



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

15 May 2025

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Wednesday, 28 May 2025**.

Thursday, 15 May 2025

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Thursday, 15 May 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:

Libraries ACT—resourcing—petitions 15-25 and 26-25

By Mr Braddock, from 790 and 2 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to fully fund our libraries and meet minimum national public library standards. Canberrans love our public libraries! But in the first few months of the year, 14 library closures have occurred. Libraries are unexpectedly shut down and library staff report high rates of burnout. The under-resourced state of libraries in the ACT is unacceptable and must change now.

- Libraries provide essential services; any member of the public can use libraries for free access to a computer with internet or Wi-Fi on their own devices.
- When attending a library branch, anyone from birth with a library card can borrow up to 50 books, magazines, DVDs or CDs for free for 30 days.
- Many rely on the printing and photocopying services libraries provide for work, study and life administration.
- Parents can bring their children to Giggle & Wiggle and Story Time to enhance language and literacy development, and school holiday programs for all ages.
- People from linguistically diverse backgrounds can learn English in conversation classes and with ESL resources. Students use libraries for studying and community groups use libraries as meeting and connecting spaces, such as Justice of the Peace sessions or Story Dogs supporting

reluctant readers.

- Libraries provide shelter for those escaping the heat and rain.

Fully funding libraries is not optional, it is a necessary part of the fabric that binds our community together. Libraries are needed now more than ever as one of the only public places that does not require you to spend any money and provides access to information without a biased personalised algorithm. Our libraries need more support. Canberra's public libraries are currently below the recommended national standards for staffing and opening hours. Without action, Canberrans will be faced with more unexpected closures and librarians will be forced to work in an unstable and under-resourced working environment. Libraries are at the heart of our community and Canberrans deserve at least the minimum public library standard—let's see that they are fully funded. Sign the petition today and help us protect Canberra's public libraries.

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

- 1) Increase library funding to meet national standards, including at least 64 hours of opening time per week per library and meet recommended library staff levels.
- 2) Ensure library staffing does not drop below January 2025 levels and prioritise providing permanent over casual employment.
- 3) Improve floor and front-facing staff numbers so libraries remain open and accessible
- 4) 4) Assess Libraries ACT's performance against the current Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries from the Australian Libraries and Information Association and make a plan of action to address where Libraries ACT falls behind.

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- 7) Improve floor and front-facing staff numbers so libraries remain open and accessible.
- 8) Assess Libraries ACT's performance against the current Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries from the Australian Libraries and Information Association and make a plan of action to address where Libraries ACT falls behind.

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

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.02): I am pleased to introduce these petitions from 792 residents, urging the government to fully fund our libraries and meet the minimum national public library standards. Two months ago, I presented a motion in this place calling on the government to provide some strategic direction and to adequately resource our libraries to ensure they are meeting the national minimum standards around opening hours and staffing. I am grateful that the minister, on 10 April, was able

to provide some clarity on the time frame for the long overdue strategic plan for our libraries. We now know that we can expect this strategy to be released at the end of this year.

While the sentiment of motion was supported by all parties here, amendments moved by the Canberra Liberals effectively served to water down the calls for the government to make tangible improvements by ensuring that our libraries are reliably open and that library staff burnout is addressed. The amendments removed the commitment for the government to adequately resource libraries to meet the national minimum standards for opening hours and staffing. Instead, the amendments replaced this tangible commitment with “Let’s see how much it costs and go from there.”

Save for the ACT Greens, every party and individual in this place voted in favour of those amendments. This means there is no longer a promise from the government that they will invest in our libraries, reliably staff them and avoid the chronic unscheduled closures the community have been experiencing for months from their ACT libraries. I note the Minister for City and Government Services will be tabling the government response to that motion later today, and I look forward to reading that. I hope that the work that the government has done to cost these improvements will make for quicker budget deliberations about the essential services that are our libraries.

As the petitions state, fully funding libraries is not optional; it is a necessary part of the fabric that binds our community together. The only way to keep our libraries functioning as the community hubs they need to be and to keep them open during their advertised hours is to increase funding and improve staffing, in terms of staff numbers, security of employment and staff support. As shown by the almost 800 signatures on these petitions, there is a clear sentiment in the Canberra community that this is not enough to acknowledge the importance of our libraries; we need to invest in them.

I would like to give a great shout-out to the principal petitioner, Caitlin, for her great work and advocacy on this issue. She is a former library staff member, who I believe is watching this right now at home with her newborn. Congratulations!

I have spoken in this Assembly about the importance of libraries before, as you will remember, but the key points I made and the key points made in this petition bear repeating. In a world where so-called third places are increasingly under threat, libraries remain one of the few clean and comfortable indoor spaces where anyone, no matter their age, their background or level of privilege, can spend time without spending money.

For our most marginalised and least privileged residents, libraries offer shelter from the elements and meaningful contact with other human beings in their community. The patrons of libraries can take something home with them—physical objects like books, magazines, CDs, DVDs or photocopying—or access non-physical things like information, internet access and contact, but also more intangible things like a sense of community, increased confidence in language skills, new information on navigating government systems, and much more. Libraries are a must, not a maybe for our community. I stand with the Canberrans calling for a clear commitment from the government to fully fund our libraries. I commend the petitions to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Convention and Entertainment Centre Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.06): I rise this morning to highlight the joint investment in the new Canberra Convention and Entertainment Centre precinct—a project that will help shape the future of our territory; a project supported by joint funding from the ACT and federal Labor governments. For too long, Canberra has been overlooked when it comes to federal infrastructure investment. Pleasingly, that era is behind us now.

The Albanese government has demonstrated that it understands and values Canberra as Australia's capital city. Since coming to office three years ago, the Albanese government has invested more than \$2 billion in our city's infrastructure, backing our city's growth, our institutions and our people. The Albanese government's investment in a new convention and entertainment precinct alongside a new territory aquatic centre in Commonwealth Park represents another significant investment in city-shaping infrastructure for Canberra. This project, though, is not just about buildings; it is, of course, about jobs, economic diversification and restoring Canberra's rightful place on the national and international stage.

A world-class convention centre and entertainment pavilion will allow us to host the events, summits, exhibitions and performances fitting for Australia's national capital. Our current National Convention Centre has served us well, but it is now at capacity. It is fully booked throughout the year. It has to turn away business. It is unable to meet the demand for very large-scale events or concurrent events. Likewise, our city lacks a large indoor venue—a venue of large scale for major live entertainment and sporting events. This precinct will change that. It will create an indoor venue with capacity for up to 8,000 patrons, which is nearly double the size of the AIS Arena. This opens the door for major touring acts, large-scale conferences, larger indoor sport competitions, and performances. This is the kind of infrastructure that supports our hospitality, tourism, construction and creative industries, and it will boost jobs and economic growth right across the ACT, regardless of the region you live in.

The ACT government has long advocated for this project. In 2019, we set out a vision in our Infrastructure Plan, and at the 2020 and 2024 territory elections we took this vision to the people of Canberra. We now have, at long last, a willing partner in the Albanese government—a federal government that recognises that building the national capital is nation building. The funding commitment from each level of government towards this project will allow us to progress planning, feasibility and detailed design, and the objective is to get the project to shovel-ready status.

It is complex and it is ambitious, and the project will unfold in stages over coming years. As Chief Minister, I am proud to have secured this partnership with the federal government and hope that this is a unifying project for all Canberrans. So, as we embark on the next three years of detailed design and preparation of a construction tender for the project, I am seeking consensus across the Assembly to back this transformative project for our entire city. I believe it would give great confidence to the tourism,

hospitality, events and live music sector to know that support for the new convention and entertainment centre is broadly based in this place. I am calling on members of the Assembly to support this investment in our economy and in Canberra and to put that support on the public record.

The Canberra Convention and Entertainment Centre is a project that will benefit future generations of Canberrans and ensure that we remain a city of ambition, culture and opportunity. In commending this project to the Assembly, I ask that members consider making a brief statement of support in the chamber today—right away if they are prepared to—and, if not today, then at some point in the near future. I think it is important that there is a strong sign from this place that this project is above partisan politics, should be supported to progress and should have the certainty that it deserves.

I present the following paper:

Canberra Convention and Entertainment Centre—Ministerial statement, 15 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.12): I take the opportunity to heed the Chief Minister's call to express support for this project. In 2001, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting was relocated from Canberra to Brisbane due to the insufficiency of our National Convention Centre and other facilities here. In 2008, the former Chief Minister John Stanhope called for a new federally funded convention centre. Between 2010 and 2015, extensive planning and design work was carried out for the Australia Forum, a new convention centre, to be built in Civic. Since 2015, some \$10 billion in commonwealth funding was delivered for City and Regional Deals across the country, with the ACT being the only jurisdiction to miss out. One of those deals was for Geelong. Geelong received a City Deal—Canberra did not—and theirs is focused on a convention centre.

Canberra is the “meeting place” and it is the nation's capital. We should have facilities to host the sorts of events that are being hosted elsewhere, including among peak bodies that are based in Canberra that have been running conventions out of other convention centres and also universities because of the insufficiency of our current infrastructure. So, yes, I absolutely do support this project. We have missed out on this for far too long. Now that there is a re-commitment to having this happen, and happen quickly, I really hope that both levels of government will cooperate to ensure this project is delivered in a timely way. Businesses in the ACT have been waiting for too long, and now is the time to deliver on this project.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Coronial inquest into the death of Jessica Bovill

Ministerial statement

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

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.14): I rise today to table Coroner Ken Archer's report on the inquest into the death of Jessica Hilary Bovill and present the government response to the Coroner's report. I start by acknowledging Jessica's family and the devastating impact of her death. Jessica was a much-loved wife and mother, and her husband Bill has written to me expressing the ongoing distress that he and Jessica's children have experienced.

Jessica died at Canberra Hospital on 11 December 2020. On behalf of the ACT government, I extend our sincere condolences to Jessica's family and apologise for the shortcomings in her care. Jessica's death was referred to the Coroner on the day she died. It has taken considerable time for the coronial process to conclude, and I recognise the compounding impact of this for those involved, including Jessica's family. In finalising the inquest into Jessica's death, Coroner Archer found that there were matters of public safety arising from the evidence provided to the Coroner. Coroner Archer provided two recommendations for Canberra Health Services, and the ACT government has accepted both recommendations.

Jessica Bovill was brought to Canberra Hospital's Emergency Department on 8 December 2020 after she was found unconscious at home. Canberra Health Services commenced a course of treatment for an amitriptyline overdose. However, due to errors in providing that treatment, the Coroner found that Jessica died in the care of Canberra Health Services following an excessive dosage of sodium bicarbonate. Coroner Archer found the systems and processes in place at Canberra Hospital to manage amitriptyline overdose did not adequately support staff to safely provide the treatment that Jessica needed. Coroner Archer found that Jessica acquired an unsurvivable brain injury from the administration of sodium bicarbonate in excess of recommended amounts.

The ACT government is committed to improving the health system to ensure that our clinicians are supported to provide the highest standard of care. This is something patients and their families should expect from the ACT health system, and Canberra Health Services is committed to delivering that. In response to Jessica's death, Canberra Health Services developed and implemented the *Emergency Department presentations of life-threatening poisoning* guideline, which was issued on 9 September 2021. The guideline was developed to provide clear guidance to nursing and medical staff to ensure appropriate treatments are administered and escalation pathways are followed in the care of life-threatening poisoning presentations. This guideline includes consulting with the Poisons Information Centre. The Poisons Information Centre is staffed by experienced clinical toxicologists who support Emergency Department teams with specialist expertise in the medical management of human poisoning.

Canberra Health Services acknowledges that the systems to support the management of presentations like Jessica's were not robust enough at the time of her presentation. Canberra Health Services has learnt from Jessica's case and has hardwired changes to care to stop this happening again. Canberra Health Services acknowledges that Jessica died following the excessive administration of sodium bicarbonate. Coroner Archer outlined this in his report and recommended that Canberra Health Services review the accessibility of sodium bicarbonate.

As reflected in the witness statements to the coroner, "in response to Ms Bovill's death, CHS has made changes such that sodium bicarbonate is now more restricted in both

availability and mechanisms for prescription.” Sodium bicarbonate remains available in limited amounts in specialised environments, such as resuscitation bays in the Emergency Department and within the Intensive Care Unit. It remains critically important that this reduced supply remains on hand as a first line of treatment for time-sensitive presenting conditions.

The most significant improvement has been made possible by the implementation of the Digital Health Record, or DHR, in November 2022, with systems to alert staff to possible errors of prescribing. At the time of Jessica’s admission, sodium bicarbonate could be administered by verbal order, with the order recorded on a paper based chart. The DHR does not allow verbal ordering of sodium bicarbonate. When prescribing sodium bicarbonate in DHR, there is a default dose of “once”. Subsequent orders will result in an alert warning of duplicate medication. The doctor prescribing the medication will be advised of the amount administered. The DHR ensures that situational awareness is maintained. The requirement for DHR prescription is in place, irrespective of the clinical circumstances and cannot be overruled. The ACT government did not implement the DHR in direct response to Jessica’s death, but we knew that moving from paper based processes and more than 40 digital systems to a single electronic health record would improve the safety of care in our public health services.

I again acknowledge the grief that Jessica’s family experiences every day. Patients and their families should expect the very best health care from Canberra Health Services, and that will always be the driving force in my commitment to improving health care in the ACT. Systems and processes in place at the time of Jessica’s presentation let her and her family down. I acknowledge the deficiencies in Jessica’s care. I am deeply sorry and can assure Jessica’s family and the wider community that Canberra Health Services is committed to ensuring no other family experiences this pain.

I present the following papers:

Coroners Act—Report of Coroner—Inquest into the death of Jessica Hilary Bovill—
Report, dated 26 February 2025.
Government response.
Government response—Ministerial statement, 15 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Reconciliation Week

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.21): I rise in place of Ms Orr. As members will be aware, National Reconciliation Week is held annually between

27 May and 3 June, marking two significant milestones in Australia's journey towards reconciliation. 27 May is the anniversary of the 1967 referendum which amended the Constitution to remove clauses that were actively exclusionary of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The 1967 referendum has gone down in Australian history as the most successful, with the highest yes vote ever recorded.

In the context of reconciliation, this is one of the strongest representations of a change in Australia's social narrative, with 90.77 per cent of Australians voting yes to changes that were inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. On reflection, this is quite profound, when the ACT was the only jurisdiction to vote yes to the 2023 Indigenous Voice referendum, which would have taken the next step for reconciliation and us as a nation. 3 June, known as Mabo Day, marks the anniversary of the historic 1992 Mabo decision, which recognised traditional connections to land, challenging the doctrine of terra nullius and underpinning what we now know as native title.

This year's National Reconciliation Week theme is "Bridging Now to Next". This theme encourages us to reflect on our history and consider how we can build a more inclusive and respectful nation. By bridging now to next, we are not only honouring the lessons of the past but are also committing to a future where we work together to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians.

Reconciliation is fundamentally about the conversations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians, and the work that we do together to build a stronger and better Australia. These conversations provide a platform for our commitment to truth-telling and truth-listening. They are a platform for how we can address the power imbalances on which Australian society was created and operates. In essence, it is the foundation to how we close the gap.

Here in the ACT, we are the only jurisdiction in the nation to recognise Reconciliation Day as a public holiday and host a public Reconciliation Day event. This year's Reconciliation Day event is being held on 2 June 2025, from 10 am until 3 pm at Stage 88 in Commonwealth Park. As with previous years, this event is a family-friendly event showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and wider non-Indigenous community participation through food, music and workshops.

Among our talented performers, we are pleased to feature the incredibly gifted Gomeroi artist Kobie Dee as the headline act. Kobie Dee has become a powerful voice in Australian hip-hop, performing nationally and internationally. Through his performances, Kobie's passion for his culture and people is inspiring new generations while addressing some of the issues being faced in contemporary Australia. Beyond his music, Kobie also launched a podcast called Know Role Models, where he hosts conversations with First Nations people about their stories of perseverance against adversity in hope of inspiring the next generation. We look forward to hosting Kobie's immense talent as a central piece of this year's Reconciliation Day event.

This event will also showcase the commitment of several non-Indigenous groups and organisations to reconciliation, opening further discussions about how we can work together to promote and practice reconciliation. In bridging now to next, it is critical we involve our young people in both remembering our shared history and celebrating the way forward together in a way that respects and embraces the longest continuing culture

in the world as part of our unique Australian identity. This ensures the lessons of the past are carried forward, the cultural understanding is deepened, and future generations are empowered to continue the journey towards reconciliation in Australia.

This year, a number of school competitions are included in the festivities, including a vocal competition where ACT high school students were invited to submit an original song inspired by Reconciliation Day. This was done in partnership and support from the Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, which supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to participate. Students were mentored at the Australian National University, and the winner of this competition will have the opportunity to perform their song live at the event. I thank the ACT Reconciliation Council for their diligent efforts in planning and promoting Reconciliation Day, as well as their broad efforts in advancing reconciliation in the ACT.

Finally, I hope that members here today and all Canberrans can consider how the theme of this year's National Reconciliation Week, "Bridging Now to Next", can be reflected in their work, family and community lives. I ask that we remember that reconciliation is, at its heart, about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people for the benefit of all Australians. I encourage all Canberrans to bring their loved ones and join us at the Reconciliation Day event. Together, we can celebrate and think about how we are bridging now to next.

On behalf of Ms Orr, I present the following paper:

Reconciliation Week 2025—Ministerial statement, 15 May 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Estimates 2025-2026—Select Committee Establishment

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.26): I move:

That:

- (1) a Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026 be appointed to examine the expenditure proposals contained in the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026, the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026 and any revenue estimates proposed by the Government in the 2025-2026 Budget and prepare a report to the Assembly;
- (2) the Committee be composed of:
 - (a) one Member to be nominated by the Labor Party;
 - (b) one Member to be nominated by the Liberal Party;
 - (c) one Member to be nominated by the ACT Greens; and
 - (d) one independent Member;

to be notified in writing to the Speaker within two hours of this motion passing;

- (3) a Liberal Party member shall be elected Chair of the Committee by the Committee;
- (4) funds be provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the Committee to facilitate the analysis of the Budget and the preparation of the report of the Committee;
- (5) the Committee is to report by Friday, 22 August 2025;
- (6) if the Assembly is not sitting when the Committee has completed its inquiry, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publishing and circulation;
- (7) the Treasurer must publish on the ACT Budget website by no later than 5 pm on 24 June 2025, table copies in the Assembly, and provide copies to the Committee for consideration, the following information:
 - (a) a statement regarding the structural position of the ACT Budget, both in 2025-2026 and over the forward estimates period;
 - (b) a medium-term (10-year) forecast of revenue, expenses, the net operating balance (excluding the Superannuation Return Adjustment), and total Government debt;
 - (c) scenario analysis for headline Budget items— including the key economic parameters and General Government Sector Headline Net Operating Balance— showing the base, high, and low cases, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (d) statements regarding the Government’s policies on debt consolidation and management, the superannuation liability, and progress towards the implementation of the 2012 tax reform plan;
 - (e) tables showing expenditure by program, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (f) tables showing employment by program (broken down by ongoing and non-ongoing) for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (g) tables showing community sector support by program and organisation, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years; and
 - (h) notes in the Budget Papers describing the accounting policies, and assumptions, and major technical adjustments, and providing a breakdown of key financial statement items, consistent with the approach of the Commonwealth and State governments;
- (8) the Treasurer must publish data from the Budget Papers and the information in part (7) in a machine-readable format on the ACT Budget website, and must provide embargoed copies of the information and data to Members at the same time as the 2025-2026 Budget documents; and
- (9) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

I am extremely pleased to be moving this motion, which establishes the select committee on estimates for the new budget cycle, but this motion goes further than similar motions in previous years. Today's motion represents a significant step forward in enhancing the accessibility and transparency of the ACT budget and ensuring appropriate accountability of government decisions through the estimates process.

For some years, estimates committees, along with commentators, stakeholders, independent analysts and even former leaders like Jon Stanhope, have raised concerns that budget reporting lacks transparency. Some have gone as far as to say that transparency of the budget process has gone backwards in the last decade, to the point where the budget papers now obscure more than they reveal.

Estimates committees have made a substantial number of recommendations about improving budget and fiscal disclosures, and while there have been some new disclosures along the way, it is fair to say that the government has not embraced budget transparency. Anyone watching this might wonder why this matters. Well, the young family in Ngunnawal who are struggling to pay bills, they need to know. The young woman waiting in pain at the Canberra Hospital ED, they need to understand. Canberrans need to understand how it helps seniors from Calwell worried about navigating cracked footpaths on their way to the shops. It is a fair question. Budget transparency is important and it matters to all of us. This government has mismanaged the budget for so long that your taxes are higher than they should be, the quality of essential services are lower than they should be and your government's priorities are not where you want them to be.

All of that is the result of choices this Labor government has made—choices you may not even know about because they have disguised, withheld and hidden these decisions in budgets that lacked transparency. We cannot judge their decisions if we cannot see the decisions they are making. We have called for change for many years, but the government has refused the call. So it falls on us in the Assembly to force change on them because if Labor are not willing to do it in government, I am determined to build a better Canberra from opposition.

