ACT government's school infrastructure program. They said:

In particular, we feel that the government should make a greater commitment in the area of school infrastructure to ensure that:

- schools are accessible places for all;
- capacity pressures are addressed; and
- older school infrastructure is refurbished to provide high quality learning environments and amenities for all.

The Australian Education Union's submission to last year's budget said:

AEU members go to work every day to experience unsanitary conditions, unworkable extreme temperatures, mould and rot, exposed electrical wires, and pest faeces.

I am sure no-one in this place, not even those across the chamber, would say this is acceptable, but, for over two decades, the Labor government has consistently failed to manage school infrastructure and has failed Canberrans. If we look at the two examples Mr Hanson's motion mentions, Lyneham High School and Majura Primary School, both in my electorate of Kurrajong, we see no better example of the government's failure when it comes to managing school infrastructure. No-one disagrees that the current gym at Lyneham High School is not fit for purpose and cannot adequately service the growing number of students at the school. Lyneham High School is close to capacity, currently sitting at 98 per cent. The current gym does not meet current building safety standards, does not meet the demands of the growing school and broader Inner North community and does not allow for competition-grade events to be held there.

As I said, no-one disputes this, but once again we see the ACT Labor government taking the local community for granted—taking Canberrans for granted. Without any consultation with either the school or the broader local community and without a satisfactory explanation, they have back-tracked once again and, instead of replacing the gym, they have decided to refurbish the old gym. They have admitted, in response to my questions on notice, that this refurbishment will not allow the gym to be used for competition-level events, which is something that the school and the broader Inner North community have been calling for. The minister also said in her response to my questions: "Current projections indicate that Inner North high school environments can continue to be met through existing capacity." Given that Lyneham High School is close to capacity, I am gobsmacked that the minister can make this statement. I am pleased that there is going to be an inquiry into the recent petition around this issue, and I look forward to participating in that inquiry.

Majura Primary School is another school that has been let down by the government. This is a school that has seen a significant increase in enrolments and the school is overcrowded. Parents have reported that their children have nowhere to play, health checks are being carried out in the preschool office because there is no other space available, and children have to do work in the principal's office. Back in 2022, the school was promised a major expansion project to accommodate the growth in enrolments. This project included a new hall, classrooms and administration buildings, and upgrades to existing facilities, but only two years later the government reduced the scope of the project, removing the new hall and making other changes.

At the time, the local school community raised their concerns about the lack of communication and consultation over the revised scope, which is something we see from the government time and time again. However, we now see the government have downgraded this project once again. Instead of committing to an expansion project, they have downgraded it to a modernisation project with a reduced budget, again with little communication and consultation with the school community. We have yet to see the full details of what this expansion project actually contains. When I met with representatives from the school community recently, they raised concerns about the lack of community consultation once again. This is not good enough. Our students, parents and teachers deserve high-quality school facilities. Sadly, this is not what they are getting from the government.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.58): I thank Mr Hanson for bringing this motion forward today and advocating for two schools in the electorate of Kurrajong, and, more broadly, for school infrastructure across the ACT. I could not find anything to amend. The motion looks great in its current form, so I am very happy. I will not support the government's amendment to the motion.

I do not want to speak on this for too long—I spoke on Majura Primary School during the budget debate—but note that both of these projects were due to have commenced some time ago. Of course, that has created frustration within the school community, among affected children and families, and prospective students as well. My conversations with members of the school community have indicated that it was not that Majura Primary School did not want the school to be expanded; it was that they were not happy with the nature of the consultation that had been undertaken to that point. Miss Nuttall indicated this as well. So of course they are disappointed and frustrated to have seen the funding pulled from that project and the scope of it reduced.

In relation to Lyneham High school, the school community, based on my conversations with members of it, understood the commitment to be a new double-court gym, with the existing gym being converted to classrooms. We have heard since that there will be competition-standard flooring but in a gym that is not competition-standard size.

We have the inquiry ahead of us to understand exactly how we got to the point where the government's understanding of their commitment and the school community's understanding of that commitment are so divergent. I look forward to being part of that inquiry and hearing evidence from all involved.

Again, I want to keep my remarks brief. I thank Mr Hanson for bringing this motion

forward today. I look forward to seeing similar motions in the future.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.00): I will also keep my remarks brief as Ms Nuttall has articulated the Greens' position very clearly and articulately. What I want to say, though, is that—not dissimilar to Mr Emerson—I have met with the school community at Majura on quite a few occasions. This is why we cannot support the government's amendment, because, in part 1(b), it whitewashes the community's experience a bit. I went back over my notes this afternoon in preparation for this debate. At various times, the school community was promised consultation and then it was put off and put off. That is where the real frustration has come from. The minister said, "We promised certain things. We did this and we did that, and we did not promise these things." The community has felt really unclear. There are engaged parents who want to be positive and want to contribute. They are smart people and they understand things can change, but there has been the constant process of being put off, uncertainty, rumours, and all sorts of other things. It has been a really frustrating process for the communities involved.

I am interested in the minister's comments about what was and was not promised for Lyneham. There is the gap between what the minister was suggesting and what the community seems to understand was put to them. I just saw that the minister has had documents brought down. We are probably going to get another intervention. I would be really interested to understand how we got such a big gap between what the community understands they were promised and what the minister thinks they were promised. I look forward to an explanation of that.

The lesson from all this is to seek to engage communities better and in a more timely manner, and sharing what the government has available at the time and what can be communicated, because that will make a significant difference to community sentiment and frustration around these projects.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (5.02), by leave: I would like to very briefly speak for a second time on this. Mr Rattenbury, I have an education policy position statement for the 2020 election from ACT Labor. That speaks clearly about upgrading the gymnasium at Lyneham High School. It is on page 4. I will table a copy of that document for the Assembly. Just to be clear, that promise was never made. I do not know why the Lyneham High School community felt that they had been promised a new gymnasium. It has been continually perpetuated by the Greens political party and by some in the Liberal Party as well.

Mr Braddock: The Greens political party?

MS BERRY: You did it today.

MR BRADDOCK: We're going to get cranky when you call us the Greens political party.

MS BERRY: Well, you are, aren't you? You are or you aren't.

THE SPEAKER: Ms Berry, are you speaking through the chair or not?

MS BERRY: Through you: you are or you aren't. I get that it is all about muddying the waters and making people feel uncertain about commitments that the government is making—telling everyone that everyone has been reneging on promises that were made. I did not, and I have said clearly that I did not. I have apologised to the Majura school community, which was why I paused the process last year, following my multiple conversations with them—and I understand that they were frustrated—in order to go through a clearer process with them.

To be clear, as I said before, not everybody will be happy with the decisions that the government makes or the investments that are made within our public school system at particular individual schools, although some schools will be very happy to receive certain upgrades, expansions and the like to their school communities. But what I do not accept is the implication that I or the government have said something that we did not say. I hold my hand to my heart and say: I know what I said. If I say something wrong or different to people's understandings, I always apologise for it. I get myself into a bit of heat for it as well. I would take that as I would deserve to if that were the case, but on this occasion no promise was made to Lyneham. I understand they thought otherwise. It is simply not the case.

Regarding Majura, I agree: the consultation process was flawed, which is why I forced the process back in 2024. That started again. I understand, from what I have heard more recently—I have not heard anything different—that the process has been welcomed. There has been a lot of engagement from the school and the broader community. If you have heard differently, then please let me know so that I can follow it up. I can only take any action if I know about it. Do not say things and then not follow up with me, because I cannot do anything about it unless you tell me.

I am a bit frustrated because I do not like people telling me that I have said things that I did not say. Anyway, I hope that clears things up. I am happy for you to make your closing remarks, Mr Hanson, which I am sure will be awesome.

I present the following paper:

Education Policy Position Statement 2020—ACT Labor.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.06): Going to the amendments, and in wrapping up the debate, I will respond to some of the comments that have been made. With Majura, I think the minister accepts that they were told one thing and the government is now delivering another, and I think she also accepts that, as a consequence, the community is upset. That is our point.

