DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

3 December 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, 21 January 2025**.

Wednesday, 3 December 2025

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (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:

Housing—establishment of rental commissioner—petition 62-25

By **Mr Rattenbury** *from 146 residents:*

> **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**
>
> The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the inaccessibility of enforcing tenancy law in the ACT.
>
> Currently the ACT is the leading jurisdiction in Australia for many rental laws and reforms. However, the only way to hold unscrupulous, dishonest and negligent landlords to account is to take them to ACAT. This system is inadequate, because tribunal proceedings are costly, timely and many people do not have the legal knowledge required to understand tenancy law and tribunal systems. The rule of law is meant to ensure everyone is equal before the law in Australia, however, as outlined above, realistically this is not the case.
>
> Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to create a Rental Commissioner to address tenancy disputes in the ACT.
>
> This commissioner would provide a free service that assists both renters and rental providers to resolve disputes. In particular we'd like to see a service that allows renters to submit complaints about rental providers, including private landlords, free of charge; however we recognise that this commissioner could address multiple tenancy related issues.
>
> A similar program, Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria (RDRV), has been trialled in Victoria as a branch of their tribunal system, VCAT. Trials have already shown considerable success. The pilot program has managed more than 5000 cases since May 2024 and resolved 70% of them without a hearing, often within a few days.

The ACT would benefit from introducing a similar system, which would help ensure fairness and prevent inequality under the law. Given the Government committed in its Supply and Confidence agreement to establish a Rental Commissioner, we also call on the Government to provide a timeline for the fulfilment of this commitment.

Public schools—senior secondary language courses—petition 77-25

By **Ms Barry** *from 582 residents:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the recent confirmation that CIT will not be accepting new enrolments for its Year 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026.

From 2017 to 2023 the Canberra Academy of Languages (CAL) provided courses for Year 11-12 students to continue learning in their chosen languages, where these courses were not available through their local college. In 2024 and 2025, an equivalent program has been delivered by CIT Solutions.

The languages offered included French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Tamil. The ACT Education Directorate is currently advising students CIT will not be enrolling new students in 2026 and beyond. This model involves students attending one face to face two-hour lesson per week, in a central Canberra location outside of normal school hours. It allows students to undertake most of their studies at their local college and is accessible to all Canberra students.

It fills a known gap in the provision of language education to senior secondary students in the ACT. The programs in part target students who studied a language in high school (years 7-10) that is not taught in any of their local colleges, and who wish to continue these studies in years 11-12.

For example, students who study French at Canberra High School, as French is not taught at any colleges in the greater Belconnen area. Similar programs operate in most other states and territories in Australia and are operated by the governments in those jurisdictions. To lose this program would be doing a great disservice to future generations of students in the ACT.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to replicate the Year 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026 within the ACT Education Directorate, starting with year 11 students in February 2026, so all ACT students can continue studying their chosen language at the ATAR level.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

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

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Parking—Tuggeranong 55 Plus Club—petitions 29-25 and 50-25

From **Ms Cheyne**, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 1 December 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Werner-Gibbings concerning parking and accessibility for the Tuggeranong 55 Plus Club.

The response read as follows:

> Dear Mr Duncan
>
> Thank you for your letter concerning petitions E-PET-029-25 and PET-050-25, lodged by Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA regarding an Increase to carparking and accessibility for the Tuggeranong 55 Plus Club.
>
> The Tuggeranong Seniors Club is located on Cowlishaw Street in Tuggeranong and has approximately 12 off street parking spaces.
>
> The City and Environment Directorate (CED) is aware that the ACT Education Directorate offers a permit system in the adjacent carpark for students who attend Lake Tuggeranong College. CED however does not support the introduction of new permit parking scheme for groups, businesses or residents throughout the Territory, as they introduce inequitable parking arrangements for the public.
>
> The time restrictions on the parking spaces alongside the club on Cowlishaw Street currently have a 2-hour restriction in place. Any proposed changes to parking restrictions in the area need to be consulted with affected residents and businesses prior to any change being made. However, CED believe the current time restriction is the most appropriate for the land use and parking patterns in this location and therefore has no plans to make amendments.
>
> A refuge island pedestrian crossing facility is provided close to the club. This crossing point is supported with warning signs to alert drivers to the presence of seniors crossing the road.
>
> Providing an improved crossing, for example a zebra pedestrian crossing, close to the club cannot be achieved without major road and carpark realignment works. This due to a number of reasons including the club being located adjacent to a sharp bend in the road, with the vehicle access to the club provided on the apex of the bend.
>
> Relevant Australian Standards require appropriate conditions to be met, including sight distances to be provided for the safety of users. These standards cannot be achieved at this location.
>
> However, CED has informed me that they will continue to monitor the movements of pedestrians in the area and take action if required.
>
> Thank you for bringing these petitions to my attention. I trust the information provided is helpful.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+—petitions 35-25 and 54-25

From **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport, dated 2 December 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Braddock concerning the accessibility of MyWay+.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 4 September 2025 concerning petitions E-PET-035-25 and PET 054-25, lodged by Mr Andrew Braddock MLA regarding MyWay+ meeting basic functional requirements.

The implementation of MyWay+ has been the most significant upgrade to Canberra's public transport ticketing technology in over a decade, and a major digital transformation project undertaken by the ACT Government.

The Government acknowledges the concerns raised by the community in this petition, and the impact some of the issues had on passengers and their experience using MyWay+ following its launch in November last year. Transport Canberra continues to work closely with our contractors to address any outstanding issues, and we are committed to continuing a program of ongoing improvements to the MyWay+ system as addressed in the following paragraphs.

Accessibility of public transport services

All buses in the Transport Canberra operational fleet are compliant with the Disability Standards applicable to Public Transport (DSAPT) compliant, in that all allow for the lowering of the bus entry, access and clear path for wheelchairs.

MyWay+ is designed to further meet these accessibility standards by providing clear, real-time information on route accessibility. For passengers who use wheelchairs, the system will provide up to date details about which services, stops, and vehicles are accessible. This functionality is supported through integration with the Transport Canberra journey planning platform and open data feeds that flag wheelchair accessible stops. Information will be displayed through multiple accessible channels including the MyWay+ app, web portal, and voice enabled journey planner to ensure usability across varying mobility and sensory needs. The system's interface will comply with WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards, ensuring that users with assistive devices (such as screen readers) can independently confirm whether a route meets their mobility requirements prior to travel.

Since MyWay+ went live, several upgrades to the on-board MyWay+ hardware have also been implemented to improve accessibility. These include:

- an increase to the volume of the audio confirmation noise for a successful tap on/off across validators;
- changes to the font size and layout on onboard passenger information display boards across the bus fleet to enhance legibility and readability; and
- adjustments to the volume and clarity of on-board audio announcements, which notify passengers of the upcoming bus stops.

Improvements to the accessibility of digital interfaces, such as the MyWay+ mobile application and customer portal, have also been iteratively progressed.

These improvements have been guided by the expert advice and lived experience of people with a disability through an independent consultant, Get Skilled Access, who have also been engaging with Transport Canberra's Accessibility Reference Group.

The ACT Government welcomes ongoing feedback from the community to help target future work towards improving users' experience with public transport, and Transport Canberra will continue to consider further improvements throughout the life of the contract.

Real-time passenger information

Real-time passenger information (RTPI) data has been available through the MyWay+ app since March 2025 and was made available for third party app developer, to create their own apps or use within their existing platforms, on 13 June 2025.

A small number of buses in the operational fleet which are scheduled to be retired in the coming months do not have MyWay' installed and will continue to display scheduled timetable information. All new buses entering the Transport Canberra fleet will have MyWay+ installed.

Improve QR code functionality

A number of improvements to the in-app MyWay+ Pass travel token (the QR Code) and in-built readers on validators were made between launch and March 2025 to improve, as best possible, the scanning performance of the QR code. These updates included re-sizing the QR code to a smaller, easier to focus dimension, as well as resizable functionality and auto illumination.

Increased education and communication activity has also reduced instances of unsuccessful taps on/off using the QR code, noting most customers have experienced the speed difference that other payment methods offer, such as the MyWay+ physical card and every day banking cards, including those saved in mobile device 'wallets' provide. This has resulted in an overall reduction in the use of the MyWay+ pass since launch.

This has resulted in a reduced use of the MyWay+ pass and the growth in use of NFC alternatives.

Transport Canberra and the contractor, NEC Australia, are currently investigating the feasibility of Near Field Communication (NFC) travel tokens as an alternative payment option for further evaluation.

Balance display on validators

Under the previous card-based ticketing system, MyWay, displaying the balance on validators after a tap was technically straightforward. The card itself held the travel balance and transaction information, allowing the validator to instantly read and display this data at the point of tap-on or tap-off.

In contrast, the MyWay+ is an account-based ticketing system, which enables multiple payments methods and linked devices to draw from a single account in addition, to the traditional "travel card". Passengers are now also able to travel "anonymously" (i.e. without being linked to a MyWay+ account) by simply

tapping on and off with their debit or credit card. This introduces a greater complexity for real-time balance displays compared to the previous model.

Transport Canberra and NEC Australia are currently assessing the technical feasibility of implementing real-time balance display within this new system framework, with consideration given to latency, network capacity, and system integration requirements.

Student concession

Student (School or Tertiary) concessions are one of many types of concessions offered to the ACT Community. Primary, secondary and full-time tertiary students are eligible for concession cards which can be purchased online through their MyWay+ account, or at a MyWay+ retail outlet. Proof of concession (i.e. a valid student ID card) must be carried while travelling on public transport.

Students can access these concession fares by tapping on and off with their MyWay+ card, the QR card or an everyday banking card registered to their account. Alternatively, students can also purchase concession tickets from any Ticket Vending Machine, which located at all light rail platforms and major bus interchanges.

Communication on how to navigate the new MyWay+ app and website

Considerable information relating to the MyWay+ Customer Portal and mobile application are available here: https://www.transport.act.gov.au/tickets-and-myway/account. This includes step-by-step guides, video tutorials and other resources.

The Transport Customer Services team continues to be responsive and available to assist customers with using MyWay+ and can be contacted by calling 13 17 10 during business hours, or by completing an online feedback form here: https://services.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/s/forms/transport-feedback

Thank you for bringing the petitions to my attention. I trust the information provided is of assistance.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Public schools—senior secondary language courses—petition 77-25

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.02): I will keep my comments brief this morning. As members will be aware, I have raised a substantive motion on this issue and it will give us an opportunity to discuss it in detail later this week. However, I would like to acknowledge and put on the record that the petition has performed phenomenally well, supported by Canberrans concerned about the deteriorating nature of language programs offered to year 11 and 12 students from 2026.

Despite only being open for 33 days, over 560 Canberrans have signed their name to

this petition calling for year 11 and 12 ATAR language courses to be continued so all students can continue studying their chosen language at the ATAR level. Many of those signatories have reached out to members across the chamber expressing their concerns about the limited scope of options being provided in this government's response. Having received more than 500 signatures, as has been indicated by the Clerk, the petition will be automatically referred to the committee and I hope that the committee will decide to inquire into this matter.

I was pleased to be asked to sponsor this petition as I understand deeply the personal benefit of speaking two languages. I speak French and English and my daughter speaks Japanese and French. Continuous learning is critical as gaps of years between courses can result in the loss of learning. As we know, if you do not use a language, it goes away and having to start from basics—like I said, if you do not practice the language, you lose your ability to remember how to use it.

I would like to thank the many Canberrans who have raised this issue with me, those who have raised the issue across this Assembly with other members, those who signed the petition, and particularly those tireless community advocates who engaged so passionately with many of us over the last few months. I would specifically like to thank Jim, who is the author of this petition for his tireless advocacy. Jim's daughter currently studies French and has no pathway to continuing in year 11 and 12 and that was really concerning to him. I hope that when we get to the debate later this week that we are able to achieve a better outcome for the children in year 11 and 12 on this issue and also a better outcome than what we currently have on the table that the minister has offered.

Housing—establishment of rental commission—petition 62-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.05): I rise today to table a petition with 145 signatures, led by principal petitioner, Ms Jessica Menace. Ms Menace was generous and erudite when she shared with me her personal experiences that led her to the point of calling for a rental commissioner to be created in the ACT. No one should have to live with black mould or face landlords who will not remedy unsafe living conditions and need to be taken to the ACAT to be held responsible. I would like to thank her for her work on this issue and her advocacy and I hope she feels proud to have garnered the support for the petition that she has.

The petition draws the attention of the Assembly to the inaccessibility of enforcing tenancy laws in the ACT. Currently the ACT is the leading jurisdiction in Australia for many rental laws and reforms, some of which I was able to implement in the last term of the Assembly in my role as Attorney-General. The petition sets out that the only way to hold landlords to account who do not live up to their end of the deal is to take them to ACAT. This system is inadequate because tribunals are costly, timely and many people do not have the legal knowledge required to understand tenancy law and tribunal systems. The rule of law is meant to ensure everyone is equal before the law in Australia. However, realistically, most people do not perceive that to be the case and do not feel empowered to take such action.

The petition asks the Assembly to call on the ACT government to create a rental commissioner to address tenancy disputes in the ACT. This commissioner would provide a free service that assists both renters and rental providers to resolve disputes.

In particular, the petitioner and signatories would like to see a service that allows renters to submit complaints about rental providers, including private landlords, free of charge. However, we recognise that this commissioner could address multiple tenancy-related issues.

A similar program, Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, has been trialled in Victoria as a branch of their tribunal system, VCAT. Trials have already shown considerable success. The pilot program has managed more than 5,000 cases since May 2024 and resolved 70 per cent of them without a hearing, often within a few days.

The ACT could benefit from introducing a similar system, which would help ensure fairness and prevent inequality under the law. Given the government's commitment in its Supply and Confidence Agreement to establishing a rental commissioner, the petition calls on the government to provide a timeline for the fulfilment of this commitment.

I would like to thank again Ms Menace for her advocacy on this petition and to the 145 signatories to it. While it might not have reached the number of signatures needed to send it to a committee, it has succeeded in raising this very important issue in public discourse and in this place, and that in itself is important. The reality is that we are now one year on from the election and post-election negotiations and I do consider it is time for an update and, indeed, fulfilment of the commitment to move forward on this issue. More Canberrans than ever before are renting, locked out of home ownership, and that trend shows no signs of abating.

We need to support renters in enforcing their rights in ways that are not financially or emotionally difficult, or potentially even ruinous, like courts and tribunals can be for some people. A rental commissioner could fulfil this function and it is time for the government to step into this space and do more to protect the rights of renters.

Public schools—senior secondary language courses—petition 77-25

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.09): I want to speak briefly on the petition sponsored by Ms Barry. Thank you very much, Ms Barry, for bringing this issue forward. I am really pleased that Ms Barry has brought it forward to this afternoon's debate as well. I have also met with Jim and with quite a lot of other constituents about languages in our schools.

We have got this petition on this particular really pressing concern right now of our year 11 and year 12 students who might not be able to continue doing the language that they have been doing right through school. That is a major problem and it is very time critical that we fix this major problem and that we make sure that the solution is equitable and available for all of our students, not just for some of them.

There are a lot of concerns that parents are raising about languages in our schools and we lodged a question on notice earlier in the year about this to find out what languages our kids can study. For instance, at my daughter's school, you can study French but only in grade 2, grade 5 and grade 6. As Ms Barry has pointed out, languages really are one of those educational skills that need to be continuous. What happens when you do not do it in grade 3 and grade 4? You go back to the beginning. It is not really providing

the curriculum promise that we expect that languages are available in schools. So I am very much looking forward to getting a better solution for our school students and a bit of reassurance, I think, for the parents who are really worried about this issue.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+—petitions 35-25 and 54-25

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.11): I would like to thank the Minister for Transport for his response to the petition that MyWay+ must meet basic functional requirements. I welcome the update on work done to date and its promises of future improvements. We have debated the issue of MyWay+ at length in this Assembly, but I thought it was worthwhile to draw to the Assembly's attention a response to a question taken on notice, number 17, during the annual reports hearings regarding the functionality of the MyWay+ validators.

It has been revealed that approximately only three in five validators are considered fully operational. About a quarter malfunction up to 10 per cent of the time and the remainder are either seriously degraded, fully degraded or require investigation. These are not good numbers for a ticketing system intended to meet the basic functional requirements of our city, particularly now that we are more than 12 months after the system has been installed and is interfacing with the Canberra public. This is another example that we did not receive the worldclass public ticketing system that we were promised and I will continue to pursue this issue.

Housing—establishment of rental commissioner—petition 62-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.12): I rise today to support the petition from ACT residents who request the ACT government create a rental commissioner to address tenancy disputes in the ACT. While the ACT government has implemented rental reforms, disputes are heard through ACAT which can be cumbersome, time-consuming and require legal knowledge that many renters simply do not have. The rule of law promises equality, but in practice there is a power imbalance between landlord and renter and many renters are disadvantaged.

A rental commissioner would provide a service to help renters and landlords resolve disputes quickly and fairly and address broader tenancy issues, including advocating for better rental laws and representing renters' interests and educating both tenants and landlords about their obligations and rights. The government has committed to establish this role. We urge the government to provide a clear timeline for delivery. This petition reflects a simple truth, renting should be fair, and a rental commissioner is the next step towards achieving that.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Knife crime—police powers—update
Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.13): On 4 March 2025 the Legislative Assembly passed a motion moved by Mr Cain to: revisit the evidence base in consultation with

relevant stakeholders in relation to knife crime; consider whether there is a need to introduce legislation which increases powers for ACT Policing to respond to knife-related violence; and to report back to the Assembly within this calendar year.

This ministerial statement is that report-back. From the outset, Mr Speaker, I do wish to reflect that the timing of this response to the Assembly resolution is, of course, unfortunate and entirely coincidental to a matter which is receiving significant attention and scrutiny. So, in responding to the resolution, I want to assure the Assembly and the community that I am alive to the issues in that matter. I certainly do not wish for this statement to be seen to be oblivious to those issues, let alone being seen as insensitive to, or undermining, the wellbeing of the young person, family and broader community.

However, I want to stress that I also do not wish to prejudice the relevant investigations taking place. So, accordingly, this response will speak only in general terms from here on.

It is important, Mr Speaker, to acknowledge the terrible impact that knife crime has on victims and the community more broadly. Knife crime reaches across the community in complex and multifaceted ways. We have seen the tragic loss of life as a result of altercations involving teenagers. We have seen robberies, road rage incidents and home invasions where the offender was armed with a knife. And we have seen knives used in family and domestic violence offences, and other sexual offences. Every victim survivor, their family and their loved ones are at the front of my mind when we are engaging in discussions about how to make Canberra a safer place to live.

That said, policy discussions about knife-related violence and our response to it must be informed by the best available evidence. Data from both the Australian Bureau of Statistics and from ACT Policing shows that knife-related crime has not increased in the AC—unlike in other Australian jurisdictions. Apprehensions data from ACT Policing shows that each year since 2019-20, police officers have detected between 100 and 120 people who are in possession of a knife without a reasonable excuse.

Data from the ABS from 2018 to 2023 confirms that this is a low number. Out of every 100 people in the ACT who was assaulted, only two will have been assaulted with a knife. Of the victims of robberies in the ACT, ABS data is showing that the proportion who were robbed by somebody wielding a knife is also reducing; trending from a third in 2018, down to about a fifth in 2023.

There is unanimity among stakeholders that the evidence shows knife-related violence remains uncommon in the ACT. Rates of knife violence across different offence types have not increased over the past six years. Rates of knife violence in the ACT do remain very low. This is, as members may recall—and particularly Mr Rattenbury, I suspect—that this is the second time in two years that the government has undertaken a review of the evidence and undertaken consultation on the issue of knife crime and police powers.

In 2024, the ACT government asked stakeholders about the evidence and the desirability of introducing Jack's Law, named after Jack Beasley, who was 17 when he was stabbed to death in Queensland in 2019. Jack's Law would allow a police officer to use metal detection wands to look for concealed knives, without any requirement that

the officer form a reasonable suspicion that the person was in possession of the knife.

In 2024, stakeholders were mostly opposed to the introduction of Jack's Law. While a few stakeholders supported introducing it based on principles of proactive policing, most stakeholders opposed introducing Jack's Law based on the lack of evidence to support the proposal. In 2025, those views have remained the same, and I can assure the Assembly of that because we have tested those views again.

Those in favour of expanding police powers and capabilities note the catastrophic effect that a concealed knife can have. Minor altercations can escalate quickly the moment a person reveals that they are carrying a knife, either defensively or offensively. As both Attorney-General and the Minister for Human Rights, I do have unique responsibilities to ensure that the right balance is struck between individual rights and community safety; between liberties and security; and between the ability of citizens to go about their business without interference from the state, and the ability of police officers to also protect the peace that allows society to flourish.

Expanding police powers to search people at random is simply not supported by evidence. It would unjustifiably interfere with individual rights, personal liberties, and the ability to go about freely in society while not significantly improving community safety and security, or assisting police to protect the peace. The very best available data on Queensland's implementation of Jack's Law revealed a very low proportion of searches resulted in positive detections of a knife.

A study by Griffith University showed that, at one location, the strike rate was 1.2 per cent, and at another the strike rate was less than 0.5 per cent. As noted by one stakeholder, these very low rates of positive detection were in high-density locations that we do not have in the ACT. At one location, the number of searches undertaken was larger than the entire population of Belconnen and still had a trivial number of positive detections.

There are concerns also about the effectiveness of the technology beyond the positive detection rate. Although the discussion is framed in terms of searching for concealed knives, searching with a wand detects metals, and not strictly knives. Wearing a metal belt buckle, carrying a metal cigarette lighter, or having a metal plate in your arm or hip would expose you to more invasive searches from police officers. Meanwhile, knives made from non-ferrous metals, sharpened resins and ceramics would not be detected. There are real concerns that allowing police to undertake searches without forming reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing would simply undermine other civil liberty protections too.

Stakeholders representing the interests of First Nations people have also noted evidence that suggested Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children, were disproportionately targeted for scanning in other jurisdictions. Although some stakeholders noted that the lack of physical contact made when searching with a metal detector would support culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches to searches, the fact that any metal on the person could result in an escalation of police intervention caused concern from those stakeholders.

Finally, for those circumstances where there is a higher density of people and a greater

threat posed by knife violence, ACT law already has in place an adapted and proportionate equivalent of Jack's Law as part of our Major Events Act. This allows authorised persons, including police officers, to do scanning searches of people who are entering an event or who are at the event, without having to form reasonable suspicion.

I wish to thank the stakeholders who gave up their valuable and limited time to revisit the evidence base and to provide their views. I want to assure the chamber and the community that the government has listened to that feedback and is of the view that introducing Jack's Law type amendments is not supported by the available evidence or by principle.

However, the government will explore possible legislative changes to allow police to conduct a scanning search where a wand is reasonably available to police and the existing search threshold of reasonable suspicion is met.

Such changes have the potential to provide police with an additional tool to use for searching, which might also be a less intrusive or less rights-restrictive approach to searching in some circumstances. It may also address occupational health and safety risks that may be present in conducting some searches. But in saying that, I do have particular regard for the views of the stakeholders that any metal on the person could result in an escalation with police too. So, this is something that we will explore and I intend to update the Assembly in 2026 on this work. Thank you.

I present the following paper:

> Knife-related violence—Prevention—Assembly resolution of 4 March 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 3 December 2025.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Voluntary Assisted Dying—access by detainees
Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.23): Mr Speaker, I am a passionate advocate for voluntary assisted dying—the right of an individual to choose to die with dignity, to choose to end their life in a safe, medically supported and self-determined way. As the minister responsible for corrections, it is important to me that, where people who are in our custody reach the end of their life, they have the same rights to access voluntary assisted dying in the AMC as any other citizen of the ACT.

Voluntary assisted dying became available in the ACT on 3 November this year under the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2024. The ACT government is committed to ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to end-of-life choices that uphold dignity, autonomy and compassion. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that this includes

access to VAD for eligible detainees at the AMC.

In line with our commitment to ensuring detainees in custody are provided with quality healthcare to a standard equivalent to that available in the community, officials have been working to ensure detainees are able to exercise their rights to access voluntary assisted dying, subject to the same eligibility criteria and safeguards as the community. To ensure information about the scheme is easily available to detainees, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service contact number, email and the ACT government website on voluntary assisted dying have now been included on the approved AMC whitelist, allowing free access to these resources.

Canberra Health Services and the justice health services have established clear protocols to guide the process for detainees who wish to explore voluntary assisted dying. These protocols ensure that detainees who meet the strict eligibility requirements can access VAD safely and in accordance with the law, namely: having an advanced, progressive medical condition expected to cause death; which is causing intolerable suffering; and retaining decision-making capacity through the process. The approach includes robust safeguards, multiple independent assessments, and oversight by the ACT Voluntary Assisted Dying Oversight Board to maintain integrity and protect vulnerable individuals.

Voluntary assisted dying is one option alongside existing palliative care pathways within the AMC, and participation remains entirely voluntary for both detainees and health practitioners. If the detainee does choose to access voluntary assisted dying, it will occur either in a health facility or elsewhere in the community, if appropriate.

We recognise that detainee access to voluntary assisted dying may also raise sensitivities for victims and their families, and we remain committed to ensuring these perspectives are carefully considered alongside the rights of the individuals in custody.