This motion is another step towards that outcome. It directs the Treasurer to provide a significant amount of information with the budget—information that is typically withheld from the Assembly and the community. It includes structural analysis of the budget so we can understand the true underlying state of the budget once we have stripped out temporary one-off measures; scenario analysis so we can compare the government's base case with more optimistic and pessimistic scenarios and better understand the fiscal risks to the budget; expenditure and employment broken down by each program, which will help shed light on what is actually being funded and by how much; and a requirement that the Treasurer publish accounting policies, assumptions and technical adjustments to dramatically improve our ability to understand the budget papers at a deep technical level.

The motion also directs the Treasurer to publish data on the budget website. This will improve accessibility for the estimates committee and the independent analysts who undertake quantitative analysis of our fiscal position. All of this means next month's reporting will be far richer and more informative than any budget in the ACT's history. It is a transformative change and one I am proud to be leading from opposition. Through

this, we are empowering the community to form a view on the government's choices and policies that is better informed than ever before.

My intention is to pilot these changes through the estimates committee this year. We may find some of the requirements are more useful than others and we may find further opportunities to improve disclosure obligations. My expectation is that the committee will consider all of this in its proceedings and that the Assembly will then consider legislating changes ahead of the next budget cycle. If the government wants to work with us on that, I would welcome their participation. In fact, I would encourage it, but we are not going to sit back and wait for them to make change. They have had their chance and they have chosen not to do it, so we will. We have already driven change this term. We are making further change with today's motion, and we will continue to drive change every week the Assembly sits, because Canberrans deserve a better budget, a better government and a better Canberra.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cocks**) adjourned to a later hour.

Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 5 February 2025 on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.33): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill, which makes a range of minor and technical amendments to existing legislation. I note that no concerns with the legislation have been raised by the community, stakeholders or the scrutiny of bills committee, and the social policy committee decided not to undertake an inquiry into the bill. We are therefore happy for the legislation to proceed.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.33): The Greens will be supporting this bill. As Ms Castley said, it does what it says on the tin; essentially, quality of life updates and updated references surrounding GMOs and gene technology. I was really grateful to receive a brief response from Minister Stephen-Smith's office and relevant directorate officials.

We ran a quick check because it initially appeared that the new section 32 of the bill changed the reference of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to ACAT. We had assumed that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in the current legislation actually referred to the commonwealth body, which seemed like an inexplicable change in the review point for appeals regarding the destruction of GMO crops. It turns out, as is pointed out in the explanatory statement, that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal refers to the ACT Administrative Appeals Tribunal, which was then replaced by ACAT in 2008. So it is a good thing this legislation is getting a much needed quality of life update for clarity.

Our other concern pertained to crop patent holders. Historically, US-based genetically modified crop patent holders have been known to sue farmers when their crops have been contaminated by their genetically modified intellectual property. So we wanted to confirm whether it was possible under this provision that a big patent holder would now

constitute anyone with an interest and therefore be able to appeal a decision to destroy a crop here in the ACT where they previously were not able to do so. I have been reassured through the briefing that we actually do not have the specific class of grower in the ACT that would be impacted. I have also been reassured that the amendment made in HLAB is highly technical and does not actually change review rights in the ACT in any substantive way, merely clarifying rather than amending review rights.

If, without these amendments, a ministerial decision to destroy a crop were to be reviewed by ACAT, one would still have expected a review process to be open to anyone with an interest. I understand that GMO reforms are still underway at the national level and I understand that these will be the reforms that should prove to be of great interest to the states and territories. We know that genetically-modified organisms and the products and the chemicals used to manage them may pose significant risks to natural and agricultural ecosystems and human health. So we need to base our legislative decisions in all cases on ethics, science and, of course, on community consultation. I urge the ACT government to continue to engage with their rural landholders and their consumers as they navigate these reforms.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.34), in reply: Thank you to Ms Castley and Miss Nuttall for their brief comments on this bill and to the Assembly for its support for this bill today. I am pleased that we have reached the next stage of consideration of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Again, I thank members for their support of the bill, and I wish in particular to thank the scrutiny committee and the Standing Committee on Social Policy for their consideration of the bill. The Standing Committee on Social Policy determined not to inquire into the bill. It is a pretty straightforward, tidy-up piece of legislation. The amendments make a number of minor changes to legislation in the health portfolio, which will improve the overall administration and operation of health-related territory laws.

The bill represents this government's approach to continuous improvement and serves as a timely vehicle for delivering a suite of minor amendments that, each taken individually, would obviously not be appropriate for standalone bills. In particular, the amendments being debated today will align territory laws with commonwealth reforms, and more generally will ensure that health laws are fit for purpose and up to date.

To briefly outline the more substantive amendments, the bill amends several pieces of health portfolio legislation to ensure that all references to the commonwealth's Administrative Appeals Tribunal are substituted with the name of the new tribunal, the Administrative Review Tribunal. These amendments will ensure beyond doubt that the new tribunal has the required jurisdiction and ensures consistency is maintained between territory law and commonwealth law.

The bill also aligns commonwealth law with territory law under the Human Cloning and Embryo Research Act 2004 and the amendments replace outdated references to the Research Involving Human Embryos Regulation 2003, which was repealed and replaced in 2017 by the commonwealth. The amendments instead refer to the relevant heads of power under the commonwealth's Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002, which give power to make regulations. Referencing the relevant act instead of the relevant regulation future-proofs the territory's legislation from updating our laws

each time the commonwealth updates its regulations. The bill ensures the Human Cloning and Embryo Research Act is current by updating the ethical guidelines on the use of assisted reproductive technology in clinical practice and research with the most recent 2023 version of the guidelines.

There is a small amendment to the Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Act 2004, as Miss Nuttall talked about, to replace the outdated reference to the predecessor of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, also known as ACAT. Alongside the referencing update, the bill also includes standard provisions about applying to the ACAT for a review of a decision. It does not change a person's right to seek a review of a reviewable decision or substantially change the existing rights under the act. I thank Miss Nuttall for her detailed interest in this and making sure the implications were fully understood and for seeking a briefing to ensure that was the case.

Finally the bill makes a number of small and technical amendments to nomenclature, language, numbering references and notes to various health-related legislation. These technical amendments improve the overall language, form and clarity of the relevant legislation that is being amended.

There is a need to continuously update our legislation to ensure it stays current and user-friendly. The amendments under this bill will contribute to this ongoing process and I want to acknowledge my colleague, the Attorney-General, who has put a lot of effort into ensuring our legislative amendments and updates are being made through a series of bills in this place. Today's bill continues that series of omnibus bills that improve our statute book and its passage will deliver sensible and timely benefits for Canberrans. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Ms Tough**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Private Members' business order of the day No 1 relating to Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, being called on forthwith.

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 9 April 2025, on motion by **Mr Cocks**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable

Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.41): The government will be supporting Mr Cocks's bill today as an appropriate measure to support continuing strong accountability, open government and transparency in managing the ACT's budget. The government is committed to providing the appropriate level of oversight of the ACT budget and the government's financial management and welcomes the strengthening of this through today's bill.

It is important to note that the government provides a significant level of public information already about the territory's financial position through the budget and the budget review papers, quarterly financial reports, annual and financial reports and a range of regular publications on the Treasury website. The government supports the timely provision of information to members of the Assembly to improve understanding of the challenges associated with the provision of essential community services, including health care, education, community safety, public amenities and transport, to name just a few. Across the country and here in the ACT, the delivery of these important services is experiencing increased delivery costs, and we recognise the continued need to invest in the high-quality services that Canberrans expect in the face of those pressures.

I thank Mr Cocks and his office for his engagement on the bill and welcome the opportunity to ensure that the Financial Management Act continues to provide a high level of transparency to this Assembly and to the community.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.43): The Greens are happy to support this bill, and we thank Mr Cocks for bringing this forward. It is a really good transparency bill. We think it is well put together. We appreciate the conversations we have had with Mr Cocks on this, and we think this takes us forward on transparency and reporting.

This bill will mean that we do not need to wait for the Consolidated Quarterly Financial Statements to see where there are gaps in our public service funding. This is a good thing, particularly at the current time, but at any time this is useful. We saw in the March Quarterly Consolidated Financial Report that was tabled on Tuesday that, on 21 January, the entirety of the \$79 million of the Treasurer's Advance was put into Canberra Health Services. We understand from other events why that has happened, but it would be fantastic to get formal and official notification of that so that everybody can see these things as they happen. This bill plugs the gap that we currently have in our system about tracking these changes and these unexpected expenditures of money that people have maybe found difficult to follow without this kind of reporting. So we are very happy to support this reform.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.44): I also rise to support this bill. This is a simple step to improve transparency and accountability, and I thank Mr Cocks for bringing it forward.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.42), in reply: I have to say that I am very happy with the furious agreement that we have heard here today. I had thought that perhaps the debate would go on a little bit longer—and I think probably some others in here thought so, too. But let me for a moment again reflect on why this is such an important bill. Over time, some of the trust in exactly what the government is doing with the budget has definitely been eroded. As we saw such a quick turnaround in the ACT

government's financial fortunes from immediately before the election to the situation we found ourselves in at the start of the year, it is absolutely critical that we make sure that every Canberran and this Assembly knows everything that is going on. That is fundamentally what this bill is about.

I appreciate the way that I have been welcomed into the upstairs halls, along with the government—and, indeed, into the crossbench as well—to discuss this bill. All of the discussions around this bill have been absolutely productive, and I am looking forward to seeing sensible reforms and to then see sensible transparency enacted in the ACT.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 10.46 am to 2.00 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (14.01): Minister Orr is absent from the Assembly, so Mr Pettersson will step up and take questions on Minister Orr's portfolios today.

Questions without notice

Budget—interest payments

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. In February, the budget review estimated the government would receive \$2.7 billion in own-source revenue this year and incur interest expenses of \$532 million, meaning that around one dollar in every five dollars raised in local taxes is being spent on interest. At the end of the forward estimates, this figure grows to more than one dollar in every four dollars. Is this expense impacting the government's ability to deliver services?

MR STEEL: I thank the opposition leader for her question. The ACT government is well placed to service our net debt. Of course, at the same time, we continue to invest in delivering the services that Canberrans rely on, particularly in health care, community services, education, transport and so many other areas that are critical and that the Canberra community relies on. We will continue to make sure that is sustainable, and that is part of the budget deliberations that are occurring at the moment for the 2025-26 budget. That also means we need to have sustainable revenue lines as well.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, are interest costs or the government's \$15 billion of debt impacting capital expenditure decisions or delivery?

MR STEEL: No. We are getting on with the job of delivering our infrastructure pipeline. Of course, we always make sure that, throughout each budget process, we look

at the sustainability of the capital pipeline. Our city is growing and infrastructure is required to support the growing population—new housing, new transport infrastructure, and new health and school infrastructure as well. We will look at that as part of the 2025-26 budget—how we can deliver on the commitments that we took to the election in a sustainable way.

MR COCKS: What discussions has the ACT government had with the commonwealth about providing debt relief, financial support or other assistance in managing the ACT's liabilities?

MR STEEL: Ministers, particularly those who are engaged in the infrastructure delivery part of government, are engaged with their respective colleagues in the federal government about securing financial support for projects. In many cases, we have been clear that projects cannot get off the ground without federal support. We have been clear about that regarding light rail stage 2B. It requires a 50 per cent contribution for it to get up, and we have secured that for the planning and design of that project. We will continue to engage with the commonwealth in relation to our infrastructure projects and, indeed, other programs where there is a shared responsibility between the federal government and the ACT government. Acute health care is a key one of those that we will continue to engage with the commonwealth on as part of the negotiations on a new five-year National Health Reform Agreement. We just wrapped up negotiations in relation to the schools agreement, which has seen a great outcome for the territory. So, yes, we are engaged. With the new federal government being sworn in, it is an opportunity to meet with both new ministers and those who are continuing in their roles, to make sure that we put our best foot forward for the territory and receive our fair share of funding for a range of services and infrastructure across government.

Budget—debt

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. The budget review estimated the government has \$14.9 billion in total borrowings this financial year, rising over three years to \$19.8 billion. When does the Government expect borrowings to peak?

MR STEEL: We set that out in the budget review and in the budget, transparently, about the level of net debt. It is something we will continue to look at in future budget processes, making sure we can continue to service that debt. We can do so at the present time, but we do need sustainable revenue lines and we also need to make sure we are keeping a close eye on expenditure, particularly as we do see extra demand in key services, particularly in health care. It is a balancing act that we have to make, but it is made harder when the opposition does not support revenue measures like we debated over the last few weeks.

Mr Cocks: Point of order.

MR SPEAKER: I thought the minister had finished his answer so—

Mr Cocks: The point of order was on relevance.

MR SPEAKER: Was it? Okay, make your point of order Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: The point of order is on relevance because the question was in relation to when debt would peak, which the Treasurer has not gone to, rather he has gone to issues around revenue raising and those sorts of issues.

MR STEEL: Just on the point of order, I do not think that what happens in the Assembly here is divorced from government decision making and the financials of the budget have a direct impact on the amount that we are borrowing.

MR SPEAKER: But again—and if we could stop the clock with 40 seconds on it, please—I am assuming you are done with your answer Minister?

MR STEEL: I am.

MR SPEAKER: I think there is merit in a relevance point of order because I do not think you went anywhere near answering the question, but Ms Castley, you have a supplementary?

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when does the government expect borrowings to peak?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the answer I just provided.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, has the government received any concerns or warnings from ratings agencies, financial institutions or bondholders about the territory's liabilities and, if so, could you please provide a summary of what issues have been raised?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice. I think there has been some public commentary from S&P, directed at all state and territory governments, about their finances in the lead up to the budgets that are being delivered this month and next month. We have already seen the Northern Territory budget delivered. They are looking at the rate of expenditure growth and they have made comments around the level of services and investment that was made to support the community and business during COVID-19. I will not verbalise those comments as they are there to see. I am happy to provide a short summary of some of those comments on notice.

Roads—traffic

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Simultaneous projects in the centre, east and south of the ACT have created a perfect storm of congestion, which is blowing out travel times for huge numbers of Canberran commuters this year. Minister, can you please tell us what is the point of an infrastructure plan if it means the government ends up scheduling a number of disruptive projects at the same time?

MS CHEYNE: I think this question is for me, Mr Speaker. There are a lot of projects underway at the moment; that is absolutely correct. The most disruptive of these is the closure of Coppins Crossing for the Molonglo River Bridge. I appreciate that that has blown out times, particularly in that area of Canberra with the Tuggeranong Parkway.

I also note that with other areas where there is significant work underway, like the Monaro Highway, the actual traffic movements have shown that it is better than what we had modelled. I believe that has even been your experience, Mr Speaker.

We do provide as much notice as we can. The closure of Coppins Crossing will end on Saturday. The crane is being dismantled as we speak and being moved across to the other side of the bridge. That is when Coppins Crossing will reopen.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will the congestion ease—not just for Coppins Crossing but as a whole?

MS CHEYNE: A lot of this work is about easing congestion: the duplication of William Hovell Drive; the Monaro Highway upgrades; this incredible project with Molonglo River Bridge; and the duplication of Gundaroo Drive—which, imminently, is going to return to 80 kilometres per hour along the entire route. Different areas of Canberra are being affected at different times. And, of course, there is the major light rail project. We need to close roads to be able to undertake some of this work safely. Ultimately, it is about planning and delivering for the traffic movements of a growing city.

MS BARRY: Minister, with a more organised approach, would you have staggered disruptive projects to minimise congestion?

MS CHEYNE: Certainly, we would love to stagger these projects as much as we can, but there are a lot of external factors at play here. The weather can have an enormously disruptive impact on road projects, in particular. Of course, there have been approvals that have, because of how long they have taken, delayed the William Hovell Drive duplication from getting underway.

What I would say about Molonglo River Bridge in particular is that it is a huge undertaking. I know that the community would have preferred it to have happened largely in the school holidays, but we were relying on the availability of Australia's second largest crane—in fact, at the moment, it is the largest, because the largest is out of action. So we were waiting for the availability of that. It had to be transported in pieces. We were also relying on the delivery of the girders, which were being manufactured in Newcastle and needed to be transported down here. So none of that work could get underway until those materials and the crane arrived. I think a lot of this is explained in publicly available information.

We are trying to give us much notice as we possibly can when there are road closures, so that people can make other arrangements.

Waste—recycling—costs

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, the ACT government is building a new recycling facility at Hume to replace the one that burnt down in 2022. It is a big contract. Veolia has announced that it is worth over \$800 million. The ACT government have said that they will pay Veolia \$259 million over 20 years in capital and operational costs, which is \$13 million per year in ACT government funding. We used to pay around \$2 million per year for our recycling. Can you tell me why our recycling costs will increase from \$2 million per year to \$13 million per year?

MS CHEYNE: I may have this information in front of me, but it is not easily found—

at least in this moment. I will take it on notice and, if I can come back before the end of question time, I will.

MS CLAY: Minister, how much did the old recycling facility cost to build?

MS CHEYNE: I definitely do not have that available to me, but I will seek it.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are there any types of standard packaging that the old facility would recycle that the new facility will not recycle?

MS CHEYNE: I do not believe so, but, if that is not correct, I will correct the record.

Kingston Oval—maintenance

MR EMERSON: Mr Speaker, my question is for the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, I recently visited Kingston Oval and was surprised by the level of disrepair of the grounds and the facilities there. Seniors footy can no longer be played at Kingston Oval. This oval is both leased and maintained by the Eastlake Football Club but remains open to the public, making it a rare asset for the community.

Given the long-term investment, ongoing costs, and volunteer time that Eastlake has contributed as the lease-holder—I understand it to be over \$1.4 million since 2002—how much has the government invested in this facility, as its owner?

MS BERRY: Thank you. I will have to take on notice the exact detail of the amount of funding that has been provided to upgrade and maintain that facility, but there was funding after the 2020 election when female-friendly pavilion upgrades were made to the Kingston Oval. I also understand that there is some nature conservation work happening at the oval, which is taking some time. I know that has been frustrating for the club. However, TCCS, I think, are working with Eastlake to develop a conservation management plan with regard to the trees at Kingston Oval.

I think there are also some heritage concerns or questions that are also being worked through. Again, when you have some of these older facilities, these are the kinds of things that—working with the community and the government—we can get some really good outcomes on.

I understand that the club also received funding in 2023—again, I will check on the actual number—and some of that funding will go towards upgrades to lighting and to the upgraded maintenance of the field. Again, I will just double-check on the actual number of the funding that has been provided by the ACT government in more recent years.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what level of government investment in the Kingston Oval master plan, which has been prepared by Eastlake Football Club, can we expect in the upcoming budget, or future budgets, particularly with regard to the essential high-priority items it identifies?

MS BERRY: I have not spoken to Eastlake. My office has not been contacted by Eastlake or Ainslie for some time, so I might have to take that question on notice around

what their aspirations are as far as their master plan is concerned. But, of course, I am very happy to work with any sports club across the ACT on meeting their aspirations and a pathway to do that through the sport and recreation infrastructure grants, as well as the participation grants.

MS CARRICK: Is the government committed to completing the six actions identified in last year's ACT Heritage Conservation Management Plan for Kingston Oval within the required 12-month timeframe?

MS BERRY: That is not a question for me, but I will take it on notice and see if I can get an answer for that project.

Roads—traffic

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. One of the three missions of the government's economic development strategy is to be "a city that gives you back time". But the inept scheduling of transport projects means that Canberra's commuters are losing up to three hours per day. Minister, why is one arm of the ACT government undermining the goals of another?

MR STEEL: It is not inept; it is investment that we are making for the future of our city, to give people back time. We are obviously in a temporary period of disruption, and that will end when those infrastructure projects are delivered. Of course, there is disruption when that infrastructure is being built, but it is critical for the future of the city that we get on with that work and deliver those projects for the growing region of Molongo, with the John Gorton Drive extension and the new Molonglo River Bridge, for example. We appreciate that that causes disruption, but at this particular time the disruption will be short, with the closure of Coppins Crossing. We are looking forward to that opening later this month, which will help to relieve congestion in the short term. The opening of the bridge will be critical for that region.

That is why our government has been investing in those things. It is extraordinary that the opposition is criticising us for getting on with those infrastructure projects which are so important for the future of our city. We are investing in the Monaro Highway project as well, and we are sequencing that so that the Athllon Drive works are not occurring at exactly the same time as the Monaro Highway project, because that would see two arterial roads under construction at the same time. We have looked clearly at the sequencing of the infrastructure program, to make sure that the projects are deliverable, and that we get value for money for those. We continue to look at the broader infrastructure market nation-wide to make sure that we are sequencing projects in the best way possible and in accordance with the advice of Infrastructure Canberra, which is the expert agency on that.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, does the government track how much time commuters are losing because of congestion caused by these overlapping projects?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question. As I outlined yesterday, we do have a traffic management centre. There was a good amount invested in that centre. I have visited it. I know Minister Steel has visited it. There are hundreds of CCTV cameras across the city, and it means that we are able to monitor where there is congestion. It means we

are able to update the variable messaging boards across the city, to explain if an area is particularly congested, and how long it might currently be taking to go down a particular road. I would encourage people to look at those variable messaging signs, see what the current timeframe is for a particular road, and take a different route, if it makes sense to do that.

We are constantly monitoring how traffic is moving about this city. Yes, this is a particularly disruptive period, but it is not without warning. As Minister Steel rightly pointed out, this confluence of closures will end. One of the most significant closures, of course, will end on Saturday.