With Lyneham, the minister said that a new gym was discussed. It is clear that, in the process, a significant number of the Lyneham community, staff and parents, believed that they were getting a new gym and, understandably, through miscommunication, intentional or not—the minister assures us it was not—they are understandably pretty upset about that.

With regard to the other “calls on” in the motion, we have said, “Update us on the recommendations of those committee inquiries.” We have also said, “Let us know

what's going on with the forward program of upgrades." The point I would make is that, just with these two schools, there is a real amount of confusion and misinformation about what is going on.

Surely, if the government were to say, "This is where we're at with the recommendations, and this is where we're at with forward works and maintenance," it would help to address some of this; otherwise we are flying blind. We are scrabbling for bits of information, holding things together, and it is a case of "he said, she said". Part of what we are trying to do here is to achieve some clarity so that we understand what the government's position is, the status of addressing the recommendations coming out of committee inquiries, as well as what the plan and the forward works are, so that we have it on the table and we can understand what is going on.

It is inconsistent for the government to say, "You should have known, but we're not going to tell you." We are saying, "There's confusion here. Certainly, school communities heard one thing, but you won't tell us what your plans are." I think it would help if the government were to provide that information that we have asked for.

Once again, I thank my mates the Greens for their support and the—

Member interjecting—

MR HANSON: I know. Miss Nuttall apologised for going into a dissertation about ageing school infrastructure. I agree with you, 100 per cent. If you go back and read my quite excellent paper, released in 2021—do you remember that one? You were probably working for the previous Greens spokesperson at that stage. "Bringing out the best in every child": do you remember that one? Ms Berry liked it. If you go to point 5, it is about fixing overcrowded schools and ageing infrastructure. I agree that, across the board, there is a significant problem that needs to be addressed.

This motion today is not just about broken promises at two particular schools. That is an example of the misinformation and misunderstanding, a lack of understanding, across school communities, and even in this place. What is going on? Just let us know.

Mr Werner-Gibbins asked the question: when is \$20 million not enough? Well, \$20 million is not enough when you have promised \$50 million. If you say to a school community, "We're giving you \$50 million because that's what you need," and then you only give them \$20 million, that is when it is not enough.

He went on to say how desperate his Tuggeranong school community was for anything—just the scraps. "We'd take the scraps." "\$500,000 would be just a miracle." That is my point, isn't it? That is the point that Miss Nuttall was making: yes, the schools are underfunded. Yes, they are run down. They are degraded. Yes, they do need the scraps. Our point, which Mr Werner-Gibbins accidentally made so eloquently for us, is that there is a desperate need for additional funding.

He then said, "Technically, Mr Hanson's correct." Technically, it was a broken promise. It is Orwellian. It is not a broken promise; it is a correction. When is it a broken promise and when is it a correction? It is—what did he call it?—a recalibration. Is that what we are saying—that something is a recalibration? In fact, he said that not giving

them that \$30 million is about fairness. This is something out of 1984. You rip \$30 million out of a school, and the local member comes in here and says, “We’re doing this because it’s about fairness.” George Orwell would be proud.

Ms Carrick made some pretty useful points as well, in that we do need information and clarity about what is occurring. That is one of the recommendations that came out of those committee reports. If we have more clarity about the decision-making process and about where we are at with school infrastructure, maintenance and upgrades, we could probably avoid some of the discussions we have had today.

Turning to Mr Emerson, I was disappointed that there was no amendment. He said there was no meaningful reason for an amendment, but I have to say that has not stopped him in the past. I am not sure whether it was because of my intervention yesterday that he decided that today there would not be a pointless, grandstanding amendment, but I am disappointed that I did not see one today. We could have had a bit of fun with that. I do thank him for his support and recognise that he has been advocating for the two schools in his electorate—Majura and Lyneham.

Finally, I support Mr Rattenbury’s comment that there has been a whitewashing of the community’s expectations. They thought something was happening, and it is not going to happen. Whether the minister says it was deliberately misleading or not deliberately misleading, if you are there as a teacher or a parent, you probably do not care. If you thought you were going to get something, and now you are not, you can understand why they are bitterly frustrated about that.

I also want to thank Mr Cain for bringing forward the comments from Ms Lee. I know that Ms Lee has been both a strong advocate for school maintenance and a participant in the inquiries that occurred, and has articulated the situation very well. She has also been a strong advocate for the two schools in her electorate that are the subject of the debate.

Once again, I thank members for their support. I would say to the minister, regardless of the arguments about Majura and Lyneham, that, with the three final points in the “calls on”, it would be very useful if we got an update and we do not have to wait for annual reports and scratch through bits of detail. Provide us with a consolidated view of the recommendations of those inquiries and provide us with an outline of what this government is going to do with regard to all schools in the ACT when it comes to maintenance and infrastructure. I think we have a right to know, and I know that parents, teachers and school communities would love to know.

I appreciate the support, and I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Amendments negatived.

Original question 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 the presentation of papers in the routine of business today be noted.

Independent review into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system—government response

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.15): I rise to speak about the government’s interim response to the Jumbunna review.

The government remains committed to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT criminal justice system, including through meeting its targets under the Closing the Gap agreement, and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028.

As part of that commitment, the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, from the University of Technology Sydney, was engaged to conduct an independent review into over-representation. I am pleased, in tabling the papers earlier today, to have presented the ACT government’s interim response to Jumbunna’s final report, which was published on 30 July 2025, a copy of which has been tabled today.

In developing this report, the Jumbunna institute undertook extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and organisations, as well as non-Aboriginal organisations with First Nations programs and staff.

I thank each and every person who contributed to the Jumbunna review. I recognise that this process is not easy. Each person who contributed has brought cultural knowledge and lived experience that cannot be replicated by government agencies or external experts. These contributions, individually and collectively, lay bare the multifaceted and interconnected drivers of over-representation, including intergenerational trauma, systemic institutional racism and lack of cultural safety.

Talking about the justice system often means revisiting pain—pain from past injustices, from discrimination and from loss. I also reflect that some of the recommendations in this report are simply not new, and that there is inherent harm in having to share the same experiences to reach the same conclusions and recommendations, when arguably, and in many cases perhaps certainly, implementation of these recommendations is what would have avoided the experiences in the first place. We are deeply grateful for the strength of those who are willing to speak, and we commit to hearing and responding to what has been shared.

The 99 recommendations in the final report include specific and, in many cases, structural issues that require careful and coordinated action across the whole of government, including corrective services, community supports, policing, courts and sentencing, the administration of bail, youth justice, child protection, and education.

The interim response reaffirms the ACT government’s commitment to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to reduce over-

representation in the criminal justice system. The ACT government will prioritise working with members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to develop appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led governance arrangements that can oversee the prioritisation and implementation of recommendations, including working with the Elected Body and with relevant Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

I do appreciate that this interim response is a little unusual. This, together with the regular reporting on the recommendations, as we work through responding to them, reflects the interrelated nature of recommendations, the need for genuine coordination across government, and that many recommendations cannot proceed without others first being implemented. I am hopeful that this rather unique approach that we will take will provide transparency on the progress of implementation while we go about this significant undertaking across government to achieve coordinated systemic and transformational reform.

Once again, I thank all individuals, community organisations and government agencies who have generously contributed to the important work of the review. Your contributions are driving meaningful change. Together, I truly hope we will be able to build a justice system that is genuinely inclusive, culturally safe and equitable for all.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

Debate resumed from 2 September 2025 on motion by **Mr Pettersson**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.20): The Canberra Liberals will support the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No. 2). It is a modest but important bill that does two practical things. First, it extends the evidence protections that already apply in sexual offence matters to certain work health and safety proceedings where the conduct involves an alleged sexual assault or sexually offensive behaviour. Second, it creates a controlled, time-limited pathway for specified industries to access the Default Insurance Fund through a prescribed employer and prescribed worker mechanism to manage near-term premium shocks without breaking the scheme or the law.