I want to thank Minister Stephen-Smith and the staff across ACT Corrective Services, and Canberra Health Services—including justice health—for their work to ensure this important service is available to all eligible Canberrans. This initiative reflects the ACT government's commitment to human rights and compassionate care, in ensuring that detainees are not excluded from important health reforms and that their end-of-life choices are respected.

I present the following paper:

> Voluntary Assisted Dying Access for Detainees—Ministerial statement, 3 December 2025.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Committees—Standing
Reference

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) at a hearing of the Standing Committee on Social Policy's Inquiry into Annual Reports 2024-25 on 10 November 2025, the Minister for Housing, Homelessness and New Suburbs advised that:

(i) issues had been identified in the management of disability accommodation modifications by Housing ACT, particularly relating to Housing ACT's registration as a provider under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA); and

(ii) the Minister advised that the matter has been referred to the Auditor-General; and

(b) constituents, including disability advocates and people with disability, have raised concerns about the ability to have modifications made to Housing ACT properties when funding is available in their individual NDIS plans;

(2) further notes that not having appropriate mechanisms in place between Housing ACT, its tenants and the NDIS can result in:

(a) unnecessary costs to the ACT budget;

(b) loss of value of Housing ACT properties of foregone improvements; and

(c) delays and frustrations for tenants of an opaque approval process;

(3) considers that an inquiry by the Auditor-General may be limited in scope and would not generally offer the opportunity for affected community members to bring forward their experiences; and

(4) calls on the Assembly to refer this matter to the appropriate committee for an inquiry into SDA service delivery through Housing ACT, in particular:

(a) NDIS funding used for SDA;

(b) own-source revenue used for SDA; and

(c) whether tenants with disabilities have had essential home modifications delayed or denied due to budget or process constraints.

Just before I begin, I wanted to clarify with the Clerk that I did receive the note. So, thank you very much to the secretariat for doing that.

Mr Speaker, my motion calls on the Assembly to refer the issues identified by the Minister for Housing in relation to the management of specialist disability accommodation by Housing ACT, to an Assembly committee for consideration of an inquiry.

However, Mr Speaker, my motion goes further. In the short time I have been here as Shadow Minister for Public Housing and Homelessness, I have been inundated with calls, emails and representations expressing deep concerns about Housing ACT's management of disability-related modifications to Housing ACT properties.

Constituents and contractors have raised with me their frustration of having modifications approved by the NDIS but then facing a brick wall in trying to get Housing ACT to allow those modifications. It appears that their frustrations arise from problems of coordination between Housing ACT, iCBR, the NDIS and housing tenants. The scale of the problem is likely to go well beyond the limited issue identified by Ms Berry in the annual reports hearing.

Mr Speaker, it is unacceptable that vulnerable Canberrans face such difficulties—with multiple commonwealth and territory agencies with different rules, processes and information. Opaque processes and inconsistent decision-making seem designed to create maximum frustration and delay for people with disability. It is also unacceptable that Housing ACT may have mismanaged its own relationship with the NDIS. It would be appalling if the ACT has been missing out on commonwealth funding which it was eligible to receive. In the context of the budget crisis delivered by this Labor team and their 25 new or increased taxes, Canberrans would be rightly disappointed if Labor's mismanagement resulted in cost shifting from the commonwealth to ACT taxpayers.

The current situation in Canberra is putting people with disability in a tough spot. They face a double whammy, Mr Speaker, dealing with the challenges of living with a disability and struggling to afford necessary home modifications during a cost-of-living crisis. Mr Speaker, it is unacceptable that they are being forced to either live without approved modifications or fund them themselves when they get frustrated at trying and trying and trying—despite the commonwealth having approved funds for these modifications to be done.

Now, I accept the minister's referral of her directorate to the Auditor-General. I think it is a significant step in acknowledging the issue. However, those of us on the other side do not consider that it is a sufficient response to the scale of the issue. I have asked for the copy of the minister's letter to the Auditor-General—and I think Mr Rattenbury also did so in annual reports hearings—but unfortunately we are yet to receive the letter.

It is not clear whether or not the Auditor-General might inquire. It is not clear what scope will be provided in the terms of reference of the inquiry, if it even occurs. Given the scale of the apparent bureaucratic insufficiencies and inefficiencies, and the potential for significantly missing out on funding opportunities, I consider a referral to the Assembly committee an appropriate measure.

The committee inquiry will allow the lived experience of people with disability to be heard. It is not uncommon, Mr Speaker, for Assembly committee inquiries to be conducted alongside an audit by the Auditor-General. There are established protocols to ensure each inquiry focuses on the strength of each process and results in a holistic assessment of challenges.

Getting a comprehensive response will assist government to make the right decisions. I am a firm believer that government systems need to be designed around the people who need to use them. It is really unfair that people with disability are forced to go through a stressful process of applying for NDIS funding—those people across the chamber and who are listening would know how difficult that process is—and then to further face stress and complexity in getting approval from the ACT for modifications

to their housing.

Here in the experience of Canberrans is critical information that is necessary to get to the bottom of the range of issues that are emerging. We need to do better at looking after our vulnerable Canberrans. This issue is such an important one that it should be investigated by the Assembly committee. I commend my motion to the Assembly. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MS BERRY(Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.33): The ACT government is supporting Ms Barry's call for an inquiry to be held into the management of specialist disability accommodation properties enrolled by Housing ACT. Mr Speaker, as you will know, specialist disability accommodation is part of NDIS. It is funding that is included in some NDIS participants' packages to be paid to their housing provider to make custom modifications or invest in the development of housing that is suitable for people with very high physical needs.

I want to make sure that I correct the record here, because it is unhelpful to suggest that all people who are living with a disability could have access to this funding. This funding is only for people with very high physical needs. That is not to suggest in any way that they should not have been entitled to that, and we will get to the bottom of that during this inquiry. We need to be very careful about how we talk about this and not rope in every single person that is living with a disability, regarding whether or not they are being supported in their housing in the ACT, because SDA is a very complicated and complex funding amount that applies only to people who are entitled to it—as I said, those with a very high physical need. We need to be careful that we are not using vulnerable Canberrans in a way that makes this a much more widespread issue for people who desperately need the ACT government's and our community's support.

Housing ACT registered as an SDA provider in 2017 and, in 2020, enrolled 112 dwellings into the program. Despite registering these properties, Housing ACT never operationalised the SDA. As I advised the committee during annual report hearings, Housing ACT will be deregistered as an SDA provider on 14 December, when the registration expires.

As members will know, I referred this matter, along with the handling of SDA since Housing ACT enrolled the dwellings, to the Auditor-General to investigate, if appropriate, and committed to the committee that I would provide a copy of the letter or update the committee on whether the Auditor-General was going to investigate that matter, if appropriate. I am happy to table that letter in the Assembly today so that members can see a copy of the letter that the Auditor-General has written to me—unfortunately, advising me that they will not be conducting an audit at this time. I present the following paper:

> Specialist Disability Accommodation Program in Housing ACT Properties—Copy of letter to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs from the ACT Auditor-General, dated 17 November 2025.

People with a disability are much more vulnerable to system failures, which is why I

absolutely welcome an inquiry by a committee of the Assembly into this important matter. It is a complicated and complex issue. We need to make sure that vulnerable people are supported appropriately in our community, so I am very happy to take the time to go through the process again, through an inquiry, so that all members understand what SDA is and how it is applied. Also, they will be able to understand whether Housing ACT, when they registered as an SDA provider, could have accessed funding, whether that was an appropriate way to support people with high physical needs with modifications for their disabilities in housing, and whether this was the appropriate way for us to go forward with that.

I am very happy to agree to the inquiry into that, and I look forward to providing further information to the committee.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.37): The ACT Greens support the principle of having a committee inquiry into specialist disability accommodation service delivery in the ACT. From the annual reports hearing, where this issue was first raised, there are certainly some questions that require more in-depth answers.

The community has raised questions about communication between Housing ACT and the minister—how registration was achieved and then funding not actually applied for without the minister being alerted to either element. I have heard concerns from many in the community that there are serious cultural issues within Housing ACT. I am aware that this is not a key area that the inquiry will be looking at, but it may still be relevant in the sense that it might help us to understand exactly how there was such a clear communication gap between the directorate and the minister.

However, the most important issue right now is working out how the tenants of these homes have been impacted. The government has assured us that no tenant has had required modifications impacted by this absent funding, and I do believe and sincerely hope that that is the case. I have not seen evidence to the contrary at this point. However, I would like to know more about the opportunity cost on behalf of the government that SDA funding would have paid for.

I am also concerned about the risk that people with a disability missed out on SDA modifications because the funding was not available from government. Looking at the NDIS website, 44 of my constituents in Tuggeranong are eligible for the SDA but have not used it. I do not think we have been adequately reassured that none of those people missed out on modifications that would have made a meaningful difference to their lives.

We need a better idea of the revenue forgone. We need to understand how it might have helped people. Funding is a very finite source in the disability space, especially in the territory, and every little bit that we can access helps us to invest in things that genuinely help disabled people. We need to understand the opportunity that is available to us to house people with a disability comfortably in places that genuinely meet their needs. I do not want this to be a witch-hunt. I am not interested in this inquiry being focused on who should be fired or punished. I hope that we can work constructively together to work out what should have been done differently and what we can do better in the future.

Going briefly to the Assembly processes for referring inquiries, I understand that this inquiry request will be referred to PAC. Noting that the minister has also referred this issue to the Auditor-General, it may be a challenge for PAC to navigate a live inquiry while the Auditor-General is still making determinations. Nevertheless, given that the funding of specialist disability accommodation has been a matter of public interest and, I think, understandable concern, it does bear public discussion through a committee process.

We are also seeing an issue emerge, in that there is no limit to the number of slots that a member can use for committee referrals like these, as they come under Assembly business rather than private members' business. In a lot of ways, this seems to be a bit of a mismatch when it comes to gravity, given that committee referrals such as this often lead to significant bodies of work on the part of committees, in the same way that private members' business leads to significant bodies of work for ministers and directorates. This is a longer term issue, and I believe it is one that is worth looking into through the standing orders review.

Putting all that aside, I look forward to a productive inquiry that provides transparency and accountability on behalf of the people of Canberra.

MR EMERSON(Kurrajong) (10.40): I thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, which I fully support. Members will know that the specialist disability accommodation scheme was established in 2016 by the NDIA. In 2017, Housing ACT registered for this scheme and, six years later, in 2023, the minister responsible for housing discovered for the first time that Housing ACT had already registered for the scheme.

In April 2024, Senator David Pocock asked questions in Senate estimates about how many people on the NDIS had SDA funding in their programs, which led to public pressure on the government and a public announcement of a four-month consultation process into this matter: what is going on with SDA now in public housing in the ACT? How many people are eligible and what are we going to do about it moving forward?

In May this year, I asked questions about this through a committee and was told that the government was still "considering its role in SDA". Last month the minister indicated that that four-month consultation process announced in April last year never occurred, and that the government still does not know how many SDA-eligible people are living in public housing in the ACT. To her credit, she referred the matter to the Auditor-General and chose to make that statement in the committee hearing.

Going to the facts about the matter, we know the average funding amount for SDA is $18,689. NDIS participants cannot receive the funding directly. It needs to be claimed through their housing provider—in this case, Housing ACT. In 2024, there were 1,721 Canberrans living in public housing who were on the NDIS and, according to testimony from a government official during annual reports hearings, six per cent of people on the NDIS have SDA funding in their packages.

Based on averages, that would equate to 103 people in the ACT. If the average funding amount is almost $19,000 and there are over 100 people potentially eligible in the territory, that equates to almost $2 million each year that we have been missing out on,

every year for the last eight years. We do not know whether that is the exact amount because we do not know how many people are eligible for this funding in their programs, but we do know that the ACT government has not claimed a single dollar from this scheme for public housing tenants in the ACT.

In a constrained fiscal environment, which we speak about and hear about often in this place, this is clearly disastrous. But more than that, it is disastrous for people with disability in public housing—surely, and absolutely, some of our most vulnerable community members, who have not been able to benefit from the funding in their NDIS plans. This is funding that is supposed to be set aside for them to ensure that their homes are matched to their needs.

The minister is right to point out that this does not apply to all people with disability, only to those with the absolute highest physical support needs. In other words, only the most vulnerable people among one of the most vulnerable cohorts in our community could have benefited from the federal funding that the government has failed to apply for over an eight-year period.

Yes, we do need to look into this. I welcome Ms Barry's motion today and I look forward hopefully to participating in an inquiry into this matter. While I am not concerned about the Auditor-General's capacity to investigate this matter thoroughly, I think Ms Barry makes a good point that public evidence from affected community members ought to be provided in investigating this. Of course, as she rightly points out, the Auditor-General might decide not to launch an audit into this matter at all.

I would encourage the public accounts committee, if that is where this goes, to inquire, if they are able to, and I look forward to seeing that happen.

MS BERRY(Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.44): I seek leave to speak very briefly to correct the record or provide clarity on this matter.

Leave granted.

MS BERRY: The letter that I provided was a letter from the Auditor-General to say that they would not be inquiring into this matter. Members must not have heard me when I said that in my statement. The Auditor-General is not inquiring into this matter at the moment. I wanted to clarify that for everybody. I thought I was clear. I have provided a copy of the letter. That is why I am very happy for a committee to inquire into this, given that the Auditor-General has decided that they will not inquire into it at the moment. I am very happy for a committee inquiry to go ahead. I think it is important.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.45), in reply: In closing, I want to thank everyone who has participated in the debate. I thank the minister for her willingness to participate in a committee inquiry. This is an important issue that all members of this chamber are, rightly, interested in. I look forward to the outcomes of that committee inquiry.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Order of business

Ordered that order of the day No 2, Assembly business, relating to membership of standing committees, be postponed until the next day of sitting.

Standing orders—suspension
Early childhood education and care incident records—order to table

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.46): I move:

> That so much of standing orders 213A(j) and 213A(s) be suspended to allow any Member to dispute a claim of privilege made by the Chief Minister, or a redaction of personal information made by the Head of Service, in relation to a document indexed and returned to the Clerk in response to the Early Childhood Education and Care Incident Records order of 24 June 2025, by no later than 27 January 2026.

I rise today to move a motion to suspend standing orders 213A(j) and 213A(s) to allow any member to dispute a claim of privilege made by the Chief Minister or a redaction of personal information made by the Head of Service in relation to the early childhood education and care incident records of 24 January 2025. These standing orders require members to raise any privilege claims disputes within five business days.

Given the volume of materials, which I have talked about quite often in this place, and the timing of the order, being due on 24 December 2025, I propose to extend the timeframe to allow for those claims of disputes, if there are any, until 27 January 2026.

I propose this motion in good faith to allow members adequate time to review the extensive number of documents, and to properly consider the public benefit—and it is important that the public benefit is properly considered—of whether or not releasing specific information that would be claimed for privilege is in the public benefit.

This is primarily to protect the identity of children and educators, particularly those who might have raised claims or concerns about their employers or colleagues. In the ACT we have a strong "see something, say something" culture. It is critical that we maintain trust in the confidentiality that is afforded to those who are courageous enough to raise those concerns.

Some of the documents that will be released will show highly sensitive information about individual children, so it is important that all of us in this place play our role in protecting their identity and dignity when releasing documents that could remain on the public record for the rest of their lives. It is very important that that is considered.

The release of these documents will back in my calls for urgent work in these spaces, to back in educators and this extraordinary sector, as well as to address child safety. I trust my Assembly colleagues will take the time to understand the complexity of each case and seek further briefings with me and my officials should additional information be required.

This is an opportunity to repair the damage. That is why I have moved the motion in my name.

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

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee
Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.50): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, providing an update on the reporting date for the committee's inquiry into petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment.

The committee had hoped to present its report during the final sitting week of the year. Unfortunately, the committee has not been able to meet that timeframe. However, I can assure the Assembly that the committee remains committed to concluding this inquiry and intends to present its report before the end of this calendar year.

The committee recognises the significance of this matter to the Hawker community and appreciates the patience and engagement of all stakeholders as we work to ensure a thorough and considered report.

Social Policy—Standing Committee
Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.51): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to its consideration of e-petition 051-25 and petition 075-25: Closure of SDN Bluebell daycare.

This petition was referred to the committee on 28 October 2025. The committee considered the petition at its private meeting on 4 November 2025 and resolved not to undertake an inquiry into the terms of the petition. When making this decision, the committee considered several ongoing activities both within the Assembly and at the federal level, including:

- the Assembly's order of 24 June 2025, as varied on 18 September 2025, to produce documents relating to early childhood education and care incidents, due 25 December 2025;
- the Assembly's resolution of 24 September 2025 relating to SDN Bluebell daycare, and the second part of the ACT government's response due in March 2026; and
- the ongoing Senate inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, which is due to report in March 2026.

The committee would like to advise the Assembly that it intends to consider the outcomes of these activities and a range of issues that may inform a future self-referred inquiry relating to early childhood education and care.

Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Ms Cheyne, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.53): I move:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly today. This bill includes landmark reforms. The bill introduces a series of critical reforms to the ACT's legislative framework to strengthen our response to family, personal and sexual violence and to promote the wellbeing and the safety of victim-survivors in the ACT.

Family, personal and sexual violence is a serious and pervasive issue in our country. In April 2024, the Prime Minister declared that Australia faced a national crisis of violence against women and children. In the 2024–25 financial year, ACT Policing recorded 4½ thousand domestic and family violence related incidents, which is an average of 12 incidents a day in the ACT. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that, in 2024, the ACT recorded 428 victims of sexual assault, which is the highest annual figure on record. Of these victims, 87 per cent were female and, in the majority of cases, the offender was someone they knew. Statistics on personal violence is similarly concerning. In 2024, there were approximately 2½ thousand victims of assault in the ACT, two in five of which were domestic and family violence related.

Behind each of these figures is a person, a family and a community whose lives have been shattered by violence. The impacts are devastating. Domestic, family and sexual violence affects lives, erodes trust and leaves lasting physical, psychological and social scars. These realities highlight the need for continued action and reform—big steps that we are taking with this bill today.

As a significant bill, careful consideration has been given to strike the right balance between ensuing safety from harm while protecting the rights of those subject to the justice system due to allegations of violence. This ensures the robustness of our laws and accords with our obligations under the Human Rights Act. A detailed discussion of how the amendments in this bill have engaged and limited human rights are set out in the explanatory statement.

The bill will establish the Family Violence Safety Notice Scheme in the Family Violence Act. This will see the introduction of a police issued safety notice scheme for the first time in the ACT that addresses a gap in our protection order regime for victim-survivors of family violence. The scheme will enable police to issue short-term safety notices where a person is facing an immediate risk of family violence. The ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia without such a scheme. The scheme will sit alongside and

complement our pro-arrest and charge policy, and it provides police with another important tool to respond domestic, family and sexual violence.

The scheme will replace the after-hours order scheme. The 2020 review of the implementation of the Family Violence Act found the AHO scheme to be under-utilised and ineffective as an immediate response to family violence, due to the short duration of orders and the limitation on issuing an AHO during business hours or alongside arrest. To address these shortcomings, the new scheme will allow police officers to issue immediate protection notices at any time if satisfied that an affected person is experiencing or at risk of family violence by the respondent and the notice is immediately necessary to ensure the safety of the affected person or to prevent substantial damage to their property.

Unlike an after-hours order, a senior police officer at sergeant level or above can issue a safety notice against an adult without the need to apply to the court. Additionally, a safety notice may be issued, even if the grounds for arrest have been met. It adds a further layer of protection for victim-survivors. To minimise the risk of misidentification or misapplication, the scheme requires that both the applying and the issuing police officer must consider several important matters, including the views of the affected person and respondent, any history of family or personal violence by the respondent, and any hardship that may be caused to the respondent or anyone else by the issuing of the safety notice.

A safety notice may contain any conditions the issuing police officer considers necessary, giving paramount consideration to the safety of the affected person while ensuring those conditions are the least restrictive of the respondent's rights and liberties. The safety notice may be in force for up 14 days. This is important because it provides time for the protected person to seek and access support, including long-term protection through applying for a family violence order. Parties to a safety notice may apply to the court for the safety notice to be amended or revoked, and this allows for judicial oversight and procedural fairness.

The safety notice scheme promotes the right to protection of the family and children, as well as the right to security by safeguarding victim-survivors and their loved ones from violence. This is landmark reform which equips police officers with a stronger and more responsive tool to combat family and sexual violence. More than a legal measure, the safety notice scheme represents progress towards greater safety and dignity.

I say to the ACT community that we hear you and we are actively considering how our laws can be enhanced to offer greater protection and be more trauma informed, and, in particular, to be consistent with the principal of doing no further harm.

In addition to the establishment of the safety notice scheme, the bill introduces three additional amendments that respond to the changing needs and expectations of our community in line with changes in social and cultural norms. First, the bill will ensure that the sentence of someone found guilty of a child sexual offence will not be reduced because of their supposed good character. Currently, under the Crimes (Sentencing) Act, if someone has been convicted of a child sexual offence, good character evidence may be considered by the court to mitigate the offender's sentence if good character did not enable the commission of the offence. This current law was introduced to implement

recommendations of the royal commission into institutional child sexual abuse. However, as the community comes to better understand and respond to child sexual abuse more broadly, it is clear that this approach creates a distinction between cases where child sexual abuse is committed in an institutional setting and cases where the offence is committed by a family member or a family friend. This is simply no longer defensible.

Recent research and commentary have highlighted that the current law is too narrow and too arbitrary in its application. It does not recognise the dynamics and complexity of child sexual abuse. We simply cannot ignore the reality, as demonstrated through case law, that someone guilty of a child sex offence has gained access to a child or children in the first place because there is a perception of their good character—that is, in appearing to be of good character, they have been trusted to be with the child or children, and it is this position of trust that has given them the access that has resulted in the abuse being committed. Consider it in the reverse: if they were not of good character, they would not have been in that position of trust, so they would not have had access to the child or children.

I acknowledge the further harm experienced by a victim who has been sexually abused as a child and has been through the court system where guilt has been proven, and then they listen to statements about the offender's good character—statements provided to help guide, not mitigate, the sentencing decision—yet it is that same good character that facilitated the offender's access to the victim and the resulting abuse in the first place. This is quite simply perverse. I am persuaded that the law must change, and this bill gives effect to that change.

This reform has been informed by and is a recommendation of the "Your Reference Ain't Relevant" Campaign. I sincerely thank the co-founders of the campaign, Harrison James and Jarad Grice, and the ACT spokesperson, Josh Byrnes. These are three survivors who have channelled their trauma and experience into ensuring that no other child endures even a fraction of what they went through. They have worked together to deliver this genuine reform for survivors in courts in the ACT.

I acknowledge Mr Rattenbury, the previous Attorney-General, for the work he began in providing genuine consideration of the compelling petition presented last term and for hosting a roundtable as part of this. As the new A-G, I have considered all the feedback. However, the most compelling interaction I had was with the co-founders. Their meeting with me earlier this year—perhaps it was the end of last year—was the turning point for me. It was quite literally the "I finally get it now" moment. I celebrate their courage, but I also acknowledge that, like for many victim advocates, their advocacy has been informed by trauma and by some of the most horrible circumstances that someone could ever imagine. This is what they have experienced, yet they have channelled that experience, through reliving the trauma and having to tell their own stories, to get reform on the table. We are so proud to stand with them today to deliver that reform. I sincerely acknowledge them. Through you, Madam Assistant Speaker, Harrison and Jarad, I am very proud to work with you.

The bill also responds to the ACT community's growing concern about image based abuse as a form of technology based abuse, and it addresses a gap in our laws. This is in recognition of how technology can be relied upon by perpetrators to control,

humiliate and exploit victim-survivors. The bill introduces a new definition of sexual offence in the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act to enable the protections available to sexual offence proceedings under chapter 4 of the act to also apply to proceedings involving intimate image abuse.

These protections allow certain evidence to be given in a closed court to protect the anonymity of witnesses and exclude the admissibility of certain evidence. The immunity of evidence, such as sexual reputation and a complainant's sexual activities, recognises the potential harm and the re-traumatisation caused by the admission of such evidence in court proceedings and the additional vulnerability of complainants of intimate image abuse. The protections are important to protect vulnerable complainants from further trauma and public scrutiny.

Further, the bill includes an amendment to clarify that, if granted leave by the court, a person can be present in court via audiovisual link or telephone. It is in recognition that attending court in person can be retraumatising and that audiovisual meetings have become commonplace due to the widespread availability of communication technology. This amendment clarifies that parties may appear in court or give evidence via remote means, reducing the risk of re-traumatisation while also improving efficiency and accessibility.

Taken together, these three amendments will contribute to the ACT's commitment to continually review and improve our laws, ensuring that they are fit for purpose, including in response to changing cultural and social norms and technology advancements.

In addition to these three important reforms, the bill also encompasses a series of amendments designed to enhance the clarity of our laws and the overall effectiveness of our justice system. These include an amendment to the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions)Act, allowing a counselled person to consent to waive protected confidence immunity and consent to the disclosure of counselling communications in civil proceedings. This amendment gives counselled persons more control over the way in which legal processes apply to their confidential counselling records in civil proceedings.

Two other technical amendments to the same act in relation to the protected confidence immunity aimed at improving the effectiveness and clarity of the protected confidence scheme, in line with its original intent, include clarifying that protected confidence immunity applies to all proceedings, civil or criminal, where protected confidence material is sought to be used, and clarifying that the court needs to consider the impact on victims of family violence offences, as well as victims of sexual violence offences, in deciding whether to give leave for the disclosure of protected confidence. Other technical amendments are also present in the bill, simplifying and streamlining court proceedings relating to family violence orders and personal protection orders.