MR HANSON: Minister, have commute times become better or worse since the strategy's goal of "giving back time" was announced in 2022?

MR STEEL: Of course, we are in a period of construction, so there has been disruption for the city as the government invests in these transformational transport infrastructure projects which will provide significant transport benefits into the future. We can expect during this period that there will be disruption to people's commutes, while we invest in this infrastructure, but it is critical that we get on with that work.

There is an alternative, of course, to that policy, which is not to invest at all in the transport infrastructure that our city needs. Of course, that would see, longer term, a worse outcome for the city. The reality is that our city is growing. We have one of the fastest growing populations in the country, of any city. We do need to invest in a range of forms of transport to move more people more efficiently around the city. That is what the transport strategy was about. It was about making sure that we are not just investing in roads but also that we are ramping up investment in public transport infrastructure—in particular, mass transit light rail and active travel—to provide opportunities for people to choose different modes of travel that do not compete with cars on the roadway.

Light rail will predominantly run in a completely defined section of the median strip on light rail stage 2, on Adealide Avenue and Yarra Glen Drive. We will be consulting with the community soon about the designs for that, as part of the draft EIS consultation process. Of course, it also delivers that outcome on stage 1, running in the Northbourne corridor, and having priority. That is critical, because we cannot augment Northbourne Avenue any more than what is already there, with six lanes. So we have to invest in sustainable transport modes. Our government is. We have a vision, and you have opposed it every single step of the way.

Budget—program terminations

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the incoming ministerial briefs released under freedom of information show that 50 programs had funding terminating within the forward estimates period and that continuation of this funding would directly impact the feasibility of the government's planned surplus. Treasurer, will you provide a list of these programs and the number of staff affected?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. That information was published in the *Pre-election budget update*, so I refer him to that document.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, do any of those 50 programs terminate this financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I refer him to the *PEBU*, where that information was released for parties to make their election commitments. He should look at those papers. It is extraordinary if he has not made reference to those papers.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, how many staff are affected by the termination of these programs?

MR STEEL: The government will, of course, through the budget process, consider the continuation of programs. We are in that process at the moment. I am not going to make an announcement in question time. We will have further information to provide when I hand down the budget.

Health—bulk-billing

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Health. During the federal election we saw commitments to triple the bulk-billing incentive. In the context of Canberra, however, both experts and ACT Labor Senator Katy Gallagher have stated that “It remains to be seen” whether these changes to the incentives will actually translate to more bulk-billed appointments. Senator Gallagher also noted that, “It is a matter for doctors to decide, the government can’t force a doctor to bulk-bill.” Given this, what model do you anticipate will be used for the promised three new, fully bulk-billed GP practices?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It would be helpful if Mr Rattenbury was able to identify what three new fully bulk-billed practices he is referring to. I know that federal Labor has obviously made a commitment in relation to the Interchange Health Co-op, where that has been a fully bulk-billed practice which was originally supported with some capital funding from the ACT government. We have also supported Interchange over the years with a total of about \$1.4 million of funding. They have also had our support—

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps I might help the minister. I am referring to a press release issued by Senator Katy Gallagher, Mark Butler, Andrew Leigh, Alicia Payne and David Smith, in which they promised three new fully bulk-billed GP clinics in the areas that needed them the most in the ACT.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It would therefore seem that Mr Rattenbury’s question is one for Senator Gallagher, Mr Smith, Ms Payne and Mr Leigh.

MR RATTENBURY: Given that the minister has consistently informed us that “General practices are private entities that determine their own billing arrangements,” will these new bulk-billing clinics instead be publicly owned?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think again Mr Speaker, Mr Rattenbury is quoting Senator Gallagher in relation to that matter, but we know from around the country, and we know from experience here in the ACT, that there can be ways of facilitating practices to recruit doctors who commit to fully bulk-billing. This is an experience that other jurisdictions have. This is an experience that we have had here before. So I think the

answer to Mr Rattenbury's question is no, it is not necessary—

Mr Rattenbury: On a point of order.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am just trying to answer your question.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order. If we could just stop the clock if we could.

Mr Rattenbury: I am sorry if the minister misunderstood but the quote that I offered was a quote from her in a question on notice. I am trying to understand how these practices are going to be bulk-billing clinics, given the government keeps telling us that GPs are private and they cannot control them, but they are promising fully bulk-billed clinics.

MR SPEAKER: All right. Minister for Health?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My understanding is the way that other fully bulk-billed practices do this around the country is that they recruit GPs who are willing to commit to fully bulk-billing.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, can you provide the Assembly with an update on bulk-billing rates here in the ACT this year and the progress in increasing bulk-billed appointments by 160,000 annually as outlined in the Labor-Greens supply and confidence agreement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Miss Nuttall would be aware, we are currently considering proposals through the budget process. That is the standard way of delivering on election commitments. The information in relation to bulk-billing rates is published, so I can certainly provide Miss Nuttall and the Assembly, on notice, with a link to that public data that is publicly available and that the Greens could search anytime that they wanted to.

Gaming—electronic gaming machines

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the progress of the latest round of the voluntary surrender scheme, which ended on 1 May?

DR PATERSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. The latest round of the Voluntary Electronic Gaming Machine Surrender Program ended on 1 May this year. This round saw a reduction of 296 authorisations since March 2024. As of May this year, there are now 3,494 EGM authorisations in the ACT. This represents a reduction of almost 30 per cent since 2018. A total of 28 different venues surrendered gaming machine authorisations as part of this program. The Vikings Group and the Southern Cross Group both led the way, with 40 surrenders each. The Canberra Raiders club surrendered 38.

The ACT government remains committed to reducing gambling-related harm, and we will continue working with local clubs to build a sustainable industry, one that fosters community connections without depending on gambling revenue.

I thank the venues for their participation in the voluntary surrender process, but there is still significant work ahead. We remain committed to seeing these progressive reductions continue, to reach our target of 1,000 by 2045.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, did any clubs go pokie-free during this period?

DR PATERSON: Thank you. As part of the program, both the Statesman Hotel in Curtin and the Canberra Bowling Club in Forrest have voluntarily surrendered—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

DR PATERSON: I would think Mr Hanson would like to listen to this, given these are venues in our electorate: the Statesman Hotel in Curtin, Mr Hanson, and the Canberra Bowling Club in Forrest. These are both excellent clubs that have gone poker machine free. I visited the Canberra Bowling Club on 2 May to see the work being done to shift their reliance on pokies. I will be visiting the Stateman Hotel tomorrow and look forward to supporting them on their journey to being pokie free.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how does this program help support the government's overall gaming reform agenda?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. I am committed to leading the ACT government's gambling reform agenda to see the harm caused by gambling reduced. A major commitment was to see machine reductions reach 1,000 by 2045. I remain steadfast in this commitment, and this round of reductions is the first step in achieving that goal. I will also be working with both the community sector and the club sector to start progressing the cashless gambling work. I remain committed to seeing this implemented in the 26th to 27th year. I look forward to providing further updates to the Assembly as this work continues. Thank you.

ACT public service—recruitment

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, the public service has been in a recruitment freeze for some time. As any experienced public servant knows, extended recruitment freezes create psychosocial risks and undermine sound workplace planning. With machinery of government changes now announced, are you able to advise the Assembly when the recruitment freeze will be lifted?

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, are you taking this?

MR BARR: Yes, Mr Speaker. I am not announcing government policy in question time, but the process outlined continues until the end of the financial year, at this point. We will make future decisions and announcements in due course.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, has the recruitment freeze resulted in any recommendations from the public service on work programs to be cut in order to

manage the frozen resources and, if so, what are they?

MR BARR: Not that I am aware of—and, of course, there are exemptions to that freeze as they relate to frontline positions and essential staff.

MR RATTENBURY: Are you able to, perhaps on notice, provide the Assembly with a monthly breakdown of EAP utilisation rates for each of the ACT government's directorates over the current financial year compared to the last three financial years?

MR BARR: I will consider that and the resources associated with doing so and am happy to take that on notice. But, obviously, we are still in the financial year. So I will take it but, at the conclusion of the financial year, we can then do a comparison against the three previous ones. The *State of the service* report might also provide that information anyway.

MR SPEAKER: So, Mr Barr, can I just be clear: you said at the start of your answer that you were going to consider taking that on notice.

MR BARR: I will take the question on notice. I will consider what information we can provide based on the level of resources that would be required to prepare it.

MR SPEAKER: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr Rattenbury: A point of order, Mr Speaker: I would be happy to receive it up to the most recently completed month, if that assists the Chief Minister.

MR SPEAKER: Excellent.

Woden town centre—community centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Twelve years ago, in the 2012-13 budget, funding was committed to start planning a community centre in Woden. In 2018 you said, “Woden is the only town centre without a dedicated fit-for-purpose community centre, and so I am bringing agencies from across government together to consider the options for a future community centre in consultation with the community.”

In July last year, there was an article in *Riotact* in which you were quoted to say construction was “expected to begin in 2026”. Before the last election, you again committed to this project.

Minister, after seven years, or 12 years, why hasn't a development application yet been submitted for this project?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take this question in my role as Minister for the Public Service, and Infrastructure Canberra's work in relation to the development of the Woden Community Centre. I can advise Ms Carrick that we are working through some matters in relation to the site and design of that project. Ms Carrick might be aware that a tender went out for design consultants for detailed design of the centre. That tender came back significantly above budget, and so that process has had to be terminated in

terms of that particular tender. We are now considering next steps in that project. But I can assure Ms Carrick that we remain committed to a community centre in Woden to be delivered as quickly as we can.

MS CARRICK: Minister, when will a development application be submitted for this project, and when will construction commence?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not able to answer that question in detail at this point, unfortunately, given the issues that we have faced in relation to this project, but I am happy to provide an offer of a briefing to Ms Carrick, if she is interested. I am not sure how much we will be able to tell her in terms of detail at this point, because there are a range of considerations, but of course, I am always happy to have that conversation with Ms Carrick.

MR SPEAKER: So you are not taking that on notice; you are offering a briefing as a response. Is that—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes; I cannot take it on notice, because I will not be able to answer it.

MR COCKS: Minister, can you confirm whether the full cost of construction of the Woden community centre has been included in the budget?

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

Planning and development—Kambah

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, expressions of interest are now closed for block 24 section 286 Kambah. I have since spoken to community groups who have been advised that the Kambah EOI will not be proceeding to the next stage. Minister, where is the EOI process up to, and can you confirm whether there has or has not been a successful applicant?

MR STEEL: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I am not in a position to make an announcement on that today, but I look forward to doing so soon.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when will we know if there has been a successful applicant?

MR STEEL: When I make the announcement; I will update Miss Nuttall at that time.

MS CLAY: Minister, do you have plans in place to consult the Kambah community on their needs and aspirations for the site?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The purpose of the EOI process is to find out what community organisations would like, to do something that is community based on the land, and for them to put forward, in a merits-based process, those proposals. That is obviously what has been assessed on six blocks, and that process still has not come to a conclusion, so I will not be making an announcement

until there has been a decision on all of those blocks.

Budget—taxation

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. What is driving the significant reductions in territory own-source revenue, including payroll tax and lease variation charges, given the rates of these taxes have not been reduced?

MR STEEL: I am happy to come back on notice with some further information. But we have noted that the federal government's insourcing process for the public service has resulted in fewer consultants being used. Payroll tax would apply to them. That has affected revenue as that policy has continued over time, but, of course, we will provide updated estimates of revenue in the budget soon, so I look forward to commenting further on it then. I am happy to direct the member to the most recent budget review where there is an explanation of the revenue lines and some of the effects on them.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, what modelling have you undertaken to understand the impact of federal Labor's cuts to contractors and consultancies on ACT revenue, such as through payroll tax? And when did you commence that analysis?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Treasury, as part of their work on forecasting revenue over the forward estimates, will make a range of assumptions based on the best information that they have available. They will continue to do that through every budget process and will provide information in the budget papers. I look forward to delivering those in around six weeks.

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, have you asked the federal government to compensate the ACT for lost revenue?

MR STEEL: It already forms part of the GST process. The ability to raise payroll tax is taken into account in GST methodology. There is some level of support provided through that process.

Roads—traffic

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, traffic congestion from my electorate has been massively impacted by congestion. Since the major street closures in Canberra due to light rail, commuters have noticed a significant increase in delays, with one Coombs resident reported as saying: "In the last six months, the commute has probably doubled. What's this going to look like in another six months' time?" Minister, how long will commuters have to put up with double the commute time, or is this the 'new normal' for residents of Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo?

MR STEEL: Well, it will look a lot better because Coppins Crossing is opening this weekend! That is the source of the congestion that we have been seeing on the Tuggeranong Parkway and the Cotter Road because it is the only entry point into the Molonglo Valley at this particular point in time. That will change in a week and then Coppins Crossing will be available. It will also change significantly when the bridge opens. The whole purpose of that bridge is to provide a northern entry point into the

Molonglo Valley but it is not the only major road project that we have going on in Molonglo. Our government is committed to getting on with the Molonglo-Parkway Drive connector. We are getting on with that work. Planning is also underway for the Bindubi Street extension to John Gorton Drive, which will provide another access point, a fourth access point, in the future, into the Molonglo Valley to and from William Hovell Drive.

So road projects are part of the solution, but they are not the only thing we need to do because as our city grows, we do need to invest in sustainable modes of transport and they are exactly the sorts of modes of transport that the opposition has continued to campaign against at every election. What we are also doing, with my planning minister hat on, is looking at integrated land use planning with transport planning. That is the purpose of the transit oriented development work that is occurring on the Southern Gateway, and of course we had that debate around Tuggeranong as well, so that more people are living close to transport so they do not need to rely on a car as our city grows. So we are taking steps to address this issue, but as you make that investment, as you construct those projects, there will be a temporary period of disruption. The community should believe that if the opposition is criticising us for getting on with the construction that they do not support these projects.

MR HANSON: Minister, when will congestion for Molonglo residents driving out of Coombs actually end?

MR STEEL: I think I have answered that comprehensively in my last answer.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will the government consider installing bus prioritisation measures as part of any road infrastructure projects?

MR STEEL: We are already doing that in relation to Cotter Road. It is already funded and it is work that is underway to look at the options. We are also doing that with the Belconnen Transitway with the updated feasibility study. We have already done it in the city as part of the disruption taskforce's work in implementing measures to support public buses to move around the city during the construction period. We have done it on Vernon Circle and we have done it on the Coranderrk intersection to support traffic flow, which has been a brilliant measure, by the way. It has made a massive difference and I hope it continues beyond the construction period.

Roads—traffic

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I refer to reports of a Canberra worker who faced a two-hour commute from his home in Molonglo Valley to work in Barton. Another instance was of a 16-year-old Denman Prospect resident who took two hours to get to school in Dickson on a weekday in March.

Minister, many promises have been made, but Canberrans in my electorate face two-hour commutes. Minister, if you are going to choke traffic in this city with tram works, why have you not actually provided a better alternative for commuters right now?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We have built stage 1 of light rail.

You opposed it the whole way through. That has reduced congestion on Northbourne Avenue by around 20 per cent. It has made a significant difference, and that affects the entire transport network. We have also done that by duplicating the Cotter Road, which was an important measure to support traffic coming in and out of the Molonglo Valley. We have done it in the most recent term 2 bus update, by providing extra bus services into the Molonglo Valley for the R10 and the 47 route bus, which runs from Denman Prospect through Whitlam, to provide sustainable transport options. Every single person who takes a bus or light rail takes a car off the road, for those who need to travel on our transport network.

So we are taking measures, and we will continue to take measures. Every time you criticise the construction, it is simply a reminder that our government is investing in the infrastructure that is required for our growing city.

MR HANSON: Minister, is it acceptable for schoolchildren in this city to have a two-hour commute?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. At this present time, there are, of course, some temporary periods of congestion resulting from construction. That will change this weekend, when Coppins Crossing reopens.

Also, we have seen some unanticipated car accidents. I was caught in one last night on the Tuggeranong Parkway, and there was one the day before in the morning on William Hovell drive as well. Those are unfortunate and do impact on travel times, but they are accidents, and the government does not have a great deal of control over when those happen. We try to make sure we respond as quickly as we can through our emergency services to clear those away, but they do have an impact on the transport network.

Our government is getting on with the infrastructure work—

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. A point of order, Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have given the minister some time before I raised the point of order. It is on relevance. The question was very simply about the acceptability of schoolchildren having two-hour commutes.

MR SPEAKER: If it is possible for the minister to be more direct—

MR STEEL: I think I have addressed that, in that it is temporary. I was talking about a very temporary period.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on the point of order on relevance: the minister is saying it is temporary, but these reports are previous to the bridge shutting. What does he mean by temporary? Is it a decade?

Mr Steel: I have a point of order. I think the member is debating the point of order.

MR SPEAKER: I think so too. And I think that the minister has, in a very small part, answered the question.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how can Canberrans trust your promises when so many of your promises have been broken?

MR STEEL: I object to the premise of the question, because we have delivered. We delivered stage 1 of light rail. We have delivered the transport benefits for our city. We delivered more services as part of the term 2 network update for Transport Canberra into key areas of the city that were facing demand, like Belconnen, with more services for the R2, and like Molonglo Valley, with more services for the R10 and the 47 route bus.

We have actually shown that we are delivering better transport services, and the construction period that we are in reminds every single person, including the opposition, that we are investing in infrastructure. We are the party and the government of infrastructure, and you are the party that does not support infrastructure. You never supported light rail, and you continue to now argue against road projects.

Mr Cocks: I have a point of order, Mr Speaker. The minister has very clearly entered into a world of debating things which are not even in the realms of reality.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister is debating. Minister, do you have more to add to this?

MR STEEL: I do not.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Woden campus

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training, and Industrial Relations. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on construction of the CIT Woden campus? What social and employment outcomes has this project provided to the ACT community?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for her question and her commitment to vocational education in our city. I am pleased to say that construction on CIT Woden is well on track and nearing completion. This \$375 million project is the single-largest investment into vocational education in our city's history. This new campus will be a worldclass facility and demonstrates this government's ongoing commitment to providing education pathways to people in the ACT.

It is not just after completion that this project will have a positive impact. The construction phase of this build has been designed to maximise positive social and employment outcomes during the build. We set ambitious targets during the build to create this positive impact, and I am very pleased to say that we have met them. One of these goals was that 10 per cent of workers engaged on the project would be apprentices. This target was set to ensure that this project contributed to and supported the development of the next generation of construction workers, apprentices and trainees. I am pleased to advise members that we achieved 12.2 per cent apprentice employment as part of this project. Of these apprentices, we said that we wanted 30 of them to be new apprenticeships or traineeships specifically for women. I am pleased to say that 30 women have found their start in the construction sector, thanks to the CIT Woden build.

The positive impact of major infrastructure projects always extends beyond the final delivered build. The ACT government remains committed, when building the infrastructure our growing city needs, to maximising social and employment outcomes for Canberrans.

MS TOUGH: Minister, as part of this commitment to social and employment outcomes, how much of the CIT Woden build was delivered through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Ms Tough, for the supplementary. The positive impact of delivering major infrastructure projects is not limited to the number of jobs created. When we invest as a government, we do so in a way that improves economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. This idea underpins our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy. As part of the CIT Woden build we set expectations in line with this policy: that the CIT Woden project would see economic opportunities afforded to these enterprises. I am pleased to say that, through this project, \$24 million was successfully procured through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. This spend was spread across multiple subcontractors and is an achievement that should be celebrated.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what percentage of the workforce employed on the CIT Woden build were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. As I discussed in my previous answers, we always aim to make sure that our infrastructure projects deliver positively to the community both during and after the build. As part of this project, we set a target to achieve four per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, providing meaningful economic and employment opportunities to ATSI workers in the ACT's construction sector. I am pleased to say that we also met this target.

Guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, the government remains steadfastly committed to supporting the economic participation of this part of our community. In doing this, we aim to ensure that we provide meaningful opportunities, as the government delivers its infrastructure agenda for Canberrans.

Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, nearly a decade ago, in 2015, the government committed to building a national ice sports facility in Tuggeranong. The Built for CBR website says that the project is expected to be completed in 2025.

Minister, after nearly a decade of broken promises, can you promise Tuggeranong residents that the project will, indeed, be completed in 2025 as the website suggests?

MS BERRY: Thank you for the question. Clearly, it is not going to be completed, so we will have to make sure that we update that website. I am disappointed, as much as the community and the ice sports and skating community are, that the joint-venture partners, Pelligra and Cruachan, have not been able to get themselves legally organised

to be able to build a new ice rink.

The government still has committed \$16 million to the project, and that is sitting there waiting for the project to begin. The land has been identified. The last contact that I had from the joint-venture partners was that they were very close to being able to make some kind of announcement that would give the community some confidence that they would begin work on the ice rink. I do not have a further update than that at this stage in time, but as soon as I am aware of any more information going forward, I will let the community know. Yes, it has taken some time.

I think one of the reasons why we have stuck with Cruachan and Pelligra is that it is a very niche sport and a very niche project as well. There are not very many people in Australia who can build ice rinks of this nature, so it is a project that has provided, and probably will provide, some further challenges going forward. But we are as committed as ever, as a government, to building an Olympic-sized, sheet ice skating centre in Tuggeranong.

MS MORRIS: Minister, has a development application for the project been lodged yet?