On the first limb, the principle is simple. A worker who comes forward about sexual assault or sexually offensive conduct in a workplace should absolutely have access to the same trauma-informed court protections that apply in mainstream sexual offence cases. The bill inserts WHS sexual context matters into the definition of sexual offence proceeding and clarifies how references to an accused person operate in that context, so that existing tools, like publication restrictions, support persons, and limits on direct cross-examination by a self-represented accused can be used where the court considers it necessary. That closes a gap, and it is my hope that it will help with reporting and participation.

I do note that the scrutiny committee raised fair trial and criminal proceedings concerns. Those concerns are proper. The human rights material accepts that some limits are

engaged, but notes they mirror protections already used in sexual offence and family violence proceedings, are targeted to vulnerable complainants, and remain under judicial control. On balance, we accept that analysis and do not see these provisions tipping the scales against a fair hearing. The objective here is equal treatment, not special treatment.

On the second limb, the bill deals with a very specific risk in workers compensation. Without a safety valve, some sectors face a near-term premium spike that could push operators into non-compliance, or out of the territory altogether. Industry advice is that, from October, insurance for horse trainers could rise towards 30 per cent of income.

This bill allows the executive to determine classes of prescribed employers and prescribed workers who can be covered by the Default Insurance Fund for a defined period, with fees and levy settings to ensure costs are carried inside the framework, rather than spilling over to others. It is a practical mechanism to manage a narrow problem, while maintaining coverage for injured workers.

Of course, our support comes with clear expectations. The case for using this provision has only been made in respect of one group of workers. The provision should not be used for any other, unless there is a strong case made, and made transparently. The government should not regard this as a backdoor to provide a benefit for their pet projects or their mates.

The Canberra Liberals are satisfied that this bill strengthens the hand of complainants in sensitive work health and safety matters in line with existing sexual offence protections, and that it provides a narrow pathway to keep a small sector inside the workers compensation system during a premium shock, rather than outside it altogether.

The Canberra Liberals will support the bill.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.24): As Mr Cocks has noted, this legislation does two things, and I will speak to each of the parts. Looking at the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1991 amendments, I note the comments from the scrutiny committee, which were then considered by Minister Pettersson, who provided an updated explanatory statement to the committee to address its observations.

The amendments to the act are a clever piece of drafting that necessitate close reading. Ultimately, I support the amendments to the act in this bill because they extend special measures and protections, which are already available to vulnerable witnesses in sensitive cases, to proceedings for work health and safety offences against the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 involving suspected or alleged sexual assault or sexual harassment in the workplace.

Broadly, these protections can include the use of a screen to help the victim feel more comfortable when giving evidence in court; restricting cross-examination being undertaken by an accused person; affording a support person for the victim during the process; closing of the court or restricting attendance while the victim is giving evidence; allowing the victim to give evidence via audiovisual link; and protecting the identity of the victim by restricting publication of their information, making it their choice whether it remains confidential or can be disclosed publicly.

Given that, at the moment, such special measures and protections do not automatically apply in proceedings for work health and safety offences, I think it is important to rectify this imbalance. We currently have a legal discrepancy between the victims of sexual offences in domestic or family violence proceedings and victims in work health and safety proceedings.

The government should be constantly looking for ways to make the legal system more trauma-informed, fair and respectful. This bill addresses how a lack of anonymity in court could deter people from reporting a workplace sexual assault to the regulator. It affords special protections to victims who are called as witnesses in proceedings that involve a work health and safety breach around sexual assault or harassment.

I am mindful of the reference in the amended explanatory statement that:

Feedback from the ACT regulator has indicated that the lack of automatic protections afforded to a victim involved, such as anonymity, has affected the willingness of these individuals from reporting and participating in workplace proceedings where it relates to sexual assault and harassment.

I accept that amendments in this bill to the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act to extend these protections to complainants in work health and safety proceedings within a workplace context aim to help address these concerns, including encouragement of reporting of such unacceptable conduct.

I appreciate that the protections in legal proceedings extended by amendments in this bill to a complainant in relation to a work health and safety proceeding will apply to provide those protections to the complainant from both the person who is alleged or was found to perpetuate the sexual violence and the duty holder, who is the defendant within work health and safety proceedings alleged to have failed to uphold their duty.

Similarly, to ensure the effectiveness of the changes, reference to the accused in a proceeding will also capture the person alleged or who was found to perpetrate the sexual violence under clause 5 of the bill to specifically apply in the context of a work health and safety proceeding. This acknowledges the circumstances specific to a work health and safety proceeding, where the perpetrator of the alleged or suspected violence and the work health and safety duty holder may and, in fact, are likely to not be the same person. I agree these provisions are necessary, noting the power imbalance that exists between an employee and a duty holder. It is vital to support vulnerable complainants in sensitive matters, and the Greens are supporting these amendments for those reasons.

I will now turn to the element of the bill relating to amendments to the Workers Compensation Act. These sections seek to amend the act to allow access to the default insurer provisions of the workers compensation scheme for certain industries or classes of workers. There are really two issues at play with regard to the insurance element of this bill. The first is that workers deserve protection for what the minister has described as “the most dangerous industry in the ACT”. The second is that it is a special bailout being applied to a very particular industry, with no real plan or strategy around the legislation, and with plenty of questions. Let me focus on each of those in a little more

detail.

On the first point, we wholeheartedly support the principle that workers should have adequate protection in the case that they are injured in the workplace. That point is not in dispute in this bill. And the purpose of the default insurer is to cover those circumstances where a worker might otherwise be denied that support because their employer has failed to take out the insurance or the employer's self-insurance provision is inadequate. The default insurer provides an important safety net for those workers who find themselves in such circumstances through no fault of their own.

The second element I referenced is the fact that these special and urgent arrangements have been put in place in direct response to the insurance pressures affecting the horse training industry. As I referenced earlier, in response to questions in the Assembly last week, the minister described this as "the most dangerous industry in the ACT". In that context, we of course want to see the workers in this industry receiving adequate coverage and protection. As workers, they deserve that as much as anyone else in the territory. Beyond that clear principle, there are so many other questions about this legislation.

The Greens position on subsidies to the horseracing industry is well-understood, and we have had an extensive discussion on this very issue in the budget debate this week, when the rest of the Assembly decided to continue offering up more than \$8 million a year for the industry here in the territory, despite the difficult fiscal position of the budget. It is hard to see this measure as anything other than another form of bailout for the industry.

The background information we have been provided is that the industry is currently facing a premium of 20 per cent of wages, with the prospect that this will increase to 30 per cent in the coming insurance period. This has been described as a "market failure", but such a description invites the question of whether it really is. What is happening here is that the market is actually pricing-in in response to the risk of the industry—the most dangerous in the territory. As my colleague Ms Clay outlined in her question in this place last week, Thoroughbred Park's annual report shows the death of a trackwork rider in 2017 and the death of a jockey in 2024. They also report a casual worker injured in 2019, two trackworkers injured in 2020, and two more workers injured in 2021. For an industry the minister told us has approximately 17 employers and around 40 workers, this is an extraordinary toll.

When other industries carry such levels of risk, we normally see them regulated to alter their behaviour or certain activities prohibited. We could name many examples, but the engineered stone industry is certainly the most recent example that the members might make a comparison to and on which the government has acted decisively. Instead, the government is simply proposing to mask over that market analysis by wrapping the industry into the default insurance scheme.

Now, in the short term, one might say that is hard to argue with. We cannot be in a situation where workers do not have cover for some time in October, just a few weeks away. But this brings us back to the questions: this situation has not emerged overnight, so how long has the government been aware of this risk, and what are their plans to mitigate it in the future? Or are we locking in something that will simply be set and then

forgotten?

The other question we have is this: what are the criteria for this approach being applied to other industries? This legislation does not set out any criteria. It simply says the minister can prescribe a class of workers. And so how is it that you get into this scheme? The discussions so far have talked about exceptional circumstances, market failures, special cases and used other such phrases, but what does that actually mean?

As part of my role on the economics committee, I have just sat in a series of hearings and received a range of submissions about insurance, where different businesses and industries have told us how the impact of rising insurance premiums is putting their business or community activities at risk. The crushing weight of rising premiums, levels well above the consumer price index, is threatening the very viability of their activity.