Reforming our laws on family, personal and sexual violence is not just necessary; it is also paramount. These reforms ensure that our laws can deliver both justice and protection for those affected by violence. This bill represents another significant step in our unwavering commitment to creating a safer community—one in which every person can live free from violence and abuse. I sincerely hope that these amendments

not only promote the wellbeing and safety of victim-survivors but also strengthen the effectiveness and responsiveness of our civil and criminal justice system. We are committed to ensuring that the complex amendments introduced by the bill are fit for purpose and that unintended consequences are avoided as far as possible.

I anticipate that the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety will have a strong interest in this bill. Noting the importance of the measures in the bill, we would certainly welcome the views of the committee on how the bill can be improved. Without wishing to formally anticipate what the committee may do with this bill, I give my word to members of that committee that, if they do seek to hold an inquiry, I would immediately suggest that this be subject to a longer timeframe, quite simply because of the significance of the reforms. Of course, notwithstanding that, this is in the committee's hands, but the government would certainly be very willing to support an extension of time from what it usually is.

Finally, this bill simply would not have been introduced today if not for the significant input received from stakeholders. I want to reflect again on the "Your Reference Ain't Relevant" Campaign. I really do acknowledge the survivors and what they have done over an extended period of time. They have spoken to, I think, every government in Australia. Some governments have tried but not quite got there in what they have sought to do. I hope that today we will achieve their recommendation.

I trust that the inquiry into the bill and the amendment will receive support, and I trust that, with appropriate scrutiny, we will see the passage of the bill next year. It will save lives right across the system. In cases where some of the most abhorrent abuses occurred, a person's supposed good character which facilitated and enabled the abuse to occur in the first place will not be a mitigating factor in the sentencing of that person, where guilt has been proven and the abuse did occur.

It is a landmark reform that I am proud to deliver in my first year as A-G.

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

Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 22 October 2025 on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.12): I will not be making a long contribution to this bill because, frankly, I do not believe it deserves it. Illicit tobacco is a crisis for the ACT, as it is for the rest of the country. It is a crisis that is fuelling the growth in bikie gangs and organised crime and it is driving legitimate businesses out of business. It is a crisis that demands action. This is not just my opinion; it is the opinion of the Assembly, as was agreed in a motion earlier this year, the opinion of the federal government, which is moving to do what it can to combat illicit tobacco, and the opinion of many in our community who are worried about what the growth in organised crime means for the safety and wellbeing of our community.

This bill is a step in the right direction and we will be supporting it, but this bill is the

smallest, least consequential step the government could take. It is a tweak. My worry is that the government intends to take many tiny steps, all to preserve the appearance of acting on the community's concerns, without delivering outcomes. Our community deserves more than this. It deserves a comprehensive plan to firmly and completely address the problem of illicit tobacco and organised crime in the ACT. It deserves an urgent response, given how long the government has let this problem fester, and we deserve a government that listens and responds to the legitimate concern about local safety. It is extremely disappointing that it has not already happened. I hope the government gets its act together over the summer, publishes a real plan and introduces tough legislation early in the new year.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.13): I rise to speak briefly about the Greens' support for the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2025. This is in line with the position we took on 8 April when the Assembly passed the related Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Act 2025, which broadened the scope of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act by including e-cigarettes as prohibited smoking products, aligning with the commonwealth vaping reforms and establishing the basis for a regulatory framework to combat the illicit e-cigarettes trade in the ACT.

The bill being voted on today is further reform that will enable stronger powers to regulate tobacco in the territory. I note that it also addresses the Assembly's resolution of 17 September—which Ms Castley just referred to and which the Greens supported—which called on the government to pursue legislative changes to strengthen enforcement capacity and introduce stronger penalties for the sale illicit tobacco and vaping products in the territory.

It is important to modernise legislation to ensure that it meets the needs of our evolving world, as well as marry with work at the national level. While illicit tobacco is illegal at the federal level, it is presently not prohibited under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act, which limits local enforcement options. The bill complements the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill by clarifying and modernising the existing requirements and powers under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act to improve regulatory outcomes.

I agree with the minister that regularly reviewing local enforcement powers is important in responding to changes in the tobacco and other smoking products market—in this case to address the growing availability of illicit and potentially more harmful smoking products. Increased accessibility to illicit tobacco may increase the likelihood of tobacco use or the risk of addiction and may even result in accidental poisoning.

It is worth highlighting that, while ACT Policing is aware that organised crime is associated with some tobacconists interstate, they have advised that they have not seen evidence of serious organised crime involvement with ACT tobacconists. The ACT is a relatively safe place to live, and the bill supports community safety and health.

The bill amends the definition of a prohibited smoking product to include illicit tobacco and expands enforcement powers to capture this illicit market. I am comfortable with the tools that it will provide authorised officers. They are proportionate and escalate regulatory tools designed to achieve compliance and target lawful disregard of

regulatory requirements. The bill will grant authorised officers modernised powers of entry and allow them to issue infringement notices related to the commercial possession and sale of prohibited smoking products. Infringement notices are an efficient and inexpensive alternative to prosecution. The inclusion of infringement notice provisions for the sale of vaping goods and illicit tobacco reflects the potential harms associated with the activity, and I consider them reasonable and proportionate.

Additionally, the bill will allow the government to seize illegal goods from retailers and retain and destroy them in a wide range of circumstances. Currently, goods seized during inspections usually need to be returned to their owner, which does not serve the new purpose of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act, being as it is to directly reduce the availability of prohibited and illicit goods.

I appreciate that officers who undertake this kind of regulatory work might face risks to their privacy and safety and, potentially more broadly, risks to their families. While I am cognisant that ACT Policing has not observed rises in organised crime activity in the ACT in this space, other jurisdictions have reported fears for their officers' privacy and safety. Given this, we do not object to the bill removing the requirement for an authorised officer to have their name on their ID cards. Instead, they will have a unique identifying number. This still keeps officers accountable to the government and is similar to changes being made in other Australian jurisdictions in response to the threat of occupational violence.

The bill has been assessed as being human rights compliant and it supports numerous rights. It limits some rights, but I am satisfied that those limitations are appropriately justified.

In conclusion the bill is aligned with the Greens' commitment to harm minimisation and will better regulate smoking products in the ACT. We are pleased to support it today.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.18): I have spoken in this place previously about the scourge that is the illegal tobacco industry. As I have said before, here and publicly, the whole space is a mess. It is a mess not necessarily because of things that have gone on in this chamber but things that have gone on in that chamber way up on the hill. We are talking about long-term policy decisions of successive Liberal and Labor governments around excise and regulation.

As we have seen playing out across Australia of late, the consequences of these decisions are now coming home to roost, with the concerning escalation of illicit tobacco-fuelled turf wars spreading across New South Wales and Victoria. I hear Mr Rattenbury say that at this stage of the game there is no actual evidence of that situation unfolding here in the ACT. But I would suggest that it is only a matter of time, and it could also be that, although we do not have evidence of it, that it is occurring.

The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this legislation, but it clearly does not go far enough. This is a good first step, but it still does not address the bigger issues. Previously, Minister Stephen-Smith has said, "We are aware of the problem." That is wonderful, but let me tell you who else has been aware of the problem, and that is Tim Nicholls, the Minister for Health in the Crisafulli government in Queensland, who has

recently introduced legislation aimed at stamping out the illicit tobacco problem by introducing harsher closure notices and financial penalties for vendors of illegal tobacco. I know that there will be a suggestion that this is another LNP conservative overreach, but I would like to point out that the Minns Labor government have certainly made it abundantly clear that their intention is to take similar steps in New South Wales, even going so far as to lobby the federal government for a reduction in the tobacco excise.

I want to compare some aspects of this bill that we are discussing today with the Queensland legislation, because I think this is really important. The bill here in the ACT will allow authorised officers to issue infringement notices with a penalty of $1,600 for the sale of prohibited smoking products through amendments to the Magistrates Court (Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Infringement Notices) Regulation 2010—$1,600. This is what they have rolled out in Queensland: fines for the commercial supply of illicit tobacco and illegal nicotine products have now increased to $32,260 for an individual, which is up from $3,200, and, for corporations, the financial penalty is now $161,000, up from $16,000.

When we consider that we have had a long history in the last four or five years of illicit tobacco operators that basically see fines as a part of the cost of doing regular business—that it has very little impact on them—I think we have to question the impact that these changes will have. I have talked to supermarket operators across Canberra, who have noticed a substantial decrease in the sale of legal tobacco. When we did the motion debate in here I quoted some of them, who suggested 85 per cent of their legal tobacco sales had dropped off. I know that there would be those who instantly say, "We are getting people off tobacco products." But, as we pointed out in that debate, the wastewater data indicates that, for the first time in a long period, we are actually seeing more and more people using tobacco products because all of a sudden they are readily available to them at a price that they can afford.

I understand the realities of what the Self-Government Act and, indeed, the Australian Constitution empowers the ACT government to actually do in this space—but we are not powerless. New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia face the same constitutional realities that we do and yet they have managed to implement a significantly stronger legislation framework to stamp out illegal tobacco.

We support what is going on here today, but it does need to be more. It is a baby step, and I am assuming that it is not going to have a great impact on what is going on out there in the suburbs.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.22), in reply: I thank members for their contributions on the bill debate today and for their support of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2025. This bill represents a critical step forward in protecting the health of our community and aligning the ACT with approaches nationally for tobacco control.

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Australia. Despite decades of progress, smoking still claims thousands of lives each year and imposes an enormous burden on our health system. The ACT government has long been

proud of our leadership in public health, and this bill continues that tradition. The amendments proposed by the bill are practical, enforceable measures designed to close a gap in our current laws, strengthen compliance and ensure that smoking products sold in the ACT meet our high regulatory standards in support of public health.

Passage of this bill today would allow the ACT to do our part in supporting ongoing efforts, led by the federal government's Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Commissioner and regulatory agencies, in disrupting the illicit tobacco trade. I remind the Assembly that the bill has several aims, including modernising compliance and investigative functions and declaring smoking products prohibited from sale if they do not meet national packaging and labelling requirements.

In addition to on-the-spot fines of $1,600 for selling prohibited products, the bill inserts critical changes to assist our authorised officers in performing inspections and to decisively undertake compliance action in the issue of fines, product seizures and destroying seized products. Empowering authorised officers to effectively seize and destroy illegal products ensures their permanent removal from circulation and represents an immediate and effective action to disrupt and deter the trade in illicit goods. By strengthening compliance and enforcement, we are safeguarding our community, particularly young people, from the well-documented harms of tobacco and vaping goods.

I reiterate to the Assembly that both illicit tobacco and illegal vaping products are already regulated by commonwealth legislation. While to date the ACT has not seen some of the serious criminal violence associated with illicit tobacco supply in other states, the government is also committed to bringing forward additional amendments to mitigate this risk, including stricter penalties proportionate to the risk that illicit tobacco and vaping products present to public health and legitimate businesses. I think it is important to recognise—and understanding the contributions from Ms Castley and Mr Parton—that this has impacts for criminal offences under the Crimes Act; whereas the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act is really about the regulation of licensed tobacco retailers.

The future reforms will draw on the experience of other jurisdictions and incorporate best-practice measures being implemented across Australia. But we need to recognise that other jurisdictions have taken a range of approaches. There is no standard response that the ACT is failing to deliver. Indeed, a number of these jurisdictions have started significantly behind the ACT in terms of the existing tobacco licensing regime that we had in the ACT, some of them having no existing tobacco retailer licensing requirements until this year. I look forward to working with members of this Assembly in the development of additional changes to ensure a considered and balanced approach regarding the supply of tobacco and vaping products.

I wish to acknowledge the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs in its legislative scrutiny role in considering the bill and how it engages with the Human Rights Act. I thank the committee for its consideration of the bill as published in the Scrutiny Report No 13. I note the committee sought clarification on how the bill operates to limit a person's right to a fair trial. I can confirm that the bill's explanatory statement referred to an engagement with the right to fair trial in error. I have written to the committee and members, and I now present a revised explanatory statement correcting the matter.

This bill represents a prudent and necessary reform. It ensures greater alignment of the ACT's legislative framework with that of other jurisdictions and advances national public health objectives by strengthening enforcement provisions and regulatory functions for smoking products. There is more to do but, in the meantime, I commend this 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.

Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 5 February 2025 on motion by **Mr Steel**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.28): As always with planning legislation, there are a lot of technical aspects and questions that we have in this bill, all of which need to be weighed up. But I think this bill ultimately boils down to one simple question: is it more important to get certain projects built a little faster or to ensure the community have the ability to ask ACAT to review certain project decisions? This question is actually quite finely balanced. There is no obvious right or wrong, and that is because the government has done a pretty poor job of making the case for the legislation.

One example is the part of the bill which allows public health projects to be classed as a priority project. This has raised some concerns that it might allow the government to fast track the development of facilities that might be controversial or inappropriate for certain communities. That fast-tracking power might be justifiable, but it is one you would only want to legislate if you had a clear need for it. But it does not seem like there is a need. In fact, the Minister for Health told the committee inquiry that she did not want the power and did not intend to use it. The Minister for Planning has also—

Ms Stephen-Smith: I did not! Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. Can I request that Ms Castley withdraw that? I did not ever suggest to the committee that these powers are unnecessary or unwanted. That is an absolute fabrication, and I request that Ms Castley withdraw that misrepresentation of my words.

MS CASTLEY: I withdraw.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: The Minister for Planning has also not offered us any real explanation for the legislation, which raises the question of why the government is trying to legislate the power.

Another example is the argument that third-party appeals are holding up these projects. The data shows there have been very few successful appeals of public health or housing projects. The minister might argue that unsuccessful appeals are the problem, but we have heard stories of people using these appeals processes to ensure their concerns are heard by the government. These are not just concerns about a project as a whole, but concerns about the design, about traffic and access arrangements and about ensuring the government is complying with the Territory Plan and other legislation.

Often these appeals are made because residents feel the government is not listening to their concerns. If this government were better at listening to local communities and responding to their concerns, they might not be subject to as many third-party appeals. But, instead of listening better, they have decided to legislate away the appeals that force them to listen to community concerns. As far as I am aware, the minister has not responded to this particular concern or explained why this change is worthwhile. So I simply do not believe the case has been made for the changes proposed in this bill.

The government is seeking to give itself more powers without presenting a convincing case about why the powers are necessary. Therefore, the opposition will not be supporting this bill. I appreciate that some are already trying to spin this as the opposition not supporting new housing or the construction industry. That is not the case at all. I have made it quite clear that I passionately support new housing and housing affordability, and I know that a strong, active construction industry is essential to this. But I am not convinced that this bill supports those goals, and I am not sure the government actually support those goals. If they did, housing approvals would not be at rock-bottom levels, the construction industry would not be struggling to survive, the minister would not be labelling legitimate local businesses as dodgy developers and the government would not have spent all year trying to get this minor piece of legislation through the Assembly.

If the government cared about affordable housing, it would have prioritised something other than this bill. It would have put all this time and energy into something that would make a real difference to housing supply and affordability. Affordable housing is not impossible. Auckland has done it. Tokyo has done it. Houston has done it. Montreal has done it. We could do it too. The only thing standing in the way is a Labor government that is happy to keep housing unaffordable and inaccessible. This Assembly can do better, and local people who are struggling with housing affordability deserve better.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.32): I rise to speak to the amendments to the Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025, circulated in my name. The Greens have long rejected policies and solutions that pit the housing crisis against the climate and environmental crises. We cannot and should not sacrifice sustainability for homes. It creates a false dichotomy and it is not necessary. The job of responsible government and responsible lawmakers is to tackle all of these problems, not pit them against one another.

People need homes. They need good quality housing that meets their needs and that they can afford, and they need them in the right location—close to shops, jobs, public transport, social infrastructure and open spaces. We do not want homes sprawled further and further away from the city centre. That is why the Greens support an urban growth

boundary, to stop that endless sprawl, and a whole new suburb at Thoroughbred Park, to make sure we are using the land we have for its most useful purpose.

We also need much more community and public housing. The ACT Greens took an ambitious goal on public housing to the last election. We wanted to build much more than we currently are. We also wanted to introduce inclusion rezoning, which means that every major development and area will have a portion of public and community housing in it. We put this plan together to create the homes we need. It is nothing new. This plan will take us back to the Labor government of last century, to the government that had the ambition to build enough government housing to meet the needs of our people. Government in this town used to own 13 per cent of all housing stock. The government now owns less than six per cent, and meanwhile our public housing waitlist is skyrocketing. It has gone from around 3,000 to almost 3,500 in the last year alone.

We also need much more community housing. The Greens legislated the right to housing earlier this year and we are keen to follow through on delivery. I welcome efforts by the government to increase the amount of public and community housing in the territory, and I am delighted to see the planning minister now has inclusionary zoning on his priority list. We need to push ahead with these and set the ambition and delivery to meet the needs of our people. I am pleased to bring forward amendments agreed with government to include community housing alongside public housing in our Territory Priority Projects. The original government bill excluded community housing—it removed it. We have now all agreed that community housing is a necessary and useful complement to government housing, and I am pleased we could come up with a way to include it in this bill.

People need homes. People also need nature. Our environment provides the clean air we breathe and the water we drink. It grows our food and our fibre. Our natural environment sustains us physically. We have now recognised this formally. The Greens successfully lobbied to add the right to a healthy environment into our Human Rights Act, and Canberrans understand this right. It also sustains our mental health. There is a deep connection between the natural world and our state of mind and mental health. But our environment is under threat from climate change and from ongoing urban expansion. These are its two greatest threats. The former Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's flagship investigation report *Close to the Edge*" says:

> While the intrinsic and extrinsic value of our natural environment is apparent, the environment is in a relentless state of decline and increasing pressure.
>
> Current legislative and policy settings are not sufficient to protect our natural environment and have categorically failed to deliver a compact and efficient Canberra despite rhetoric.
>
> The severity of urban expansion impacts on the ACT's environment to date was not inevitable. Canberra is a planned city and these impacts are the result of strategic planning decisions …

We must make better strategic planning decisions. If we do not, we are simply choosing more destruction. Our communities recognise this. There is mistrust of our local environment and planning laws amongst the environment sector and the Canberra

community more broadly. We see it in formal consultations, and I hear it in Belconnen when I talk to folk. We must hold to account governments and relevant decision-making bodies on planning. We must hold them to account to the community for their impact on the environment. We must hold them to account for First Nations peoples and First Nations cultural heritage.

One of the ways that has been done is through the appeals processes embedded in our planning system. That is the key thing we are discussing here today, and it is why I have brought these amendments. We need greater protections for the environment and for First Nations cultural rights. That is what these amendments do. They bring in new protections that do not currently exist. We certainly need these protections if we are removing third-party appeal rights.

The declaration of a development as a Territory Priority Project in the current planning legislation removes the right for third parties to appeal a development decision in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. That is a significant limitation of rights. It is one the Greens believe should happen only when it is absolutely necessary. Our key concern with the original bill as presented was that the removal of this right could enable the fast-tracking of projects that have a significant impact on our environment or on First Nations cultural heritage. In this scenario, our passionate and diligent communities who care about our environment and about cultural heritage would not be able to appeal an approval for such a development. That development would simply be fast-tracked and it would go ahead.

This concern was raised by a number of groups through the committee's inquiry into the bill. As the Environmental Defenders Office said in their submission to the inquiry:

> Decisions made by governments and corporations that affect the environment are often focused on a short-term goal or a single project proposal, without considering the cumulative impacts of multiple proposals through time.

There is a risk that fast-tracking entire categories of developments will result in the "gradual erasure of environmentally significant or sensitive areas over time".

This bill therefore represents a key decision-making moment for government. How will government protect the interests and rights to the environment, of the environment, of First Nations peoples and of the communities that advocate for them? And how will the government do this while also delivering on the need for more public and community housing and the need to deliver this faster, given our skyrocketing waitlist and the housing crisis?

I believe the amendments I am proposing today strike a balance between providing certainty for community housing and public housing development, where those proposals are supported by the territory or the commonwealth, as well as protecting environmental and First Nations rights. Section 216 only applies to a narrow category of community housing. The proponent must be a registered charity and community housing provider with funding wholly or partly from the territory or the commonwealth. If the development is more than 100 dwellings, it is not eligible. If it delivers less than 15 per cent of community housing dwellings in the development, it is not eligible. We would expect, if it is a small amount of community housing, that the balance would be

affordable housing. That is generally how that sector has been operating. There is also a sunset clause. The new section 216 provisions have an expiry date of 31 December 2029, and there will also be a review into the operation of these changes, with the review starting after 1 December 2028, with the report presented to the Assembly no later than 30 June 2029. It will be a matter for the next Assembly to carry out that review.

Similarly, these amendments change section 218 initial declarations. To lay out how a 218 declaration works, it must be made by two ministers. With these amendments, it must also meet one of three key public interest objectives—not all three, but one of those. Then it must be publicly notified and there is a possible disallowance. The amendments I have circulated introduce new protections, key environmental and First Nation's cultural protections in addition to this.

There are also other protections in that system that are practical rather than legislative. Projects that have the backing of commonwealth funding have already been subject to a lot of scrutiny. Community housing providers highlight the level of information and evidence that needs to be provided to get funding from the commonwealth. It is a key protection. If the commonwealth has agreed to fund it, it should be a solid proposal that will deliver much-needed housing. In getting commonwealth funding, a critical consideration is certainty. The commonwealth need to know that their investment is well spent. They need to know the project will go ahead and that it will be delivered in short timelines and on certain timelines. That is why providing certainty around approvals in this context is important.

A community housing provider must be registered and a registered charity for 216. That means commercial developers—and I was reading earlier this week about all these developments and a fear that they were gaming the system to get fast-tracked—state significant developments for commercial purposes. Here, with these amendments, they would not be eligible. If they tried to come through 216, they would not be eligible. If they tried to use section 218, it would be up to the members in here to test the project and to disallow it if we did not think it met the public interest.

So let's talk about the environmental and First Nations cultural protections. They are key to these amendments in 216 and 218. If a community or public housing proposal requires an environmental impact statement or if a development application has a significant impact on an Aboriginal object or place, that proposal can no longer be a section 216 Territory Priority Project. For 218, the Planning Authority must get advice from the Conservator and from the Heritage Council. The Conservator will say if the project will have a significant adverse environmental impact on a protected matter or affect a protected tree or declared site. The Heritage Council will say if the project may impact on an Aboriginal place or project. If that happens, the Assembly can choose to disallow the TPP declaration.

Those projects might still go ahead. What it means is they are not suitable for fast-tracking; they need to go through the regular planning process and they will be subject to the regular appeals process. We should not be fast-tracking development that raises serious environmental or First Nations cultural concerns, not even when that development might deliver public or community housing.

The Greens have reached this position after a lot of consideration. As referred to earlier,

there was a lot of information provided through the committee inquiry. I then consulted with community housing providers and with community organisations, including Community Housing Canberra, ACTCOSS, the YWCA, CatholicCare and the North Canberra Community Council. I also consulted with a lot of environmental organisations and with many individual constituents and other stakeholders. There were a lot of different views presented, and I really, really appreciate the candid, informed nature from people talking to me. It helped us bring our thoughts together and it helped us formulate what protections we needed.

I want to commend Mr Steel and his office for the extremely positive way we worked together to bring forward these amendments—thank you. I really appreciated being part of the roundtable that the minister held with community housing providers and associated organisations earlier this year. That gave us such a valuable insight into the sector, and it was immensely helpful for the Greens to hear the same evidence that the government was hearing from that sector. I think it really helped us come to an agreed position on community housing.

There is one area where we could not reach agreement on, and that is whether public health should be nominated as a Territory Priority Project under section 216. During the committee inquiry, the Minister for Health talked about how her directorate consults on development proposals and she talked about how she could use section 218. That is now happening. We have seen the minister make 218 declarations for the Inner South Canberra Health Centre at Griffith and for the Northside Hospital at Bruce.

We do have a few quotes that came out from the transcript there. Given that this point seemed to come up, I might read out a couple of those quotes from the minister:

> I am confident we would be able to declare a TPP under the existing provision.
>
> There is a mechanism under section 218 of the Act that could be used.
>
> If you look at section 218 of the Planning Act and the criteria that a development would be required to meet to be declared a Territory Priority Project, all of those criteria would pretty much be satisfied for all of the public health facilities that we would be considering developing.
>
> It seemed convenient while this bill is being brought forward that we say actually rather than going ahead through each one of these individually every time we come to one, let us just say up front health facilities will be automatically subject to being a TPP.

The personal conclusion that I have taken from that evidence is that the Minister for Health is able to declare health facilities through section 218, and I have seen the evidence that she has done so, because she has brought forward two quite successfully, which is great to see. So, on that basis, the Greens have concluded that there just is no need to make public health facilities automatically declared under 216. It would be better to keep the 218 protections, which are public notification and the possibility for Assembly oversight and disallowance—and that is what the amendments I have circulated do.

The Greens believe we should give the government powers that it needs to do its job that are in the public interest. The Greens believe we should not give the government

much more power than it needs to do that job, particularly when that power is explicitly waiving community rights to appeal. I understand the government has a different view on that. That is perfectly okay. That is why we have a parliament. People have different views. So it will be up to the Assembly to decide what happens with public health facilities. I gather that it is quite likely that public health facilities will remain in 218 and probably will not be added into the automatic 216 track today, but we will come to those amendments and debate them separately in a moment.