MS BERRY: No.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you commit to releasing the full details of the accepted tender, once we are there, to ensure transparency for the community?

MS BERRY: I will release whatever is publicly appropriate to release, understanding that most of the conversations that have been had between the joint-venture partners are between each other. So that will be information for them to be able to provide if they see fit. But I am certainly happy to be as open as we possibly can be.

Mr Barr: That is now it. Further questions can be placed on the notice paper. Thank you.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Waste—syringes

MS CHEYNE: In response to Ms Castley's question yesterday, following on from Ms Morris's question on syringes, funnily enough, I responded to this as a question on notice in April. The question was about whether discarded syringes had increased since drug decriminalisation. My understanding or my memory is that that was late October 2023. For the calendar year 2023 City Services had 223 work requests for discarded syringes; in 2024, they had 255; and, in 2025, to date there have been 81. If you transpose that over this entire year, that is around 240. So the answer to whether discarded syringes has increased since then is categorically no.

Waste—recycling—costs

MS CHEYNE: In terms of Mr Braddock's question before regarding whether anything that cannot be recycled in the new facility could be done in the old one, there are no items that were recovered in the old facility that will not be able to be recovered in the

new facility.

Government and civil services—cycleways

MS CHEYNE: In response to the question on the Garden City Cycleway, the intent for completion of the cycleway includes what is identified on the City Services website as segments 5 to 7. The timing and delivery of these remaining segments is subject to funding and stage of design planning undertaken to date. Project details will be updated on that website.

In March 2025, the ACT and federal governments committed funds to deliver the next stage of the Garden City Cycleway, which will be between North Ainslie Primary School and Majura Primary School. It will deliver parts of segments 5, 6, and 7 via the Dickson District playing fields, Downer shops, the Academy of Interactive Entertainment and the Mount Majura Walking and Cycling Trail. That will see a further 3.15 kilometres of the cycleway built to be enjoyed by cyclists and pedestrians.

Waste—recycling—costs

MS CHEYNE: In terms of Ms Clay's question earlier about what the cost was of the material recovery facility that burnt down, I think that the construction cost is publicly available, but—with my Googling skills—I did not have enough time in the hour to find it. But I am sure Ms Clay can if she would like to. The complication with that response is that it was expanded and further enhancements were made to it. So any answer about how much it cost when it was first constructed is not the full picture.

MS CLAY: Sorry, I just seek a clarification. There were, I think, three elements of that question that got taken on notice, and I am just want to check whether we are getting the rest of it on notice or whether that is the minister's complete answer to that question.

MS CHEYNE: I took the first question on notice and I still take that on notice. The second and third I have answered.

Midwifery—continuity of care

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The other day, Ms Clay asked me about continuity of care and how we are working towards meeting our targets. Specifically, Ms Clay asked, "Do you have any reports looking into how we will be working to meet the target, and when will you be releasing those reports?" I talked about a review that was currently underway. I can now confirm that Canberra Health Services has undertaken a project that may offer alternative models for continuity of care to support the expansion of the program. This work has culminated in a paper that outlines an alternative model and other considerations. This report is currently an internal working document developed to inform ongoing policy discussions and is not currently publicly available. Once that work is complete, we will be able to provide further information for Ms Clay.

Papers

The Clerk presented the following papers:

Independent Legal Arbiter—Report—Health expenditures and the 2024 caretaker period information—Light rail—Disputed claims of privilege, dated 15 May 2025, prepared by The Hon Keith Mason AC KC.

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

Health expenditures and the 2024 caretaker period information—Order to table—Assembly resolution of 4 March 2025 (1 folder).

Light rail—Documents—Order to table—Assembly resolution of 19 March 2025 (1 folder).

Government—order to table documents—Legal Arbiter’s report

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.03), by leave: I am not sure whether all members have had the opportunity to review the Independent Legal Arbiter’s findings, which were circulated to our offices earlier this afternoon. For those who are not aware, the Arbiter was engaged to consider several claims of privilege made by the Chief Minister over documents the Assembly ordered him to produce in relation to health expenditures and light rail.

This is one of the most critical, scathing statements that I have seen. I was genuinely astonished by the Arbiter’s findings, which rejected each of the six claims of privilege which were raised by the Chief Minister that I chose to challenge. As one example, a document was withheld as it “contains material that would prejudice a deliberative process of government and disclose the deliberations of cabinet and unreasonably prejudice intergovernmental relations”. That is quite a grand claim, and one which earned a response from the Arbiter that said, “I found it difficult to understand what is sought to be advanced by these assertions in their application to this particular document.”

In another, the government made a claim of legal professional privilege. The Arbiter responded to this one saying, “I have difficulty in seeing anything in the nature of legal advice in the document beyond the assertion that the proposed text of certain legislation has been finalised by Parliamentary Counsel’s Office.” On the three business cases relating to light rail, the Arbiter responded: “My attention has been directed to no portions of the documents that may be of particular sensitivity, and no submissions have been made presented to supplement the globally expressed claims of privilege.”

In claim after claim after claim, the Arbiter found that privilege did not attach to these documents. In other words, the Chief Minister has unreasonably attempted to deny the publication of information that the Assembly has directed him to release. These were not closely contested claims of privilege; they were completely and utterly unfounded. It is notable that, in moving OPDs, under standing order 213A, the Chief Minister repeatedly protested about the time and expense incurred by the government, which raises the question about how much time and money was incurred by the government in prosecuting these empty claims. What was the point?

Today’s findings mark a significant step forward in our campaign for greater transparency from this government. In this term, we have already demonstrated the role that Assembly orders can play in forcing the production of documents. We have demonstrated that these orders extend not just to the production of documents but also

to the creation of documents to fulfil an order and we have now demonstrated that the bar for privilege is set high enough that the Assembly and the community can expect the government to produce most documents in its possession when directed to do so.

This is not a transparent government. It has not been transparent for a long time, and it is clear that this suits the government. But it does not suit us, it does not suit the Assembly and it does not suit the community. So we will keep fighting for change and we will keep winning those fights, as we have today.

Finally, I want to thank the Independent Arbiter, the Hon. Keith Mason AC KC. His work on this matter has been invaluable and, on behalf of the Assembly, I express our sincere appreciation for that.

Canberra Health Services—visiting medical officers

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.07): Yesterday, Ms Castley asked a series of questions relating to the position of Director of Cardiology, in particular. I can advise that Dr Peter Scott was appointed as the Director of Cardiology at the Canberra Hospital in December 2021. No changes have been made to this position since that time, and Dr Scott was recruited from Calvary Public Hospital, Bruce.

Government—order to table documents—Legal Arbiter’s report

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) (3.08): Pursuant to standing order 213A(h) I move:

That the Assembly authorise for publication the report of the Independent Legal Arbiter in relation to light rail business cases and health caretaker documents tabled by the Clerk.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act—

Pursuant to section 7—Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Declaration 2025 (No 1)—Notifiable Instrument NI2025-239, dated 7 May 2025.

Pursuant to section 8—Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Directions 2025 (No 1)—Notifiable Instrument NI2025-240, dated 6 May 2025.

Belconnen Town Centre—Primary and secondary school—Proposed establishment—Assembly Resolution of 15 May 2024—Government response dated May 2025.

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act, pursuant to section 22—Close to the Edge—An Investigation into the effects of urban expansion on the environment of the ACT—

Special Report, undated.

Special Report—Statement, dated 15 May 2025.

Estimates 2023-2024—Select Committee—Report presented—Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024—Government response to Recommendation 55, dated May 2025.

Health expenditures and the 2024 caretaker period information—Order to table—Copies of—

Indexes of returned documents—Updated, dated 15 May 2025.

Supplementary documents—

Part 1—Shortage of specialists (0053-0057), dated 15 May 2025.

Part 1—Scope of services for health centres (0070-0078), dated 15 May 2025.

Libraries ACT—Strategic plan and Resource Improvement—Assembly Resolution of 19 March 2025—Government response to 3(b) through (e), dated May 2025.

Planning Act, pursuant to subsection 268(2)—Statement of Leases Granted—1 January to 31 March 2025, dated January 2025.

Work Health and Safety Act—

Pursuant to section 2.37—Work Health and Safety (Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner) Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2025-2029—Notifiable Instrument NI2025-192, dated 22 April 2025.

Pursuant to Section 2.38—Work Health and Safety (Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner) Strategic Plan 2025-2029—Notifiable Instrument NI2025-186, dated 22 April 2025.

Standing orders—suspension

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.09): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Assembly business order of the day, relating to the establishment of the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026, being called on and debated forthwith.

Question resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

Estimates 2025-2026—Select Committee Establishment

Debate resumed.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.09): I move the amendments circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “passing”, substitute:

“(3) a Liberal Party member shall be Chair of the Committee;

(4) funds be provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the Committee to facilitate the analysis of the Budget

- and the preparation of the report of the Committee;
- (5) the Committee is to report by 29 August 2025;
 - (6) if the Assembly is not sitting when the Committee has completed its inquiry, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publishing and circulation;
 - (7) the Treasurer must publish, by no later than 5 pm on 24 June 2025, the following information on the ACT Budget website, to table copies in the Assembly, and to provide copies to the Committee for consideration:
 - (a) statement regarding the structural position of the ACT Budget, both in 2025-26 and over the forward estimates period;
 - (b) scenario analysis for headline Budget items – including the key economic parameters and General Government Sector Headline Net Operating Balance – showing the base, high, and low cases, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (c) statements regarding the Government’s policies on debt consolidation and management, the superannuation liability, and progress towards the implementation of the 2012 tax reform plan;
 - (8) the Treasurer must, where available by the day of the Budget, or otherwise by 17 October 2025:
 - (a) publish a medium-term (10-year) forecast of revenue, expenses, the net operating balance (excluding the Superannuation Return Adjustment), and total government debt;
 - (b) provide notes in the Budget Papers describing the accounting policies, and assumptions, and major technical adjustments, and providing a breakdown of key financial statement items, consistent with the approach of the Commonwealth and state governments;
 - (c) work closely with the community sector to publish tables showing community sector support by program and organisation, for each of the current financial, Budget and forward estimates years;
 - (d) publish all future Budget data in a machine readable (CSV or XLSX) format;
 - (e) make a statement in the Assembly on 21 October 2025 on the feasibility, cost, and the Government’s plan for reporting the information in (8)(a) to (d) where that information has not already been published.
 - (9) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.”.

Over the past few days, there have been significant discussions on this motion between the opposition, the Greens and the Treasurer’s Office, and I want to acknowledge all of the productive engagement that we have had. It has been constructive and it has allowed us to find a degree of common ground. That said, we are reluctantly accepting some of the arguments put forward by the government—specifically that it is not in a position to release the full scope of information that was included in the original motion prior to the budget.

But let me be clear that this is not a free pass, because what this process has revealed is somewhat troubling. The fact is that it seems ministers themselves cannot access this information in a timely or complete way. That highlights a deeper systemic problem not just about what is being withheld but also about what is not been captured at all, it seems. Our acceptance of this delay is not a concession on the principle. We are prepared to allow more time for this material to be released, but we are not prepared to concede on the necessity of its release.

The ACT budget papers are the least accessible and least transparent in the country. That is not just our view; it is the view of the analysts, stakeholders and many in the community who try to navigate these documents every year. While community expectations are moving forward, this government has been moving backwards, and that is not good enough.

This motion is a step, one step, towards addressing those concerns, but it cannot be the last. Further work will be needed through the Assembly and the estimates process, if we are serious about rebuilding public confidence and restoring the basic transparency that good financial management demands. We support the motion, but work is far from done.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.12): I move:

Insert after paragraph (8)(e):

- “(f) the alignment of expenses by function under the General Government Sector expenses with other reporting methods across the Budget, including the ‘How we spend our money’ ring;
- (g) the reporting of Commonwealth funding categories with expenses by function; and
- (h) further information on total territory borrowing and interest payments, particularly the leases/other category.”.

I like looking at budget papers and annual reports, and it is frustrating when it is difficult to track revenue and expenses between different parts of the budget. My amendment will align the expenses by function table with other reporting methods across the budget, including the “How we spend our money” ring that is shown on our rates notice. I am also keen for the money received from the commonwealth to align with how the money is spent—for example, health and education. These are fairly obvious, but other categories are not so obvious. I have also included more information about the leases that are included in the total territory borrowings and interest payments.

The ability to track expenditure across tables in budget papers is good governance. While it might sound technical, this capability is fundamental to ensuring transparency and accountability in government. Budget papers are more than just numbers; they are a reflection of a government’s priorities and promises. But, without clear, consistent tracking of expenditure across different tables and sections, it becomes nearly impossible for the community, journalists and even parliamentarians to follow the money.

When expenditure data is fragmented or inconsistently recorded, it creates blind spots.

These blind spots can hide inefficiencies. On the other hand, when we can trace every dollar from allocation to outcome, we empower oversight bodies, foster public trust and strengthen democratic accountability. Transparency is not just about publishing data; it is about making that data usable, traceable and comparable. That is why governments must prioritise clarity and consistency in how they present budget information, because when we can follow the money we can follow the truth.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.14): The government will support Mr Cocks’s amendment and Ms Carrick’s amendment, and of course we will also support the establishment of a Select Committee on Estimates. We do welcome the opportunity of scrutiny of the territory’s budget and finances. The government acknowledges the strong interest of the Assembly in the way that the government raises revenue and delivers services, and the significant amount of scrutiny provided to accounting metrics across several budgets now, including the budget review earlier this year.

However, this motion is not just about the establishment of a select committee. It has tacked on to it, from its original form, a range of extremely late demands of the government as to how it publishes the budget papers, which are documents of the executive and are currently being drafted for presentation to the Assembly. With just six weeks before I hand down the 2025-26 ACT budget, these demands are for major changes to the budget and broader financial management framework and systems, which are unrealistic in the timeframe and impossible to deliver by budget day.

The demands show the lack of understanding of the ACT’s budget system and the scale of change being sought to it, not just to the budget but right across every single directorate and agency in the ACT government and the associated ICT systems that they rely on for financial management. Just six weeks before a budget, this would have placed impossible demands on the public service, who are now working incredibly hard during the last stages of the budget process. All this information, of course, could have been asked for at any other point in time—in the previous term, previous year—for consideration and endorsement of government. The problem with demanding this information six weeks before a budget is due to be handed down is something that all public servants in Canberra can understand. It is a real challenge. It is impossible. It is unfeasible.

This motion also calls on the government not just to change how it reports the territory’s finances in the budget with just Treasury but also to produce new information that has not existed before—new reports, new models—and many of these requests raise questions about whether the Canberra Liberals are just outsourcing their work to the public service and the executive arm of government. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow treasurer already have extensive means to scrutinise government expenditure through the budget, through the processes of this parliament and the select committee and, of course, through other processes—question time, annual reports, you name it—to understand where money is spent.

In a small jurisdiction, ACT Treasury is not a large agency compared with other jurisdictions, and we do have to be careful about their workload. Weeks ago, Treasury officials already outlined to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and

Administration that changes to our budget reporting would require a significant and substantial amount of work that, when implemented in other jurisdictions, including the commonwealth, has taken years of work by dedicated specialists; that is the advice of the public service.

Notwithstanding the demands in this motion as it was originally drafted, the government can support some elements of the request made by the Leader of the Opposition, and we are committed to working with our public service to deliver improvements. The amendments to this motion that have been moved by Mr Cocks are the result of engagement between our parties, and I thank him for the understanding that the demands were impossible to deliver in the timeframes. It does reflect a more practical approach to improving budget and financial reporting in the territory. And in recognition of our shared interest in continuous improvement, I have asked Treasury officials to commence work to explore what opportunities can be made to include some of these elements in future budgets.

In addition, I specifically asked that, for budget day, more information be provided about community sector funding. There is a body of work underway between the Community Services Directorate and ACTCOSS to provide that information. I look forward to releasing more details when the budget is ready. I have also asked the Treasury to have a look at what medium-term information about the budget position is available, with a view to providing that to members opposite on budget day.

It is important to be clear that, even as amended, these changes are significant. The motion proposed by Ms Castley requires an extensive body of long-term work, and it is inevitably a trade-off, as all things are when it comes to the budget. It is about priorities, as Ms Carrick mentioned, and this will require investment. Treasury officials working on this will be left with less time to manage the territory's finances on a day-to-day basis. It will require investment to undertake that work, and we will have to manage that in the context of other demands on the budget, whether it be in health care, education, community services—a range of other areas.

Mr Speaker, Canberra is a place that respects and values our public service. ACT Labor's track record on this is clear, and it aligns with the views of the community. Two weekends ago, the people of the ACT and Australia comprehensively rejected a plan by the Liberal Party to cut the public service. They comprehensively rejected the contempt of the public service at that election, which would have had a disastrous consequence for the ACT's economy and the budget.

Now, I note that the local branch of the Liberal Party has been at pains to distance themselves from that rhetoric, and I want to acknowledge that. Just last week Ms Castley was on the front page of the *Canberra Times* assuring the public service that she was not like Peter Dutton. I hope that is the case. I would like to see all parties and all members in this chamber demonstrate respect for the role and the workload of the public service. That means accepting that whilst improvement and accountability are important, not every idea or request can be accommodated, especially when those requests are based on comparison to the commonwealth public service, a massive organisation compared to the ACT public service and the ACT Treasury.

I am pleased that through engagement with Ms Castley and Mr Cocks, we have been

able to come up with a more realistic and achievable path for achieving the aims of this motion that better respects the public service, compared to the original drafting. I look forward to handing down the territory's budget very soon, a significant task that is made possible with the hard work of the ACT public service, particularly in Treasury. I commend both of the amendments to the Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.21): I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward this motion to establish what is one of the key oversight mechanisms for the government's budget. I note with interest the innovation of including what is, essentially, an order for the production of documents as part of this motion and offer my support for the calls for enhanced transparency of the ACT budget. I would also like to thank the Leader of the Opposition's office, plus the Treasurer's office and other members in this place, for their engagement on a number of amendments which you now see in front of you.

I will talk on some of those amendments, and, firstly, the timeframe. The timeframe in which the committee is required to report is essential. After a hard-won fight over the sitting calendar at the end of last year, we established that there needs to be sufficient time for which questions on notice can be answered by the government and considered by the committee prior to the production of the report. That is why it was so important for us to see the timeframe amended so that the committee is not overly rushed and nor is the government in their response—so that we can ensure that we have due process in the oversight of the budget.

This rush is particularly driven by the fact that the ACT government is now delivering a budget later and later each year. It is later than any other state and territory in terms of its delivery. The hardworking public servants, whom I applaud and thank for their efforts, used to be able to do it within a reasonable timeframe; however, we are now seeing it come in later. It was acknowledged during a debate on the community sector funding last week that the late delivery of the ACT government's budget is now also having an impact on the community sector, and that is something we need to consider.

The Greens will be supportive of Mr Cocks's amendments that, essentially, are a negotiated solution that breaks the information demands into two buckets. The first is what can be realistically provided within the budget; noting there are only six weeks left, and the appropriate officials are already burning the midnight oil in order to produce the budget. The second category are those elements which cannot be realistically incorporated into this budget but which the Assembly views as important. This paragraph sets a path for the government to provide this information, or its plan to provide this information, in future budgets. The Treasurer's office has also offered a briefing at a later date on this topic, which is something that I would be very grateful for. Should the Treasurer's statement in October be unsatisfactory, this Assembly can then determine what further steps it may wish to take.

I also stress my desire to see the work on program-level reporting. This was, in fact, a recommendation of the public accounts and administration committee's inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2024-25 (No 2), a recommendation that the government response simply "noted". The budget papers are extremely opaque and challenging to follow from one budget to another, and hence this information will be helpful in increasing the transparency.

Whilst Mr Steel may claim that this will create a workload for the public servants that will require trade-offs elsewhere within the government, I would also note the ability for transparency is important for the work within this Assembly, and for the greater community—to ensure they are able to understand and track the expenditure and use of resources across years on particular items or programs.

It is not enough for the government to simply note that committee's recommendation. I want to see meaningful action in this space. Through the passage of this motion today, we are asserting to the government that transparency is important for the Assembly, and there needs to be further work in this space.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.24): In closing, I wish to make a few brief remarks and thank everyone who worked together, as a few members have mentioned, to get agreement today. I do share the views of the shadow treasurer. Our goal is to transform the publication and transparency of the budget papers and to ensure that the community is more informed about the state of the territory's finances.

The transparency is sorely lacking at the moment. I was genuinely surprised to learn that some of the information in this motion is material that ministers themselves have sought but have been unable to access from the public service, and this is an absolute indictment on the government's management. My message to the Treasurer is that your office has committed to working with us in the Assembly in good faith, and we will hold you to that. If you choose not to fulfil the commitments you and your team have made, you can expect that we will begin drafting legislation before the year is out, because Canberrans will have better budget reporting with or without your support.

Thanks again to those who have worked on securing agreement. I would like to reflect on a couple of comments the minister made. He said that the Canberra Liberals want new information and that we are outsourcing our responsibilities—or whatever the words were. I thought, "Surely, that is not the response!" How terrible is it for an opposition to try and get some information out of the government from whom we have just had a report tabled that shows they love to hide things? Heaven forbid we dare to ask for more clarity and information in the budget papers!