I and my colleagues in the Greens have heard similar stories from a range of communities. The arts and live entertainment sectors spring especially to mind, but also community service organisations, charity events, and multicultural groups have all made the same point to me and my colleagues. How do they get a ticket on this train? Do they just lobby the minister or perhaps the local member? Do they get access to someone in the Chief Minister's office? Or do they simply need to know the right public servant who can brief up to their minister? The legislation does not answer this question because no criteria are spelled out.

And that is why I am proposing an amendment to the legislation that changes the minister's decision to prescribe a class of workers or employers from a notifiable instrument to a disallowable instrument. We will obviously come to this later in the debate, but I will speak to it here because I think it is relevant to this section of the bill's debate, and then I will not need to speak during the detail stage in any length.

In the absence of clear criteria in the legislation, it is appropriate that the Assembly be given some level of oversight for future decisions that this or another minister might make. This is not about the current example that has driven the legislation but, rather, about future decisions. As the scrutiny committee noted:

The Committee notes that the explanatory statement explains that this new Division is directed towards determining who is "eligible for a non-commercial mechanism for accessing workers' compensation through the making of a notifiable instrument." The Committee notes that this is more specifically described than the wording of the new section 166J which grants the Executive the power to "determine the objects of the DI fund."

The scrutiny report also commented:

The new section 166J in new Division 8.2.2A grants to the Executive the power to make a determination in relation to the class of workers and employees that can be prescribed, the conditions of the prescription and the maximum period for which an employer may be prescribed. The Committee notes that this level of detail is appropriately placed in a statutory instrument but is concerned about the determination being declared a notifiable instrument.

Having reflected on those comments from the scrutiny committee, we understand the

intent of the government in this bill. But given the novel nature of this provision and the uncertainty of the frequency and breadth of how it might be applied in the future, it does seem appropriate to allow some level of parliamentary oversight of the provision. Change in the process from a notifiable instrument to a disallowable instrument seems a reasonable balance. It does not require new legislation, which as we all know can be a time-consuming process, so it still allows a relatively rapid process, but it does provide an option for the Assembly, if a majority considers that the proposal is not reasonable or is one that does perhaps not reflect a proposition that the community might understand and accept.

While we will return to this later, that is the context in which my amendment fits and one which warrants explanation during the in-principle stage. That said, the Greens will be supporting this bill today, and I will come back to my amendment during the detail stage.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.36): I will speak about one aspect of the bill today. My colleague Mr Rattenbury has covered the bill as a whole. I will talk about the aspect that grants the horseracing industry and the horse training industry access to their government default insurance.

A lot of groups and sectors were given a good start in the early days of Canberra, and the horseracing industry was one of them. Back in 1962, Thoroughbred Park was on the outskirts of Canberra, surrounded by paddocks, and going to the races was genuinely part of normal life for a lot of people, over six decades ago.

Over the years, public taste about what entertainment we like has changed. Public sentiment about the darker aspects of the horseracing industry has changed. Since 2011, the ACT Labor government has given or pledged over \$100 million of taxpayer money to the horseracing industry to keep them afloat. This incredibly generous subsidy, a subsidy greater than all of our professional and community sports get, a subsidy almost as large as the entire arts sector gets, is not enough to keep them afloat.

The Labor government is now legislating to allow them access to an insurance slush fund in a further attempt to salvage this dying industry. It is uncoded. Government has not yet said how much offering the government Default Insurance Fund to the horseracing industry will cost. The minister has explained that there is no direct cost to government in this bill because the costs are borne by everyone who pays a workers compensation premium, as each of them will pay extra to cover the Default Insurance Fund. ACT Labor, once again, is passing on the costs of the horseracing industry to other people, regardless of whether those other people wish to subsidise that industry or not.

The minister has indicated, rather hopefully, that the cost of the extra WHS premiums for the horseracing industry will not increase overall costs by much, because there are not very many people involved. It is a tiny industry, which begs the question: why are we working so hard to keep it afloat? The minister has told us that the horseracing industry is “the most dangerous industry in the ACT”. He said:

Advice to me by officials causes a sense of alarm about rising rates of noncompliance with workers compensation.

As my colleague outlined, the horseracing industry has reported two worker deaths and five worker injuries in recent years. The minister said his insurance scheme will cover approximately 17 employers, with around 40 workers expected to be in scope. If those two sets of numbers are comparable—I am not 100 per cent sure that they are—we are propping up an industry with a five per cent death rate and a 13 per cent injury rate in less than a decade.

It is no wonder that their workers compensation premiums are rising to 30 per cent of payroll. It is no wonder that this dying industry say they can no longer afford to pay for their WHS insurance. What other industry with this track record on work safety would be propped up by the government? Any other industry would have been shut down by their union by now.

Government usually regulates dangerous industries. That is what we do with dangerous industries. In this case, government is effectively underwriting and rewarding the risks of the industry and the risks of individual businesses operating within it.

I used to run a business. You pay your insurance. You negotiate your insurance. You shop around. You reduce your risk. You do whatever you can do. I negotiated my business insurance down by 75 per cent after a year of operating by reducing my risk and by demonstrating to my insurance broker and my insurer that I had done that effectively. But I had a huge advantage. I was not operating in the most dangerous industry in the ACT.

I will tell you what you do not do. You do not run a business uninsured. You do not say, “I’ve got a really great prospect here; I just need someone else to pay my premium.” If a business cannot pay its premium, typically, it stops operating. The party is over. It is okay; it is not a judgement. A lot of businesses fail every day, and it does not mean that the person running it did not work hard. But if you cannot afford your basic insurance costs, that is a clear sign that your business is not working. It is not a good reason for a government to step in and foot the bill for an individual business.

Of course, we are in a different situation when we are in interesting times and everyone is struggling with premiums. I have had a chance to read the economics committee report that was handed down today, and I have to say that what it said on insurance and premiums was pretty fascinating in relation to today’s bill. It turns out that quite a lot of businesses and industries are telling us that they are struggling with insurance.

WHS premiums for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service rose by 42 per cent, and they had to cut their staff. They are offering less domestic violence support to Canberra’s women than they did because they cannot afford their WHS premiums. Did government list them in today’s bill so that they could help more women? No. Some of our live music venues told us that their PL premiums increased by 1,000 per cent—a 1,000 per cent increase. Are they in Labor’s special government insurance bill? No. Businesses and sectors wrote in to say that they are failing, or they have already gone under, thanks to increasing premiums. Are they in today’s bill? No.

Fifty organisations and sectors wrote in to that parliamentary committee inquiry on insurance to tell government what was going on—and there is quite a lot going on for

a lot of businesses. Guess who did not bother submitting? The horseracing industry. They did not have to, just like they do not need to apply for a grant or a tender, or go through a commissioning process to get their government funding. They also do not need to bother submitting to a boring parliamentary inquiry on insurance. They just met directly with the minister and, a couple of months later, they got a special deal written just for them in a special bill that has been rushed through so quickly that there is not even time to run the ordinary processes of scrutiny through a parliamentary committee inquiry.

In better news, I will say that today's bill from Labor does set a pretty clear precedent. The Labor government are happy to step in and pay WHS insurance for businesses that are struggling. They are doing it today for the horseracing industry, and that is the precedent. It is great news. If you are struggling, I will give you some tips. Do not take the slow road. Get yourself a good, persuasive lobbyist. Go and hire a horseracing industry lobbyist. They know how to get the job done. Get your meeting with the minister and ask for what you want.

Do you want generous funding in a budget with a \$1.4 billion deficit full of "tough decisions" when everyone else is getting funding cuts? Just ask. Do you want a special law written only for you, listing only you, fast-tracked through parliament with no parliamentary committee scrutiny so that government can pay your insurance bill? Just ask. The horseracing industry had their meeting a few months ago and look where they are today. It is a real success story for all of the struggling businesses in Canberra, and I would encourage you to take up the offer. That is unless, of course, special deals are only available for the horseracing industry.