I want to thank the planning minister and his office for the constructive negotiations. It took a lot of time to get this right. Defining what community housing is, in particular, was quite difficult and getting those environmental and First Nations cultural protections was also difficult. I think everyone came to that with goodwill, and I think we have got a really, really good outcome that balances community interests, environmental, First Nations cultural and public interest concerns.

These amendments today will allow the fast-tracking of some public and community housing developments, but only in certain situations. We also have a sunset clause on 216, we have tight definitions on what community housing is for 218 and we have Assembly processes that will protect the public interest for 218. We have also had verbal confirmation from the minister that the advice from the Conservator and the advice from the Heritage Council will be public, so that members of the public can see that advice and so that the Assembly will be able to consider that. It is really great to hear that. Some of these things happen administratively—you do not always need to spell it out in the act—so it was great to see that we will get that transparency. There is also going to be a legislative review of the amendments, and that legislative review will be tabled in the Assembly. So the parliament can come back and consider: do we still need these fast-tracks; are they working; is there any change that we need to make; should we allow everything to sunset out?

I am pleased that, because of the amendments today, it looks like we are one step closer to delivering public housing faster without compromising environmental or First Nations communities and rights. It is smarter planning. It is the outcome that our constituents expect of us. It was not easy to put together, but that is how we have to deal with difficult issues. Difficult issues require a bit of thought into the lawmaking. We are a party of the environment and we are also a party for housing. So we are pleased when we can bring both of these together.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.49): I would like to thank Ms Clay for all her hard work on amending this bill. It is appreciated. The ACT urgently needs more public and community housing. To achieve this, we require new funding from both the ACT government and the commonwealth government. The government has signed up to the National Housing Accord and committed to delivering 5,000 additional public, community and affordable rental dwellings in Canberra by 2030, including 1,000 new public housing builds.

The commonwealth have made it clear through HAFF that they want to fast-track the process to build housing. Territory priority projects aim to provide this certainty by fast-tracking delivery and removing third-party appeal rights. However, the real test over the next 12 to 24 months will be whether government can deliver better planning, clearer timeframes, faster decisions and strong partnerships with industry.

Key questions remain. Are we prepared for upcoming HAFF funding rounds to secure the best outcomes for Canberrans? What is the target for housing through HAFF round 3? Is land available for community housing providers? Who will apply for the housing? Have processes to approve DAs been streamlined? Do we have projects ready to go, with approved development applications?

While ACAT processes have sometimes been slow and costly, they also provide important checks and balances. Rather than removing appeal rights, I believe we should streamline ACAT processes, prioritise public and community housing projects and fast-track them to address identified compliance issues and ensure the approval process remains robust, keeping our tree canopy, improving solar access, ensuring privacy and improving community trust in the planning system.

I note that the bill requires the minister to review the effectiveness of these amendments after 1 December 2028 and report to the Assembly by 30 June. Importantly, the definition of territory priority projects for housing will expire on 31 December 2029. This will allow the review to identify the best approach to fast-track essential housing in the future.

Our focus must remain on delivering housing quickly, transparently and in partnership with the community and industry. I support delivering public and community housing as a priority. While I believe that better planning and the streamlining of approval processes are more likely to enable the faster delivery of housing, I will support this bill and hope that it does fast-track the delivery of public and community housing, as it has espoused that it will.

Again, I thank Ms Clay for bringing forward amendments to improve this bill.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.52): I will make some brief remarks. I was inspired to do so when I was reflecting on the discussion we heard in the chamber yesterday, when Minister Steel gave us a more than thousand-word, seven-minute lecture on his views on the role of the planning committee in reviewing the missing middle reforms, and his agitation at the apparent delay caused by the committee. I was struck by the regrettable tone of those remarks, in light of the history of this issue and the approach from the current government.

As Ms Clay has pointed out on previous occasions, the work on the missing middle started eight years ago, and there has been a long process to get to this point. I am very pleased to see that the minister has been very focused on this in his time in the portfolio, and we are now seeing it come to realisation. This is a positive development, and one that the Greens have made very clear that we support. But we need to reflect on the fact that it has taken that period of time. We saw a major amount of planning reforms come forward in the previous term which failed to address the zoning question which is now being addressed.

I think that context was lacking, and it is relevant to today's debate, because we are talking about how to get this work done faster. We are committed to getting this work done faster, but we need to make sure that the government is focused on the real issues—and I think we have seen some progress in that regard in this proposed

approach—and not throwing out red herrings or blaming the wrong people for some of the delays we are seeing.

This is particularly relevant in the context of the government not having any interim targets on housing. The point I make here is that there is no accountability along the way. We have seen the government announce a target of 30,000 new homes by 2030; and, as Ms Carrick just touched on, 5,000 public, community and affordable houses by 2030. But the questioning we have done in both the estimates process and the annual reports process have revealed that there is no actual plan to get to those places. There are no interim targets.

When you sit there and say, "We've got these targets," and we ask the minister, "How many do you plan to build this year," or "How many do you plan to build in 2026 or 2027," there is no answer. The reason that these interim targets are important is not just as a political trap for the government, but as an effective way of measuring how you are going. When we have a debate about the need to fast-track things, there can be a conversation, and you can say, "We didn't make our target in 2025 or 2026, so we need to take further measures."

We see the government making these big statements, but it is not prepared to spell out the detail or, seemingly, do the work that lays out how we will get there and what the stepping stones are. These are points that we have explored to a degree in the committee hearings. The government clearly have a different view, because they do not see this as a necessary step. But when we have to sit through a lecture, directed at the committee, about taking the time, after years of work from the government, to have a process in this Assembly where the rest of the Assembly gets to look at it and reflect on it, a statutory process, it is quite regrettable.

As Miss Nuttall outlined yesterday, there is a clear solution to this. Minister Steel made the point that this work possibly could be delayed until September 2026. That is because there is a three-month gap in the sitting calendar next year, and we cannot get through the requisite number of sitting days to allow this plan to sit on the table. Miss Nuttall outlined yesterday that there is a clear solution. We are up for it. We will come back in June or in August. Put more sitting days on the calendar. But do not come in here and lecture the committee about their taking the time that is available to them, particularly given the committee—as Ms Clay indicated in her remarks—will seek to do it faster. But let us make sure, when we are having these debates about how we get more housing built and how we get it done faster, that we focus on the real issues and not the red herrings or the blame games.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.57): I want to thank the planning minister, after that shellacking, for bringing this matter to the Assembly. It is true that the ACAT appeals process is able to be used vexatiously to impede important community developments, and it is interesting that the government introduced this bill without including community housing from the outset, given that perhaps the prime example of using the ACAT appeals process vexatiously, of which we are all aware, was in relation to a YWCA community housing development for vulnerable women in Ainslie. I am glad to support the addition of community housing in this bill.

With that said, we have also seen ACAT used to show successfully that projects have

been approved that do not meet planning laws. Not every appeal is vexatious; far from it. This is, of course, a broader area for reform. We should be asking ourselves the question: should ACAT's reviews really be the process we use to check that a development meets our regulations and community expectations?

I have spoken already and asked questions about public certifiers as a solution here. This is something that has been committed to over multiple terms of government, and multiple elections. When I was trying to get a building approval certified in a former life, running a small business, I was encouraged to seek out a so-called "drive-by certifier"—someone who I could get in quickly at a low cost, who would sign it off and allow me to open the business. I am not kidding. This was recommended by multiple tradies.

The drive-by certifier was not available. I ended up finding someone who was quite strict, which was probably a good thing. Frankly, with the position that I was in, wanting to open the doors of the business as soon as I could, and feeling confident that the tradespeople I had engaged had done the right job, I wanted someone who would do it quickly and who would not be too hard on us. That inbuilt conflict of interest in our certification system for buildings clearly needs to be addressed. It can play an important role in addressing some of the gaps that we are seeing tackled by ACAT reviews.

It is also important that we acknowledge that, of course, such reviews or appeals are not the primary reason that we do not have enough public and community housing; far from it. The reality is that this is the result of insufficient government investment over decades, and policy settings in this country, including here in the ACT, that treat housing as a tool for wealth generation, preservation and growth rather than a means to satisfy an absolutely fundamental human need.

In the late 1950s, as ACT Shelter has been speaking about recently, 84 per cent of Canberra's homes were government built. It was not until the 1970s that privately built residential dwellings began to outpace those builds. At self-government, the proportion was down, but still over 12 per cent. Today, it is under six per cent.

Earlier this year, the Assembly voted to make the ACT the first jurisdiction in Australia to recognise a right to adequate housing in law. This means that government have to show they are working towards achieving that right, and fulfilling it for all Canberrans, including the many people in our community for whom private housing is absolutely unaffordable.

It has been difficult to form a position on this bill. It is complex, and I think that is coming out in the debate today, but I have repeatedly called for government to use every lever available to them to address the housing crisis. This is a relatively small lever, but it is a lever, and I am satisfied with the compromise position negotiated by the Greens, which establishes a range of very important safeguards.

I want to thank the Greens for working on this collaboratively, along with the government, and proposing what I see as an appropriate and measured approach to this complex issue. I am particularly pleased to see environmental impacts and Aboriginal cultural heritage considerations being properly considered through the proposed amendments. Of course, the sunset clause gives us the opportunity to reassess the

appropriateness of the changes that are before us today. I also support the Greens amendment to remove public health facilities from these changes.

The third-party appeal rights we have are a right that is enjoyed and expected by Canberrans. The decision to remove or limit that right should only be taken where there is significant justification. The acuity of the housing crisis that we are facing and the devastating impact of that crisis on young Canberrans, people escaping family and domestic violence, single parents, pensioners, and a range of other vulnerable Canberrans, is, I believe, justification enough for exploring these changes.

Regarding health facilities, though, I cannot see the argument for an automatic declaration. We have seen recent use of the existing mechanism to declare public health facilities as territory priority projects, and I do not think we have heard a sufficient explanation as to why this mechanism is somehow ineffective at preventing the hold-up of these developments. Two health facility projects are currently in the process of being declared as TPPs, including one in my electorate, in Griffith, the consultation process for which has led to quite clear, extensive community feedback. I will not be supporting the government's proposal to include public health facilities in section 216 and will instead support the Greens amendments in their entirety.

Reflecting on Mr Rattenbury's remarks, on the back of the passage of this bill, we need to see things fast-tracked. We need to see investment fast-tracked, not just approvals. I expect to see the government step up its efforts in the construction of public and community housing across our city and in fulfilling its commitment, agreed in our supply-and-confidence negotiations, to increase the proportion of public and community housing in the territory, which has been in constant decline for decades, to the severe detriment of countless Canberrans.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (12.03): Madam Assistant Speaker, I cannot tell you how pleased I am to rise today to support the passage of this critical bill. It is essential that there is a pathway to enable more public, community and affordable housing to be built in Canberra.

This bill will stop vexatious appeals delaying the construction of safe, secure and affordable homes for people who need them. At no point did the territory priority project approach ever propose to reduce environmental heritage or cultural protections. I need to make that clear. At no point did the territory priority project approach ever propose that design and planning rules would be scaled back. That needs to be made clear as well.

The primary purpose of this bill has only ever been about limiting appeals to ACAT from people who do not want public or affordable housing tenants living next door to them. That is it. In my mind, I do not think that is complex. I do not think it is difficult, so I was perplexed to hear Ms Clay talk about it being so difficult to come to this point in the negotiations with Minister Steel, in bringing this amendment forward, and to hear Mr Emerson's description of it being complex. It is not. I just want to build more homes for people who need them; that is it.

It turns out that I have a long memory of the trouble that I have had in this place and within the community in building homes for people who need them most. That is why I am so relieved to see this project, because it will mean that we will be able to build more homes quicker, where people need them, and that are appropriate for the people who need them most.

I had to think about some of the comments that Mr Rattenbury made about red herrings, about having numbers and a plan each year for delivering on this public housing plan. I remembered that the Greens party made a significant commitment to build 10,000 homes, but when they were asked where they were going to build those homes, they could not say. I get it; we all want to build more homes, which is great, which is all really great—

Mr Rattenbury: There is a published document. Go and look at it. It's in each district. Look at the plan.

MS BERRY: Madam Assistant Speaker—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Barry): Members! Go on, Ms Berry.

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Rattenbury!

MS BERRY: Thank you. I do not recall, when Mr Rattenbury was minister for housing at the time, whether there were numbers in place for the initial growth and renewal program each year, before I took over the housing project. I get it; we all want to have a pathway forward. We have made a commitment over the next five years to deliver 1,000 more public housing homes, and we will deliver on that. But we also want to make sure that that delivery includes partnerships with organisations like Community Housing Canberra, the YWCA and others; and, importantly, partnerships with the federal government.

Let us not forget that the Greens party in the federal space held up the Housing Australia Future Fund, which delayed the delivery of more community housing homes in this country, including the ACT. We are now into the third round of the Housing Australia Future Fund, which means that there are more opportunities for states and territories, including the ACT, to build even more public housing and community housing properties.

I am excited about those opportunities, although it will be a challenge. It will be a challenge to deliver those, because of the finite amount of land that the ACT has to build on. Also, there are still challenges within the construction industry and, of course, with the weather. We are dependent on good weather to make sure that we can get those homes built in a timely manner.

I wanted to comment on the red herrings that Mr Rattenbury talked about, and my memories of the red herrings coming from the Greens at a particular time, regarding a Dickson Common Ground project, which talked about the potential for cork trees to be removed that had been heritage listed, or were going to be heritage listed. That was

never the case. They are still there. You can go and look at them today. They continued to stoke fear and division in the community for that project not to go ahead because it might remove some cork trees.

That was despite my saying—I think Ms Stephen-Smith said it as well—that the cork trees were never at risk. We confirmed that with the community on a number of occasions. I get annoyed when the Greens party and the Liberal Party—I will come to them in a moment—suggest that they have been the ones that have been so holy on this, and it is simply not the case. It has been a fight, every step of the way, to get public housing built in the ACT.

I will quickly comment on the joining of community housing to these projects as well. Community housing had never been excluded. We had always said it would be considered, and we were meeting with the community housing organisations in the ACT about what that might look like. I am pleased that they are now included, absolutely, but it was never the case that they were going to be cut out completely from priority projects. We just thought it would be simpler to move ahead with public housing and get that through, and then we could work with the community housing sector on what that looked like.

Fortunately, we have been able to get that through, despite how difficult, apparently, it was for the Greens to come to that point. But we are there now, so I am pleased to see that going forward as well.

On the Canberra Liberals hook, I am disappointed that, even now, they cannot support this bill. So much has happened, and everybody is calling for more housing and saying that we are in a crisis, yet they will not support the very thing that could actually make a difference to building more homes for people who need them.

Under the previous growth and renewal program, some Canberra Liberal members were standing with the community, supporting, in my view, vexatious appeals to ACAT, simply for the reason that they did not want people who were living in public housing living next to them. It was that obvious. The unfair stigma that was placed on people on lower incomes at that time—and it seems to continue to be the case—is something that we cannot afford to accept anymore at all. I never accepted it—that people on lower incomes should not have the same goals and aspirations for a happy and fulfilled life, living in a home wherever they wanted to in our community. They should be able to have that decent, fair crack at happiness, like the rest of us. We all have to be on that unity ticket together. It bamboozles me that people think we should not be doing everything we can to build more homes for these people.

Our community is calling for more homes, especially in the social and affordable space. This bill is one of the ways that the ACT government can deliver on that. As I have described, so many people in this chamber have stood in the way of that reform, simply because the government wants to be able to build more homes for Canberrans who need them.

Mr Emerson was right to mention the YWCA project for housing for women in Ainslie. That was a perfect example of vexatious claims made by those in the community who did not want people on lower incomes, in desperate need of support, living next to them.

It was the most ridiculous time, when we could not push through that process and get those homes built sooner.

I would say there was a fair amount of caution—if I can be kind by saying caution—from the Greens at that time regarding using the call-in powers that were available, to call that project in and have those homes built. We will not have to do that anymore, thanks to this bill.

With every home that is delivered from now on, as a result of the bill that has been introduced, I will always reflect that this is the change that members of this government have needed, in order to agree to more public and community housing in Canberra. Delaying this bill has caused Canberrans who most need a home to be without one. I cannot accept that that is the way we should go into the future.

Today, thankfully, I think that debate is over, and this government, along with the community housing sector, can continue to march forward and progress towards building even more homes for people in the community who need them. Despite the Canberra Liberals disagreeing with this bill today, I hope that they agree with that commitment to our community that we are all on a unity ticket to build more homes, and we cannot accept the stigma that is placed on people on lower incomes by saying that public homes should not be built, or community housing should not be built, in every single neighbourhood across our community, because we desperately need them.

I will finish there. My message is to the Canberra community and the community housing providers who have worked so hard to convince the Greens to change their minds. I acknowledge the work that Minister Steel and his office have done. I say to the public housing tenants who are on the waitlist right now—the 3½ thousand of them who are on the waitlist right now: we will build homes as fast as we can. This bill will allow us to get you into homes sooner, and I hope that you will have trust in the government and the members in this place that we will pursue that goal with a vengeance.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.14 to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice

Club closures—loss of community facilities

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

Minister, in a supplementary question on 29 October regarding the possible closure of a bowling club in Weston Creek, Ms Carrick asked you directly what the government will do to ensure that there are community facilities in Weston Creek. You responded that it is simply not possible for the government to provide the facilities and the community contribution that these "privately owned businesses" provide.

Based on that answer, can we assume that, as your government continues to force the closure of clubs like Chisholm Vikings, it is not in a position to cushion the community against the loss of community facilities and community contributions, and that the

community will simply miss out on those facilities and contributions?

MS BERRY: Can I just get the bit again that you said about Chisholm?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton, can you repeat that bit?

MR PARTON: Based on that answer, can we assume, as your government continues to force the closure of clubs like Chisholm Vikings, that it is not in a position to cushion the community against the loss of community facilities and community contributions?

MS BERRY: First of all I say that I do not believe that it is the government's fault that the Chisholm Vikings club is closing. So I will just put that on the table, as well. And no, the ACT government cannot replace every facility across the ACT that might change whether it is a private business, a kebab shop, a community sports facility—

Mr Parton: We are talking about clubs here, Minister.

MS BERRY: Yes, but you are suggesting that it is the ACT government's fault—through you, Mr Speaker—that the Chisholm club is closing, and I do not believe that is the case. The ACT government works closely with all our community sports organisations to ensure that there are facilities for our growing need, particularly in the sport and recreation space, and we will continue to do that. But we cannot be held responsible every time a privately owned or operated facility closes.

MR PARTON: Will the government ever be in a position to manage the 500 hectares of greenspace and sporting facilities that clubs provide, given that you have said it is simply not the government's role to pick up the slack when these "privately owned businesses" close?

MS BERRY: First of all, I would say that Mr Parton is attempting to verbal me by saying "Pick up the slack." I have not said, "Pick up the slack."

The second part to that is that, whilst I am aware that the Chisolm club has made the decision, for whatever reason, to close their business, what happens as a result of that is not known. Once that is known and if the government can, within reason, support the operation of facilities that may have been previously privately operated, then of course we will consider it. But we cannot pick up every single privately owned organisation's businesses when they decide to close. That is just not something the ACT government can be responsible for. That is not to say that there might not be opportunities in this circumstance for the ACT government to work with community clubs on organisations or fields that might be left as a result of a club closing. These are very early days, so I would say in this circumstance, for Chisholm in particular, that we could consider something going forward. But again, at this time, it is early days and we do not know the consequences of the closure on our community.

MS MORRIS: Minister, what is the hit to the bottom line of government from the double whammy of a huge reduction in community contributions and a massive dip in gaming tax revenue?

DR PATERSON: This question falls in my portfolio responsibility. We currently have

the clubs inquiry underway and I completely reject the premise of Ms Morris's question and Mr Parton's.

Mr Parton: You talked about reimagining the club sector.

DR PATERSON: I would like to point the Assembly to the 2023 Vikings Group annual report; I do not have the latest one, because the clubs are working on more transparency in their presentation of annual reports. The club saw an increase in their gross revenue. So I would put back to Mr Parton and the Canberra Liberals that this is a business decision for the Canberra Vikings. We have seen them look to expand over the border in Jerrabomberra, and that business venture was clearly not successful.

Ms Morris interjecting—

DR PATERSON: The club sector and the hospitality sector have seen a whole raft of changes occur over the past decade, particularly with the impacts of COVID. As clubs work to understand what a sustainable future looks like for each club group, as we do the clubs inquiry, there will likely be club closures and there will likely be club mergers. This is a normal part of everyday business.

Visitor

MR SPEAKER: Before I go to the next question members, I would like to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of former member of the First Assembly, Norm Jensen. On behalf of all the members here I welcome you back to the Assembly.

Questions without notice

Clubs—rates and levies

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I have met with a number of clubs in my electorate who are facing massive rate increases on land they are attempting to develop for much needed housing as a way of diversifying away from gaming revenue. One club's rates went from $44,000 per year to over $600,000 per year.

Treasurer, why are you standing in the way of clubs who are proactively attempting to diversify their income streams away from gaming by seeking to address the undersupply of housing in the ACT?

MR STEEL: We are not. As planning minister, I approved major plan amendments to support clubs in the ACT to be able to diversify, including at Ainslie Football Club. It is really important to note, though, that the former EPSD Directorate had provided guidance to clubs around the implications of, for example, changing their lease—which may have implications for the value of their lease that may then result in potential taxation implications.

Every club needs to consider that, when they undertake this work to potentially rezone or change what their lease purpose clauses are, this has an effect on the value of their land. It means their land is more valuable. It means the assets on their books are more valuable. That has a taxation implication, because, as they build more homes, the government quite rightly expects that they—because there is an increment that is owned

by the community in their leases—pay a contribution back to the community. That may support, for example, investment in infrastructure around where they are proposing to build more homes. In the case of the Ainslie Football Club, we have done that already by investing in both light rail—600 metres away—and in the active travel path that is directly next to that future development.

My general advice to the club sector is make sure that you read the advice from the planning directorate around your planning proposals. We also encourage them to engage directly with the City and Environment Directorate, who are piloting a clubs concierge.

MS LEE: Treasurer, why are you continuing to impose unreasonable fees and charges that go to increasing the cost of construction and reducing housing affordability?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. With this land that was given to clubs—not all of it, but a lot of it—as concessional leases. When you deconcessionalise a lease it changes the value of that lease. We treat taxpayers fairly in the territory. If the value of their lease goes up, it does usually mean that you will have to pay more in terms of the rates that apply and, potentially, there are LVC implications. Those need to be understood prior to undertaking development.

I encourage the club sector—and I have spoken to the peaks about this, to let their members know—that when they undertake this work they should engage with the City and Environment Directorate to understand the implications. If they are going to change their lease, they might want to do that closer to the time that they are actually undertaking the development, not leaving ten years or five years in between in which they may be paying increased taxes for a development that they have not yet built to provide them with a new revenue stream to diversity their revenue.

I encourage them to understand the implications of the decisions that they have made based on the current policy that exists. But, of course, our government has also committed to introducing new policy to support them to diversity their revenue streams. That includes a review of the CZ6 zone—which is often the land-use zoning that applies to club sites—to enable them to do more within that zone. For example, they could look at opportunities for retirement living or residential, which would give them the opportunity to diversity their revenue streams in the future.

The boards and the management of these clubs need to understand the implications of the decisions that they are making. We are working with them closely, through the clubs concierge in the City and Environment Directorate, to support them in making those decisions.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, have you been forced into imposing these massive rate increases as a revenue-raising measure as a result of the mismanagement of the ACT's budget over the past 14 years under the previous Treasurer?

MR STEEL: No. As I have said, in many instances the reason that they may be paying more is that they have re-zoned, changed their lease within their current zoning or deconcessionalised their lease, meaning that the value of that lease has gone up. The asset value has gone up. Their property values have gone up. So, yes, generally

speaking, when property values go up more rates are required, and there are LVC implications.

Mr Cain: A point of order, Mr Speaker. The Treasurer is just repeating things he has already said. The question was very specific: has he been forced into these revenue raising rates increases because of the mismanagement of the previous Treasurer?

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Community sector—pay and conditions

MR RATTENBURY: My question is, I believe, to the Chief Minister.

During the 2024 ACT election, ACT Labor committed to moving towards parity between ACT public service and community sector conditions, through the ACT community sector multi-enterprise agreement, or MEA, including funding paid parental leave, paid domestic and family violence leave, and enhanced superannuation. Can the Chief Minister outline where this is up to, and why it has still not been resolved?

MS ORR: I will take the question in my capacity as Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. This particular commitment, while forming a part of a number of agreements with the crossbench, was also a commitment by the Labor party in the 2024 election. It specifically indicated that we would do this through the MEA, which is currently before the Fair Work Commission. The ACT government has been joined as a party to the negotiations between the 17 employer groups from the community sector and their employees.

We continue with the process, noting that this is quite a new function within the industrial relations framework—and we continue to work through being one of the first groups to utilise being joined to this negotiation process.

MR RATTENBURY: Can the minister please provide an explanation for rejecting the employers' initial funding proposal without presenting an alternative funding model, or any constructive negotiation to resolve the impasse?

MS ORR: I will work through that, but first I would like to note that I do find it concerning that a process that is before the Fair Work Commission and in which the government has been partaking, in good faith, is now being brought forward and questioned within the chamber—the implication being that, clearly, people who are at the table are now providing commentary to other political parties, which makes a complicated negotiation further complicated.