He also said that it was unfeasible and impossible to provide this, yet he is still agreeing to the amendments in the motion. It is something that we saw with the health minister last week. She said she could not possibly keep Burrangiri open, but when pressured and pushed, she was able to make it happen. It is clear that this government has grown used to getting their way for far too long, and this is not going to remain. It is not going to continue to happen.

Canberrans do deserve better, and the Canberra Liberals are here to make sure Canberrans get what they deserve. I do want to thank, again, the Greens and Minister Steel's office for working with us. It took us a while, but we got there in the end. I thank all the members for their support with this motion today.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.28), by leave: I wish to thank Ms Castley for this motion establishing this year's estimates committee, and I apologise for not jumping up more quickly. I appreciate the collaboration between members that has occurred, since

this matter was adjourned earlier today, to achieve the aims of the original motion, while balancing those aims with what is feasible.

I want to thank Ms Castley, in particular, for including in this motion a call for greater transparency with respect to community sector funding distributions. A table showing community sector support by program organisation will be invaluable not only to us in this place and to interested community members but also to community sector organisations themselves, and I note the Treasurer's comments with regard to work going on in this area. The ACT's dedicated and often under-appreciated community sector organisations are not just supported by government funding, per the wording of this motion, but they are really delivering critical services on behalf of the government to some of the most vulnerable Canberrans.

The government relies utterly and fundamentally on our community sector. Their capacity to operate in genuine partnership with government is compromised by decisions about their funding arrangements—arrangements that directly affect their ability to do their job in supporting people across our community—being consistently made behind their back. Community organisations, those on the frontline with boots on the ground, are surely best placed to know where funding is most desperately needed, where it is being delivered effectively to address community needs and where it might need to be reallocated to produce better outcomes in a more coordinated, efficient manner.

I have been told by long-time members of our community sector that organisations delivering key services used to have ready access to more information about funding amounts provided to different organisations and about the relevant services provided. This transparency, one women's refuge manager told me, allowed for a greater collaboration across services. They knew where the funding was so that they could be responsive and flexible based on the circumstances at hand. If one crisis service provider was unable to meet the urgent need of a woman and her children, they would quickly arrange a warm transfer to another provider of similar services.

For vulnerable people in crisis, that kind of efficient collaboration, focused on helping the human being in the most effective possible way, is absolutely vital. It might seem minor, but at a human level, it can make the difference of a vulnerable member of our community having a safe place to sleep at night, without them being told, "You need to contact the central intake phone online," only to find out that phone line is off the hook after-hours and them being left, as a consequence, without a place to go.

Today, these same organisations tell me they are operating in the dark. They no longer know where funding is being allocated across the sector. They cannot coordinate. Instead of working alongside each other, they are forced to compete for what often feels like scraps. It is not in the nature of the kinds of people that choose to work in the community sector to take a competitive stance. They are built to collaborate and built to share, but these inherent collaborators have been made competitors by administrative processes and opaque funding arrangements that do not seem designed to help these organisations or the vulnerable people they help.

Still, on behalf of our community sector and the vulnerable community members that rely heavily on their services, I remain hopeful. I am hopeful that the upcoming budget

will not be marked by cuts to vital community services and hopeful that the government recognises the cost—human, social and economic—of failing to invest in the people and programs that keep Canberrans from falling through the cracks. This is an ongoing conversation, and beyond the upcoming budget, I look forward to greater ongoing transparency being provided with respect to government’s investment not just in our community sector but in vulnerable people through the support provided to them by our community sector.

Thank you again to those who pulled together positions on this motion. I am supporting Mr Cocks’s amendment—the debate is already closed, so we all are—and Ms Carrick’s amendment to that amendment. I do think her point about federal funding and where that goes, including for community services, is really vital. I am looking forward to the budget and getting stuck into estimates hearings.

Ms Carrick’s amendment to **Mr Cocks’s** proposed amendment agreed to.

Mr Cocks’s amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Orr for this sitting day due to illness.

Margaret Timpson Park

MS BARRY(Ginninderra) (3.34): I, and also on behalf of Mr Cain, move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the vital importance of open green public spaces in enhancing the liveability of high-density urban areas;
- (b) the well-documented positive impact of accessible green spaces on the physical and mental health and overall wellbeing of individuals and communities;
- (c) the rapid growth and urbanisation of the Belconnen Town Centre, which now requires urgent and forward-thinking investment in public infrastructure to avoid becoming an overdeveloped and underserved precinct;
- (d) the current limitations of Margaret Timpson Park, which in its existing form, size, and design, does not meet the recreational and social needs of the surrounding community;
- (e) the Belconnen Community Council’s (BCC’s) strong advocacy for the expansion and improvement of Margaret Timpson Park into a larger and more inclusive public space;
- (f) the overwhelming support from the Belconnen community for more

green space, as evidenced by recent BCC community consultation and surveys;

- (g) Federal Labor’s 2025 Federal election promise, and ACT Labor’s 2024 ACT election promise, to fund \$1.5 million worth of amenities upgrades at Margaret Timpson Park; and
 - (h) the unique opportunity to repurpose the underutilised site at Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen— commonly referred to as the big hole in the ground— into a vibrant, people-centred green space; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) expand Margaret Timpson Park to incorporate Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen;
 - (b) transfer custodianship of Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen to the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate;
 - (c) recognise the essential role that green public space plays in supporting healthy, connected, and resilient urban communities;
 - (d) integrate health and wellbeing considerations into planning decisions related to public open space in all high-density areas; and
 - (e) work in collaboration with the Belconnen Community Council, Belconnen residents, and urban design experts to develop a renewed vision for an expanded Margaret Timpson Park that reflects community needs.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.34): Today I rise with a simple but powerful proposition: that we choose to invest in the health, happiness, and resilience of our community by expanding Margaret Timpson Park in Belconnen.

The Belconnen town centre is growing fast, as is the Belconnen district as a whole. High-rise buildings are rising, and dwellings are multiplying. But amidst this densification, what is not growing fast enough are the greenspaces that residents within the Belconnen town centre deserve. Margaret Timpson Park, as it stands, will struggle to remain sufficient as the population continues to grow in Belconnen. It is a site with endless potential in the heart of the Belconnen town centre and serves a community that deserves so much more.

We have a unique, time-sensitive opportunity before us. Adjacent to the park lies block 45, section 54, on the corner of Swanson Court and Benjamin Way, what the Belconnen locals call “the big hole in the ground”. For too long, it has sat underutilised; an eyesore and a lost opportunity. But it does not have to be. With vision and leadership, that space can be transformed into a vibrant, welcoming, people-focused green oasis—one that not only enhances liveability but strengthens community bonds.

This motion, which I am pleased to present alongside Ms Barry, calls on the government to do the right thing: to expand the footprint of Margaret Timpson Park; to transfer custodianship of this vacant site to Transport Canberra and City Services; and to work closely with the Belconnen community, particularly the Belconnen Community Council, to reimagine an expanded park that truly reflects the needs of the growing population around the Belconnen town centre.

We already know what Belconnen residents want. The Belconnen Community Council has made it loud and clear. Their consultation has shown overwhelming support for expansion of the park. This is not just a wish list; it is a widely-shared priority.

Mr Speaker, we are not starting from scratch; \$1.5 million has already been committed for upgrades to the existing park—playgrounds, toilets, landscaping. And credit where credit is due: it is appreciated that the federal government has so promised this amount of money.

This funding is welcomed, but much more could be done. We need a park that matches the scale and density of the community around it, a community that is growing fast and will continue to do so. The research is irrefutable. Greenspaces reduce heat, improve physical and mental health, encourage active lifestyles, foster connection and even reduce crime. In town centres like Belconnen, these spaces should not be a luxury. They are essential infrastructure, just as vital as roads, schools, or public transport.

Mr Speaker, other jurisdictions, including Victoria and New South Wales, are already embedding greenspace targets into their planning frameworks. We cannot afford to be left behind. This motion aligns with Canberra's own policies—the Living Infrastructure Plan, the ACT Planning Strategy, the Urban Forest Strategy—all of which talk about the importance of public greenspace. The question today is whether we want to back these policies with action.

Mr Speaker, let me be clear: the Canberra Liberals wholeheartedly support the need for greater housing supply and variety, particularly social housing. In fact, the Canberra Liberals took the most ambitious and visionary housing and planning policy package to the ACT electorate last year. But this relatively small block has greater potential for community good as an extended greenspace than as a few floors of residences amongst the towers of growing residential accommodation in the Belconnen town centre. This block can serve a greater good as part of Belconnen's central common area, rather than being placed in the next indicative land release program. But who knows what will happen?

Mr Speaker, we have a duty and obligation to create town centres that nurture people and create opportunities for them and their children. This is about good planning. It is about health. It is about futureproofing our city's largest town centre. It is also about dignity: the dignity of every resident, who deserves a space close to where they live, to breathe, play, gather and belong.

I do want to thank my Liberal colleague in Ginninderra, Ms Barry, for her work on this joint motion. As well, I want to thank the Belconnen Community Council for their advocacy, particularly the council chair, Lachlan Butler.

In closing, I urge this Assembly to please not let this moment pass. Let's not settle for the bare minimum of community amenities and greenspaces. Let's seize the chance to do better, to be bold and to build a legacy in Belconnen that our future residents will thank us for. It is not a massive ask to extend an existing park across an adjacent block. That is not a massive task to undertake, and I urge the government to do so.

MS BARRY(Ginninderra) (3.41): I rise in support of my motion, and I thank Mr Cain

for co-sponsoring it with me. We are both, obviously, strong advocates for Belconnen and Ginninderra. This motion seeks to focus the government's attention on the need to consult with the community and consider the long-term future of Margaret Timpson Park, in the context of the Chief Minister's speech on 6 May 2025, where he noted that the commonwealth would be contributing to the upgrades.

Having appropriate urban parks close to where people live is an important contributor to human and social wellbeing. Parks make us more physically active and provide opportunities for natural experience and recreation. Great parks have positive impacts on biodiversity and property prices and contribute to cooling the local environment. They also have a huge impact on our mental health and overall wellbeing.

When we think of the world's greatest cities, they are generally characterised by significant and deliberately designed parks, which provide relief from the concrete jungles that big cities can become. We can think of Central Park, for example, in the Big Apple—New York. We can think of Hyde Park in London. We can think, closer to home, of the green space around Sydney and Melbourne.

Margaret Timpson Park was one of the parks established by the National Capital Development Commission during a period of rapid development, at a time when the population grew from 40,000 to 300,000 people. Canberra is now growing to 500,000, with projections showing growth to 700,000 and more. We need to act now to lock in some space in our urban infrastructure so that we can accommodate the high-rise towers which we will be building in the surrounding areas. If this is not done now, it will be very hard to retrofit parkland in the future.

There have been many attempts to bring Margaret Timpson Park up to date, as a facility that provides for the needs of the community, now and into the future. Canberra locals have sponsored and supported questions and motions on many occasions over the last 24 years, including expansion to include the vacant site of the old Belconnen health centre.

I must say that I have very fond memories of campaigning in Margaret Timpson Park. I spent two weeks there at the last election. It was one of the few spaces where current campaign restrictions allow candidates to meet and have considered conversations with electors on their way to lodge their votes. I know that many people came to Margaret Timpson Park because of the opportunity to have those discussions with candidates. I think that all members who spent time there enjoyed the festival of democracy, as I call it, and wondered whether a larger, redesigned park might include better facilities to support large community gatherings.

We need to make Margaret Timpson Park the community asset that Belconnen deserves. The time is right, because of the commonwealth funding and the block of land that is not currently allocated. This is a rare opportunity to do something wonderful for the community. What is missing is the knowledge of what the community wants.

I acknowledge that there are options for development of housing on that site. I acknowledge the desperate need in Canberra for more housing. The vacant site is relatively small and has strict height restrictions so that any building cannot be more

than four storeys in height. Those limitations do not make the site a great candidate for residential development.

I have heard suggestions that this land could be used for social housing, and that is reflected in the Greens amendments, which we will speak to later. If social housing were to be considered in the future, it would likely be more practical to utilise the grassland area. However, given the current plan for urban infill, it makes sense to extend this land to provide much-needed outdoor space for families amidst the proposed high-rise developments in Belconnen.

There are many options for consideration of the use of this land. These could include an enclosed dog park, a children's play area, an adventure playground, barbecues, with tables and chairs, public toilets, enhanced gardens, a public art installation—who wouldn't love another Belconnen owl statue—an outdoor public meeting space for performances, and an integrated community centre.

I am sure that, if we consulted with the residents of Belconnen, they would raise these and many other suggestions. A genuine public consultation process would give the community an opportunity to unite around their priorities and the options that best suit their needs.

In closing, I urge members of the Assembly to consider the future of Belconnen, what that area would look like, and the future needs of the people who will live in those apartments, in order to lead a wholesome life. I commend this motion to the Assembly, and I encourage the government to think big about the future of Margaret Timpson Park, and to provide the community with the facilities that it needs and deserves.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.46), by leave: I move the following amendments that have been circulated in my name:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(h), substitute:

“(h) the opportunity to both improve the amenity of Margaret Timpson Park and deliver the community need for more public, community and affordable housing; and”.

2. Omit paragraphs (2)(a) and (b), substitute:

“(a) release Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen as soon as possible for development, including social and affordable housing;

(b) ensure built form has minimal impact on the recreational value of Margaret Timpson Park, and investigate options for integrating any future built form on Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen with Margaret Timpson Park, similar to Common Ground Dickson;”.

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

“(e) continue to consult with stakeholders, including the Belconnen Community Council and residents, in advance of and throughout the planned upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park in 2026 to ensure the park upgrades best meet community needs, including investigating options to improve access for people running events.”.

This is a 2,712-square-metre parcel of land and it is in a prime, appropriate location for housing, with access to public transport, shops and services, as well as a fabulous park right at its front door. As it stands, the site can accommodate 60 dwellings, as well as ground-floor commercial and community operations.

Mr Speaker, if you have visited Common Ground in Dickson, you will see what a lovely community has been developed there. The location of this land means that it is perfectly positioned to further activate and enhance Margaret Timpson Park so that it is a similarly lively hub, which is exactly what the government's intention is. Just like the Dickson Common Ground, I feel that the Belconnen community will also warmly embrace this common-ground-like project.

I know how important green spaces and recreational facilities are, particularly for residents in Belconnen, but I believe that my amendment, combined with funding that was provided by ACT Labor, and now the funding by the federal Labor government, for \$1.5 million worth of upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park will make the existing green space even better, particularly as it is incorporated into a new project like the one that my amendments suggest. That is why we are incorporating green space into the Lathlain Street Precinct project, which is just around the corner.

It is also part of the planning work for Belconnen, changing the shape of Belconnen. It is evolving all the time. New memories are being created there which are very different from my own memories growing up. That is why we need to make sure that Belconnen residents have everything they need to lead good and happy lives. I believe that is a strong vision shared by ACT Labor for the future.

That is what is outlined in the Belconnen District Strategy, with consultation to continue with the community and stakeholders, including Belconnen Community Council, to make sure that upgrades and developments balance everybody's interests. There has never been a more important time, I think we would all agree, to increase the amount of social and affordable housing, which is why ACT Labor believes this could be the best use of block 45 section 54 in Belconnen. ACT Labor has been working towards that end since last year, when we put it in the Indicative Land Release Program.

The intention is for the whole site to be social and affordable, much like Common Ground Dickson, which adds so much value to the existing community, as well as creating safe and secure homes for people who need them most.

I know that my amendments are not necessarily supported by the Canberra Liberals, but I truly believe that green spaces and building homes that are so desperately needed right now can be developed together and give the community, both existing and new, a lovely neighbourhood to be enjoyed and strengthened for many years to come. I note that the Greens have proposed some further amendments which call for a minimum of 15 per cent public or community housing. My expectation is that it will be much more than that. Nonetheless Labor will be supporting their amendments going forward.

I encourage members to consider the amendments that I have moved, which will bring about a better outcome for the existing community, with an upgraded park facility, as well as more community and commercial areas, with a new development of around 60

dwellings. They will also give the people who most need it in our community a beautiful home to live in, as I said, with a beautiful, upgraded park right on their doorstep.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.50), by leave: I move the following amendments that have been circulated in my name:

1. In paragraph (2)(a), add: “with at least 15 percent public or community housing and a consideration of whether the whole site could be developed by a community housing provider”.
2. After paragraph (2)(e) add:
 - “(f) report back to the Assembly by 30 June 2025 on the timeline for completion of the funded upgrades for Margaret Timpson Park and the timeline for the development of homes on Block 45 Section 54.”.

I will speak to the motion, Ms Berry’s amendments and my own. I would like to thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. It is a really important issue. It has been great to work with their offices on this. We also worked quite closely with Minister Berry’s office and her adviser, who gave us some excellent assistance with these amendments, and we have worked with Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick. I have also spoken to the Belconnen Community Council and a number of Belconnen community members about this matter.

This was a difficult one for the Greens. We have taken as much time as the parliamentary process allows us to think about this. The original motion, at its heart, says, “We have a site here for homes; let’s turn that site into a small extension to the park instead, and not build those homes.” When we looked at this, and when we looked at the balance of the issue, we decided that is not the right call to make at this point in time, in a housing crisis. But it has not been an easy decision for us to make.

It is time to talk about Maggie T Park. Margaret Timpson Park was established in 1984 as a way of connecting the buildings with the town centre. It underwent a number of revisions over the years, with the last one being in 1995. It was first known as Belconnen Town Park; it was then dedicated to Margaret Timpson in 1994. Margaret Timpson was a fierce campaigner for gender equality and an advocate for women, and she was also a statistician for the ABS. There are a lot of great reasons to name the park after her.

Mr Deputy Speaker, if you find the time to sit in Maggie T Park, you will see that a lot of people move through it. There are not a lot of people who stay in it or go to it. I reflect on Ms Barry’s comments about the two weeks that she spent there during the election. Honestly, most of the time that I see people in that park is at election time. There are not many people in that park otherwise; they just pass on and go right through.

Belconnen needs great parks—of course we do—and we do have some great parks. But Maggie T Park at the moment is not living up to her potential. People review our parks on Google Maps. The new Eastern Valley Way Wetlands already has four reviews; they are all five star, even though it only opened last year. The wetlands were commenced by Mr Rattenbury and completed by Minister Cheyne after a lot of community consultation. It is a fantastic design. It went through a couple of town hall

meetings, it is a really good result and it already has five stars.

John Knight Memorial Park is a fantastic park. It is long established. It has a lot of reviews—1,072—and the average review is 4½ stars. We have a new park coming in Lathlain Street. Obviously, it has not been reviewed yet, as it does not exist, but I think that will be a good small park that will act as a backyard, gathering place and play area for the people living around it. That is a really good function for a park like that. That is one of the things that Maggie T Park could be, but currently it is not.

Margaret Timpson Park is older than Google itself and it does not have a single review. Not a single person in Canberra has bothered to review it. No-one has even jumped on to say, “It’s not really working,” or to leave a bad review. It is literally unremarkable.

This tells us what is not working about Maggie T Park at the moment, and we need to change that. We campaigned for this. I campaigned for this last term, and I know the Liberals have also been campaigning to improve Maggie T Park. I sponsored a community petition about this and I have written to planning ministers. We have repeatedly asked for play equipment, barbecues and the basic facilities that you need in a park that is well designed, and that make people want to stay there rather than simply walk right through. I am absolutely delighted that Labor has agreed to make these changes based on federal funding promises. It is long overdue.

We have also asked for—and it will be seen in the motion—better event management there so that organisers can access that park from Swanson Street instead of Benjamin Way. I have been to two events in Maggie T Park in the five years that I have been a politician. There are not a lot of events being held there. One of the problems is that it is difficult and expensive to organise temporary traffic management from Benjamin Way, which is a main road. If we can come up with a way that makes it easier, we can activate that, in the way that people have activated Haig Park. There is so much that we can do to make that park live and breathe, and live up to her potential. All of those changes will make Maggie T Park a better place.

A better Maggie T Park will provide a place for office workers in the area to sit and take a break and have their lunch. Families in the surrounding apartments will be able to pop out and use the play equipment. Older people can sit and relax against a backdrop of improved landscaping. It is encouraging that government will work with the community to develop the design. We see this firm commitment, we have heard it before, and it is reconfirmed in the amendments moved by Minister Berry.

Hopefully, the people who use that park—the people in the surrounding businesses, the owners, the Belconnen Community Council and all of our residents—will get involved and offer their views. Working in conjunction with design experts and landscape architects, we can have a really great Maggie T Park. We can have this; we do not have to choose between that and the motion on the table. We are already committing to do that, and this is the work that needs to happen.

It would be great if government took the time to get the design right. Everyone wants to get on with it. We do need to build it, but we do need to design it well. It is a core theme of our new planning system, especially for a central area like this. I would like to commend Minister Orr for the work she is doing in establishing a government

landscape architect. I do not think that position will be established quickly enough; if it had been, the kind of role that a government landscape architect might play is to ask: how do we redesign this?

The question at the moment is not whether we make Maggie T Park beautiful. We are going to do that, and we should. The question is: do we slightly expand the park or do we put homes there, which is what it is currently zoned for?

We are living in a world in which we are hitting Earth Overshoot Day earlier and earlier every year. Our collective carbon footprint is still growing. The future of block 45 section 54 is exactly the kind of situation where we need to challenge business as usual. “Bigger is better” is not true. We need to challenge that fallacy. “Bigger is better” is simply overshooting the Earth’s resources, and we cannot live that way. We need to work out how to do things in a smaller footprint. We need to do that in all ways on all projects.