If you try to get a meeting with the minister and you get refused, or if you get your meeting, you ask for your money and your insurance scheme and you do not get it, please get in touch with my office. I would be more than happy to find out what it is about your business that means you are less attractive to be subsidised than the horseracing industry.

Because we did not have the opportunity to hold a parliamentary committee inquiry or hearings to interrogate this legislation, which is what usually happens here, we have not had the information that we would like to have on exactly how this scheme will operate and exactly who will get picked. The major parties have teamed up to rush it through, without that level of scrutiny.

The only oversight we have had is questions that we Greens have managed to ask in question time. We have asked the minister what he is doing to make this industry safer, because underwriting insurance claims does not make an industry safer; it simply compensates people for the deaths and accidents that will keep happening. We have asked whether the industry has complied with all its WorkSafe recommendations. So far, it seems to have done so. That is very positive, but we have not really heard much about how safety will improve.

This is the most dangerous industry in the ACT. It has caused multiple deaths and injuries. It is so noncompliant with basic requirements that the government now say they need to step in and provide them with special access to the government insurance. This is an industry whose primary economic contribution to Canberra comes from

gambling and ads on gambling. I am really struggling to understand where Labor's values are, when they are working so hard to save this industry.

My colleague Mr Rattenbury has explained the amendment that he will put up today, which will mean that new businesses and sectors who want to apply to the default insurance scheme will have to go through a disallowable instrument process rather than simply be notified by the minister. He has explained some of the transparency reasons for that. I support that level of transparency. I think it should have applied to everybody who gets this.

The Greens have negotiated with the Canberra Liberals and ACT Labor on this, and it was made very clear to us that the only way we could get agreement to pass the change to make the next round of businesses disallowable is if we agreed not to seek disallowance for the horseracing industry's coverage, so we have agreed to that.

The Greens ran an amendment earlier this week to phase out funding for the horseracing industry from the budget. ACT Labor, the Canberra Liberals and both Independents voted it down. They all voted to keep channelling public funds to the horseracing industry. It is clear to us that, for whatever reason, it is the will of parliament at this time to support the horseracing industry.

Parliament will continue to support the ACT's most dangerous industry. Parliament will ensure that they can continue to operate here in the ACT. Parliament will give them whatever generous government support they need, including funds that are more than the entire sports sector gets, and including special access to the government insurance scheme. That is the will of parliament and, if we put up anything that goes against that will, we will lose the vote on the numbers.

In order to ensure proper scrutiny of the next businesses and industries that might get added to this scheme, we have agreed that we will make this mechanism disallowable, but we will not put up a disallowance motion for the horseracing industry. That is the only vote we have been told that Labor and the Liberals will back, so we have negotiated to get the best outcome we can for the people of Canberra today. It is not the outcome I want, but it is the best we can get from your elected representatives right now.

Parliament regards the horseracing industry as very special indeed and deserving of special treatment—better treatment than the sports sector, better treatment than any other struggling business or industry. The Greens respect the will of parliament, but if you have personal views on that, I suggest that you contact your local member and ask them how they voted this week.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (5.48), in reply: The ACT government is deeply committed to ensuring that every worker is afforded fair conditions, a safe workplace and the fundamental right to protection from harm, especially from acts of sexual violence and harassment. This bill progresses two significant amendments in support of this commitment.

The first of these amendments is to the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1991.

The bill will extend protections and support to complainants of sexual assault to a wider range of proceedings. Namely, these protections will now be offered in workplace proceedings where a work health and safety breach involves alleged or suspected sexual assault or harassment. This reform would grant victims in work safety matters the same evidentiary safeguards and procedural rights as those available to vulnerable witnesses during other criminal and civil proceedings. It would close a known gap and ensure that victims of workplace and sexual violence receive protections that are trauma-informed, fair and consistent. It would enhance the legal framework, ensuring that victims are supported by the justice system.

They strike a careful balance by upholding the rights of all parties while recognising the particular vulnerabilities of complainants in these cases. This reform is achieved by including offences against the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 in the definition of sexual offence proceedings.

The special protections extended through this amendment include screening the accused from the witness in the courtroom, reducing the risk of intimidation or re-traumatisation; prohibiting self-represented accused persons from cross-examining the witness; allowing a support person for the witness; giving evidence in a closed court that seeks to protect the complainant's privacy and dignity; giving evidence at a pre-trial hearing, reducing the need for multiple court appearances; giving evidence via audiovisual link; prohibiting publication of the complainant's identity, with it being their choice whether their details remain confidential or can be disclosed publicly; recognising evidence of family violence as relevant, acknowledging family violence provides critical context, helping courts to understand patterns of coercion, control and risk that may otherwise be overlooked; and immunity from scrutiny of sexual reputation.

Ensuring that these protections operate effectively in the context of a work health and safety legal proceeding is not simply a case of expanding the definition of sexual offence to these types of proceedings. A work health and safety proceeding is not a proceeding to determine whether a sexual offence under the Crimes Act has been committed; rather, it is about determining whether there may have been a breach of the Work Health and Safety Act. These are distinct questions.

To effectively expand special protections to complainants of sexual violence or harassment in these proceedings, it is necessary to consider the surrounding context of this type of proceeding. There are two distinguishing features that are critical to the effective operation of these protections in relation to work health and safety proceedings. These are: the fact that the accused in a work health and safety proceeding is the WHS duty holder, and not necessarily—in fact, is unlikely to be—the person who may have committed the alleged sexual assault or harassment; and the nature of work health and safety proceedings is to determine whether there may have been a violation of work health and safety duty, and not necessarily that criminal conduct has occurred.

These key differences require further and consequential adjustments. Firstly, the definition of a complainant is amended in the bill. This is needed to ensure that complainants are not technically barred from the special protections, rendering their extension ineffective, simply because the WHS offence by its nature is not necessarily against the complainant.

Further, these protections will apply to both the duty holder accused of failing to meet their work health and safety obligations and the suspected or alleged perpetrator of the sexual violence. This is achieved through ensuring that an accused includes the latter in a work health and safety proceeding.

This reflects the reality that, in many cases, the perpetrator of the sexual violence and a WHS duty holder being prosecuted are not always the same person. It also acknowledges the power imbalances that often exist in workplaces and ensures that complainants are not further disadvantaged by the legal process.

Feedback from the ACT regulator has made it clear. The absence of these protections, particularly anonymity, has discouraged some victims from reporting serious workplace issues and participating in investigations. This is unacceptable. No-one should have to choose between their safety and their right to justice. By extending these protections, we are sending a clear message that workplace sexual assault and harassment are serious matters. Victims will be supported and not silenced when they come forward.

This reform directly responds to recommendation 39 of the *Respect@Work* report, which calls for greater coordination and consistency across anti-discrimination, employment and work health and safety laws. By recognising workplace sexual assault and harassment as sexual offence proceedings, this amendment strengthens the alignment between criminal justice and workplace safety frameworks. It reflects the vision, advanced in *Respect@Work*, of a system that is victim-focused, trauma-informed and legally coherent, and one that does not force victims to navigate fragmented or duplicative processes.

This reform also aligns with the ACT government's broader commitment to addressing psychosocial hazards in the workplace. By embedding trauma-informed protections into work health and safety proceedings, we strengthen our prevention efforts and reinforce the importance of safe, respectful and accountable workplaces. If we fail to act, we risk discouraging reporting, undermining justice and allowing unacceptable workplace behaviour to persist. This amendment is a vital part of our broader strategy to prevent and respond to sexual violence in all its forms.

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all justice stakeholders whose insights and lived experience have shaped the development of this amendment. The consultation undertaken on this reform has ensured it is responsive to the realities faced by victims of workplace sexual assault and harassment. Their contributions have been instrumental in crafting legislation that is principled, practical and deeply aligned with the ACT's commitment to safe and respectful workplaces.