The government, as I said in my first answer, has been joined to proceedings. It is not a party to the negotiation; it is there as the majority funder, to inform what it is and is not in a position to fund. The proposals are to be negotiated and put forward between the employer and the employee groups. Government is then to reflect on those. The advice to me and to the cabinet has been that it is not for government to do the negotiation between the two teams, or to take over the negotiating role between the two sides of the negotiation.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, by what date will the ACT government provide a definitive funding position to the MEA bargaining process, so that the Fair Work Commission process can progress and the MEA, which is nominally expired in 2018, can be finalised?

MS ORR: In addressing the question, I note that the member has pointed to 2018. I would note that the negotiations for the MEA far pre-date the government being joined to the process. Certainly, we have been there, I believe, since 2024. So, it has certainly not been the whole time that this has been under negotiation. We will continue to work within the framework and the processes, and the positions put to us, within our own processes and considerations through cabinet. And we will provide responses as promptly as we can to the ongoing Fair Work negotiation.

Government procurement—policy

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Minister, as you know, today is the International Day of People with Disability. Last year, the City of Sydney banned the procurement of services using contractors or subcontractors that pay sub-minimum wages to people with disability, including through the supported wage system. Is the ACT government considering introducing a similar procurement policy?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I will take it on notice.

MR EMERSON: This one might need to be taken on notice, too. Minister, do any ACT government contractors or their subcontractors currently employ people on sub-minimum wages?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the detail of that question on notice as well. I note that it is incredibly important, and it is something that people with disability have been fighting for, for a long time, that their value as employees and workers is recognised, and that it is vital that they are paid fair wages for the work that they do. As a matter of principle, I want to support the principle that Mr Emerson is clearly enunciating in his question, and recognise that it is International Day of People with Disability, I-Day, and the contribution more broadly of people with disability to our community is of vital importance.

MS CARRICK: Minister, is contracting or subcontracting people with disability on sub-minimum wages consistent with the ACT's Disability Strategy and Human Rights Act obligations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice. This is a contentious issue. It has been an issue on which people with disability and carers have had different views over time. I would agree with the premise of Ms Carrick's question, that employing or subcontracting people on under-minimum wages is not appropriate. But I will have to go and check whether that is a specific policy in relation to the procurement providers.

Planning—town centres

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister and it is about implementing CBR2030. I was really pleased to read *CBR2030: ACT's strategic economic*

development framework, which has a mission to plan and design connected town centres and group centres to "bring everyday life closer to home". It says:

> These places will bring together housing, jobs, government services, public spaces and community facilities in ways that make everyday life easier and more connected.

I couldn't have said it better myself. You are also continuing to support the growth of Canberra's night-time economy as part of your commitment to "a more dynamic, inclusive and liveable city". Noting your 2016 *Canberra: a statement of ambition*, where you said, "Cities don't succeed by accident or by leaving things to chance—they require design, good governance and great collaboration," what are the governance arrangements to plan, collaborate and design town centres and group centres?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Carrick for her endorsement of the Economic Development Strategy in its decade-long set of iterations and progress. In fact, this question was asked at the annual reports hearings. The current administrative arrangements create the planning context and framework within the City and Environment Directorate. That was an administrative change I made at the beginning of this parliamentary term to bring the City Services and Planning areas together to create the capacity to undertake many of the objectives outlined within the Economic Development Strategy.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Chief Minister. I remind Ms Carrick that questions have a certain length to them, and I ask her to make sure that, as we move forward, she adheres to that.

MS CARRICK: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Will planning for the town centres and group centres include identification of sites for entertainment precincts to grow Canberra's night-time economy?

MR BARR: The work that Minister Cheyne has underway in relation to the night-time economy, with her partner minister in this portfolio, Minister Steel, progresses those opportunities.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, what are the timeframes for developing plans to bring together housing, jobs, government services, public spaces and community facilities in ways that make everyday life easier and more connected?

MR BARR: Evidently, that is ongoing work that has been undertaken over many decades of Canberra's history. In relation to priorities over the next few years, we have recently adopted the new Territory Plan. I have put in place a range of administrative arrangements to support the development of a number of aspects that Ms Carrick outlined in her long original question and Mr Cocks touched upon. There is legislation before the Assembly today that will support the quicker delivery of more housing, and we have some very significant investment proposals from the private sector for the delivery of more housing and community facilities in the Woden town centre, for example, that are currently before the community and will ultimately be before this place for consideration. So there is a lot happening across Canberra.

We are seeing quite a lot of interest in investing in our town centres. In Gungahlin, the Gungahlin Town Centre East development, which the Suburban Land Agency is leading, is well progressed in its planning phases. There are proposals for the Belconnen town centre and the Tuggeranong town centre, and the new Molonglo town centre was recently elevated to a town centre. So there is a lot happening across each of our town centres.

Planning—Greenway

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. It is a bit long—sorry!

Minister, residents from the Waters Edge complex at 10 Ellison Harvie Close in Greenway have been in touch with me regarding concerns about a development application to construct a path on the lake side of their complex to active travel. The DA is 202442924. This DA has been conditionally approved. While residents been asking for a safe, sealed path for a while, the current proposal puts the path only a metre away from residences. This is a safety concern for individuals with mobility, sight or hearing impairments. Young children, including babies, are at risk due to the close proximity of the proposed pathway to the residential boundary. What consultation did you and the directorate undertake with members of Waters Edge and what did those instances of consultation look like?

MR STEEL: I will take that question on notice and get some information for the member. Obviously, the assessment of development applications is undertaken by the independent Territory Planning Authority. I am not directly involved that process, nor am I involved in the decision-making process, unless the project is a Territory Priority Project, which is something that we have been discussing today—because, at the advocacy of the Greens, the call-in power was removed from the Planning Act, and we set up a new process, the Territory Priority Project process, that is instead in place for that.

If the intent of the question is that I should intervene, there is no mechanism now under the Planning Act to do that in relation to the DA. But if it is in relation to getting more information about the consultation, I will take that on notice and come back to the Assembly—

Miss Nuttall: With apologies, on a point of order: the question was not about asking the minister to intervene; it was asking what consultation the minister and the directorate had done.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, do you have anything further to add?

MR STEEL: I think I have been very clear that I am not involved in the consultation. But I will come back in relation to what the independent Territory Planning Authority has done in relation to the consultation.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you plan to respond to the letter that Waters Edge residents sent you earlier in the year outlining their concerns? If so, when might they expect that response?

MR STEEL: I will check that. Obviously, when I respond, I will be very clear that the response will include advice from the independent Territory Planning Authority about their decision-making, which is of course independent from me as minister in relation to individual DAs.

MS CLAY: Minister, what is the plan to consult residents of Waters Edge on the construction of the path now that the DA has been conditionally approved?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am not responsible for the path directly, and so I will not be consulting further on a project where I am not the proponent. But I will come back in relation to the process that had been undertaken. I do not believe any further consultation is proposed in relation to the path, but you may wish to ask the proponent of the project whether they have any future plans.

Property developers—regulation

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. During annual reports, you were asked about big and small developers leaving the ACT. You admitted you had heard of some developers leaving and said: "If dodgy developers leave the territory that is a good thing."

Does the government believe every developer leaving the territory is dodgy? And, if not, why has the minister smeared honest operators?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question because I do not think I did say that in the very first part of the preamble, but also the answer is no. I do not believe that the whole construction industry has dodgy developers. But what I do know, what I have heard from the construction industry, is that when there are dodgy developments it smears the entire industry. That is why we have introduced the property developer licensing act which is being implemented at the moment, to make sure that we can extend the chain of accountability in our building system to make sure that it deters dodgy development from occurring in the territory, but also, if it does occur, then that licenced developer is held to account and there is a legal mechanism for the consumers—who are the people, by the way, that we are all trying to protect—to have an opportunity to go and seek a remedy from the developer. They currently do not have the opportunity to do that. They can go after another licensed occupation, like builders, like electricians, or like plumbers, but they cannot go after the developer. We have provided that mechanism and we want to make sure that mechanism works. We want to make sure there is still investment in the territory and housing being built in the territory. We will work with the construction industry on that. But Canberrans have had a gutful of dodgy development in this city, and we are not going to stand for it.

MS MORRIS: Why does the government continue to impose the highest level of regulatory burden on businesses who seek to increase housing supply in the territory?

MR STEEL: We are not. We are making it easier for more homes to be built, by introducing the largest planning reforms to update the Territory Plan since self-government, to enable homes to be built in areas where they were previously prohibited. We will be bringing those forward in tranches. We have done that with the

missing middle, we are doing it on transport oriented development in the Inner North, we will do it on the southside as well and with more shopping centre shop-top and shop-adjacent housing opportunities for the construction sector.

But there is a social contract that comes with that, that if we allow them to build more homes that were not previously possible, those homes are built well. I think the community understands that and they have that expectation already, even where we are not providing the opportunity. For most consumers, the largest decision that they make in their lifetime is to purchase a home, and if there are defects in it, it costs them tens of thousands of dollars to be able to remedy those defects unless there is a mechanism in place for them to go and seek to be put back in the same position that they were in prior to the development occurring, allowing them to go and seek compensation, or the remedy to be repaired, from someone who is responsible for the development, whether that is the builder, whether it is another licensed occupation or whether it is now the developer under the developer licensing scheme and that is a good thing.

MS BARRY: Minister, how can you possibly be encouraging businesses and investment in the ACT housing sector while you continue to publicly admonish the industry which is required to build these homes?

MR STEEL: Because we have the support of the industry for the changes we are making—changes that you apparently do not support in the chamber today in relation to the territory priority projects bill which the industry supports; HIA, MBA, and the Property Council. The construction industry supports those changes which you do not support. They support our changes to missing middle reforms. They support our changes around transit orientated development and shop-top and shop-adjacent housing that we will be bringing forward. All of these changes will support them to build more homes for our community, but of course that comes with an expectation that we want quality building. We do not want to see clubs and we do want to see developers build homes that cannot be lived in or that leave people in desperate financial circumstances. So that is why we are putting in place consumer protections that support the Canberra community while they make this massive investment in a home for themselves and their families.

Aged care—proposed University of Canberra facility

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, can you update the Assembly on the University of Canberra's recent aged-care announcement?

Mr Parton: That was my question!

MR BARR: Thank you, Ms Tough. It seems you have usurped the opposition leader's first question to me!

Yes, I can indeed update the Assembly. I can say with great pleasure that, consistent with the University of Canberra Amendment Act 2015—which was passed with the support of Labor and the Greens, but opposed by the Canberra Liberals—the university announced it will develop the territory's first intergenerational retirement living community on its Bruce campus, in partnership with Pariter and Opal HealthCare.

I understand this will be only the second such university-based precinct in Australia, a precinct that will bring together retirement living, health care, education and community engagement in a purpose-built environment. It will complement the University of Canberra's existing health assets, including the University of Canberra public hospital and the UC Health Hub, and it will further activate the university's health neighbourhood under the campus masterplan.

This is a 100-year lease agreement. Pariter and Opal HealthCare will develop and operate the precinct, which is expected to become a benchmark for intergenerational living models across the country.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how will this partnership benefit health, education and research outcomes in the community?

MR BARR: A key challenge that is currently being faced by all state and territory governments across the nation is bed block in our hospitals, where older patients who no longer require acute hospital care remain in hospital thanks to difficulties in accessing appropriate aged care or transitional accommodation. The university partnership directly responds to that national challenge by creating 230 independent living units and a 180-bed residential aged-care facility within the University of Canberra health precinct. This development will increase capacity in our aged-care system, support smoother transitions out of hospital and ease demand on our acute care beds.

The university's agreement also unlocks substantial education and research opportunities, including student placement programs, collaborative employment pathways and new research initiatives in aged care and retirement living. This is a genuine innovation. We welcome it, and we acknowledge how it positions Canberra as a national leader in age-inclusive precinct development.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how does this project align with Labor's priorities to support reform in the health and aged-care sectors?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary question. The project adds a very strong alignment that we share with the federal government—to strengthen our nation's healthcare system to deliver modern and high-quality aged care. In this instance, both levels of government are working to improve aged-care standards and expand workforce capability, and we are doing so in partnership with the University of Canberra. By integrating retirement living, residential aged care and health services within an established university health precinct, this project delivers a contemporary model that matches the reform direction of federal aged-care policy, whilst also advancing the territory's own commitment to health innovation.

The government wants to see more initiatives like this—initiatives that build capacity in the aged-care workforce and ensure that older Canberrans benefit from the national shift towards better and more integrated healthcare services. This was only possible because of laws passed in this place a decade ago. They were opposed by the Canberra Liberals, and they stand condemned for that very poor decision of ten years ago.

Planning—Symonston and Jerrabomberra

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. The Territory Planning Authority is considering a development application to establish a light industrial/commercial business park precinct on block 12 section 111, Symonston and block 2233, Jerrabomberra. Representations have been submitted on the DA from the Friends of Grasslands and the Conservation Council who have raised concerns about the proposed development. The site is within the Eastern Broadacre area, which is subject to a strategic assessment. Given that the strategic assessment has not yet been finalised, how and why is the development application being progressed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Yes, I am aware of that development proposal, which will need to be assessed by the independent Territory Planning Authority. I will come back on notice around the specifics of whether it is included within the Eastern Broadacre investigation area. I recall that it was not. But I will come back with some further information.

The Eastern Broadacre investigation area is only a fairly narrow corridor. It does not include every single area on the east of Canberra. So, there will be certain blocks that do not fall within the remit of that work which is subject to the strategic assessment. That is being updated at the moment, to provide to the commonwealth for approval following further environmental and other studies that need to be updated.

MS CLAY: Given that the strategic assessment looks at the overall environmental impact in the Eastern Broadacre area and the need for offsets, are potential environmental impacts through the proposed development pre-empting the outcome of the strategic assessment process?

MR STEEL: That would depend on whether it is included within the Eastern Broadacre strategic assessment area. That is what I will come back on. But I have every confidence that the Territory Planning Authority will consider the environmental and other requirements, and overlays on that block—and will consider that in making a decision in relation to what I understand is a subdivision application.

MISS NUTTALL: How can you ensure there will not be significant environmental impacts from the proposed development, given that the studies necessary to determine the suitability of the land for any development have not been finalised?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for the question. Strategic assessments under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act obviously cover a wider area, but of course there are our own requirements in the Planning Act where an EIS may be triggered to look into those—or there may be an environmental significance opinion, for example, and information that may be considered from the conservator in relation to individual sites that are put up through the planning process. So, I am confident that, under the Planning Act and the broader framework including the EPBC Act, there are mechanisms to consider those environmental matters as part of the assessment process regardless of whether they are included within a current draft strategic assessment that is being undertaken in the Eastern Broadacre area. But I will come back to confirm whether it is included in that area.

Housing ACT—maintenance

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, Housing ACT is cutting labour hire and contract staff while the territory faces growing debt and increased pressure on the budget. Is this another example of frontline public services being reduced to plug holes created by years of uncontrolled spending from Labor?

MS BERRY: No, and we are not cutting staff.

MR COCKS: Minister, how will the staffing cuts that have been reported impact wait times for people on Housing ACT waitlists? If you claim they are not cuts, what has happened?

MS BERRY: A number of staff in Housing ACT that were on contracts were mistakenly told that their contracts would end at Christmas. Housing ACT apologised as soon as they were aware of it and immediately rectified that situation, to ensure that those staff continued their employment.

MS BARRY: Minister, with the cuts that you said are not occurring, what impact will these have on the amenity and maintenance of Housing ACT properties?

MS BERRY: I have just explained the situation with regard to some employees that were mistakenly told that their contracts would end early. That situation has been resolved. The Assembly is already aware that there has been a change to housing managers' work with regard to their jobs and going out to homes, to ensure their safety and the safety of tenants. There is a doubling up of staff that go out to those services, which means that not all tenants will get a visit, as had been the case previously. Those visits from housing managers will occur on an as-needed basis, to ensure that those most vulnerable in our public housing homes get access to their housing managers. That does not mean that they cannot report to Housing various issues that they might have, just because a housing manager is not there. They are always welcome to go into Housing ACT or call Housing ACT and their housing manager, should they wish to.

Planning—CSIRO Ginninderra

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, the development of the 701-hectare CSIRO Ginninderra site has been on the table for over a decade. The ACT is tracking at just 49 per cent of its National Housing Accord target while this prime land remains idle, driving up prices for Canberrans and wasting taxpayer effort and money. Minister, how much taxpayer money has been spent to date on negotiations, legal processes and studies for the CSIRO Ginninderra land? And why, after 10-plus years, has the government failed to deliver a single home for Ginninderra residents at that site?

MS BERRY: Mr Cain might not know that the CSIRO land is not owned by the ACT.

Mr Cain: I'm well aware of that, Minister. We're all well aware.

MS BERRY: I guess there are three partners in negotiations for the land and releasing it to the ACT. It is a massive block of land, and it is a complicated and complex process.

So I guess the negotiations more recently have taken some time—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MS BERRY: This land is not owned by the ACT, and I find it difficult to understand why Mr Cain is so angry with us when we have been reporting every step of the way about our negotiations. Yes, it is taking some time, and it should take some time; it is a large piece of land. It is not owned by the ACT.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MS BERRY: We are doing everything that we can to ensure that we are able to have success and a positive outcome from those negotiations. Of course, we—

Mr Parton: A point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker: the question was very specifically about how much money has been spent to date on negotiations and legal processes, and I do not believe that the minister is being responsive to that question.

Mr Cain: She can take it on notice if she doesn't know.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, that was an element of the question. If you do have an answer to that—

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just needed to make the point that it is not our land. Perhaps the question on the issues that Mr Cain is trying to track down could be asked of the actual owner of the land, regarding the investigations that they have done.

Mr Cain: No—how much on your efforts?

MS BERRY: However, given that he is so interested in our part in this story, I will take the question on notice and will see what information is available and could be provided publicly, and will provide that to the Assembly next year.

Mr Cain: That wasn't so hard, was it, Minister?

Ms Berry: Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Is this a point of order?

Ms Berry: Yes, Mr Speaker. The constant interruptions by Mr Cain while I was trying to answer the question, and then when I had finished answering the question, are unparliamentary and he should be called to order.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for that. I would remind you, Mr Cain, to remain quiet while you are listening to the answer to the question that you asked.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members, I remind you we are in question time. I appreciate the humour. However, Mr Cain has a supplementary question.

MR CAIN: Mr Speaker, we are clearly all biting our tongues!

Minister, what funding risks or penalties does this pose for the territory's budget, given the ACT's shortfall at 49 per cent of its national housing target?

MS BERRY: I am not quite sure—

Mr Cain: To do with the costs of negotiation et cetera, Minister, which you have taken on notice.

MS BERRY: The negotiations are not complete, so I probably cannot respond to that in any more detail.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you table your government's proportion of the cost of negotiation and correspondence with the commonwealth on this site before the end of the sitting year?

MS BERRY: The negotiations are not complete, so I cannot agree to the request in that question.

Roads—speed limits

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services and relates to speed limits. I refer the minister to research recently published by Dr Molloy about examining speeding behaviours by Canberra drivers and the need for lower speed limits as well as to the updated Austroads *Guide to Road Safety for Safe Speed Management*, which highlights how "reducing urban speed limits would lead to major reductions in pedestrian and cyclist injury," and that "aspirational speeds aligned to safe system performance are 30 kilometres per hour where pedestrians and cyclists interact with traffic".

Minister, is the academic evidence and policy advice converging behind the idea that 30-kilometre-per-hour speed zones should be the norm in urban backstreets?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. Effectively, yes. The evidence has been laid bare. I would note—at least in response to media inquiries, if this information has not been published yet—that Roads ACT has been working on a new set of ACT speed-zoning guidelines that reflect the latest evidence. Those guidelines are now with me for sign-off. They include a codification of a 30-kilometre-an-hour speed limit but also a detailed review process of how to assess what the appropriate speed limit should be.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why is the government looking to test lower speeds on a single street—being Sherbrooke Street—rather than across a broader area, which would allow for a proper investigation of driver behaviour in a lower-speed area?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question, and I appreciate his genuine interest in this.

Sherbrooke Street is what we have committed to. It has already had a substantial amount of work put into it in terms of the design. As Mr Emerson well knows, we are at a point where we can implement, subject to funding being secured. Given the many different aspects that we have already designed for Sherbrooke Street, we would like to test those before rolling out to other streets. I do appreciate that there have been recent petitions in this place that have called for other streets to have a speed limit lowered to 30 kilometres an hour, like in Lyneham. But, at this stage, it is best for government to assess one street rather than doing all of the design work for different streets that have different constraints and testing in that way.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what metrics of success will the government use to assess the trial in Sherbrooke Street?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice. I think we do have metrics but I cannot recall what they are. If they have not been developed yet, I will also come back with that as well. I just cannot recall.

Vocational education and training—skills funding

MS CASTLEY: My question is for the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister in the 2024-25 budget the government committed to spending $63.9 million on skills. However, this year's budget papers show that the government only spent $28.1 million on skills funding, that is less than half of what was promised. Minister, why did the government underspend on skills funding by 56 per cent? What did you cut?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Castley for the question. In a general sense, the skills space has seen a reduction in the number of people undertaking apprenticeships. This has resulted in an underspend in certain parts of the portfolio.

MS CASTLEY: Minster, what impact will the underspend on skills funding have on ensuring a properly skilled labour force to meet the housing targets?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Castley for the question. Ms Castley asks a very good question in that the ACT government is committed to improving the skills offering in our city to provide for the future needs of our growing economy. Central to that is ensuring that, commonly, young people have access to the skills and training that they require. A key focus of that skills mix at the moment is in the construction industry, which is a focus of joint effort between both the ACT and commonwealth governments. At the ACT level, we have in the budget funded an increase in the subsidy to key construction trades to 90 per cent. We have also continued the $250 cost-of-living payments to apprentices as well as a further $250 payment to first year apprentices. This is in conjunction with the initiatives by the commonwealth, which are of a larger nature, but in conjunction hopefully—

Mr Parton: Point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance. The question was very clearly about what impact will the underspend on skills funding have on ensuring a properly skilled labour force to meet the housing targets and I am not sure the minister is being relevant to the question.

MR SPEAKER: I think he is answering around that area, but he has 39 seconds to go, so he may have more to add.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you Mr Speaker. I think I am being directly relevant. I acknowledge it was a good question and this is a priority for government to respond to the skills needs of our growing city.

MR MILLIGAN: What impact will the underspend have on housing affordability?

MR PETTERSSON: It is an interesting question. Labour costs, I guess, are contingent upon the supply of available workers and central to there being that supply of labour is them having the required skills. That is why as a government we are committed to improving the availability of that training but also to provide the incentives to encourage more people to undertake training in the construction space.

Planning and development—Macquarie swimming pool

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. The current zoning for the Big Splash site permits a building of only two stories on only up to fifteen per cent of the land. The minister recently told an annual reports hearing that a proposed redevelopment would be considered by the National Capital Design Review Panel. However, the review panel only considers projects that are five stories or higher.

Minister, can you please confirm how many stories were proposed and how much of the site would have been occupied by the building?

MR STEEL: I think that is one criterion that the National Capital Design Review Panel considers. I am happy to come back on notice to see whether one of the other criteria would apply if a proposal were put forward in relation to a two-storey development at Big Splash. I have not met with Big Splash; I do not know what they are proposing. I understand that they have made initial representations to the City and Environment Directorate in relation to potential development on the site. Obviously, that does not mean that the government supports any future development at Big Splash. I want to make it absolutely clear that the government has no intention of supporting any zoning changes at Big Splash away from the current PRZ2 zoning, if they were proposing work that goes beyond the current allowances of the Territory Plan.

I will come back in relation to the NCDRP issue. I am not sure if I can comment on the proposal. I am not sure whether it has been made, but I will check that as well to see whether a formal application has been made through to the Territory Planning Authority.

MS BARRY: Minister, given the proposal was clearly inconsistent with the legal requirements of the zone, why didn't the government immediately rule it out?

MR STEEL: I do not make planning decisions on individual development applications, unless they are Territory Priority Projects. When a developer comes forward, they go to the independent Territory Planning Authority. They fairly assess, under the Planning Act and against the Territory Plan, whether it can be approved or not; whether it can be

approved with conditions; or whether it needs to take into account a whole range of different other matters, which be environmental or otherwise. There are, of course, referral agencies that are involved in this, right across broader government.

So the government will not be pre-emptively not approving development applications that we are not involved in the direct assessment of, for me as minister. The Territory Planning Authority has a mandate that is set out in the Planning Act. They are required to follow the processes under the Planning Act. I have every confidence that they would do so professionally in relation to any proposal that comes forward.

I committed in the previous answer to come back on whether there is actually a development application that has been brought forward.

MR CAIN: Minister, what was the legal basis used by the Chief Minister to rule out rezoning the Big Splash site, and was this a decision of cabinet?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. The earlier question was about an individual development application, not a major plan amendment, which you are now asking me about. I have previously said, in the answer to the first question, that the government has no intention to change the zoning of Big Splash. I am happy to state that again: we have no intention to change the zoning of Big Splash.

Under the Planning Act, there is a process that is set out about major plan amendments. They can be brought forward by me, as minister; they can be brought forward by the Territory Planning Authority; or they can be brought forward as a proponent-initiated major plan amendment. If it is brought forward as a proponent-initiated major plan amendment, then that would be considered first by the Territory Planning Authority, and then it would go through the process and eventually end up here in the Assembly.