Let us focus on making that path better rather than bigger, and let us look at the hole in the ground, which is the thing that people are really upset about at the moment. That hole in the ground can solve a lot of problems. The one that I think it is best placed to solve right now is the housing crisis. That is where it can play a good part.

Block 45 section 54 south of Maggie T Park was once a public health facility. After that, it was considered as a possibility for a demonstration housing project. The project put on the table was for affordable build-to-rents, targeting singles and couples in the lower end of the quintile 2 income bracket. Unfortunately, that project did not proceed.

Our housing crisis has got worse since that proposal was put on the table. We need it more now than we did when it was first put up. People on lower and moderate incomes are finding it harder and harder to rent, let alone buy. We cannot solve that housing crisis if we continually spread out our suburbs into green spaces. If we continue to expand our borders, we will not fix this problem.

The Assembly has recently recognised this really firmly. We are going to set city limits. That has been called for by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment in her 2023 report. We know that we need to do that. We need to do that so that we are putting people close to homes, close to services, close to schools, and close to public transport, like the bus exchange, which is right there, at the heart of Maggie T Park.

We need to do that so that we are not requiring people to have endlessly long car commutes, and spending money they do not have on petrol that they cannot afford. We need to do that so that we can grow sustainably.

The only way we can meet all of these challenges is with really good design—keeping the green spaces that we have, like the existing Maggie T Park, building good, well-designed architecture around that park, and creating more homes that are within our existing footprint.

I am encouraged by the fact that the government is moving to develop the site. It has sat unused for too long. I am so pleased that the development will focus on social housing in some form. I have put up an amendment regarding that. I think Labor is

absolutely in agreement on this point. We need at least a minimum of public or community housing there. If that could be a common ground, as Minister Berry has suggested, run by a community housing provider, that would be an excellent use of a small-scale development right on the park. I cannot imagine what a gift that would be, if we could give that to so many people who need a home.

That site is close to jobs. It is close to community infrastructure, public transport and key health services. It makes so much sense to develop this housing for low income groups, like our key workers who find it hard to find affordable housing close to where they work. These workers include our nurses, teachers, childcare workers, early education workers, police and bus drivers. We need to be building homes for our people.

I am also really encouraged by the fact that we can have a well-designed set of dwellings on that site. That can be put together so that it has a seamless, inviting connection to Maggie T Park. How you do something is as important as whether you do it, and the park and the housing can complement each other. The homes there could activate the park, if it is well designed with good flow.

Belconnen is growing fast. This has been pointed out by my colleagues Ms Barry and Mr Cain. Our population has grown by 30 per cent since 2001. We are projected to get a lot more homes in Belconnen. We are already up to 106,000 in our electorate. We are the most populated district in Canberra. By 2041, we will be up to 128,000, and a big chunk of those people live in Belco CBD. We already have over 10,000 people, and growing.

We are waiting for a lot of facilities. We are waiting for a school, we are waiting for hourly Sunday buses, and a bus lane to stop our buses getting into traffic. We are waiting for quite a lot of infrastructure and facilities. If we can also get some certainty on when we will get those, people will be a lot happier about the development that they are seeing.

We need some certainty on when we are getting light rail out and where it will go. We need to know when we are getting our play equipment and upgrades in Maggie T Park, which will make it a beautiful park for everybody living nearby. We need a library that is well enough staffed that it does not need to shut down regularly. I remain embarrassed that Belconnen is currently topping the list of shutdowns for this year. There is a lot of improvement that we need to do. We need to make the improvements that we need as well as building the homes that we need. It is not an either-or situation.

Block 45 section 54 and the upgrades to Maggie T Park cannot solve all of the problems that I have outlined on their own. They will not single-handedly solve the climate crisis, environmental destruction and the housing crisis. But every decision you make on every project, and every proposal that you seek, can take you in the right direction to come up with a good way to solve those problems. If we are not really engaging and genuinely trying to solve those problems, we will not get anywhere.

I want to run briefly through the amendments that I have moved. I want to make it clear that we are not in any disagreement on this, but I want to clarify that we do need a minimum amount of public or community housing there, and it would be fantastic if

the entire facility can be a common ground facility or something of that nature. That would be excellent.

I have put in a deadline for reporting back to the Assembly in June. Part of the frustration with that hole in the ground is that it has been there for quite a long time and the community do not know what is going on with it. They know there was a proposal, and the proposal has gone away. There is not a lot of information about why. They do not know when they are getting the upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park, so they do not know when they will see that on the ground, and they are not sure what will happen next. Providing people with a bit of certainty and a bit of a timeline on that will go a long way to assist.

I encourage everybody to engage with this really deeply and thoughtfully. We have difficult decisions to make here. We need to make them not just for the problems today; we also need to think about the people who do not yet live here, the future generations, our children and our children's children, and the sort of world we are leaving them.

I know that sounds like a big and grand way to talk about what is, in actual fact, an extremely small site next to Margaret Timpson Park, but that is the way that the Greens have approached it. We have a park that could be made beautiful, so let us do that. We have a small site next to it that could be turned into useful community housing, so let us do that, too. I commend the amendments that have been circulated in my name.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.04): I want to thank Ms Barry, Mr Cain and Ms Clay for engaging with me and my office on this matter, for bringing this motion today and for putting forward constructive amendments. I always very much appreciate it when members come and engage with me. I know that often, apparently, the vote is not so important, when it comes to the numbers, but I very much appreciate the engagement and the conversations that we have and that help me to form a position, especially on a matter that, in this case, is outside my electorate, and I needed a little bit more education on it.

I agree with Mr Cain's comments earlier. I think that green spaces and community gathering places are increasingly important as our city densifies. We need to be planning in a way that brings people together and encourages people to connect with each other, and with nature, as we are living more on top of each other in a denser city, which is something that has been discussed in this place and something that I support.

In the mighty electorate of Kurrajong, one area that has done this quite well is new Campbell, or Campbell 5. It is a perfect example that I became familiar with, having run a small business there for five years. It is a development that started with significant community pushback and inputs. People were afraid of the level of density that was to be introduced there. As part of a range of different developments, an incredible park, Hassett Park, was established. This has become a vital community asset where people meet each other, who otherwise would not meet.

When I have spoken with people who live in old Campbell, who might have previously opposed that change to their suburb, they are really happy to see the change in demographic and the provision of new services, new small businesses in the area, and different kinds of people who they are able to connect with in their suburb through the

park there.

We need to arrest the decline in social housing as a proportion of total housing. I have a commitment within my agreement with the Labor government to increase the proportion of public and community housing in the ACT. That is absolutely vital, and I think we all agree that we need to do that as urgently as we possibly can.

The inclusion of a mention of Common Ground in Dickson in Ms Berry's amendments was potentially the clincher for me in forming a position on this, because I think that is such a fantastic model. We have 40 social and affordable housing dwellings in that development. It integrates housing with shared spaces, and many of them were supported in being set up by different community organisations, and community members provided donated goods.

On the ground floor, there is Cafe Stepping Stone, which more people have become familiar with after Hannah and Vanessa, its founders, were named the Australian Local Heroes of the Year. Sometimes the people they are employing are now living in the building; also, more widely, they are employing refugees and migrant women with barriers to employment. My three-year-old calls it "the cafe with the park". It is his favourite, and it is always the request, when we ask where to go on a Saturday morning.

We have to balance amenity for existing residents with providing housing for those who currently lack a home. The other day, my office received a phone call from someone. Someone on my team asked where they lived, in an attempt to determine whether they were a constituent. They asked, "Which suburb are you in?" and they said, "I don't have one." They were calling because they are homeless and seeking support from any local member.

In this matter, with the provision of housing, if there is some kind of commitment—it is signalled in the amendments that we have seen—to a Common-Ground-like development here, it is an absolute priority, and I hope that the park upgrades will be expedited on the neighbouring block.

I will be supporting Ms Clay's amendments to Ms Berry's amendments, and the amended motion today. Again, I thank all members for coming and speaking with me about this motion.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.09): I also thank Ms Clay and the Liberals for coming and talking to me about the motion and the amendments. I rise to speak to the motion on Margaret Timpson Park, which is in a great spot in the middle of Woden. I always advocate for balanced planning—

Members interjecting—

MS CARRICK: Sorry; Belconnen. I do not usually talk about other districts, but in this case, if I have to vote, I want to put on the record why I am voting like I will on this one.

I always advocate for balanced planning, balancing homes, jobs, public spaces and community facilities. I have been thinking about this one, and about what is the best

planning outcome for people.

I always think of public spaces in the context of activity. When they are centrally located public spaces, it is nice to have some activity around them. How can we make Margaret Timpson Park a destination? As Ms Clay said, people move through it. How do you make it a destination, a place that attracts people of all demographics to meet, for kids to play, for parents and grandparents to watch the kids playing, and for young people to hang out?

My view is that the planning should not only keep the area green but also activate the area, day and night. I would have north-facing cafes and restaurants, and perhaps even a pub, alfresco dining, with people congregating in the warm winter sun in the mornings, looking out over the kids playing, and with families using the barbecues. I cannot support just housing or just a park. I think the planning should support connecting the community in this very central area of Belconnen.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.11): I have been talking about Margaret Timpson Park for more than a decade, and I genuinely welcome this debate and the agreement I think that we are all showing here today. But there has been a lot of history that is missing and there have been a lot of myths, I suppose, about how the park is or is not used. So let us begin.

First of all, Margaret Timpson Park is not just important to me as the local member or as the Minister for City and Government Services; it is my home. It is effectively my backyard. I live 100 metres from Margaret Timpson Park, and I use it often—not just to walk through. So I take a political but also very personal interest in its future.

As we have heard, next to Margaret Timpson Park is a site where the former health building was located. It was demolished in 2020. That site was consolidated with a neighbouring site next to it that was undeveloped. That site has never been part of Margaret Timpson Park. It was never zoned as urban open space, like Margaret Timpson Park is; it was zoned for community facilities use, consistent with it being a health centre.

The future of the site was first considered as part of the Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan, on which consultation occurred in 2014 and 2015, and the Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan was released in 2016. That master plan mooted a site of four to six storeys. The justification for not expanding Margaret Timpson Park into that land reads:

The suggestion to demolish the former community health building and expand Margaret Timpson Park over the site and the adjacent vacant block has been considered; however, this is difficult to justify given the existing park's low usage and loss of income to the community from the possible sale of these blocks. While the ACT Health Directorate currently requires this building, a better outcome may be to encourage future redevelopment that overlooks and opens onto the park. To ensure a better relationship with the park and adjacent buildings, it is recommended to limit development on this site to four storeys.

The master plan, when completed, ultimately recommended a site of six storeys and

also recommended rezoning it from community facilities to commercial zone, allowing for residential development to occur there, too.

To give effect to those planning recommendations in the master plan, a variation needed to be made to the Territory Plan. That was released for public consultation in 2018. As part of that public consultation, just three responses were received about Margaret Timpson Park. In response to that, the ACT government noted:

The health centre site is currently developed, and to return it to a park would incur substantial cost for not equivalent benefit to the community through loss of land sale, construction work and ongoing maintenance costs.

The development of the health centre site provides the opportunity to develop pedestrian friendly activities along the park edge as part of any future development, drawing in people from the surrounding area. Providing ground floor commercial with residential above adjacent to the park will also improve passive surveillance as the nearby Sentinel apartments only provide blank walls, car parking access and loading docks at the lower levels adjoining the park frontage.

The site has been consolidated—

as I flagged—

with the adjoining vacant block and has a height limit equal to the height of the podium carpark of the Sentinel building. This will maintain views to the north from Sentinel.

Ultimately, the provisions in the variation to the Territory Plan included “requirements for the active frontages as well as a general requirement for all development to contribute to the amenity of adjacent public spaces and to the streetscape”. The Territory Plan was ultimately passed in February 2019 and came into effect soon after, with the site limited to three to four storeys.

There are some members of the Sentinel community who have continued to suggest that an extension of the park is what would be most appropriate. I have a lot of sympathy for that, but it was, back in 2019, selected for demonstration housing. There was not consultation on it being a demonstration housing site specifically, but it has always been ACT government land and, it being a site for apartments was subject to community input. At the time, it was my view that demonstration housing was a better outcome than straight up apartments, as it was intended to be a Build to Rent model—that is, affordable housing—and still very modest in height.

And then there was silence. The demolition of the block occurred before the 2020 election. The “hole in the ground”, as it is known, has been a thorn in my side ever since. In fact, during the rainy periods, the hole in the ground became known as “mini-Lake Ginninderra”. I was relieved that the public proposal process for demonstration housing finally concluded early last year. Work was then proposed to consider other appropriate housing uses for the site. In the interim, the visual amenity was improved, with semi-permanent hoarding around the site, and that includes artworks by local artists, which look lovely. There was a separate conversation about increasing the play areas in the town centre and the master plan went to that, recommending that Margaret Timpson Park be considered for improvements in the future, but just in its existing site rather than expanding to the land next to it.

It was ACT Labor that committed to upgrade Margaret Timpson Park—I know, because I wrote it—and that included incorporating a new playground, public toilet, barbeques, picnic tables, landscaping and an accessible ramp to the park on the northern edge. The playgrounds and the toilets were considered fundamental for any upgrades to this park, because other outdoor playgrounds and toilets are at least a kilometre, if not further, away. I am exceptionally grateful that the federal Labor government has committed to fund this and to realise something that has been part of the vision and the master plan for about a decade.

I need to reject that Margaret Timpson Park is underutilised or not valued or could be so much better. Some of the descriptions today make it sound like it is a wasteland. It is not; it is absolutely beautiful. It is lush. The same team that creates Floriade is responsible for Margaret Timpson Park and John Knight Memorial Park. I am sorry that Ms Clay has not been to many events there, but there have been stacks and there are still heaps. There was the Belconnen Twilight Market in 2018. Canberry Properties held markets early in the 2020s. ConnectUp 2617 is now holding, I think, bimonthly markets there. Tonga Day has been hosted there twice. Belco Bowl Jam closed Swanson Court earlier this year, which is adjacent to Margaret Timpson Park. Also, Canberra Day in the Suburbs in 2020 was held in Belconnen, in Margaret Timpson Park.

I am also pleased to let Ms Clay know that ACT Labor also has an election commitment to develop a comprehensive guide to clearly identify sites which are suitable for community and private events, weddings, hawkers, busking, rallies and activations and to provide information on the available services at the site like water and electricity, approvals required and any complexities. We also committed to upgrade and improve availability of power and water at sites the ACT government prioritises for activation, standardising gate and other access and to enhance spaces to expressly support temporary activation, such as busking corners with shade and acoustics, and dedicated spaces for food and coffee vans in our public areas. Margaret Timpson Park does have electricity but not easy access to water, and there needs to be considerations of any impact to residents in the area, because the sound can bounce between the buildings.

In closing—now that I have given us all a history lesson on Margaret Timpson Park—I certainly appreciate the desire for something to happen at the hole in the ground and, to be quite honest, after we have spoken about this for so many years, I really do look forward to this being the start of us not just delivering on our ACT Labor election commitment but also seeing some modest housing, some community housing, on that site that contributes to what has become quite an extraordinary community—a very densely populated community, but Belconnen town centre has changed so much in the 16 years that I have lived there. I commend all the amendments and motion as amended to the chamber.

Ms Clay's amendment to **Ms Berry's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Question put:

That **Ms Berry's** amendment, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 8

Andrew Barr	Marisa Paterson	Chiaka Barry
Yvette Berry	Michael Pettersson	Peter Cain
Andrew Braddock	Shane Rattenbury	Leanne Castley
Fiona Carrick	Chris Steel	Ed Cocks
Tara Cheyne	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Jeremy Hanson
Jo Clay	Caitlin Tough	James Milligan
Thomas Emerson	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Deborah Morris
Laura Nuttall		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Berry's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.25): Let's not beat around the bush: this is a shameful and hypocritical backflip by the ACT Greens—the anti-green space Greens.

Members interjecting—

MR CAIN: I will be going to some source documents, and I invite all of the chucklers on the floor to remain, including the Chief Minister. You need to work on your evil laugh, Chief Minister. That would be much more fitting.

Before I do speak on this disappointment, I want to appreciate the discussions I have had with Ms Berry this morning—I appreciate the openness of those discussions—and with Ms Clay, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick. Despite landing on different positions, I do appreciate the fact that we can talk about these things beforehand in an attempt to persuade one another—though that clearly has not happened in the direction I would have preferred.

I do want to mention that, in November 2022, Ms Clay presented a petition to this Assembly, and I would like to read from that petition. In summary, the petition called for the extension of Margaret Timpson Park. At that time, as has been touched on already, that hole in the ground was designated as a demonstrated housing project. That was the state of the plan for that hole in the ground when Ms Clay called for the extension of the Margaret Timpson Park. Included in the plan for that demonstration housing, was public and affordable housing.

So, in late 2022, Ms Clay supported a petition, and argued for it in this place, against a housing project that included public and affordable housing. What has happened since then? Now we have her coming to a position where she is saying, “No, do not extend the park, but let's have social and affordable housing.” What has happened since then? Here is the petition that Ms Clay actually supported in November 2022 and spoke about in the chamber:

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the ACT Government to utilise the vacant allotment (the site of the old Belconnen Health

Centre) adjacent to Margaret Timpson Park in the Belconnen Town Centre to extend the Park. Belconnen Town Centre is experiencing rapid population growth due to recently built and planned high rise apartment buildings ...

Moving to the end of the petition, says:

The extension of Margaret Timpson Park would be a welcome and simple step in offering something to the community by way of improving local amenity, given the large increase in the number of Canberrans (particularly children) now living within the Belconnen Town Centre area.

That was Ms Clay's position in November 2022, in opposing a demonstration housing project that included affordable and social housing. What has happened since? This is a shameful backflip. It is unsurprising that ACT Labor want to keep that parcel of land for housing, because they just have their eyes on money from land. So I am not surprised by that. That is the least disgraceful part of this amended motion and how it has travelled. That is the least disgraceful part. The most disgraceful part is that the Greens have moved from a position where they wanted the park extended rather than it be available for public and affordable housing. What has happened to the ACT Greens? They are the anti-green space Greens.

Just yesterday, in supporting a motion not to develop Coombs Peninsula, Ms Clay said:

It is essential that we have more housing, but we just need to make sure that housing is delivered in a way that respects and protects our environment and also serves the need of the people who will live in those houses.

How about a relatively small increase in a very prized part of the Belconnen town centre, a park? Do you think that the growing number of residents around the Belconnen town centre would appreciate that? I have a strong feeling that they would—and the Belconnen Community Council agrees wholeheartedly with that position. I will read from the media release from April this year from the Belconnen Community Council:

The Belconnen Community Council (BCC) is urging the ACT Government to improve and expand Margaret Timpson Park, creating a larger, greener, and more usable public space in the heart of Belconnen.

Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen, next to Margaret Timpson Park—commonly known as the “big hole in the ground”—presents an opportunity to create a vibrant, people-focused space that better serves the needs of a growing town centre.

My God! Hear, hear to that!

Members interjecting—

MR CAIN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to speak without interruption, please.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you set a good example, Mr Cain, I am sure the other members will follow.

MR CAIN: Well, I am the speaker at the moment. I am trying to say a few words here.

Members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

MR CAIN: The press release goes on to say:

The park’s current size and design do not meet the needs of an increasingly dense and busy town centre, says BCC Chair, Lachlan Butler.

“The Belconnen Town Centre is home to thousands of residents, yet it lacks the public space and amenities to match. If we expect people to embrace higher-density living, we need to give them the community infrastructure that supports a high quality of life,” Mr Butler said.

He warned that without better planning, the town centre risks becoming a collection of high-rise dormitories rather than a vibrant town centre.

“Do we want our town centres to be just places where people sleep, or do we want them to be destinations—places with jobs, activity, and spaces where people actually want to spend time?”

Recent BCC community surveys found overwhelming support for more greenery and improved public spaces in the town centre. Instead of selling this land for development, the ACT Government should commit to expanding Margaret Timpson Park and ensure it remains public space for future generations.

“While the ACT Government has committed to upgrading amenities at the park, this is only the start. With Belconnen’s rapid growth, we need to plan for the future by securing more high-quality public space now,” Mr Butler said.

“This is about long-term planning and making sure Belconnen’s public spaces reflect its growth,” Mr Butler said. “We urge the government to work with us and the community to make this happen.”

The Canberra Liberals are working with the community. In this case, the government, the Greens and, sadly, the independents.

We have had a few responses. I just want to mention the idea of, “Is the park really a destination place?” My goodness; the government has accepted \$1.5 million dollars to enhance the park. How about turning that money into making an expanded park a destination place for the community of Belconnen?

Ms Clay: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—at your discretion, under possibly 46, personal explanations; 47, except to explain by words; or 52, reflections upon the votes. I am not really sure which standing order applies here, but this has been quite personal. Can I address that under those?

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Clay, I understand that, under standing order No 47, you have the opportunity to explain.