The second amendment made in this bill is to the Workers Compensation Act 1951. The ACT workers compensation scheme provides a legislated insurance framework for supporting and returning injured workers back to work and has the following features. It is a mandatory scheme, meaning that all employers of ACT-based workers must, by law, hold a policy of insurance or be an approved and licensed self-insurer. It is privately underwritten, meaning that policies are issued to employers by licensed commercial insurers; the premium rate paid in exchange for cover is determined by the

licensed insurers operating in competition. The rate sits at around two per cent of wages on average and has done for several years. There is also a safety net provider, namely, the Default Insurance Fund, which assists and compensates injured workers if their employer does not hold a compulsory insurance policy.

Larger Australian states, including Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, also have compulsory workers compensation insurance but operate differently. In those schemes the government is the underwriter and, consequently, it can set the price of insurance, direct the cross-subsidisation of specific sectors, or grant premium exemptions. This is a relevant power to have when and if commercial insurance arrangements are unsustainable or if private underwriters are unwilling to offer insurance for certain work.

Recent experience of the ACT workers compensation market shows us that the ACT could also benefit from the government having a tool to provide targeted interventions in the general operation of workers compensation. Doing so would allow us to ensure workers are properly protected and supported in the event of a work injury, even where insurance costs would otherwise be unsustainable.

The amendments in part 3 of this bill create a timely but limited mechanism to respond urgently and decisively when there is a need. Once enacted, the executive would be able to declare classes of employer and worker to be eligible to enter a determined indemnity arrangement. Actual entry would commence when an eligible employer pays a fee and provides relevant information.

If a covered worker sustains a work-related injury, they would receive compensation services and payments from the safety net Default Insurance Fund, with the cost of any such claims being met from the fee paid and the Default Insurance Fund, which is funded by a levy on insurers. This is not something that we would do lightly or could do at scale. Because the ACT workers compensation scheme is small by national standards, there is a very limited capacity to spread the cost of insurance across the premium pool without disrupting the market or introducing inappropriate cross-subsidies.

The design of this new determined indemnity mechanism demonstrates a continued position that compulsory insurance is a mandatory requirement. Employers have obligations under the act that will continue. Most importantly, the worker experience if injured would be the same. They would continue to be covered by the statutory compensation entitlements set out in the act and supported in recovery following a workplace injury, the same as any other worker in the ACT.

This bill strengthens the protections for vulnerable workers and reinforces the ACT government's commitment to safe, fair and respectful workplaces. It ensures our laws reflect our values and that every worker in the territory is protected, empowered and treated with dignity. I present a revised explanatory statement to the bill, and I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Clauses 1 to 6, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 15, by leave, taken together.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.59): Pursuant to standing order 182A(c), I seek leave to move an amendment to clause 13, as it is in response to a comment made by the scrutiny committee.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name.

Colleagues, as outlined earlier, I have given the reasons for this amendment. I take this opportunity to thank the minister's office in particular for the engagement on this bill. It has been really useful to have the conversations and to be able to resolve the position. I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (6.00): ACT Labor will be voting in favour of Mr Rattenbury's amendment. In the unamended bill, the determinations that certain classes of employers or employees are prescribed with a determined indemnity scheme would be notifiable instruments. This aligns with other instrument-making powers under the existing act, such as the declarations of persons taken to be workers under the act for the purpose of insurance coverage, such as religious workers or family daycare workers. Notifiable instruments provide transparency and accountability in the exercise of this power.

As members would be aware, notifiable instruments are afforded scrutiny in this place. They are publicly available, being notified on the Legislation Register website, and decisions of government are regularly debated in, and receive the scrutiny of, the Legislative Assembly. However, I note that, while the scrutiny committee did not call for the bill to be amended in relation to this matter, it did contemplate whether these instruments should be notifiable or disallowable. Mr Rattenbury's amendment would make this power a disallowable instrument. While notifiable instruments are by no means immune from Assembly scrutiny, disallowable instruments give the Assembly the ability to overturn these decisions quickly, without the need for legislative amendment. I thank members of the ACT Greens, Independent members, as well as the Canberra Liberals for the constructive conversations that took place in relation to this amendment and, indeed, the entire bill.

Members are aware of the cohort the government intends to declare under this scheme. We have been up-front that this is to be exercised in relation to the horse training industry, separate to the racing industry. The legislative amendment and planned declaration respond to market failure, and swift action is needed. Given the short timeframe available, Assembly disallowance of the instrument the executive intends to issue would have significant consequences on impacted employers and employees. As

such, I was really pleased to reach consensus with the Canberra Liberals, the ACT Greens, as well as Independent members that, should the Assembly support this amendment, no motion of disallowance would be brought should we proceed in declaring that intended cohort. I commend the amendment with that context.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 15, as amended, agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Personal explanation

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) (6.03), by leave: Mr Cocks, in his speech during the debate yesterday for Ms Barry’s motion, made several statements indicating that I did not engage with Ms Barry or propose amendments to her motion, other than to rewrite it. I acknowledge that Ms Barry’s office provided her motion to my office on Wednesday, 10 September, which was appreciated, and subsequently my office and I engaged with Ms Barry and her office.

In advance of this sitting week, my office again reached out to Ms Barry’s office and, on Friday, 19 September, we provided potential amendments to the motion for consideration. The original amendments did not use the “omit all and replace” approach, as was the case in the final version of my amendments. Over the weekend, negotiations continued, with much back and forth and several revisions. I and my office were genuinely endeavouring to find a mutually agreeable set of words on this issue of importance to both me and Ms Barry, as well as many others in this place, as evidenced in yesterday’s debate.

On Monday, 22 September, when the notice paper for this sitting week came out, the motion was listed, but it did not reflect the proposals we had put forward over the weekend. We were later informed that the proposed amendments were not supported. Following publication of the notice paper, members from across the Assembly reached out to us seeking views on behalf of Labor, and this was the start of further negotiations between Labor, the Liberals and members of the crossbench. During these ongoing negotiations and in an effort to reach consensus, further edits based on multiple iterations of feedback were made. For readability and in what had become a very complex and extensive negotiation and a heavily edited document, the “omit all and replace” approach was used for clarity and ease of reading. We did not believe this to be a controversial approach as using “omit all and replace” was common practice in previous Assemblies. I do however note that this Assembly is increasingly preferring the approach of identifying parts of motions to amend, and I am happy to move with the times on this convention in the future.

Given all this, I do not believe Mr Cocks’s characterisation of my approach to the negotiations or intention of the proposed amendments as stated in his debate speech

was accurate. Comments made by me and others during the debate about the extensive and respectful efforts made by those negotiating are a much more accurate characterisation.

Statements by members

Menslink

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.06): I acknowledge the wonderful work of Menslink. I, along with several MLAs and a federal senator, attended a breakfast on Tuesday morning. It was an inspiring event that highlighted the importance of supporting young men and boys in our community. Menslink have been providing mentoring, counselling and life-changing support for over two decades. Their programs help young men navigate challenges, build resilience and foster healthy relationships. Sadly, for many, a conversation with a Menslink mentor is the first time they have someone who really listens to them and supports them.

We were all very moved and touched by the testimonial from well-known celebrity Barry Du Bois. I thank Ben Gathercole, the CEO, and Menslink board chair, Michael Battenally, for their wonderful support and work to help young men and boys in our community find the best versions of themselves.

Roads—safety

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.07): Earlier this month I received an email update from the Amy Gillett Foundation which contained an inspiring piece of news; that is, Finland’s capital, Helsinki, has gone for a whole year without a traffic death. That is an extraordinary outcome. The email outlined that Helsinki’s success is a combination of lower speed limits in residential and central city areas, actively enforced with 70 new speed cameras, and new pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. Roni Utriainen, a traffic engineer working for the city of Helsinki, stressed that Helsinki’s success is based on data-driven, long-term mobility policies.

Members might wonder why I am bringing this example to this chamber. Helsinki has a surface area of around 715 square kilometres, very comparable to Canberra’s area of around 800 square kilometres. Their population is a little higher than ours, at 1.35 million in the metropolitan area, compared to Canberra’s nearly half a million. It tells us that, with commitment, passion and ongoing effort, you can actually achieve the goal of getting to zero deaths on our roads. It is not something that you just hope for, though. You have to make the investment. You have to make the changes. You have to make your priorities clear. That is what Helsinki has done, and that is what Canberra needs to do.