It is not just up to government and ministers to decide whether we would support rezoning; it is up to the entire Assembly. It would come here. I do not see a lot of support for it in the Assembly. But it would still need to go through a process, and it would have to be fairly considered under the Planning Act.

As far as I am aware, there has been no application in relation to rezoning. The ACT government is not planning on making a change through the government-initiated major plan amendment process that I have outlined.

Housing ACT—fire damage

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for housing. On 7 June this year, there was a house fire at a Housing ACT complex in O'Connor. As a result of that house fire, all the residents were relocated to other public housing. According to these residents, there has been a lack of information on the cause of the fire. Minister, have residents been provided a detailed report on the cause of the fire? If not, will the government provide a report to all former tenants?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what compensation is the government providing to former

public housing tenants who have lost all their belongings due to the fire?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice, too.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how does the government expect low-income residents to replace what they lost due to this fire?

MS BERRY: I cannot speak for these circumstances. I have taken the first two questions on notice. On the supplementary question, Housing ACT works very hard to support tenants when these kinds of circumstances might occur, including providing them with emergency accommodation and supporting them to find replacements for things that they might have lost during a fire. Also, it would be a tenant's responsibility to have insurance on their own belongings, as well. However, noting that these people are vulnerable, there are a range of supports that are available across community organisations. Housing ACT would support housing tenants making contact with those organisations, or vice versa.

We know it is a particularly stressful time for anybody in those circumstances, but particularly for people in public housing accommodation. Housing ACT takes their responsibilities very seriously in supporting tenants through that process.

Health—Southside Hydrotherapy Pool

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, on 25 August, the long-awaited Southside Hydrotherapy Pool opened at the Lakeside Leisure Centre in Tuggeranong, yet there is significant concern in the community about the overall accessibility of the facility to the public. Extended and regular bookings by community groups like Arthritis ACT have significantly reduced operating hours for the public, placing an additional burden and expense on some of the community's most vulnerable residents. Minister, what is the arrangement between the Lakeside Leisure Centre, Arthritis ACT and the ACT government over the use of the Southside Hydrotherapy Pool?

MS BERRY: The hydrotherapy pool facility can be booked by people, as with any other sports facility, through Belgravia Leisure's Active World app. They can show up and use casual entry, as well as book through the Lakeside Leisure Centre reception. In the pool itself, 12 people can use the pool at any given time.

I cannot confirm that I have had any correspondence from anybody with regard to concerns about organisations like Arthritis Australia using the pool, but I can give some attendance numbers. There is general entry use of 899, commercial entry use of 108, and not-for-profit entry of 787, showing that it is a very popular pool space and that it is being used quite well across the community, across a range of different areas.

I might take a bit of that question on notice; if there is any further information I can provide about usage of the pool that is helpful in responding to that question, I will do so. Bookings at that pool are made as they would be for any other pool usage by the community.

MR PARTON: Minister, what is the benefit of opening a public facility like the

Southside Hydrotherapy Pool if it is not accessible to a large portion of the community that it was intended to serve?

MS BERRY: I would not agree with the premise of that question, given the number that I have just provided on the usage of the pool by the broader community, which was 899. There was clearly very significant use of the pool through the month of October. Commercial entry was 108 and the not-for-profit entry was 787. I would say that it is accessible to ordinary users in the community.

MS MORRIS: What can you say to the residents of Tuggeranong and Canberra's south who were promised a new facility and who, however, have been met with increased costs and restrictions on doing so?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with the premise of that question, either. I have just given some information on the usage of the pool facility, and the feedback that I have had from the community and user groups has been very positive. As I said, if there are issues that have been raised with my office and if I have any other further information that is useful, I will bring it back to the Assembly.

International Day of People with Disability—community organisations

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, as I am sure you know, today is International Day of People with Disability, or I-Day for short. I understand that last year responsibility for marking the day transitioned from the ACT government to community control. How will government support community-led celebrations of I-Day in the ACT this year?

MS ORR: Today most definitely is I-Day, the International Day of People with Disability. The ACT government transitioned the festivities to celebrate this day to community control last year. However, we continue to support it through funding a range of activities to celebrate the day—and not just today but also throughout the year—and supporting a community controlled steering committee, with partners for I-Day celebrations planning activities and coordinating events throughout the community to raise awareness of the issues that I-Day focuses on.

This year's theme for I-Day is "Halting Hate, Finding Kindness". This has been the focus of the activities that the steering committee has progressed, including the official opening today of the main event for the steering community. I had the pleasure of dropping in and making a few comments. I was definitely not the highest profile person in the forum, because events were opened by Michael Theo, who is an actor in *Austin*. It is fair to say he made some lovely comments about Canberra and confirmed that he did not believe we were boring, based on his time filming here. I think he very much embraced the "Halting Hate, Finding Kindness" theme, even if it is not entirely focused on disability. He was definitely embraced by those watching online, which is another way of indicating community control: they can choose the format so that everyone can participate in the way that suits them. There were a lot of love hearts, thumbs up and applauses going up during his speech on the online forum.

There are a lot of roles that we will continue to have. We are the first jurisdiction to transition this day to community control, and we will continue to support the steering

committee as they grow their focus on the activities and events that recognise the contribution that people with disability make to our community and the issues and matters that are important to them.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what is the significance of transitioning to community control?

MS ORR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question because it is a really important one. It goes to the core value of "Nothing about us without us" and making sure that the disability community has governance over the things that concern them. Community control of I-Day means that it is planned, designed, delivered and overseen by people with disability, their organisations and advocacy groups. It is accessible for people with all kinds of disability, including intellectual and cognitive disability, and it is an opportunity for people with disability to inform, lead and participate at all levels. It really goes to show how important it is that the community is brought in on this.

As I mentioned in my last answer, the event today highlights how these considerations become tangible with what is put forward. The event we had was online so that everyone was able to attend. They could easily attend from wherever. We had an Auslan interpreter and we had captions available. I slowed down my speaking because sometimes I speak a bit fast and people do not always understand me. I was reminded to slow down. It is about creating an environment where it is okay to say, "Hey, this is what I need. If we all do that and participate, we can have a good time."

MS TOUGH: Minister, how will the community celebrate International Day of People with Disability this year, and how can the broader community get involved?

MS ORR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. I understand the steering committee has been meeting throughout the year to plan the program and bring on board what the disability community would like the celebration to include. A lot of work has come from that. There is a showcase of creative works and new media partnership, with the *Canberra Weekly* featuring a centre-spread supplement and a celebration pass. There is a podcast series with Radio 1RPH. As I already mentioned in my last two responses, the showcased theme is "Halting Hate, Finding Kindness". This theme is all about addressing disinformation and hate speech and working towards having a truly inclusive Canberra. There is still quite a lot to get involved in, and I would encourage members to go check it out.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, the time has come. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Club closures—loss of community facilities—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, under 118AA, question 1, supplementary 2 from Ms Morris, I do not believe that the answer was fully addressing—or, indeed, addressing—the question.

MR SPEAKER: I cannot recall what that was, and you have not really provided much more of an explanation. I will review the *Hansard* and I will get back to you.

Climate change—ACT greenhouse gas emissions inventory report

MS ORR: On a matter arising from yesterday's question time and Mr Rattenbury's and Ms Clay's questions on reporting and statutory timeframes. I have some further information that I think will be helpful to informing the answer to those questions. A range of reports were put forward. On the minister's annual report—this is on climate change—the minister must present the report to the Legislative Assembly within six months after the end of the financial year. That would be 31 December this year. This is a legislative requirement under section 15 of the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010. That deadline has not been passed, being 31 December, and, as I have previously said, that report will be tabled in this sitting.

On the Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report, the requirements there are that the independent entity is required to provide the ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report within three months after the end of the reporting period for a financial year. The reporting period is defined as two years after the end of that financial year. The minister must present the report to the Legislative Assembly within 21 days after receiving the report from the independent entity. The Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 2024-25 is due on 30 September 2027. That is the submission from the independent entity. The minister received the report on 27 November this year, 2025. The presentation of the Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report for 2024-25 is due to be tabled in the Assembly by 18 December 2025. That is all covered by section 12 of the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act. As those dates have either been met or not passed, the final one, which is the tabling, will occur in this sitting, which is before the 18 December deadline.

There is a statement if targets for a financial year are not met. The minister must present a statement to the Legislative Assembly within six days after receiving the Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report for the financial year. The date for six months after receiving it would be 5 February 2026, which is six sitting days from 27 November, which is when the minister—myself—received the Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report. That is covered by section 13 of the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act. I promise I will not keep people waiting until 5 February, and I will be tabling that also in this sitting.

I think there was a question about the *Close to the Edge* report. The introduction to the *Close to the Edge* report notes that the report is done under section 12.1(c). It is a special report, as described in section 21. Section 21 outlines what the report covers and the ways it can be done. There are two ways. One is that a minister directs the commissioner to conduct an investigation—that is 21.1(a); and 21.1(b) is that the commissioner initiates and conducts an investigation. The requirements for both of those is that the commissioner must, under 21.1(c), prepare a special report on the investigation and, under 21.1(d), within 28 days after the date of completion of the report, give the report to the minister.

Sections 21.2, 21.3 and 21.4 go on to detail the requirements under section 21.1(a), which is if the minister has directed. There are no further requirements under section 21 for reports done under section 21.1(b), which is if the commissioner instigates an investigation. However, section 22 does outline that the minister must table all reports and recommendations, including those initiated by the commissioner, within six sitting

days after the day of receiving that report, including a special report. I received the report instigated by the former commissioner on 29 April 2025 and I tabled the report on 15 May 2025.

On all the information and briefing provided to me, and hopefully with that level of detail, it is my understanding that there has been no missing of statutory deadlines.

Property developers—regulations

MR STEEL: Earlier in question time I was asked about whether big and small developers are leaving town regarding an answer that I provided in an Assembly committee hearing. I have checked the *Hansard* and, in relation to a question asked of me by Ms Castley as to whether big and small developers are leaving town, I said, "I do not see that. I do not agree with the premise of the question." That is why I also did not agree with the premise of Ms Morris's question to me in question time today. What I also went on to say was: "I have heard that some developers are not willing to work here under property developer licensing and, quite frankly, if dodgy developers leave the territory that is a good thing."

Papers

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

> Commonwealth funding improvement—Assembly resolution of 3 September 2025—Government response, dated December 2025.

Juries (Peremptory Challenges) Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Werner-Gibbings, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (3.18): I move:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to introduce a bill to amend the Juries Act 1967 regarding peremptory challenges. This bill reduces the number of peremptory challenges available to the prosecutions and the defences in ACT jury trials. The amendment will improve both the representativeness of jurors in the ACT and the efficiencies of the court system—in the latter respect by finding some savings of time and money within the system itself and for all those who participate in it. In essence, this bill will reduce the number of peremptory challenges in the ACT from eight to four for juries of 12 people and decrease by four the number of peremptory challenges for juries of other sizes. That is the "what"; I will now canvass the "why".

The jury selection process in the ACT and throughout Australia makes two classes of challenge available to parties in a jury trial: challenges for cause and peremptory challenges. A challenge for cause requires the party challenging a potential juror to

provide a justifiable reason for the challenge. No Australian jurisdiction has numerical limits on challenges for cause. However, these challenges are limited in practice, because the challenging party must justify their challenge and then provide evidence for it if required. This bill does not impact the number of challenges for cause in the ACT. Indeed, to ensure a fair trial for the accused, it is essential that the entitlement to an unlimited number of challenges for cause remains.

The other class of challenge, and that to which this bill refers, is a peremptory challenge, where one party refuses to allow a potential juror to sit on a jury without giving any reason or cause. It is important to note that parties in a jury process possess little, if any, information about the trial's potential jurors. So lawyers who are trying to craft a jury whom they think will be the most receptive to their case at the trial make assumptions about how people with certain observable characteristics will make decisions. Thus, peremptory challenges are based on these observable characteristics, such as apparent age, ethnicity, gender or physical disability.

Excluding potential jurors for any of the characteristics I have cited generally serves to reduce the diversity and representativeness of juries as well as undermine the impartial nature of the randomised jury selection process. For example, it is often felt that women are more likely to be sympathetic to the victim of a sexual assault than men. From the anecdotal discussions I have had with some ACT court system participants this year, I have concluded that women are far more likely to be challenged peremptorily and excluded from serving on juries for a sexual assault trial in our jurisdiction. This is a common-sense conclusion, but not an authoritative one. Studies on jury selection have not yet been carried out in the ACT. However, a 2018-2019 study on Victorian jury trials found that 70 per cent of peremptory challenges were made against women. Thus, Victorian juries had a lower proportion of women than in the general community.

Juries should contain a cross-section of our community, ensuring that legal decisions are made by a group representative of society's diverse perspectives. Excluding potential jurors purely based on observable characteristics leads to jurors being less diverse than the general population, and this is inherently unfair. It also weakens the assumption we all rely on: that our juries represent our views as lay members of our community. Reducing the number of peremptory challenges available in jury selection will lead to more representative juries. That is not just the right thing to do; it is also the fiscally and temporally responsible thing to do—that is, this bill will save both time and money for all involved.

High numbers of peremptory challenges prolong the jury empanelment process. This can cause unnecessary stress for potential jurors as well as cause delays to criminal proceedings, negatively impacting the accused, victims and witnesses. It can also increase administrative costs for the court and the prosecution, as well as increase legal fees for the accused, which in some cases are borne by Legal Aid. At the 2009 trial of Abdul Benbrika and his associates, over 2,000 citizens had to be summoned to empanel one jury and over 1,000 had to attend court over two days for the empanelment process. This is not a typical example, but it does throw stark relief on the fact that trials can cost thousands of dollars per hour. So any saving in time is also a saving in funds.

Furthermore, empanelling many potential jurors is a substantial financial cost to the employers of the potential jurors and the jurors themselves if they are self-employed.

The number of peremptory challenges available to the defence and prosecution varies across Australian jurisdictions. In the ACT, the defence and prosecution are currently entitled to eight peremptory challenges to potential jurors each—which, along with Queensland, is the highest number in Australia. In the ACT, where there are multiple accused being tried together, there are eight peremptory challenges allowed per accused person.

Reducing the number of peremptory challenges would bring the ACT closer to other Australian jurisdictions. In Tasmania and the Northern Territory, the number of peremptory challenges is six, except for serious offences such as murder in the Northern Territory, when it is 12. In New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, the number of peremptory challenges permitted is three. Some overseas jurisdictions, such as the United Kingdom in 1998 and Canada in 2019, have abolished peremptory challenges altogether. However, that is not proposed for the ACT in this bill.

The Federal Court of Australia permits four peremptory challenges for each party to its jury trials, a sensible number that this bill would replicate for the ACT. This is because there may be circumstances in which the behaviour of potential jurors, rather than their observable characteristics, may concern the defence or prosecution. A potential juror glaring at the accused, for example, or reacting strongly to the nature of the charges or behaving in a flippant manner might be behaviours that suggest a potential bias but may not meet the standard of proof required in a challenge for cause. The parties should have the right to challenge a potential juror demonstrating such behaviours without needing to prove unequivocally that the potential juror held a bias.

Mr Speaker, I submit to you and our colleagues that this bill improves the peremptory challenge system in the ACT without abolishing it and will result in a fairer, more representative and less costly justice system. I look forward to the Juries (Peremptory Challenges) Amendment Bill 2025 going through the committee and scrutiny process. With that, I accordingly commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Cost-of-living—taxation

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.27): In conjunction with Mr Cocks, I move:

> That this Assembly:
>
> (1) notes that:
>
> (a) independent data has confirmed Canberra is one of the most expensive cities in Australia;
>
> (b) the compounding impact of rapid increases in essential costs, including housing, energy, insurance, transport and groceries, are disproportionately affecting young families, those on fixed incomes and retirees; and
>
> (c) despite these external pressures, the Government has allowed own-source taxes and charges, including rates, vehicle registration, parking

fees, and utility levies, to rise faster than inflation and wage growth;

(2) further notes that:

(a) the Territory's cost of living crisis is exacerbated by a hostile environment for small business, where high taxes and excessive regulation stifle competition and pass costs on to the consumer; and

(b) housing affordability and a competitive economy are essential to retaining skilled workers, supporting the private sector and ensuring Canberra remains a city of opportunity rather than a city of debt; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) recognise the cost of living crisis in the ACT has not ended;

(b) implement an immediate cost of living cap that ensures no government fees or charges grow by more than the wage price index;

(c) review the tax burden on small and medium businesses, including payroll tax thresholds and commercial rates, to foster competition and lower prices for consumers;

(d) establish a compliance burden taskforce aimed at removing regulatory barriers and costs in the ACT; and

(e) report back to the Assembly on 3(b), (c) and (d) on 10 June 2026.

We spend so much of our time in this chamber talking about things that are of very little interest or concern to the vast majority of our constituents. I am still amazed by the amount of time that we spend talking about ourselves or having deep ideological debates about matters which, by and large, rest with the federal government or even with international jurisdictions. When you pick up the hard copy *Hansard* books, which are scattered in offices around this place, if you randomly skip to any page, you are likely to land on an earnest debate about some high-flung issue that has no relevance to the people out there in the suburbs.

I spoke by leave as the new leader of the Canberra Liberals yesterday, and I made it clear that I was here to reclaim Canberra for suburban Canberrans. This motion is certainly about that. If you knock on as many doors as Mr Cain and I do, you very quickly realise that the people in the suburbs are not stressing about most of the things that fill those *Hansard* books; the biggest thing that is giving them grief is actually paying the bills.

They call us an affluent city, but I have got to tell you that it is difficult to use that as a response to people who talk to you with tears in their eyes about the potential of defaulting on their mortgage or the ones who are not sure how they are going to pay the rent. We are doing this motion today because this pain is real and, although there are many external factors which have led to this cost-of-living crisis, this government needs to own up to the role that it has played in getting us to this point and to genuinely consider its ability to ease some of those pressures.

I spoke to Monica down at Lanyon Marketplace a week before last. Monica has three kids—two teenage boys and an eight-year-old girl. She spoke to me about how she is dreading the school holidays. I said, "Come on; I have seen your kids. They are not much trouble." She said, "No, that is not the problem." She said that she and her partner have a mortgage on a house in Banks. They have been there for four years. It is a

struggle. As the months and years have gone by, their cost-of-living has risen at a time when she has lost working hours in her casual gig and her husband suffered a demotion. They are right up against it.

She said to me that, in the school holidays, her boys eat her out of house and home. She said, "It is not as if we can afford to take them to things that cost a lot of money outside of the home," and so they will spend much of the school holidays at home. She said—and I know every single parent in this place will understand—"I just cannot afford to spend an extra $200 plus a week for every week of the school holidays, because it is just crazy." She said that, whenever they get bored, they just come and open and the fridge. Ms Carrick knows exactly what I am talking about. I will tell you what she is going to do, and I reckon this is a genius idea. She is going to every day pack their lunch boxes the very same way that she would have if they were going to school. She is going to pack lunch and two snacks and leave it with them in the morning and say to them, "This is you for the day. This is what you are eating." I think it is a very smart idea.

This motion is for every Monica out there. This motion is for every Canberran who is actually struggling to make the sums add up. When we talk about making the sums add up, in answers to questions on notice earlier today, Mr Steel's answer regarding the increase in rates for some clubs is a fairyland answer. It is an answer which is attached to a specific regulation but it does not actually line up with the reality that is facing that club. So often in this place it is a fairyland situation that is presented by members, particularly of government, with regard the cost of living for individuals and families.

We are living in one of the most expensive cities in Australia. The compounding impact of rapid increases in essential costs are impacting young families and those on fixed incomes, including retirees. Despite that pressure, this government has allowed own sourced taxes and charges, including rates, vehicle registration, parking fees and utility levies, to rise faster than inflation and wage growth. This motion says that it is time for that to stop.

The territory's cost-of-living crisis is exacerbated by a hostile environment for small business. We are seeing high taxes and excessive regulation that stifles competition, and the costs are being passed onto consumers. Housing affordability and a competitive economy are essential to retaining skilled workers, supporting the private sector and ensuring that Canberra remains a city of opportunity—and that is not what we are seeing at the moment.

Very simply, this motion calls on the government, in the first instance, to acknowledge and recognise that the cost-of-living crisis in the ACT has not ended—because there have been some utterances from members of this government that that is not the case; to implement an immediate cost-of-living cap that ensures no government fees or charges grow by more than the wage price index—and we do not think that is unreasonable; to review the tax burden on small and medium businesses, including payroll tax thresholds and commercial rates; and to establish a compliance burden task force aimed at removing regulatory barriers and costs in the ACT. It should be a no-brainer in the circumstances in which we are existing in this city. I certainly commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.33): As the Leader of Opposition has pointed out, we

are essentially living in a city of two realities. There is the reality inside this building, where the Treasurer and the Chief Minister tell us that the budget is responsible, resilient and prudent—they sing their own praises and they claim that the economy is strong—and then there is the reality in the suburbs, in our community, in supermarkets and in small businesses, which are all trying to keep the lights on. Out there, things are not quite the rosy picture that the government likes to paint.

I expect that the Treasurer will do what he always does: he will claim that, if you do not agree with him, you are busy talking down Canberra. He made the claim yesterday, and I would be very surprised if he does not do it again today. But here is the thing, and I have said it before: if you cannot acknowledge a problem, you cannot fix it. No matter the great things Canberra and Canberrans have going for them, there are problems and the government must face up to them.

The Canberra Liberals are moving this motion today because the gap between the government's reality and the lived experience of Canberrans has never been wider, and because the government strategy for closing their budget gap seems to be to tax Canberrans until they cannot afford to complain, at the same time as they are pushing up operating and compliance costs for businesses, forcing them to pass on higher costs, face closure or face the prospect of leaving town.

Canberra is one of the most expensive cities on the face of the earth. That is not just a figure of speech; it is a data point. According to one cost-of-living index—and I know that the government does not like it—Canberra was ranked the most expensive city in the country and the 12th most expensive city in the world. On the numbers, that means it is more expensive to live in Canberra than it is to live in London. It is more expensive than Paris and it is more expensive than Tokyo. If you do not like the index source, let's look at some of the data—the individual costs that are making life harder in Canberra.

Let's start with housing because everyone knows that is a massive part of the problem. Look at mortgages. Roy Morgan Research data is pretty alarming. It shows that nearly 30 per cent of mortgage holders in the ACT are considered at risk of mortgage stress. That means that almost one in three families in this city are lying awake at night, wondering if they can hold onto the family home—that is if they are fortunate enough to have been in a position to buy a home in the first place. If you are locked out of the housing market and rent, then you clearly know that the cost of rent is ridiculous in Canberra, as is what you get for your money. You only have to stand in line to inspect a small mouldy townhouse in Woden that costs $650 per week, to try to get in, along with a whole queue of other people, to understand that.

It is not good enough to rely on: "Well, it's bad everywhere." Clearly, things are bad here, and the government needs to face up to the fact. The data supports it. We know from the SGS Economics and Planning Rental Affordability Index recently released that, for low-income earners, pensioners and students, Canberra is classified as extremely to severely unaffordable. Some agencies are even bringing in new ratings on these scales, and Canberra seems to be on the path to being impossibly unaffordable. We have seen rents stabilise slightly in the last quarter, but years of double-digit growth has reset the baseline to an agonisingly high level. The average rent for a house in Canberra remains the second-highest in the country, only behind Sydney. Money that goes to rent cannot be spent at local businesses, cannot be spent on buying groceries

and cannot be saved for a deposit on a house. Every cent that is spent on unnecessarily high rents is gone.

On energy costs, the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, the ICRC, approved massive price increases for ActewAGL. The standing offer price was approved to increase by 12.75 per cent last financial year and 10.75 per cent this year. No-one's income is going up by that much, and we already have high electricity prices. When a family's power bill jumps by hundreds of dollars a year, that is not just an inconvenience; that is also a cut to the grocery budget. As well, sports for kids are cancelled and the heater is turned off in the middle of a Canberra winter.

I expect the government, whether it is the Treasurer, the Chief Minister or someone else—and it is has already been planned—will try to suggest that Canberra, somehow comparatively, is not so bad. I expect the Treasurer will stand up and blame global headwinds. He might blame COVID; he will probably blame Mr Fluffy; he will blame supply chains. He will blame pretty much anyone but himself and his government. But the excuses wear thin when you look at the costs that this government controls.

What we see in the ACT is a government that are not fighting inflation; they are fuelling it. They look at the inflation rate and they decide they might go a bit higher. That is what they have done with the Safer Families Levy; they have done it with the Police, Fire and Emergency Services Levy; and they introduced a brand-new levy for health. Every fee and charge across the board seems to have gone up by the Wage Price Index, plus a bit, because the government's budget seems to have been doing it a bit tough. It is a deliberate fiscal strategy. The government use the Wage Price Index, not as a limit, recognising that people's incomes are going up at that speed, but as a minimum target. If they see wages go up by 3½ per cent, they think, "Great. That's 3½ per cent more that we can take." But that wage rise has been eaten up by the 12 per cent electricity hike, the five per cent insurance hike and the 20 per cent jump in grocery prices. By the time the ACT government take their cut, families and individuals are going backwards.