MS CLAY: Thank you. I am flattered at the level of attention from Mr Cain. It is quite nice to be quoted at such length—and I would encourage him to do that as often as

possible. I did sponsor a petition in 2022. I literally mentioned that in my opening speech, along with all the other campaign efforts that I had undertaken on Margaret Timpson Park. As we all know in here, community petitions are bringing in the voice of the people to parliament. It is one of the roles we do. If you look in the *Hansard* for the speech I actually delivered at that time, it is almost identical to the one that I just gave in here about how we need homes, how we need green spaces and how we need to deal with all of these problems. So it is certainly very consistent.

Mr Cain has asked what has changed since 2022. Quite a lot of things have changed, but to recap briefly: the housing crisis got worse, the climate crisis got worse, environmental destruction got worse and people still need a nice park and homes. So I would encourage him to reflect on some of the things that maybe have changed in the last three years. It is lovely to be quoted at such length, but perhaps go back and read the actual *Hansard* and quote accurately. That would make for a better quality of debate. Thank you.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.37), by leave: Well, that was the most selective, performative contribution from Mr Cain. Ms Clay and I do not agree on all things, but I absolutely agree with all of her remarks on this in this place today. Yes, we all bring petitions; we do not necessarily agree with them. Also, on top of all the things that Ms Clay just outlined, at the time that that petition was brought, there were no upgrades planned to Margaret Timpson Park either.

We are in a very different situation now where we as a government have already committed to undertaking those upgrades, with the \$1.5 million in funding. Andrew Leigh and I stood in Margaret Timpson Park just five weeks ago with Margaret Timpson's husband Chris, where Andrew Leigh was able to confirm that the federal government would fund those upgrades. That is terrific, particularly given Margaret Timpson's standing in the commonwealth government and what she did for women in the 80s and 90s. We now know with certainty that this lush, beautiful green space—that also has an incredible Bert Flugelman sculpture and shade sails and is close to other amenities—is going to be upgraded with further amenities.

Things have changed. The situation has changed, and I think we can have both—we can have a better park and we can also have some modest community housing. So I absolutely appreciate Ms Clay's explanation, because she is right. I will stop reflecting any more on anyone else.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.39)—in reply: I want to thank everyone who has participated in this debate. I thank Ms Clay for her engagement with my office. I thank the independent members for their engagement and I also thank my colleague strongly for his support for this motion and for co-sponsoring this motion.

I think what is clear today is that we all have started the debate about the hole in the ground in Margaret Timpson Park. That debate has started, and I hope that something is done to the hole in the ground. We were hoping that what would be done is an extension of the park. Unfortunately, that is not the agreement that has been reached today. While it is disappointing, I think there are some gains to be had that we have

started that conversation.

I want to respond to what Ms Cheyne said and also reflect on what is missing. What is missing is public consultation on what should happen with the hole in the ground—not Margaret Timpson Park, but the hole in the ground. I think Ms Cheyne said that, when public consultation was done, it was done on the display homes—though I stand to be corrected. Belconnen Community Council, as outlined by Mr Cain, has done public consultation, and that public consultation has revealed overwhelming support for the extension of the park to cater for the needs of the growing population in Belconnen.

I think it is really important that the community gets to have a say on what happens to the hole in the ground. If what that survey has revealed is any indication, it shows the overwhelming support for an extension of the Margaret Timpson Park and the hole in the ground. I urge the government to ask the community what they would really want to see that land used for. I urge the government to listen to the community's needs and expectations when deciding what to do with the hole in the ground in Margaret Timpson Park.

Again, we have missed an opportunity here to extend the park to cater for the growing needs of the community. We are boxing people in. We are talking about urban infill, but we are not balancing what that looks like. I wonder if the mention of Common Grounds is an afterthought of this motion. I wonder if that is an afterthought, because this motion was brought forward. It is really disappointing again to see this motion not get up. Once again, I thank Mr Cain for his strong advocacy and his strong support, and I hope that community expectations prevail in this case.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Estimates 2025-2026—Select Committee Establishment

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Speaker has been notified in writing of the following nominations for membership of the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026: Mr Cocks, Mr Rattenbury, Ms Tough and Ms Carrick.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.44): I move:

- (1) a Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026 be appointed to examine the expenditure proposals contained in the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026, the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026 and any revenue estimates proposed by the Government in the 2025-2026 Budget and prepare a report to the Assembly;
- (2) the Committee be composed of:
 - (a) one Member to be nominated by the Labor Party;
 - (b) one Member to be nominated by the Liberal Party;
 - (c) one Member to be nominated by the ACT Greens; and
 - (d) one independent Member;

- to be notified in writing to the Speaker within two hours of this motion passing;
- (3) a Liberal Party member shall be elected Chair of the Committee by the Committee;
 - (4) funds be provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the Committee to facilitate the analysis of the Budget and the preparation of the report of the Committee;
 - (5) the Committee is to report by Friday, 22 August 2025;
 - (6) if the Assembly is not sitting when the Committee has completed its inquiry, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publishing and circulation;
 - (7) the Treasurer must publish on the ACT Budget website by no later than 5 pm on 24 June 2025, table copies in the Assembly, and provide copies to the Committee for consideration, the following information:
 - (a) a statement regarding the structural position of the ACT Budget, both in 2025-2026 and over the forward estimates period;
 - (b) a medium-term (10-year) forecast of revenue, expenses, the net operating balance (excluding the Superannuation Return Adjustment), and total Government debt;
 - (c) scenario analysis for headline Budget items – including the key economic parameters and General Government Sector Headline Net Operating Balance – showing the base, high, and low cases, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (d) statements regarding the Government’s policies on debt consolidation and management, the superannuation liability, and progress towards the implementation of the 2012 tax reform plan;
 - (e) tables showing expenditure by program, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (f) tables showing employment by program (broken down by ongoing and non-ongoing) for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years;
 - (g) tables showing community sector support by program and organisation, for each of the current financial, Budget, and forward estimates years; and
 - (h) notes in the Budget Papers describing the accounting policies, and assumptions, and major technical adjustments, and providing a breakdown of key financial statement items, consistent with the approach of the Commonwealth and State governments;
 - (8) the Treasurer must publish data from the Budget Papers and the information in part (7) in a machine-readable format on the ACT Budget website, and must provide embargoed copies of the information and data to Members at the same time as the 2025-2026 Budget documents; and
 - (9) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

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 presentation of papers in the routine of business today be noted.

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment—urban expansion—report

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.44): I would like to speak to one of the papers tabled: the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's report. It has sounded an alarm in the bush capital. This new report has just been released. When we were in cabinet, we fought for a lot of the things that are being called for now. We fought for more environmental funding, and it is clear that Labor's Treasurer needs to provide that. We cannot keep pushing nature to the bottom of the pile for funding.

The commissioner has said:

Healthy biodiversity is essential to the natural world and fundamental to human life.

This is absolutely true. Her report *Close to the edge* focuses on the impact of urban expansion. It says that our federal environmental law, the EPBC Act, is, in effect, legislation for development approvals rather than legislation for environmental protection. The report says:

... government spending on the environment at all jurisdictional levels is meagre and demonstrably inadequate ... It is therefore hard to take the view that biodiversity protection is a genuine priority for the ACT. Additional allocations of funding in the ACT Government budget are required for better environmental outcomes.

That is what our commissioner has reported.

We are now on the crossbench. We are working pretty hard for environmental protection, notwithstanding some comments we heard earlier. We are very proud of the fact that we have agreement to set city limits. We understand that is absolutely needed to stop the endless sprawl that we have seen until now. It is really important that we follow through on that commitment.

Last term, Labor refused to take the commissioner's advice to set that urban growth boundary. I am really pleased that it has now been reconsidered. I am so glad that we have that agreed to and that we are proceeding with that, along with our missing middle design guides and the work that we need to do to protect the green spaces we have and develop in a really sensitive and person-friendly way. We have a lot of work to do on reviving nature in the city, and we very much hope that our new Labor environment minister will get on with that and take some of these recommendations seriously.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Mr Braddock, I also want to mention some work that you did in

another capacity. There are some recommendations relating to AstroTurf and fake grass. It was pleasing to see that the Assembly has also agreed to do some further work on this. The commissioner's recommendations have taken that a bit further.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Sport and recreation—archery

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.47): I rise today to express my sincere gratitude to Cherie Theyers, Stephen Slack and their team at the Tuggeranong Archery Club for hosting us at the National Youth Archery Championships last month. I was joined by Mr David Smith and my colleague Mr Taimus Werner-Gibblings at the opening ceremony for the national championships. Mr Werner-Gibblings spoke very eloquently and the young archers from across Australia seemed pretty pumped.

I have clearly been living under a rock, because I had not realised that in the heart of Tuggeranong, right along the Murrumbidgee River, is a world-class, competition-standard archery facility. Our archery range is the envy of Australia. Also, I wrongly assumed that professional archery had just indoor and outdoor ranges on flat ground in very controlled conditions. Imagine my surprise and absolute delight when Cherie's lovely partner, Stephen, offered me a lift to the rest of the range. We piled into his sedan with his gorgeous doggo and trundled past the beautiful flat fields towards the Bhutanese traditional archery range, which is, as I understand it, the only one of its kind in Australia. We then went to the field range, which is straight-up bushland. Stephen showed me the incredible cross-country course, which is designed for shots to go through brush, down craggy hills and through old truck tyres. This route was a sneak peek into a heavily-guarded secret. The athletes do not get to see the course until they are on it, because they need to calculate and figure out all their shots in real time.

You will absolutely catch me at one of the come-and-try sessions this coming Sunday. I was a terrible shot at school camp, but I cannot keep going, knowing one of the coolest places ever is smack-bang in the middle of my electorate, without trying it out.

Birthday greetings

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.49): Just a quick shout-out to my wife: it is her birthday today. Her sister, Verity, and brother-in-law, Lars, have come down from Queensland to see her. I tried to encourage them to come and watch question time today. I sat here expecting them to arrive, but they seem to have found something better to do—disappointingly!

Ms Cheyne: Do you know it is Mr Steel's birthday?

MR HANSON: It is Mr Steel's birthday as well! Well, happy birthday, Mr Steel. Happy birthday to Chris and Fleur.

Parks—Umbagog District Park

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.49): I rise to speak briefly about a proposed upgrade to

Umbagog District Park. It is my honour to speak about our valuable green spaces in Belconnen. While I wholeheartedly support the need to continue investment in our local parks, as was seen in this afternoon's debate, I must raise some important concerns brought forward by the Umbagog Landcare Group and other community stakeholders. These concerns specifically relate to the proposed location of the upgrades at the Wombat Stew site at the park.

A desktop assessment was conducted and failed to account for the proximity of a registered heritage site and other significant environmental values, including native grasslands and Indigenous artifacts. Residents do not necessarily oppose the upgrades, but they have asked that the ACT government engages in meaningful consultation with the community, particularly the Umbagog Landcare Group. The residents would also like the government to consider alternative sites for these upgrades, such as Daly Crescent, which may be less disruptive and provide better accessibility options.

As the government continues with budget planning and project design, I urge the ministers to take these concerns seriously and work collaboratively with the community to address them.

Health—thyroid disorders

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.51): I rise today to mark Thyroid Awareness Month. More than a million Australians live with undiagnosed thyroid disorders. These conditions include hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism, autoimmune thyroid diseases and thyroid cancer. They can affect every part of a person's life—energy, mood, fertility, metabolism and mental health—yet, despite how common and serious these conditions are, awareness remains low.

Thyroid disorders affect 10 times more women than men. People, especially women, are too often dismissed, misdiagnosed or left waiting years for treatment. The symptoms are labelled as anxiety, depression, exhaustion or just hormones. Trust me, as someone with a thyroid disorder, I know what that is like. Thyroid Awareness Month is about changing that. It is about raising awareness, improving early detection and ensuring our health system listens and responds to the people it serves. The Australian Thyroid Foundation suggests that, if you are concerned about symptoms or changes to your health, chat to a GP about simple thyroid blood tests.

I will continue to advocate for better thyroid care, as someone who went through a bit of a journey to get my own diagnosis, and for women's health care more broadly, because, for too long, like many women's health conditions, women's pain and suffering has been overlooked, and I really want to see this end. So, to those living with thyroid conditions and those who are still yet undiagnosed, we see you and we hear you and we will keep fighting.

Birthday greetings

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.52): In the spirit of birthdays, I rise to wish my senior adviser, Andrew, a happy birthday. Andrew is not at work today. I wish him all the best. He keeps me in line. I also wish Mr Steel a happy birthday. There are lots of May babies, Taurus babies, in this space. And, Mr Hanson, it is your wife's birthday as well. Happy

birthday.

Ms Tough: And happy birthday to you, on the weekend.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I did not want to say that, but, yes, it is.

Birthday greetings

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.53): In the spirit of birthdays—I do not know what happened nine months before this week in any of those years—I rise to wish my adviser, Naomi, a happy birthday for yesterday. She brings so much joy and light to our office. We were able to respond in kind yesterday with temporary tattoos, balloons, a lot of joy and laughter, windchimes and some Lego. That is a pretty good birthday. I am very lucky to have her and, indeed, my entire team. It was great to come together to celebrate.

Birthday greetings

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.54): Very simply, I would be remiss if I did not note that it is my media adviser, Jordan Maloney’s birthday today.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Mr Cesar Leon—tribute

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.54): I move:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

I rise to pay tribute to and reflect on the death of Cesar Leon. Of course, we Australianised his name, and he was known throughout Macquarie as “Cesar”. Mr Speaker, it is a little odd, because I am not sure I have ever known someone for so long while also knowing so little about them. What I can tell you is that Cesar was my friend.

Cesar was born in Venezuela and, for many years, was a flight captain in the military, captaining a helicopter and flying across the Andes throughout his career, including rescuing people. I am not entirely sure how he came to be in Australia, let alone Canberra. What I do know is that I met him at about this time nine years ago, in the cold, in the evening, outside Jamison shops.

Cesar was a regular in the evenings, arriving on his mobility scooter, dressed handsomely, and with particular attention always paid to his moustache—something that I never saw him without. In fact, it was a regular joke, although he was always very serious, that he wanted to exchange his moustache for my beautiful eyes. He always asked me to reconsider, and I said no.

Cesar often ordered takeaway from Jamison Takeaway, run by Sam, as it was then. He was also a regular at the Canberra Southern Cross Club. Their care of and kindness to him were unmistakable.

Towards the election in 2016, he asked if he could attach one of my “Tara” corflutes to his scooter. I was humbled and reluctant but also grateful—free advertising. We strapped the sign to the back of his scooter seat with cable ties, and he was a travelling billboard throughout Macquarie. The only issue that emerged was on election day itself, when he turned up at the Macquarie polling booth but was advised that he could not enter. Political material, of course, cannot be in the polling booth. He told me later that he was sad to have the cable ties cut off but that, ultimately, it was more important that he voted.

His eyes were always twinkling; he was always mischievous and flirtatious. He would end each message or each conversation with a big kiss. But he was also in an incredible amount of pain. I remember, a year after that election, visiting him in Calvary. He had cancer and, I believe, multiple sclerosis, yet he kept on.

In 2020 he spent months asking me when I would have my sign ready to attach to his scooter again. We have a wonderful selfie together from that day, from the day that I did that, in the car park in Jamison. That is something that I will continue to treasure.

I saw less and less of Cesar in the last few years. When I did, it was clear that he was weaker each time. The last time I saw Cesar was on election day this year, just 12 days ago, at the polling booth in Macquarie. He was not able to operate his mobility scooter himself anymore. He was being supported to head into the booth to undertake his civic duty. As someone who is very familiar with South American politics, Mr Speaker, I think you know just how seriously he took it, as a Venezuelan.

He died two days later, on 5 May. I will miss Cesar at the shops. I will miss his hugs, his insistence that he kiss my cheek or hold my hand, and the many conversations that we had. It is about how people make you feel, Mr Speaker, and he certainly always made me feel special. I hope that I did to him a little bit, too.

ACT Policing—graduate recruit ceremony

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.59): I rise today to inform the Assembly of an important and positive milestone for ACT Policing and the Canberra community.

This morning, I had the honour of attending the graduation ceremony of 26 new recruits into the Australian Federal Police, including 24 officers who will now officially be joining ACT Policing. This marks the third ACT Policing graduation in less than 12 months and represents a significant step forward in strengthening our frontline police capacity.

These new officers have successfully completed rigorous training and will now serve the ACT community as part of our local policing efforts. They bring with them a wealth

of personal experience, a deep commitment to serving the public, and a strong desire to contribute to the safety and wellbeing of Canberra.

While many of the graduating officers are local to the Canberra region, I am particularly pleased to note that others have relocated from across Australia, including from as far away as Western Australia, to join ACT Policing. This is a powerful reflection of the reputation of our police service and of Canberra as a place to live and serve.

Choosing a career in policing is not a decision that is made lightly. It is a decision that requires courage, integrity and a dedication to serving others. These new officers have taken up an oath to uphold these values, and I commend them for stepping forward to protect and support our community. On behalf of the ACT government and the people of Canberra, I extend my sincere thanks to each new officer for choosing this path, and for their willingness to meet the challenges of modern policing with empathy, professionalism and strength.

This graduation is part of the ACT government's ongoing commitment to grow our police force. We have committed to recruiting an additional 150 ACT police staff, with approximately 90 new officers expected to graduate this year alone. It is also worth noting that we have already seen a record interest in policing careers, with application numbers reaching the highest levels that ACT police have ever recorded.

To the newest members of ACT police, I say congratulations, welcome, and we look forward to the important work that you will do in serving our beautiful Canberra community.

Justice—ACT Law Week

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.01): I want to speak briefly about ACT Law Week, which begins tomorrow. Law Week is a wonderful national initiative held each year to promote public understanding of and engagement with the law. Here in Canberra, it is a week-long celebration of our legal profession and the dedicated people who work within it. As the shadow attorney-general, I deeply value the work of Canberra's legal community, from lawyers and barristers to paralegals and clerks, as well as those valuable lawyers who work within our levels of government.

Each year, the ACT Law Society, in partnership with other key legal organisations, hosts a variety of events which shine a light on the local legal profession and the role it plays in our community. I look forward to attending the ACT Law Week Awards Dinner tomorrow night, which is an opportunity to recognise outstanding contributions within the profession. It is good to see that some of the proceeds of tomorrow's dinner will go to a local Ginninderra-based charity, Roundabout Canberra.

Throughout next week, I look forward to attending several events as part of Law Week. On Tuesday, the 2025 Blackburn Lecture will be held at the ACT Law Society offices, featuring the Hon Justice David Mossop. The lecture promises to be an extremely insightful presentation, and it is great to see, again, that contributions are being collected by event organisers for Roundabout Canberra.

I am particularly looking forward to attending next Wednesday's Law Week breakfast,

hosted by the ACT Bar Association Women Barristers Committee. Having attended quite a few of these events in my nearly five years as shadow attorney-general, I look forward to a morning of networking and inspiration as we hear from guest speaker Vanessa Edwige.

Next Friday, the ACT Law Society will host a mock jury empanelment at the ACT Supreme Court. Participants will be guided through an interactive role-play, experiencing the jury process firsthand, as they take on the roles of judge, prosecution, defence, jury and accused. Also on Friday, there is the “You be the Judge” event, a simulation of a court hearing that invites the public to step into the shoes of a judicial officer.

That same afternoon, I will be attending the exhibition on local justice organisations. I look forward to seeing groups such as Legal Aid ACT, community legal centres and Victim Support ACT present and show off their wares and services. Even the beloved court support canines will showcase their work at the event.

Law Week is not just a celebration of legal professionals; it is a celebration of how justice operates in our society, and an opportunity to learn more about the legal system and how our legal community functions. I encourage everyone to attend an event, if they are able to, and take part in the week’s important legal celebration. It will be a very interesting week.

I want to thank all those who have helped organise the 2025 Law Week, especially the ACT Law Society and the ACT Bar Association. My understanding is that the usual entertaining Golden Gavel will be held later in the year, and I look forward to joining our legal community for that event as well.

Roads—traffic

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.05): It took a resident of Weston Creek 55 minutes this week to get home from the city on the R7. The “R” in “R7” stands for “rapid”, but you would not know it, based on that timeframe. According to the MyWay+ app, it should take 23 minutes. If only I could get the live data working on the app!

We know that this massive delay, in part, can be attributed to the closure of Coppins Crossing in recent weeks. Especially during peak hour, traffic is backed up on Cotter Road, all the way from Adelaide Avenue. But here is the thing about traffic: you are not stuck in traffic; you are traffic. Every additional car, whether there is one person or whether there are five people in it, takes up space on the road and contributes to congestion.

That is why we advocate for public transport. Not only is it better for the climate and does not lock people into having to fork out indefinitely for rego, insurance and fuel, but it is a space-efficient way to move people around our city. If everyone took public transport, we could cut traffic congestion by a lot, freeing up the roads for those who absolutely have to utilise, and have no alternative to utilising, a motor vehicle.

Canberrans who recognise this are making the choice to take the bus every single day. Unlike light rail, which has its own dedicated corridor, buses share the road with other

vehicles. On Tuesday, at 5.30 pm along the Cotter Road, that Weston Creek resident on the R7 was forced to confront this reality.

The closure of Coppins Crossing is not the only culprit creating a nightmare for Weston Creek and Molonglo Valley residents trying to get to where they need to go. What we are seeing is an exacerbation of existing traffic pressures. With a population projected to grow to 70,000, Molonglo Valley residents need to be confident that transport infrastructure is built for this volume, and it is better to build this sooner rather than later.