World Pharmacists Day

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.09): Today, 25 September, is World Pharmacists Day. This year’s theme is “Think Health, Think Pharmacist”, and celebrates the role that pharmacists play in our health system. Community pharmacy in particular is an integral part of the healthcare system, providing advice and a range of other services. It is the most frequently accessed health destination, with over 443 million individual patient visits annually. Here in Canberra, this accessibility is vital. Our pharmacists work hand

in hand with doctors, nurses and other health professionals.

The expansion of pharmacists' scope of practice is a key driver of this. As our health landscape continues to evolve, the role of pharmacists has never been more important. Pharmacists are there for patients every single day, no matter the location or their age. My first job was in a community pharmacy. I saw firsthand the value community pharmacy provides to everyone of all ages—the services provided, the Webster-paks, the kind advice. It is such an integral part of everyday society.

I want to give a shout-out to Mark and the team at Lanyon Pharmacy, who I was not able to visit today, despite our best efforts. Kaydence, at Lanyon Pharmacy, won the ASBA of the year at this year's ACT Training Awards—a first, we think, for a community pharmacy. You will hear more from me about Kaydence in the next sitting.

If you find yourself in a pharmacy today, whether it is to fill a script, get a vaccine or simply pick up a bag of my favourite Glucojels, be sure to thank them for all they do.

Discussion concluded.

Gambling—cashless gaming—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: I want to report to the chamber that earlier, in question time, there was a point of order raised under standing order 118AA, involving a question to Dr Paterson. I would like to make it known to the chamber that Dr Paterson has responded in writing, and her response will be included in the *Hansard* reflecting today's proceedings.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Youth—mental health

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.11): Belatedly, I am making this speech on behalf of my work experience student; it is from a couple of months ago now. This relates to mental health. My work experience student wrote:

Mental health is a topic that affects every single one of us. While we often talk about physical health and how to keep our bodies fit, we sometimes forget that our mind is just as important, if not more. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps to decide how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.

The past couple of years have been difficult for all Canberrans when it comes to mental health, especially for Canberra's youth. First, COVID-19 slammed shut our daily interactions, forcing many of us to be left in isolation and fear. This impact was limited not only to Canberrans but was widespread across the globe, with people facing higher levels of stress and anxiety, all affecting their mental health.

The second reason, and possibly the most significant, was the rise of indiscriminate use of social media following the lockdown and isolation of the pandemic. People started to doomscroll, caught up in a vicious cycle of scrolling and scrolling. This had a huge impact on mental health, particularly for youth, many of whom started to engage in unreal expectations, leading to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Of course, this is all common knowledge. Mental health for many is a buzzword and is thrown around so many times that sometimes it seems to have lost its meaning and importance. But the reality is that it is crucial to our overall wellbeing. It impacts how we think, feel and act. It impacts our very own being. This is why it is crucial we work to better maintain the mental health and health of those around us.

The ABS National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that 38.8 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds experienced a mental disorder in the 12 months prior to the survey in 2022. For comparison, 26.3 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds experienced this. One in five, or 20 per cent, of young people experience high or very high levels of psychological distress, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. There are concerning trends in self-harm among young people, with rates nearly doubling for girls aged 15 to 19, and tripling for girls aged 14 and under, between 2008 and 2022, according to this data. Suicide also contributes significantly to premature mortality in First Nations young people. Young women are also more prone to mental health conditions, as 45 per cent of them experienced mental health conditions in the past year.

In the ACT a significant proportion of young people experience mental health challenges. Data from 2020 to 2022 indicates that almost two in five—38.8 per cent—individuals aged 16 to 24 experienced a 12-month mental disorder. The ACT government reported that 67 per cent of young people cite anxiety and stress as a primary issue.

While anxiety and stress are major contributing factors, school or study problems and bullying are also significant concerns for youth in Canberra. Thirty-two per cent of young people report school or study problems as a major concern and 27 per cent of young people in Canberra report experiencing bullying. I repeat: 27 per cent.

From my personal experience, many of my peers at school need an ILP, which stands for Independent Learning Program. These are generally for people who are on the spectrum or have ADHD, or those experiencing psychological distress. I am thankful to all those teachers and staff who give their time to help the ILP students learn and mature.

According to the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network, the significant barriers faced by young people in accessing mental health care are the high costs of mental health services, long wait times and ineffective care. A significant number of young people in Canberra are seeking help for mental health concerns, with CAMHS community teams receiving 1,498 approaches in 2022.

However, a report from *Region Canberra* highlights that a large proportion of these cases are deemed unsuitable for CAMHS support and wait times for initial appointments can be lengthy. I do give credit to the ACT government for the allocation of \$9.4 million in funds to support young people's mental health, which will contribute to better support of the overall mental health system. There are also

many programs and platforms for which I am grateful, such as the Youth Aware of Mental Health—YAM—and Beyond Blue, that provide much-needed support for the emotional wellbeing of young people.

Overall, as technology advances and our world evolves, new problems and issues will arise, including in areas such as mental health. Mental health systems should continue to operate and continue to grow, thus providing the necessary support and treatment that so many young Australians deserve to thrive.

Youth—political engagement

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (6.16): My adjournment speech tonight comes from Alina Farrall, a very impressive year 10 student at MacKillop Catholic College who we had the privilege of hosting as a work experience student this week. Alina indicated her passion for youth engagement in politics and the options available to them. I want to give a precursor, a little disclaimer, to the speech, because she kind of throws our education department under the bus in terms of the fact that we are just Assembly education. I am not sure that it was absolutely fair, and I have put Alina in touch with the education unit here, so that she understands the programs that are run to engage youth in politics. Notwithstanding that, this is, word for word, exactly what Alina gave me:

Young people have to grow up and live in a world impacted by decisions that the parliament makes today. They deserve to have a voice, someone who stands up for them on issues that directly affect them. The youth feel left out. They feel as if their opinions do not matter in the world of politics. So many young people feel strongly about issues that affect not only them but the wider community. Yet where is their representation?

Currently, there is no proper way for the youth to get engaged in politics. In schools, young people feel that politics is irrelevant, especially since “the government doesn’t care” about them. They are not taught about politics in class. They are not given any opportunities to learn about it, unless they seek it themselves. We need to make political engagement more accessible for young people and give them opportunities to be able to be educated on politics.

Despite being the capital city and the political centre of Australia, the ACT lacks resources and events that allow young people to get involved and have their voices heard. While there is the ACT Youth Assembly, the government is not required to respond to any issues raised and it only runs every two years.

However, it last ran in 2023, with the next one not occurring until March 2026. In 2026, the Y is rolling out the Youth Parliament program in the ACT, which is great news for young people. This program has been widely successful in states across the country, so hopefully this will have a similar effect here, too. But we need to ensure that the youth are aware of this program. Advertising in schools and social media would be key in gaining outreach and letting people know of this program.

From the perspective of my current work experience student, she has spent a large amount of time researching ways to get involved and has been met with very little opportunities. Of such research, all that is available is the National Youth Parliament, which was only launched in late August, and the Youth Parliament mentioned before. The Office for Youth has some opportunities, although all committees are national. Overall, young people deserve to have opportunities that

allow them to get engaged in politics. These people are the future of our country and therefore deserve to be heard and have a voice in decisions that will directly affect them.

That is from Alina, who is brilliant. It is a very small town that we live in. I am sure we will bump into Alina again, and I hope it is very soon.

Nigeria—Independence Day

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.19): I rise today to acknowledge and celebrate the 65th anniversary of Nigerian independence, marked on 1 October each year. On this day in 1960, my birth country, Nigeria, claimed its sovereignty and stepped forward as a proud and independent nation. That moment symbolised not only freedom and self-determination but also resilience, courage and the determination of the people to chart their own course.

Since independence, Nigeria has grown to become one of the leading voices on the African continent and an influential presence on the world stage. Nicknamed the “giant of Africa”, it is Africa’s most populous nation, with close to 300 million people. It is home to more than 250 ethnic groups and a place where extraordinary diversity has fostered extraordinary creativity.