It is not just about numbers on a spreadsheet; it is about the human impact. As Mr Parton has already outlined, it is about the young couple from Stirling, who both work full-time in good public service jobs, and on paper they should be fine, but they are still renting because, every time they save a deposit, the goalposts shift. They are delaying having children because they do not see how, if they manage to buy a house, they can afford child care, rent, rates, groceries and electricity. They are delaying having a family because the cost-of-living crisis is holding them back.

It is about the pensioner in Curtin, and so many like her, who has lived in her house for decades. She owns it, but her rates bill has skyrocketed. She is asset rich but cash poor, and she has faced a tough choice throughout winter—whether to turn on the heater or not. On the coldest nights this year, she has had to face that choice, knowing that it will cost her. She has had to make choices as to whether she buys her pharmaceuticals or puts some groceries back on the shelf. It is about the mother in Pearce struggling to afford her phone bill or the family in Garran, who two years after buying their dream home, had to sell it. There is a real human impact to the choices that the government make. I am sure that they will say that there are choices that people across Canberra can make too. They will offer policy solutions, but their policy solutions have not fixed the problem. Indeed, many of the policy solutions that they propose have made things

worse.

We cannot talk about the cost-of-living crisis without talking about the impact of the government's hostile business environment, because "hard for business" means "expensive for Canberra". In anticipation of part of the amendment circulated by Mr Rattenbury, the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index shows our neighbours in New Zealand are ranked first in the world, while Australia sits at 14th. We do not know exactly where Canberra sits in that data, but I can tell you what business owners are telling me. Every business owner I speak to—builders, cafe owners and retailers—all say the same thing: Canberra is the hardest place in Australia to get anything done.

The Treasurer clearly does not get the impact of the government's decisions. In fact, he seems to struggle even with the maths of it. Just yesterday, for example, the Treasurer tried to suggest that small businesses would pay less under the government's changes to payroll tax. By the Treasurer's logic, because they not only broadened the base but also lowered the rate of payroll tax, small businesses would be paying less. But, if you do the sums, a whole pile of businesses with a payroll that was previously under the old threshold are now captured by the new threshold. They have copped a tax hit; they are not paying less. In fact, any business captured by the new threshold that has a payroll of less than $18 million pays more. Eighteen million dollars in payroll is the point at which things switch over and some businesses will pay less. We all know that the payroll tax changes that they have brought in are a tax on jobs. They are a handbrake on growth.

We have a planning system that adds months, sometimes years, to simple projects. There are astoundingly long approval processes that will not be relieved by anything that the government are doing in this place today. And that is all before you get to the burden of the cost of compliance that is borne by Canberra businesses. For years, we have been fighting to try to get the government to even measure the regulatory burden, but they are more interested in what they call regulatory "value". I can only assume that is because they know that the cost is so expensive.

They had a so-called Better Regulation Taskforce, but that process did not get us to a fix either. There is all of the complexity surrounding the government's centralised long-service scheme and all of the complexity involved every time a business has to engage with the government. Every step that adds to the cost for the business and to the rent of the shop is ultimately added to the cost of everything that is paid by people.

That is why we have set out a roadmap towards relief and reform. If the government are in as prudent a position as they claim, we believe the government should be able to cap their fees and charges. They should be able to constrain the amount they charge Canberrans—who are already struggling with the cost of living—to wage growth. We are calling for a review of the burden on small businesses, and we are calling for a compliance burden taskforce. We need to slash the cost of doing business in the ACT. We have to protect businesses and the people who have set up in Canberra and are doing great things in Canberra—people who are investing their livelihoods to deliver services to Canberrans; people who have chosen to put their lives on the line to deliver what everyday Canberrans need, and they are too often being hit by higher costs to do so.

Canberrans are exhausted by the cost of living, they are exhausted by prices, they are

exhausted by the struggle, and they are exhausted by a government that refuses to take responsibility for its own role in the crisis. It is a government that hikes rates and hikes fees and allows electricity prices to skyrocket. This motion is about competence, compassion and economic reality. It is time to get the costs back under control and give Canberrans a break. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.47): I rise today to talk to the motion brought forward by Mr Parton and Mr Cocks about the cost of living, which is something the government takes very seriously and has been working very diligently on to ensure appropriate supports and concessions are in place to support the most vulnerable people in the community.

The ACT has very effective mechanisms to help Canberrans with the cost of living through a diligent and important concessions regime for government fees and charges. Most concessions in the ACT are means-tested to ensure that they support the people who need them most, meaning many of the most vulnerable in our community, especially those on fixed incomes, are supported through cheaper or, in many instances, entirely free services. We do this mostly by supporting Canberrans with federally issued concession cards linked to commonwealth income support—through the Low Income Health Care Card or the Pensioner Concession Card, for example. Indeed, the 2025-26 budget identifies over $150 million of cost-of-living support.

We have made permanent the increase to the electricity, gas and water rebate, up to $800 for 41,000 Canberra households. We provided a further $250 cost-of-living payment to apprentices, with a further $250 for first-year apprentices. We expanded the Future of Education Equity Fund to support more Canberra students and their families with the cost of living. We provided a free school camp at Birrigai for public school students. We provided a registration fee reduction for caravans and trailers. We have increased stamp duty concessions for first-home buyers, pensioners and people with disability. This builds on the existing and wide range of extensive rebates, concessions and subsidies that we provide to low-income Canberrans.

We have the pensioner general rates rebate of 50 per cent, up to $750, and the Police, Fire and Emergency Services Levy rebate for pensioners of $115. We have subsidies to help purchase over 9,000 pairs of glasses for vulnerable members of the community. We have the Taxi Subsidy Scheme that provides 132,600 trips for people living with a disability or significant mobility restriction. We provide up to a 100 per cent discount on motor vehicle registration for eligible Canberrans, representing over 70,000 vehicles, and concessions for driver licences. We have also reduced or provided free fares on public transport for seniors and pensioners.

There are more right across government and those delivered in addition by the federal Labor government, like successive rounds of energy bill relief, tax cuts for all Australians and 20 per cent cuts to student debt, many of which those opposite and their friends in the federal coalition club have opposed, rejected or otherwise not supported.

It is always the government's intention to keep all taxes, fees and charges as low as possible. Over the last five years, the government has made deliberate and conscious decisions to defer, pause or stop increases to charges while the community responded

to the pandemic and dealt with the inflationary period that followed. Our intention is always for changes the government makes to taxes, fees and charges to be about managing the cost of delivering those services. The government has been managing those costs. However, those costs must be balanced with raising sufficient revenue to fund the high-quality services that Canberrans expect, including the delivery of free public healthcare services, which are relied on by many vulnerable members of the community but are paid for by all of us.

Because of deliberate actions by this government, supported by our agenda to diversify the economy, deliver more housing, support more renters into the rental market and embrace renewable energy, Canberrans benefit from some of the lowest energy prices in the country, with the average ACT household paying less for electricity on the standing offer than South Australians, New South Welshmen and Welshwomen, and Queenslanders.

Our efforts to support more housing means the ACT is becoming more affordable to buy a home or rent. Our rental protections mean that Canberrans do not face the same massive rent hikes experienced in other states or territories. Real wages continue to grow in the ACT, with some of the highest growth in the country, and Canberran households have the highest disposable income in the country.

The government acknowledges the impact that has been felt by the community and businesses over many years. I do not pretend, nor does the government, that the past few years have been easy. There are challenges and the cost-of-living impacts are real, and they have been felt by many vulnerable Canberrans. It is, however, a fantasy to pretend that the government has not been supporting families and businesses and that this has not come at a cost to the budget. The reality is that our government has provided significant support to businesses, the community and our most vulnerable people year after year.

We have lowered the rate of payroll tax for businesses with a total payroll tax of less than $20 million. We still have a very high payroll tax threshold before businesses pay, compared to other jurisdictions, and, despite what those opposite say about what I have said in response to questions in question time, it is a fact that business with a payroll of less than $4 million pay less payroll tax in the ACT than in New South Wales. That is exactly what I said in the answer, not what Mr Cocks claimed in his speech. They do not pay any conveyance duty at all when purchasing a property up to $2 million—increased from $1.9 million from 1 July this year—and they pay no duty on their insurance. We abolished insurance duties as part of tax reform, which everyone paid when they were taking out an insurance policy.

To continue to provide more support to Canberrans, we must have a sustainable budget. We must have a sustainable budget to support every Canberran when they present at the emergency department, call an ambulance or go to high-quality public high schools.

It is disappointing that Mr Parton, in one of his first social media posts as leader, has conflated the ACT government budget with the ACT economy. It is important that he knows the difference. In his first speech to the parliament, he seems to have created a brand new number based in truthiness that the ACT government somehow owes $29 billion, which is not the case. Net debt is about half of that. This number seems to

be a complete fiction or a demonstration that Mr Parton cannot read the consolidated financial statements. It is just like Mr Parton's argument that a fifth of all revenue goes to paying debt. It is another complete fiction—cherrypicking from the budget papers, which is the Liberal's favourite pastime.

I will continue to make the point in the chamber every time that we have a debate such as this. There is a role for every single member of this Assembly in addressing our fiscal challenges. The chamber cannot oppose and curtail every revenue measure, call on the government to continue to spend more and more, oppose sensible expenditure reductions and reprioritisation by the executive, and then credibly argue that the government is not effectively managing the budget.

I can anticipate that we will be supporting the amendments that will be moved by the Greens later in the debate. They provide some sensible clarity to both the noting section of this motion and in relation to the calls-on the section. This is something the government considers every single budget: how we support Canberrans who need help the most, but also how we can deliver the services that Canberrans rely on, including many of the same vulnerable Canberrans who need access to free healthcare services, free public schools and a range of other critical services that the government provides.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.55): I welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters today. Mr Parton and Mr Cocks are certainly right to raise the issue of the cost of living. Many people are continuing to do it tough and find that costs, particularly for housing, are increasingly unaffordable, so much so that Australian housing markets frequently top global indices as the least affordable. This leaves less money available for essentials and, frankly, the small treats in life. That is the reality that many Canberrans continue to face.

In the opening paragraphs of their motion, Mr Cocks and Mr Parton identify a number of the key areas. I have spoken about housing already, and I think there are some big-picture discussions we need to have, many of which sit beyond the remit of the ACT Assembly, as to how we deal with the issue of increasing housing costs. Tax reform at a national level is one the Greens continue to flag. We cannot effect it in this place, but it is something we can advocate for from this place.

In paragraph 1(b) is a discussion about other key areas. When it comes to energy, in the Greens' time in government we made some important contributions to tackling the cost of energy in this city, such as moving to a supplier of renewables, which are well-insulated against energy price rises and are not subject to the global vagaries that we saw arise at the beginning of the Ukraine war and pushed up fossil fuel prices enormously. We have started to phase out what is increasingly expensive fossil fuel gas here in the ACT and are moving to what we know is a lower cost option for Canberrans, which is to have an electric household. Clearly, measures to improve insulation have been important in helping people to manage their energy bills.

Insurance is flagged in the motion. There was fascinating evidence when we had the economics committee's inquiry into insurance issues in the ACT. Insurers advised us that extreme weather events that driven by climate charge are a key source of pushing up their premiums across the world. I also suspect that there are some very generous profits built in, but they certainly flagged that extreme weather events that are driven

by climate change are an important factor in driving up insurance premiums.

Mr Cocks and Mr Parton also raised a number of other important issues, including transport. They made some important points around the cohorts of people impacted, particularly those on fixed incomes. I would add people on a range of government benefits—the disability pension and a range of others. What we see and clearly understand in this place is the two-speed nature of a city like this, where we have plenty of people whose incomes are quite healthy and they have a very good life, and at the other end of the spectrum we have people who are genuinely struggling. The motion speaks to some of those cohorts. It is really important that we think about those issues as well.

When it comes to groceries, my federal Greens colleagues—particularly Greens Senator Nick McKim—have led recent inquiries into Australian grocery prices. The Coles-Woolworths duopoly means we lack the competition seen in other developed markets which would help bring down the cost of filling your trolley. We need to see action at the federal level and at the territory level to ensure that the ACT benefits from any new players in the Australian grocery market. That is not an easy problem to fix, but it is an area in which we have to make determined decisions and then move forward. I spoke about some of the cohorts. We must remain very conscious of that as we have these sorts of conversations.

In paragraph 3, where the motion starts to talk about the calls on the government, it firstly calls on the government to recognise that the cost-of-living crisis in the ACT has not ended. There is no dispute about that. So many in this town are struggling. We need to do what we can in the many acts of balance that we try to do, with the many policy considerations and competing pressures, to ensure that we continue to find ways to help people with the cost-of-living crisis.

The motion talks about business regulation. The Greens certainly hear from business about some of the same themes picked up by Mr Parton and Mr Cocks's original motion. We do not think that the government is hostile to business, but we believe that there is a failure to understand that the cost of poor business regulation and the compliance burden add up, and that the government needs to make a concerted effort to ensure that regulation is as streamlined as possible.

We should not aspire to be the lowest taxing jurisdiction in Australia, because to do that would mean we would have to cut essential services, but we can aspire to making doing business here as simple as possible. So much of that could be fixed by a taskforce that would look at the process of regulatory compliance and the experience of business as to how rules are enforced. We know there have been some efforts by government to improve certain parts of business regulation through the Better Regulation Taskforce, but we also know there is plenty more to do. There are many more opportunities and much we can learn from better regulation efforts elsewhere in Australia and around the world.

That is why, in the amendment that I have circulated and will move shortly, we talk about the Ease of Doing Business Index. We do not have to look very far for some ideas, as the motion notes. Our Kiwi cousins across the ditch have consistently topped the World Bank's annual Ease of Doing Business Index, while Australia is ranked 14th.

That scoring is done on the basis of the performance of our biggest cities, so we do not really know where Canberra would stand. This index looks at a range of issues, including the ease of starting a business, the complexity associated with construction permits and development applications, the ease of registering property, the ease of getting credit, the ease of paying tax, the ease of trading internationally, and the enforcement of contracts. There is a whole range of measures, some of which sit in the ACT's remit and some do not.

If we made all these things and, no doubt, others easier here than elsewhere in Australia, it would help to make us a more attractive place for business to succeed and we would start to garner the attention of both interstate and international investors. This sort of growth not only creates employment and economic opportunities in our city but also drives government revenue, when there is a range of more successful businesses operating in the jurisdiction. That is a particular factor that I put in my amendment. That is probably the main substantive point.

The others are a slightly different view on how we might express it, and there are some changes to the calls, but, overall, we support the intent of the motion and trust that the amendments are seen to be an "and" exercise rather than a "but" exercise. I seek leave to move together the amendments circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move the following amendments together:

1. In paragraph (1)(b), omit "families", substitute "people".
2. Omit paragraph (1)(c), substitute:

   "(c) due to the fiscal situation, the ACT Government has allowed own-source taxes and charges, including rates, certain vehicle registration charges, parking fees, and utility levies, to rise faster than inflation and wage growth;".
3. Omit paragraph (2)(a), substitute:

   "(a) that the Territory's cost of living crisis may be exacerbated by poor business regulation and excessive compliance burdens, reducing competition and resulting in. higher costs to consumers;".
4. After paragraph (2)(a), insert:

   "(b) while Australia ranked 14th globally (New Zealand was 1st) in the World Bank's 2025 Ease of Doing Business index, there is no data on where Canberra stacks up;".
5. Omit paragraph (3)(b), substitute:

   "(b) ensure that so far as is possible, ACT Government fees and charges do not push up the cost of living beyond the wage price index for vulnerable groups;".
6. Omit paragraph (3)(d), substitute:

   "(d) establish a compliance burden and regulatory enforcement taskforce aimed at removing unnecessary and cumbersome regulatory barriers and costs in the ACT, making doing business as simple as possible;".

7. After paragraph (3)(d), insert:

   "(e) investigate the ACT undertaking a regional World Bank Ease of Doing Business assessment to identify barriers to business success and growth; and".

8. In paragraph (3)(e), omit "items (3)(b), (c) and (d)", substitute: "items 3(b) to (e)".

With all of that, I hope members from across the chamber can get behind my amendments and we can make a concerted effort to think about some of these issues, move forward and work to implement changes that can improve the situation for Canberrans across the board. I thank Mr Parton, Mr Cocks, Mr Steel and their offices for their constructive engagement on this motion. I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.04): On the amendments, I would like to thank Mr Rattenbury and his team for their constructive engagement around this issue. It was not necessarily an area on which we thought we would find an easy consensus—the level of regulation that businesses in the ACT have to engage in. I think it is a testament exactly to the degree of impact that businesses are feeling that they are reaching out to all representatives to express how difficult it has become in the ACT, not only to operate but with the hope of thriving as a business. It has been a very productive process, and I am grateful to the Greens for engaging in the way they have.

I want to express one note of caution. I considered moving an amendment around the cap. A change in one of the amendments removes any reference to capping government fees to the wage price index. Indeed, the amendment proposed today takes out a lot of the power of requiring a cap; instead, it seeks simply to "ensure that so far as is possible, ACT government fees and charges do not push up the cost of living beyond the wage price index for vulnerable groups".

I think it is admirable that the Greens have tried to achieve consensus. I understand that it is important to the government as well to have that degree of flexibility. However, "so far as is possible" provides a lot of wriggle room for a government that does not have a great track record when it comes to sticking to the ambition that is outlined in many of these motions.

With that said, we will not be opposing the amendments because the intent is correct. Every piece of the amendments is well aligned with the heart of exactly where we were going, as the Canberra Liberals, in noting the extensive impact on businesses, including small businesses, and in noting international indices.

I would like to take a moment to mention the vulnerable groups aspect. While we would have liked to see a cap applied for all Canberrans, it is those people in Canberra who are vulnerable who bear the greatest burden when we see flat rate increases across the board. The lower your income, the greater the impact of a flat rate increase. So many of the changes that we have seen in the budget, the fee increases, do hit vulnerable Canberrans worse than they hit those who can afford it—those who are getting by just fine on their own.

I would like to thank the Greens for bringing the amendments. We will be supporting

them.

Amendments agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.08): It gives me some pleasure to note that this motion will be passed today. There are very important elements and actions involved in this motion. It is disappointing that the Treasurer has chosen to take a more combative line and seek to interpret creatively some of the debates that happened this week. Certainly, it is my recollection that, when we questioned the Treasurer's approach to payroll tax, and suggested that the cost would increase for small businesses, and asked how any reduction would be achieved, he said, "Because we reduce the rate." Reducing the rate was not enough to offset the increase caused by lowering the threshold.

It is disappointing that the Treasurer did not seem to understand where the number, $29 billion, came from. Of course, $29 billion was the figure provided to us by Treasury officials, who were sitting beside the Treasurer in annual reports hearings, as the total liabilities of the ACT. Twenty-nine billion dollars: it is not an insignificant amount. It is not the Treasurer's preferred number. It is not the net debt number. But it is an important number. Mr Deputy Speaker, you have to understand the total cumulative effect of all the government's decisions.

Of course, within that context, there is the astounding, rising range of interest expenses in the budget. It is clear from the numbers; it is in the report of the estimates committee that, by the end of the budget period, the cost of interest expenses will be one-quarter of ACT own-source revenue. It is a fact that, as of today, that number is one-fifth of own-source revenue.

The fastest growing item in the budget is interest. The response that we had from the government was to try and reassure Canberrans by saying, "Don't worry; we care about cost of living because we're spending more." You cannot alleviate and fix a cost-of-living crisis just by spending more and taxing more. It just drives a merry-go-round.

With all that said, though, I am glad to see that this will be passed, because it matters to people across Canberra. Whether you are a vulnerable person or whether you are getting by okay, we have all felt the cost-of-living crisis in our day-to-day lives, and nowhere more than in housing, as we have already discussed. I am hopeful that the steps outlined in this motion today will provide a better path than we have been seeing from the government so far.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Active travel infrastructure—Belconnen

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.12): I move:

> That this Assembly:
>
> (1) notes that:
>
> (a) the population of Belconnen is expected to grow to 128,000 people by 2041 with greater demand for new and updated active travel

infrastructure;

(b) transport makes up over 60 percent of the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions;

(c) on 27 October 2025, the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water announced that the ACT will not meet the 2025 legislated emissions reduction target and stated if we stay on our current trajectory, the ACT will struggle to achieve net zero by 2045;

(d) the Government's Active Travel Plan 2024-30 shows a future principal cycle route, completing the connection from Belconnen Town Centre to West Belconnen via Southern Cross Drive;

(e) the Government's Active Travel Planning tool notes a main future route completing the path along Belconnen Way, a new main future route on Kingsford Smith Drive and a principal future route on Coulter Drive;

(f) the Government has committed to build a separated cycle path along William Hovell Drive as part of the road duplication project in addition to the Belconnen bikeway;

(g) the Ginninderry development will build off-road path connections down Drake Brockman Drive towards the William Hovell Drive/Kingsford Smith roundabout;

(h) Ginninderry Riverview's West Belconnen Integrated Sustainable Transport Plan notes segregated on-road cycle path connections down Parkwood Road to Southern Cross Drive;

(i) the Government has agreed to investigate safer streets options across Canberra, including 30km/h speed limits; and

(j) a *Missing Trunk Path Connecting Belconnen-Kippax-Ginninderry (Completing Active Travel Requirements in West Belconnen)* community petition was tabled in the Assembly on 2 December 2025;

(2) further notes that on 3 September 2025, the Assembly agreed to a Greens motion for the Government to seek 50:50 Commonwealth funding on all ACT infrastructure projects where total project costs exceed $5 million;

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) conduct a feasibility study in consultation with targeted stakeholders - children and adults who can no longer drive, Belconnen Community Council, Pedal Power, SEE-Change, Canberra By Bike, and Living Streets Canberra - to deliver a complete active travel network between West Belconnen and Belconnen Town Centre based on the MIS-05 Active Travel Facilities Design; and

(b) table the feasibility study by the second last sitting day in 2026; and

(4) further calls on the Government to:

(a) consider what funds and work would be required to implement by 2030 the Government's Active Travel Plan 2024-30, and report how much funding has been allocated and spent per financial year in the City and Environment Directorate's annual reports; and

(b) report back to the Assembly on all sections in these calls by 27 May 2026.

I love to ride my bike. I have been riding around Canberra for the last couple of decades

and more, and I love to ride around for transport. I have ridden around in Tasmania; I have ridden around in places overseas, like Colorado and New Zealand, and I love to ride around in Canberra. It is a fun way to travel, it keeps you fit, and you do not even have to think about it. You do not need to take time out of your day to go to the gym; you just factor it in, and you are always getting that little bit of exercise that we need so much.

It is great for my brain. When I ride home, by the time I get home, I am in a good mood. That is great for me, and it is great for my family. It saves you money. You do not have to find extra money for petrol or for a second car. It is just a great way to get about.

A lot of people would like some of those benefits in Canberra, but a lot of people are finding that Canberra is not currently set up to help them ride, to help them thrive, particularly if they are new to it. When you have been doing it for two or three decades, maybe you will put up with just about anything. But if you are new to it or if you are the parent of a child and you are introducing them to this for the first time—maybe you have grown up in a country that did not have riding as a matter of course—you need a little bit more assistance.

When I am out in the community, not just Belconnen but all over Canberra, I hear from a lot of people who tell me they would really love to start riding a bike, but, ultimately, they do not. There are a lot of barriers to this. Amongst those barriers, they are worried about missing connections. They are worried about starting on a bike path that suddenly disappears. They are worried about incomplete paths and, in some cases, they are really worried about unsafe cycling infrastructure, or they are worried about riding on the roads or near cars.

When you put that together with our incredibly fast streets, you can understand that a lot of people do not feel safe to ride around Canberra. A lot of people do not feel safe, particularly, riding on roads, or riding in the on-road lanes on our roads. I have heard that from a lot of people. It is particularly the case for women, for children and for parents, when they are making decisions for their kids. But it is actually important for a lot of people, regardless of who they are. My male partner loves riding a bike. He hates riding on the roads. He will not do it. He needs a separated path.

People will not ride if they do not feel safe. If we want more people to use active transport, if we want all those city benefits of active transport—reducing congestion, reducing climate emissions, cleaning up the environment, improving public health and public mental health—we need to make sure that we are providing the minimum that people need to travel in safety and comfort.

When I am talking to people who do not ride or walk for transport, I often ask them to think about what their requirements for transport are. Canberrans typically have pretty high standards for transport. They expect convenience, they expect speed, they expect a direct route, they expect to be able to get on their vehicle, whether that is a bus, light rail or a personal car, and they expect it to go where they need to go and take them where they need to go. They expect all these things when they are not riding a bike. Those are actually the same expectations that people have when they are riding a bike.

Canberra is better with bikes. We need wide, connected footpaths, not paint lines next

to the road, and we need these so that everyone can use them. We want people to choose bike riding, walking, scooting and wheeling whenever they can. People want that choice, but the way we are currently designing our city means they do not have that choice.

The ACT government knows this, which is why they have a really great active travel plan. The ACT government has all these routes planned, but what we do not have is clarity on when we are going to deliver that. The plan is by 2030, but we do not know how we are going to get there by 2030.

The ACT Greens have been hearing from people all over Canberra who want to know when those pathways that are identified under this plan will be built. I am hearing about a lot of issues, particularly around west Belconnen. West Belconnen has a significantly growing population and, as more homes are being built in Ginninderry, we need to fill in the missing key active travel infrastructure that has been identified.