While Coppins Crossing reopens, hopefully, in a few days, the residents of the Molonglo Valley and Weston Creek will remember the inconvenience and frustration it has caused. Next time a road closes, they might think, “Gosh, if only there was another way.”

That is why I am sponsoring a community petition calling for full bus lanes along John Gorton Drive and Cotter Road, and the Bindubi Street extension, which was the subject of a motion debated a couple of months ago in this place. These bus lanes will be in addition to the existing lanes for all other vehicles. There were always plans for these to be constructed. What are currently grassed verges were provisioned with the intention to have bus lanes, back in the 2008 Molonglo roads feasibility study.

I am glad the government supported my motion last year to improve bus frequency. For the residents of Molonglo, the R10 timetable promises a frequent and reliable service, but being stuck in traffic prevents this from being fully realised. And it is possible. In late 2023, the Greens, Labor and the Liberals came together in support of the delivery of a complete Belconnen busway by the election in 2028.

In particular, I want to acknowledge the tireless advocacy of my Greens colleague Jo Clay, in fighting for a transitway for Belconnen in the previous term of this Assembly. I quote the transport minister from earlier this week, who described light rail as a “congestion buster”. The Greens support light rail. We want to see it rolled out to more of Canberra faster. But we do not have to wait for light rail to Molonglo to realise the benefits.

Right now, John Gorton Drive and the Cotter Road have “queue jump” sections for buses. This means that buses can get ahead of other traffic at intersections. But with the current congestion we are seeing, you will get two or three cars ahead, but you are still going along at that snail’s pace. Full bus lanes will mean buses can zoom on by, getting people to their destinations on schedule. I again quote Minister Steel, who is also a member for Murrumbidgee: “We can’t duplicate, triplicate or quadruplicate our roads out of this problem.”

I am looking forward to the support of the Labor government and other parties for this community petition, and a commitment to delivering full bus lanes along Molonglo’s key transport routes. The ACT Greens champion a livable city that is easy, comfortable and affordable to get around. That means providing genuine transport choice in terms of public and active travel options that get people out of their cars, and building the infrastructure to make that happen.

Woden—community centre

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.09): I rise to respond to the Chief Minister's ministerial statement this morning that called on members to support investment in the Convention and Entertainment Centre. To be clear, I support national facilities that allow Canberra to host events, summits, exhibitions and performances worthy of a capital city. These projects are important. They help define our national identity. But just as important is the infrastructure that supports our local communities. I support investment in social and economic infrastructure across our districts and investment in organisations that support our communities—places that also create jobs, foster connection and give people a sense of belonging, which underpins the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

Let's take Woden as an example. The CIT was replaced, which is a terrific facility, but the town centre has lost most of its recreation precinct. It does not have an indoor sports stadium or an arts centre, and we are losing our 50-metre pool and our ice rink. Today, we found out that we have also lost the community centre because of cost. The plan cost too much, so it has been cancelled. The community centre is critical for Woden Community Service to deliver the services to people needing support in the community. These are not luxuries; they are essential community assets that support physical and mental wellbeing, and yet they are disappearing.

The ACT government has limited funds. Even when national facilities are 50-50 co-funded with the federal government, the ACT still bears a significant cost. That cost falls on ratepayers, increasing our debt and the interest we must pay. We must be honest about that. We need to strike a balance. National infrastructure is important, but so is local infrastructure. Both are essential to a thriving and inclusive city.

The Chief Minister, who is also the Minister for Economic Development, is responsible for planning major projects like the Canberra Theatre Centre, the Convention and Entertainment Centre, the new aquatic centre and the new Canberra stadium. These are big-ticket items, but where is the plan for strategic, social and economic infrastructure in the rest of Canberra?

The Chief Minister asked members of the Assembly to support investment in the Convention and Entertainment Centre without providing a business case, scope, budget, time frame or risk assessment. That is not how we should make decisions that affect generations of Canberrans. The Chief Minister said that, at long last, we have a willing partner in the Albanese government—a government that sees building the national capital as nation building. That is welcome. But my question is: when will we have a willing partner in the ACT government—a government that sees building local communities as just as vital; a government that understands that investing in our suburbs is also an investment in our physical, mental and financial wellbeing?

Let me be clear: I am not against national infrastructure. I am calling for transparency, a clear understanding of the costs and a balanced pipeline of projects that includes the social and economic infrastructure our communities need to thrive.

Mr Ben Smith—tribute

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.13): I rise today as a representative of Canberra's equestrian community to pay respect to Ben Smith, a stalwart of our community for more than three decades. Ben died in December at the age of 81.

Ben was many things, but, above all, he was a doer. Ben did not join without joining in, whether it was rowing in his earlier years at the University of Aberdeen; coaching at the ANU rowing club and serving on its committee, including a stint as president; serving on boards and committees at his children's preschool and primary school; involvement with Canberra Riding Club Pony Club and Zone 16 Pony Club in the 1980s and 1990s; or involvement with the National Capital Horse Trials Association and Equestrian Park Management Group in the decades since then, which often included becoming treasurer. He was good with numbers and enjoyed keeping the books in order. This position also allowed him to stay in the background while knowing exactly what was going on and being able to influence it. I reckon he was the National Capital Horse Trials Association's treasurer for at least 20 years, and he also held this job at the Pony Club for many years.

He was best known as the Canberra horse trials course builder and designer. He was the person who maintained the cross-country course and filled the water jump and the person who organised the cross-country day for our events and briefed the officials and jump judges. This part of his equestrian journey started in the mid-1990s when Equestrian Park in Yarralumla played host to the pony club state eventing championships. He worked with other parents and young riders to significantly improve the Canberra Lakes Pony Club course and bring it up to championship standard.

Once that was done, he became the convener of a small team that established Canberra horse trials as an open one-day event under the National Capital Horse Trials Association banner. It quickly became one of the best events in New South Wales, if I do say so myself. I have great memories of those early years, including the Saturday night events in the Woolshed, with Shane Rose hanging from the rafters!

Unfortunately, the cross-country course was 80 per cent destroyed in the bushfire of December 2001, which ran right through Equestrian Park to Yarra Glen. As members would be aware, the wider equestrian community was even harder hit in January 2003, but we regrouped and Ben led the way in rebuilding, along with Grant Johnston and a small committee, including the inimitable Kate Mackenzie.

Cross-country course designing and building took up an enormous amount of Ben's time in retirement. It engaged his intellectual curiosity and was an opportunity for creative expression. Equestrian Park became Ben's own special-purpose men's shed, where he often worked alongside Bob, designing and building cross-country jumps. Course building kept him occupied and physically active, while also giving him something to whinge about at home and to talk about with many eventing people across New South Wales, who came to know, respect and love him.

Ben was always humble and tended to make himself scarce if a fuss was likely to be made, but he did know what he was worth and appreciated this being recognised. Among the memorabilia at his memorial in February were Ben's 2008 ACT Equestrian

Association Outstanding Service Award, which was a much-used cookbook, a photo of him receiving a 2009 ACT Sport and Recreation Volunteering Award, and his 2016 Equestrian New South Wales Eventing Volunteer of the Year Award. He kept the award and photo on his desk. In April this year, the National Capital Horse Trials Association ran our first event without Ben. It was really hard. There were a lot of tears, but the committee did an amazing job, and I congratulate them on running a great event.

I said at the beginning of my remarks that Ben was, above all, a doer. To me, of course, he was, above all, my dad. Many members of this place, especially the members for Kurrajong and their volunteers and staff, will know Ben from pre-poll and polling days, handing out and being here. I have often described Ben as my rock, and it is still hard to believe he is gone. His legacy, including for the National Capital Horse Trails Association, Eventing New South Wales, Canberra's broader equestrian community and the infrastructure of Equestrian Park, will live on for many years to come, but we will continue to miss him so very much.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Mr Rattenbury**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended to allow the adjournment debate to conclude when all Members wishing to speak had done so.

Family and domestic violence—Stop Killing Women rally

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.18): Over the past couple of months, I have taken part in several rallies and campaigns in support of greater action on domestic, family and sexual violence. I wanted to speak to them today, because it is an absolute indictment on our systems that four rallies have been needed this year alone.

The Stop Killing Women rally, organised by Australian Femicide Watch, happened back in March and was timed to put pressure on federal politicians and candidates to roll out meaningful budgetary measures, policy, legal changes and action to end violence against women. At the time, 112 women had been killed since the start of 2024. I would like to acknowledge Mr Emerson, who spoke very sincerely at the event. The speakers were incredibly powerful. They spoke from lived experience.

At the end, as is always the case with Red Heart campaigns, we were invited to walk up to each of the red hearts planted in the earth and read the names of each woman and child that had been killed. It really hit me in that moment, that age did not matter. There were kids barely able to walk. There were women in their seventies and eighties with a whole life's worth of experience and connection and celebrations. There were women my age and probably my height. It hit me that the biggest risk factor here was being a woman.

Then, in April, there was the Thousand Bikes Against DV rally by the Central West Riders. This was once again held outside Parliament House. It was done to honour the life of Molly Ticehurst, who was killed in Forbes on 22 April 2024. The event was driven by Molly's family, who organised a roaring brigade of motorbikes down to Canberra to commemorate her and to put pressure on the government to do better.

Members of the community were invited to take a red heart and place it in the ground in the name of a woman or child the heart represented was called. Finally, Molly's young son came up to place his mum's heart out the front. As an onlooker, I could feel the profound mix of grief and love in that moment. Molly was clearly a very kind woman and her family loved her very much. When I walked the length of the red hearts this time I saw that one of the hearts was for a woman not three suburbs from mine from last year. It should not matter where in Australia a woman is killed; we should be just as angry every single time, but it still got to me.

Then, later again in April, a few of us here attended the Vote 4 Her rally on Kambri right before the federal election. and it was lovely to run into Ms Lee on the way and walk in together. The Vote for Her movement, a student-led movement, came about when one of the student organisers witnessed a friend's profound grief at and loss of their close friend. It was a student movement calling for those in power to fix this crisis. Within a week, they had rallied around the cause. They were able to gather members and candidates from all across the political spectrum. I hope their courage in sharing their stories was able to motivate them. I know I am motivated by this.

In the past weekend, I participated in the No More Violence rally calling to once again end violence against women, men's violence, and all forms of domestic, family and sexual violence. We marched from Regatta Point to Parliament House. I would like to acknowledge Minister Paterson, who attended the event too. We heard from victim-survivors, advocates and crisis services. They once again came together to say enough is enough. It broke my heart to hear, at this point in time, last weekend, that we have now lost a total of 156 women and children since the start of 2024. That is 44 women and children killed since the first time we met to mourn them in March.

I wish I could make a more articulate point here, but I am so, so angry. I am an angry woman. I know there are plenty of words in the English lexicon gendered to minimise my anger. Maybe I am just histrionic, neurotic or hormonal. Rage comes in two flavours—regular and feminine. Even the words in our language are designed to make us quieter or “yappier” and position us as better victims. I need you to forget those gendered words for a second when I ask you to stop killing us. If you have to, imagine for a second that I was a bloke asking you to do the exact same thing. Stop killing my friends. Stop killing my constituents.

I need men to speak to their mates. Being a bystander is not enough. When men do not listen to women, we need them to listen to you. You will be uncomfortable when you speak up, I guarantee it, but you will be helping us if you do and you will be complicit in our fate if you do not. I need the men in this place to listen. I am grateful to those who are in the chamber right now. I need the men in this place to critically engage with policies from prevention to crisis support. I need the men in this place to fund family, sexual and domestic violence crisis services to the actual level of need in our community, because our women need to be safe. I need the men in this place to come to our rallies and stay and listen to us, because we need them to hear the stories that we hear.

I promise you I will do my bit. I will listen and learn as much as possible from those on the frontlines of domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, research,

policymaking, lived experience and prevention, so that I can not only help my constituents on an individual level but also contribute to genuine, far-reaching solutions that go far beyond the cycle of a short-term election cycle. But I need your help too.

Liberal Party

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.23): In the entirety of my time in politics, I have heard time and time again that Canberra is a Labor town. But I reject this, and the evidence rejects this. Canberrans have voted Liberal and are willing to vote Liberal. We have seen Liberal Chief Ministers, albeit not for some time. Even in the last ACT election just six months ago, less than 2,000 votes, or 0.7 per cent, separated us and Labor.

But no-one can deny the devastating result for the Liberal Party on 3 May. As former Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham said in his deep reflection on this election result:

A Liberal Party fit for the future will need to reconnect with and represent liberal ideology, belief and thinking in a new and modern context. Australians still seek all of the freedoms that liberalism stands for. Freedoms of belief, worship, family, enterprise and ownership.

He went on to say:

Beyond the presentation of ideology, there must be a reshaping of the party to connect it with the modern Australian community. Based on who's not voting Liberal, it must start with women. Based on where they're not voting Liberal, it must focus on metropolitan Australia.

Now I turn to what some of would describe as a controversial topic, and that is quotas. I say at the outset that I am incredibly proud of the record of the Canberra Liberals when it comes to the representation of women in our local party. We became the first party in the ACT—not just the first Liberal Party division, but the first and so far the only party in ACT—to boast an all-female leadership team, and we had a female-majority party room last term. And it is not just recent history. When Kate Carnell became Chief Minister back in the 1990s, she became the first female leader of a Liberal government in the country. Today I acknowledge the historic milestone that we now have the first female leader of the federal Liberal Party. It is a sad indictment, however, that it took too long.

Charlotte Mortlock, creator of the Hilma's Network, to encourage and promote women from the Liberal and national ranks into politics, has launched a petition calling for the Liberal Party to adopt quotas and, whilst doing so, acknowledges that quotas are not ideal but they are “a pragmatic response to an existential threat”. As *The Australian's* Claire Lehmann points out:

The choice for the party is not between quotas and purity—it's between quotas and irrelevance.

I do not believe that quotas are the endpoint or the answer, but quotas are a mechanism to get to where we need to be—equal representation of women in parliament—because it is clear that our mechanisms have not worked. Charlotte also goes on to quote former Deputy Leader of the New South Wales Liberal Party Ron Phillips, who, back in

1995—some 30 years ago—said:

We have all been conned if anyone thinks that success in politics is based on merit alone. A cursory glance around the parliaments of this country should free anyone from the misapprehension of merit being the primary guiding principle of getting into parliament.

In fact, men only started to talk about the importance of merit when women began to contest selection in numbers. So women should not let merit get in the way of getting into parliament. Men don't.

He goes on to say:

Ever since the establishment of the liberal party, women have been constitutionally guaranteed equal representation ... and affirmative action is nothing new for us or for Robert Menzies.

Robert Menzies, of course, himself was a strident and public advocate for gender equality. It seems extraordinary that it was back in 1946 when he said:

I hope that the time will speedily come when we can say truthfully that there is no sex discrimination in public or private office, in political or industrial opportunity. We are all, men and women, citizens with a common interest and a common task.

Almost 60 years on, this must be more than just hope.

I congratulate Sussan Ley on her election as leader of our party. Sussan has a deep connection to Canberra, having attended Campbell High and Dickson College, and was an incredible support to me during my time as leader. The challenges she will face are enormous and, while some of her greatest champions will bemoan the glass cliff she has been thrust upon, the rebuilding of our party must start with a step in the right direction, and that is what the federal party has done. I conclude, Mr Speaker, with Sussan's own words:

We have to have a Liberal Party that respects modern Australia, that reflects modern Australia, and that represents modern Australia. We need to meet the people where they are, and that is what I am committed to doing.

Israel-Palestine conflict—Freedom Flotilla Coalition

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.28): I rise to highlight the recent attack on the Freedom Flotilla Coalition ship the *Conscience* in the Mediterranean Sea. The Freedom Flotilla Coalition has been sailing boats and ships for 15 years to expose and physically challenge Israel's illegal blockade and now total siege of more than 2.2 million Palestinian people in Gaza.

Two weeks ago, more than 40 volunteer participants from more than 20 countries, including four Australians, were in Malta preparing to board the *Conscience*. To try and ensure the safety of the ship, the coalition had prepared for the action without publicity. On 2 May, they were planning to load a significant amount of humanitarian aid—and human solidarity—and sail the 2,000 kilometres to Gaza, Palestine.

Shortly after midnight, the ship was attacked by drones 14 nautical miles east of the coast of Malta. Two missiles struck the ship, causing extensive mechanical and electrical damage. Fortunately, no-one was killed or seriously wounded, but it took more than an hour to put out the extensive fires. The ship now needs substantial repairs before it can be loaded to sail to Gaza. The *Conscience* is still being denied access to a safe harbour by the Maltese government and no crew exchange has yet been allowed.

Despite calls from civil society and some elected representatives across the world, we have seen little action from governments, institutions and corporations. They have failed to condemn this drone strike carried out in European airspace, 20 kilometres off the Maltese coast. What an extraordinary proposition: a ship operated by a non-government organisation, seeking to do nothing more than deliver humanitarian aid, is attacked by drones in European waters and airspace, and the key reaction from key institutions is mostly to look the other way.

As someone who has a long history with Greenpeace, this reminds me very much of the attack on the *Rainbow Warrior*, an act of state-sponsored terrorism. On 10 July 1985, two operatives of the French foreign intelligence agency sank the flagship of the Greenpeace fleet, the *Rainbow Warrior*, in the port of Auckland, on her way to a protest against a planned French nuclear test at Mururoa Atoll.

Through the dedicated work of New Zealand police, the culprits were identified and there was significant international fallout, with the jailing of the saboteurs, political resignations, condemnation of the French government and reparations paid to Greenpeace and the family of Fernando Pereira.

I know people who were on the ship that night, and it is important to recognise that this was an action with very real consequences. Photographer Fernando Pereira was killed in that act of state-sponsored terrorism, leaving behind a wife and two children.

Given that history and in solidarity, Greenpeace issued a statement after the attack on the *Conscience*. It said:

Greenpeace strongly condemns the drone attack on the *Conscience*, a humanitarian vessel carrying aid to Gaza. We call on all governments and international bodies to ensure the *Conscience* is allowed to complete its mission unmolested after repairs are carried out. Humanitarian relief efforts must be protected, not targeted.

The attack on The Freedom Flotilla's peaceful ship comes as Israel continues to enforce a full blockade on all aid entering Gaza, compounding an already catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Blocking aid and targeting those who deliver it are grave violations of international humanitarian law.

The people of Gaza are facing famine, disease, and the collapse of basic infrastructure. Aid missions are a lifeline, they must be supported, not attacked ...

The bombing of the *Conscience* and the continued blockade must not go unanswered. Humanitarian missions must be safeguarded, and international law upheld. Civilians and aid workers are not targets.

Those are powerful words from Greenpeace—people who know the reality of this

situation.

I conclude my remarks today by offering my solidarity with the brave crew and dedicated members of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition. No matter your view on their cause, they should not be subject to state-sponsored terrorism. This attack cannot be ignored. There must be a proper investigation and those responsible should be held to account.

Ginninderra Falls—land sale

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.32): How amazing is Ginninderra Falls? I do not know how many people here have had the pleasure of going out there. I have. It has been closed since 2004, but before that it was an amazing piece of nature where you could go with your friends or your family. You could walk down there, swim in a beautiful waterhole and have a picnic. It was an astonishing piece of beauty right on our doorstep in Canberra, unlike anything else.

It makes me really sad that so many people who call Canberra home have never been able to enjoy these beautiful falls and that surrounding area. Our community want to see the falls again. That is why they have started two petitions via the Legislative Assembly and via change.org to see the falls not only as a local attraction, but also as a biodiversity haven for our native wildlife and as a place that respects the First Nations cultural values of that place. I have sponsored one of those petitions.

People are keen to see our ACT government get more invested in the Ginninderra Falls. It is a magnificent natural asset right on our doorstep and the only road to access the falls is via the ACT. The falls sit in New South Wales, but this is inherently part of our region and part of our identity.

Those falls are currently in a sale process. Our community want a really good outcome for this—one that protects the ecological value of the land, one that ensures that sites of significance to First Nations people are managed by First Nations people, and one that makes sure that this region is once again publicly accessible.

We have heard from government that they have not valued that land. They did not consider purchasing the site, they did not put in an EOI, and they did not obtain any valuations for the land for sale, which is quite a small part of it, I understand. They have not estimated the value of the tourism and public access to the falls, and they have not really taken a lot of steps on this project.

It is, I think, a fair reflection—and this comes up quite a lot with me in the community—that most people want the ACT government to be more proactive, to make sure that these falls are used in the way that they could be, and to be protected for nature as well.

While it is great to hear that the Suburban Land Agency is a member of the Cross Border Working Group, we would like to elevate the voices of our community. Those petitions are a great starting point, if you would like Ginninderra Falls to be protected for nature, for the First Nations cultural areas to be handed back for First Nations management, and for public access, to the bits where that is appropriate, to happen again. Jump on and sign one of those petitions.

People in Canberra love our natural environment; it is actually why a lot of people have chosen to live here. This is a city where you can live and have a city lifestyle surrounded by nature. With Ginninderry seeing more and more people living in west Belconnen, we have a responsibility to ensure that our surrounding environment is protected where it needs to be protected and available for the community to enjoy, not locked up, not left and lapsed, not disregarded. We need to recognise the value of these amazing natural areas.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.34 pm until Tuesday, 24 June 2025 at 10 am.