Nigeria’s influence is felt globally, not only in politics and economics, but also in literature, sports, fashion and music. In literature, Nigeria gave us the legendary Chinua Achebe, whose novel *Things Fall Apart* remains one of the most widely read books in modern African writing. The Nobel Prize winning playwright and poet Wole Soyinka showed the world the power of Nigerian words and ideas, while Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie continues to inspire a new generation with her powerful storytelling and advocacy.

In politics and public service, Nigeria has produced leaders of international standing, including Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who today serves as the first woman and the first African to lead the World Trade Organisation, and recently elected Olukemi Badenoch, the leader of the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom. In sports, Nigeria have excelled on the world stage, with footballers like Jay-Jay Okocha, Nwankwo Kanu and, more recently, Asisat Oshoala.

Nigeria is also a cultural powerhouse. Its music industry has become one of the fastest growing in the world. Artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid and Tiwa Savage have brought Nigerian sounds to the global stage, headlining festivals and winning international awards.

These achievements not only point to the national pride, but also demonstrate the extraordinary creativity, resilience and innovation that define the Nigerian spirit.

Here in Canberra, we see the same spirit reflected in our Nigerian community. Nigerians in the ACT contribute across every field—health care, business, academia, education and community service. They share their culture generously, from vibrant festivals to music and food and, in doing so, they strengthen the multicultural fabric of our society.

However, it is not all glitz and glam. It would be remiss of me not to use this opportunity to speak to the leaders of the country, and to them I say that the obligation of leadership is universal. In Nigeria, as in all nations, those entrusted with authority must focus not only on today's urgent needs, but on tomorrow's aspiration. Nigerians look up to their leaders for security, health, education, and for work, that gives dignity and purpose.

On the 65th anniversary, I commend the Nigerian people, both at home and here, for their enduring pride, their remarkable creativity and their ability to inspire. The Nigerian story is one of challenge and triumph. Also, it is a story of promise, and a story that continues to unfold with each new generation.

On behalf of myself, I extend the warmest wishes to Nigerians across our city, our country and our world. Happy Independence Day, and may the green and white flag continue to shine as a symbol of hope, creativity and unity for generations to come.

Mental health—R U OK? Day

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.23): I wish to acknowledge the importance of R U OK? Day, which this year was held two weeks ago, on 11 September. I would like to share one of my R U OK? experiences. Obviously, there were many R U OK? events and opportunities available in that week. My own experience that day was with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services, along with several other MLAs from this place, including Ms Carrick and Ms Barry; I believe Ms Castley was there, and, I think, Mr Emerson.

It was an inspiring opportunity to see our community come together to provide mental health awareness, connection and support. Asking someone, "Are you okay?" may seem like a simple question, but it can be a profound act of kindness for many. It has the power to open a conversation that can change a life.

I spoke briefly about the Menslink breakfast this week. Barry Du Bois shared his experience, including a point in his life where he was contemplating suicide, and there were such simple words of support from a workmate, an apprentice, who said, "I'm with you, Barry; I'm with you, mate." The simplest thing can change the course of a person's life. Similarly, saying, "Are you okay?" could do that for someone in our community.

At the event we had the privilege of meeting a Deadly Choices ambassador and representatives of 13YARN, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support team. Their dedication, knowledge and compassion were evident in every interaction, reminding us all of the importance of a culturally safe and inclusive mental health initiative.

During the day, I witnessed firsthand how meaningful conversations can foster connection and understanding. R U OK? really encourages people to talk freely and openly with someone they trust, and for others to listen deeply. You do not have to be a professional to check on whether someone is okay; you might be able to direct them to some professional help where they can get further assistance.

I want sincerely to acknowledge and thank Winnunga, the organisers and volunteers for

holding this event, and I trust that it will be something that they do every year. I particularly thank Julie Tongs OAM, the CEO of Winnunga, and the chair of the board, Craig Ritchie, for their work at that organisation and for hosting such an important day. Their efforts make a difference to many lives in our community, and particularly amongst our Indigenous community, of course.

R U OK? Day is more than a date on the calendar; it is a really important idea, a seed that we should allow to grow in all of our hearts and minds, to make sure we are checking in on each other, and that we truly are okay.

Brindabella electorate—Monaro Rock quarry

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.27): Apologies to everyone for my post 6 pm speech, but I could not let this go unsaid this week. Over the past few weeks, I have received a high volume of correspondence from the Brindabella community raising concerns about the proposed Royalla quarry by Monaro Rock. The proposed quarry is under three kilometres from homes in Tuggeranong and Lanyon. I will say that my house is pretty close; you can see it on the maps that have been put out by Monaro Rock. In New South Wales, it is only 1.5 kilometres from homes. This is quite close and, understandably, it is causing a lot of concern.

The main concerns I have heard about are the impacts on air quality, water quality and road safety. As a local member I have considered what to do, to stand up for my community on this issue, rather than just making videos about it.

On behalf of the constituents who have reached out to me, and the ones who have reached out to me through others because they were not sure what to ask or say, I put in a formal submission to New South Wales Planning this week, recording the concerns of the community. A copy of it is on my socials.

The submission outlines the concerns raised with me about air quality, silica dust in the air from the quarry and its risks to human health, and the release of benzene from the proposed asphalt plant onsite. Silica dust can cause silicosis. It can cause other lung conditions, kidney disease and possibly autoimmune diseases. We have done a lot to recognise the risks of people working with silica dust, but what about the people who are exposed to it when it is airborne? Benzene has been linked to bone marrow failures and leukaemia.

When we add in to this the beautiful topography of the area, with Enchanted Hill just over the border, Tuggeranong Hill, Theodore Hill, which I recently climbed, and Rob Roy, and the mountain wind gap and Venturi effect, which I recently learnt about from concerned neighbours, the risk of the dust coming through to Tuggeranong becomes even more concerning.

I grew up on the New South Wales Central Coast, with coal power stations all around, and not far from coal mines, where there was coal dust in the air and on everything. There were high rates of asthma and high rates of cancer, so I share the concerns of my neighbours and my community about the air quality from a potential quarry.

Silica dust can also settle on our beautiful hills and end up in our waterways when it

rains, on top of the discharged water coming from the proposed quarry into Tuggeranong Creek, which flows into Lake Tuggeranong and the Murrumbidgee River, a waterway on which we spend a lot of time and money trying to improve the health and quality, potentially, as raised by some residents, for the work to be undone by a proposed quarry.

With respect to road safety, the quarry proposal includes a proposed road into the ACT and an intersection with the Monaro Highway. This will require an ACT development application. As Minister Chris Steel said, there is also federal involvement; I understand that the NCA will need to be involved.

I have written to Minister Chris Steel to ask whether there have been any steps taken yet by Monaro Rock. I do not believe that there have, but I will be keeping an eye on this. This will also give the Canberra community another chance to comment on the project.

The Monaro Highway, as many of us in Tuggeranong know, is a pretty busy road. Adding up to 200 additional trucks a day is a lot, particularly in the snow season, when the road already sees a lot of extra traffic. These concerns do not even go to the broader concerns I have had from the community about the impact on local flora and fauna, as it is in box-gum woodlands. There are gang-gang cockatoos. There are quite a lot of animals that live in this area. It also potentially poses a bushfire risk. Like many residents of the Lanyon Valley, I share that concern around bushfires in our region.

I look forward to meeting with Monaro Rock in the coming weeks to discuss the community concerns about the proposed quarry. While the ACT government does not have a lot of power to stop a development proposal in New South Wales, I will be standing up for the community and making sure their voices are heard on the proposed quarry, and that their concerns are listened to.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.31 pm until Tuesday, 21 October 2025 at 10 am.

Standing Order 118AA—answer to a question without notice
Gambling—cashless gaming

Dr Paterson (*in response to a question from Mr Braddock on 25 September 2025*):

In response to the Speaker's ruling in accordance with Standing Order 118AA at the conclusion of Question Time on 25 September 2025, I can advise that the answer is no, I will not seek costings for the implementation of account based gaming from clubs.