A lot of people in Belconnen say they want to walk or roll to their local shops for groceries, medical appointments, or just to feel safe for their kids to ride to and from school or around the neighbourhood. Most of the comments and questions I am hearing from the community when I am out and about relate to what is happening with the path identified on Southern Cross Drive, connecting Belconnen town centre to the Kippax shops, when the path along William Hovell will be extended on Kingsford Smith Drive, when Belconnen Way will be connected directly to the city in the inner north, and updates on how the William Hovell Drive path is tracking. There are a lot of specific paths that people want to see fixed or built, but these are some of the ones that keep coming up for us in Belconnen.

That is why I tabled the community petition yesterday, asking the ACT government to complete the missing pathway on Southern Cross Drive, connecting Kippax shops and the Belconnen town centre.

These are not new asks. The government has already committed to these under the government Active Travel Plan. We are not asking for a new commitment. We are simply trying to get clarity on when people can expect to see this work and when it will be delivered and completed.

I would like to note that, under Ginninderry's plans, there will be bike path connections down Drake-Brockman Drive to William Hovell Drive, and from north Ginninderry, to provide access along Parkwood Road, joining a short existing path to Kippax shops on Southern Cross Drive. That is great. That bit will already be done. We just need government to do the Kippax to Belconnen section.

The Greens appreciate that the ACT Labor government's budget is not in a great position at the moment. That is why I have made this motion quite simple and quite modest. I am asking for government to work with the community, the people who will benefit most from those pathways, and figure out what should be prioritised. I am asking for government to keep the community informed, to provide an update on how government will prioritise this ACT-wide plan and deliver the outcomes that Canberrans want and rightly expect to see, which government has already promised.

This motion will establish some transparency on exactly how much funding is spent to deliver on the plan each year. It is great to have a vision, but we need to see that vision delivered, if the community are going to get the benefits, and that is what we are calling for. We are calling for the ACT Labor government to get on with the work they said they would do, particularly in west Belconnen, where active travel paths are either missing or incomplete.

Weeks ago, the Labor climate minister said that the ACT will not meet its legislated emissions reduction target, and we are off track to achieve net zero by 2045. We have not seen the latest inventory; we are looking forward to seeing it when it is released. But we know from previous inventories that transport continues to be the ACT's biggest polluter. Transport is responsible for over 60 per cent of our climate pollution.

We are in a climate crisis. The world is facing more extreme and destructive climate events. We are facing rising sea levels. We need to take urgent action. Part of that is providing the community with the pathways and connections so that they can choose emissions-free, climate-safe, accessible, easy, active travel.

What we are often hearing with some of these big problems is governments putting the onus on individuals to change what they do. We often hear governments asking individuals to reduce their waste, to make climate-friendly choices, to make healthier choices for diets and lifestyles. We need our government to help us make those choices. We need the government to give us the tools. Building the paths, connections and infrastructure that people need and want will make it easier and safer for people to walk and ride all around Canberra. Build it, and they will come.

Canberra is largely a livable city, and there is a lot we can be proud of. But the 40,000 people who are living in west Belconnen have been missing out for a long time. They feel that their paths are long overdue. That is why one of the particular calls in the motion is for a feasibility study that is designed with the people who need to use those paths—kids, students, adults who cannot drive. The feasibility study is to make sure that we are getting that particular west Belconnen connection and that we are getting the right paths in the right spots. That is one of the calls that we have put in the motion that we are hoping will bring on that work a bit more quickly.

My colleague Mr Braddock will touch on some of the other safer streets measures which support pathways and which help people to choose active travel. I will just say that, when we do a whole lot of measures together, when we are creating slower streets and wide, accessible paths, when we are making a really friendly environment that people want to walk, ride and wheel around, people's lives will improve. Their physical health and mental wellbeing will improve, as they are being active. Parents will have confidence that their kids can walk or ride to school safely, and parents will avoid that awful stress of juggling school drop-offs with work and everything else they have in their lives. And we will be taking real climate action while we are doing it.

Active travel connections and paths also support the ACT government's Preventive Health Action Plan 2023-25, which points towards helping Canberrans to live more active lifestyles. That plan notes that four in 10 adults in the ACT are not meeting national physical guidelines and points to factors like computer-based jobs, the increased use of technology and screen time, and a heavy reliance on cars. Active travel

infrastructure supports a wide variety of lifestyles so that people can be more active, so that they can also use more public transport and, ultimately, so that they can reduce their reliance on cars, reduce their household costs, and increase and improve their climate action.

This motion today is really simple. It asks government to take the next logical steps on the government's plan that is a really good plan and that has been thoughtfully and well put together. This motion today could give us cleaner air and less pollution. It could give us, if it is done really well, more shade to cool down our suburbs over summer. It will certainly deliver massive quality-of-life benefits to households, including savings, and it gives people more choices. When there is a lack of choice, we often mistake that for demand for the other options, and I do not think that is the case in Canberra. It is time to give Canberrans more choices, and particularly to give people in west Belconnen more choices. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.23): I would like to begin by thanking Ms Clay for bringing forward this motion and highlighting the missing links in our active travel network in west Belconnen, between the Kippax shops and the Belconnen town centre. A physically separated path along Southern Cross Drive will make cycling and other active transport options safer, more attractive and accessible for everyone. But as was mentioned the other day when the petition was presented, this is not just an issue for Belconnen. We need safe and direct active travel routes between all our key centres. Canberra needs a comprehensive active travel network to promote the mode shift necessary to address traffic congestion, reduce traffic emissions and encourage healthy activity.

As Ms Clay identified, people will not ride if they do not feel safe. This is particularly an issue along the main arterial between the north and the south, between Woden and the city, where people are riding on the road with buses, trucks and cars travelling at 80 kilometres an hour. This corridor is also particularly relevant because it is facing up to a decade of traffic congestion due to the road, bridge and light rail construction works. A safe and direct active travel option on this route will provide an attractive alternative for those who wish to avoid years of congestion by changing how they travel. It is an old corridor. It has been there for more than 60 years. If the government are serious about active travel, it is concerning that they have not built a dedicated, safe cycleway on this major arterial.

I am concerned that we will miss the opportunity to achieve a significant mode shift on the Woden to Civic route if we do not provide a safe and direct cycle option while these construction works are ongoing. It is critical for the government to commence work on a protected active travel route along the full length of the Yarra Glen and Adelaide Avenue corridors, connecting Woden to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, to promote mode shift, ease congestion and reduce emissions.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.25): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion. I thank Ms Clay for bringing forward this motion, which calls on the government to deliver its Active Travel Plan. Whether you are walking to the local park, whether you are a student cycling to school or a retiree taking a stroll, active travel infrastructure is a key part of bringing our community together. A thriving city should provide multiple options for people to travel, and that includes roads, public transport,

community paths and cycle lanes. These are the basic essentials that a good government should be providing.

Throughout 2022-23, the government sought advice from the community about active travel infrastructure in the territory. In February last year, the former minister for city services announced the government's six-year Active Travel Plan. As noted in this motion, several key promises in this plan will add to the active travel network. For us, on this side of the chamber, this is a simple issue. The government made a commitment before the election; now they must work with the community to deliver it.

That said, it has been well over 18 months since the initial announcement. The community have yet to see a delivered plan from this government. It is concerning that it seems to require a motion brought to the chamber by Ms Clay to be passed in order for the government to deliver on its Active Travel Plan and its election promises. I certainly look forward to seeing what the government puts forward next year. and I am sure Canberra residents will look forward to seeing the government implement this Active Travel Plan. They will certainly be looking forward to being included in any consultation going forward.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.27): I want to thank Ms Clay for this motion today and her advocacy for improved active travel infrastructure, not only for her electorate but for the territory more broadly. It is also always a pleasure seeing Ms Clay's bike in the bike storage area. It is regularly there throughout the year, so she is certainly living up to what she is calling for here in the Assembly.

I want to focus my remarks during this debate on the call in this motion for the government to "consider what funds and work would be required to implement by 2030 the government's Active Travel Plan 2024-30". On 25 September, a couple of months ago, I brought a motion to the Assembly which contained similar calls. The calls in that motion included fully costing the delivery of all future network links identified in the cycling network map in the Active Travel Plan and publish an indicative timeline for the construction of these links, and fully costing the delivery of all potential future priorities identified in the cycling network map in the Active Travel Plan. This was among other calls.

The Greens were supportive of those calls, as was Ms Carrick, and I thank her for that. But the government and opposition worked together on amendments that removed the calls from the motion. I believe they were amendments that were actually drafted and moved by Mr Milligan, so I am quite confused by Mr Milligan's remarks this afternoon that the Canberra Liberals support the delivery of the Active Travel Plan, having voted against what I would describe as a stronger call on the government not just to consider what would be required to implement the plan, but to provide a costed plan for delivering on the plan, and an indicative timeline for doing so. I am genuinely confused by the position of the Canberra Liberals or why it has changed in the last two-and-a-bit months. But I am glad that it has; and, if that is the position moving forward, the Assembly will get an opportunity to vote on it and indicate that we do want to see this plan delivered.

That amended motion was ultimately passed. It was reduced from fully costing network links to providing a list of those network links, which is certainly less detailed than

costing them and providing an indicative timeline for delivering on them. That is what we will get today. In combination we will have, on the back of this, a list of all future network links in the Active Travel Plan and findings from the government's consideration of what funds and work would be required to implement its own Active Travel Plan.

I appreciate that Ms Clay has put forward a very modest call, and she has indicated that in her remarks. I can understand why. This gives us something, hopefully, to work from, when the government reports back in May. We will have the list of links from April.

I genuinely find it very confusing that we are having to do this. This is the government's own plan, the government's own policy. When the plan was released, back in February last year, Pedal Power ACT's then executive director Simon Copland said:

> The Plan claims to support numerous improvements we have been advocating for.

good news—

> Sadly, in practice, without targets, an implementation plan or allocated funding, this document is more a wish list than an actual plan.

It is a strange situation in which to find ourselves, having multiple members bringing forward motions asking effectively whether and when the government intends to implement a plan that it put 18 months into developing, and released 18 months ago. What we are really asking with these motions is, "Is this actually a plan or is it just a concept?" To borrow language from a witness who appeared last week before a social policy committee hearing on a separate matter, a plan without funding is not a plan; it is just an aspiration.

I will be curious to see—as I am sure Ms Clay will be, and it sounds like Mr Milligan will be as well—whether the active travel aspirations move any closer to becoming an actual Active Travel Plan in response to this motion, and whether considering what funds and work would be required to implement this plan equates to anything more than what was done before the plan was published. You would think, in publishing a plan, that you would consider what funds and work would be required to put that plan out.

Just to be clear, I am not criticising Ms Clay's choice of words; I am just saying that it is clearly the case across multiple different plans that we have seen discussed in this place that they are seemingly put out without due consideration of the funding and work required to implement them.

Ultimately, I am glad that this motion will pass today. I am hopeful that we might learn something from the government's consideration of what it would look like to implement the Active Travel Plan. I remain a bit disappointed that stronger calls in a motion from two months ago that would have required clear costings and an indicative construction timeline for this plan were apparently, at that time, too much to ask for.

Ultimately, again, I thank Ms Clay for bringing this motion forward and acknowledge that she has been advocating for more investment in active travel in this place for a long time before I have. I am glad to be able to work together and support this motion. I am

sure we will have more like it in the future. This is something that I think Canberrans really do want for our city. It requires a shift in mindset from all of us to invest not just in the city that we have and servicing the kind of city that we currently have, but the city that we want for the future, for future generations, for our children and for their children. I think we all agree that active travel should be a larger part of that future city than it is of the city that we have now.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.33): Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin had a vision for Canberra. It was a planned city with urban density surrounded by nature, drawing on the Garden City Principles. The original drawings from the design and for its implementation by the commonwealth are fascinating to look at. Some of the original drawings are held in the Assembly's collection and are currently on display in Mr Cocks' office. When you look at the designs, you get a sense of the clear and complete design for the early stages of Canberra's development.

But it was also designed to be added to by each generation. The Griffin Plan provided the strategy for coordinated growth, as opposed to development in a piecemeal fashion. You need to plan for your urban design to be complete and to plan for its completion, but of course city designs need to evolve for the future, and Canberra most certainly has been growing. A very significant gap emerged as Canberra sprawled beyond what we would now call the Inner North and the Inner South. To me, it represents a significant flaw of Canberra's design in the post-development work in the post-Griffin era.

Canberra sprawled with a mindset that the private motor vehicle was the main mode of transportation. This came at the detriment of other modes of travel. It left us with a disjointed series of routes and connections for anything other than cars and trucks. Where active travel infrastructure is installed, it is almost always done in conjunction with a road project nowadays. So the bike path typically ends where that road project ends, sometimes suddenly and abruptly. It is particularly prevalent in Belconnen, hence Ms Clay's motion today, and I would like to thank her for bringing that forward.

Over the past five years I have been in the Assembly, I can reflect that getting the ACT government to think about active travel projects in any terms other than alongside road and other infrastructure development projects has been like pulling teeth. The government has been incapable and seemingly unwilling to identify how much it actually invests in active travel as distinct from roads. It makes it very hard, therefore, to assess how the ACT performs against the internationally recognised optimal benchmark of putting at least 20 per cent of your roads budget to active travel works. And for the record, road shoulder rated to carry 42-tonne trucks is way over-engineered and over-expensive to carry a 100-kilogram cyclist and their bike.

There are, of course, exceptions. The Garden City Cycleway stands out, but these are the exceptions, not the rule. The cycle path connection along William Hovell Drive is only being progressed because William Hovell Drive is being duplicated. And the extension to Bindubi Street looks like it is being pushed back into the "hopefully, maybe, we shall see" timeline. The government has a blueprint for a citywide network of active travel infrastructure but it is currently being driven by road project priorities.

I have mentioned this before, but I will say it again. During the election campaign the

Greens costed what it would take to fully build out this active transit network, and it came to an estimate of approximately $216 million, which the Treasury's costing process affirmed. That is the cost of two major road duplication projects to deliver a significant piece of citywide infrastructure. It is a piece of infrastructure that would benefit everyone by completing the city's connections and thereby properly piecing together the incentive system for people who want to travel by bike or walk rather than drive.

Doing this would in turn reduce Canberrans' reliance on cars, thereby reducing congestion on our roads, to the benefit of everyone on our roads, and also defer the need and cost of future road duplications and upgrades. It would contain the growth in greenhouse gas emissions from transport, allowing for further changes in technology to more meaningfully bring those down. Further improvements could also be made by making our backstreets easier to walk through. As we covered in question time today, the 30 kilometre per hour speed limits, supported by updates in local road design over time, will substantially reduce the risk of injury to pedestrians and cyclists and further support people making the short journey to the nearby major walking or cycling route.

Getting the government to recognise all of this sounds like it should be simple and yet somehow it has not been. The entrenched attitude towards favouring private motor vehicle persists. I just want to add one more point to echo what Mr Emerson said, and to do this I am going to quote Arthur Tange, who, if you are not aware, was a former Secretary of the Department of Defence and known as one of the "Seven Dwarfs", ie the major mandarins who shaped Canberra, or actually, I should say, the federation. He said, "Strategy without consideration of resources is not strategy." It is simply a glossy brochure. Well, he did not say the last part, I just put that part in, but I felt it was appropriate.

So in closing, Ms Clay's motion is focused on the localities of greatest significance to her electorate and I welcome that. I am hopeful that pressure in specific places will help inspire bigger thinking across the entire cycling network that we have available here in Canberra.

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) (4.38): I thank Ms Clay for the motion. I will try and be brief, because it is clearly late in the day and I am feeling snarky—and that is probably not the impression that I want to give, because our offices have worked so collaboratively.

Many of the contributions today have spoken about the Active Travel Plan as if it is a checklist of cycling routes to deliver by 2030. It is not, and I really need to make that clear. Whether it was intentional or not, I think—with the exception of Mr Braddock—the way that everyone has spoken about the plan makes me think that no-one has actually read it. Mr Emerson just referenced a construction and funding timeline for the plan. I think Ms Clay, Mr Milligan and Mr Emerson all talked about how we are 18 months into the six-year plan, and there were inferences made about our running out of time to deliver something. I will draw their attention to probably the most important part of the plan, which explains what it does, which is:

> This plan outlines ACT government priorities for strengthening active travel and improving quality of life. Projects included throughout demonstrate what these priorities mean in practice. New projects and initiatives will progressively be delivered in coming years.

Not by 2030. This is what is certainly shaping us over the next six years, but it is not a deadline or a timeline. It is showing what is shaping us now. We may not get to all of those things. We simply may not. I hope we do, but it is certainly the ambition.

But the characterisation of what this plan is and does has been, I think, mischaracterised. I note some of the things in the plan are not construction related at all—like a regular community education campaign, the lowering of speed zones in areas with high risk to vulnerable users and things like installing automated counters so that we can measure the difference that our investment is making.

We are very happy to support this motion. Mr Emerson, there is a very helpful standing order that you may wish to make use of, which is standing order 136, if you think that a motion is the same in substance as any question that has been dealt with in the last 12 months. But I think we all accept the intention with which this motion has been provided today.

I do not think Mr Braddock has to worry about piling on the pressure to get what is in this motion achieved. It is the government's own election commitment that we will commence the delivery of the West Belconnen bikeway, a high-quality, safe cycleway connecting West Belconnen suburbs to the town centre and through to the city.

I would also refer members to our statement of priorities or our position statement. It is extensive and, additionally, our regional plans all have active travel infrastructure as something that we will deliver. I vividly recall staying up into the dawn working on this and thinking about the project costs and what we could realistically deliver. It is ambitious but, equally, it is something that I think we have done a lot of work on costing while taking into account the other priorities of government as well.

It is true that there is a cycling network map included in the Active Travel Plan, but I need to stress again that this is just one component of the Active Travel Plan. Equally, the way that the cycling network map characterises the routes are what we are delivering now where work is already underway, then potential future priorities and then a future network as well as the existing network. The key action associated with the cycling network map is to progressively build the identified priority missing links, using protected cycleways or offroad shared or cycle path infrastructure and reviewing priorities on an annual basis. So I think what is stated in the plan is consistent with what is in the motion. Of course, we are happy to report annually and be transparent annually and more often if members wish. But I would really like to not have exactly the same discussion again, because it has clearly created a visceral reaction in me.

I would complement Mr Emerson, however. In a recent question on notice, there was a question about the framing of how a route has been presented on the walking and cycling infrastructure map. I was just blown away and delighted that you had looked at it, or your staff had, and had a very genuine and very reasonable question about, I think, its design and construction and how it was being presented as construction—so which

one actually is it. That was great; bring on more of that. I was very impressed. Thank you for actually looking at that map, because that is something that we have spent quite a lot of energy developing to try and give that transparency of "Here is what we are working on; here is the stage that it is at; and here is the funding that it currently has." so that the community and members in this place are clear on what things are fully funded, what things require further funding or further funding decisions, and that our ambition continues to progress.

So I am feeling less snarky now. I really just needed to be clear about what the plan is and what it is supposed to do. I note Ms Orr earlier today, on something totally different, was asked about delivering something within statutory timeframes and so on. Again, this is not a checklist of things that we are going to deliver by 2030; it is how we prioritise things. It is how we are assessing the needs across our network. I think that what Ms Clay has asked, particularly about the West Belconnen bikeway, is absolutely reasonable. I think having as many people involved in the development of that is helpful. Of course, I have a particular interest in seeing that the Belco bikeway extended through Florey, where the original bus lane was once intended to go. However, I also very much appreciate that Southern Cross Drive or Belconnen Way and heading to Kippax is probably going to serve more people better.

So I am very happy to support Ms Clay's motion. I apologise for being snarky, but could we just please talk about it in the way that it is, not as the way that perhaps you would like it to be?

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.47), in reply: I want to thank my colleagues, Ms Carrick, Mr Milligan, Mr Emerson, Mr Braddock and Minister Cheyne. I want to thank Minister Cheyne and her office for working so constructively with us on this motion. It was actually a really great negotiation and a really great chat.

We have a lot more business to do today and, when we are all in such furious agreement on what a great idea this is, we do not need to talk too much further about it. I am really pleased that this motion is going to pass today. What we will get from this motion is a feasibility study that will be put together in consultation with targeted stakeholders. That is going to include kids, adults who can no longer drive, the Belconnen Community Council, Pedal Power, SEE Change, Canberra by Bike and Living Streets Canberra. If there are other really important stakeholders there, I am sure the minister will pick them up, but that was the list that we came up with. That feasibility study will be about how we deliver a complete active travel network between West Belconnen and the Belconnen town centre, based on government's existing Active Travel Plan.

We are also going to get a consideration of the funds and work that would be required to implement by 2030 the government's Active Travel Plan 2024-30. We will see a report of how much funding is actually allocated and spent each financial year, and we will then of course be able to compare that to how much it would cost to deliver the whole plan by 2030. I have heard that very clearly, Minister, and I am sorry that the debate has led to your feelings of snarkiness.

Ms Cheyne: I have calmed down.

MS CLAY: You have been extremely clear today that there is no intention to deliver that by 2030. So I guess what would be—

Ms Cheyne: That is not what I said.

MS CLAY: I did not mean to misquote you. I believe you have been clear today that that 2030 plan is about prioritisation; it is not a clear commitment to deliver by 2030. Mr Speaker, I look to you to see if I have misquoted anything in that. I do not believe I have. I certainly did not intend to.

Ms Cheyne: I am happy to clarify with the—

MR SPEAKER: If the minister would like to seek leave to speak again, that will be a matter for the Assembly if that is her intent. She is not on her feet. So, until she gets on her feet, I suggest you continue.

MS CLAY: We will get a consideration of the funds and work that would be required to implement by 2030 the government's Active Travel Plan 2024-30 and we will get annual reports on how much funding is actually allocated and spent each year. I think this is a really good step forward towards giving Canberra—and West Belconnen in particular—the active travel network that we need. I think it will provide really useful connections for Canberrans. It is going to be really good cost-of-living relief for any people who take this up, who start using active travel in place of other more expensive forms of transport. It will be great climate action in a city that has well over 60 per cent of its climate emissions coming from transport—and the last time I saw that line it was heading in the wrong direction.

I think there are a lot of great reasons to push ahead with this, and I thank everybody for the great contributions today. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

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) (4.51): I seek leave to speak again—

MR SPEAKER: Under standing order 47, through me?

MS CHEYNE: I understand that might be it.

MR SPEAKER: Let's do that. I will grant you leave under standing order 47.

MS CHEYNE: I think the Assembly needs to grant me leave.

MR SPEAKER: No, not with standing order 47.

MS CHEYNE: Really? Okay; well, I have been schooled by the new Speaker. Wonders never cease. I am enjoying this very much.

Quite honestly—and this is a good-faith conversation here—Ms Clay, through you, Mr Speaker, it all goes back to "read the plan". There are key actions, but they are not

key actions to be delivered by 2030; they are key actions that we will look to deliver as priorities allow. There is also a stack of things that—

MR SPEAKER: We will just keep it to where you think you have been misquoted, under standing order 47.

MS CHEYNE: I am.

MR SPEAKER: It is not an opportunity for another go.

MS CHEYNE: I was just trying to give an example to reflect that. But I will be guided by you, Mr Speaker. I certainly do not wish to argue with you. I will look at page 42, so you can see that there is a whole heap of things that say, "Here are things that we will be exploring." That is not a delivery; they are things that we are interested in looking at and doing as priorities allow.

I just wish for the Active Travel Plan to not be seen as "this is a delivery plan". It does not mean that the government is not ambitious for the actions that are within it and that they are not live and actions that we are working through over these next six years. But this is not a be all and end all—"We must do all these things by 2030." That is not how the plan is framed. My issue then is with the suggestion that the government is not going to deliver it all by then, when that is not the thing.

So the premise on which we are arguing this is inconsistent with what we are actually talking about. The government has good intent to progress the plan and we will be transparent about it as much as we possibly can. But the plan is not a delivery checklist by 2030. So to say that we are not going to deliver it by 2030 makes no sense, because that is not what it is. I hope everyone follows the logic of that—but, if not, I have tried.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly

Club closures—loss of community facilities—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: Members, at the end of question time, Mr Cocks raised the point of order under standing order 118AA, regarding a supplementary question that Ms Morris had asked. That was answered by the Minister for Gaming Reform. The question related to the closure of the Vikings Club in Chisholm. Ms Morris asked: "Minister, what is the hit to the bottom line of the government from the double-whammy of a huge reduction in community contributions and a massive dip in gaining tax revenue?" Dr Paterson's answer pointed to the decision being a decision by the Canberra Vikings, a business decision, and that the club closures and managers' mergers were a part of everyday club business.

Having reviewed the transcripts—and I clarified; I sought advice—I consider that Dr Paterson's answer did not address what effect, if any, the closure would have on the bottom line of the government and was therefore not responsive specifically to the question asked by Ms Morris. I ask the minister to provide a written response by 1.45 pm tomorrow.

Papers
Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.56): I wish to speak in support of the Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025, and I thank the minister for progressing this important legislative amendment. The amendments contained in this bill are designed to enable timely delivery of critical infrastructure for vulnerable persons in our community.

However, this bill is about more than a change to planning law; it is about the kind of community we want to be. This bill, through practical outcomes, reflects a community sentiment of compassion, balance and fairness—one that ensures its most vulnerable citizens are not left waiting longer because of avoidable delays. Housing and health are not abstract policy areas; they are the foundations of wellbeing. A safe home is the platform for education, employment, stability and dignity. Accessible health care is the foundation of a fair society. Without these, every other right and opportunity is undermined.

That is why the ACT government has a clear commitment to deliver new public homes, why we have signed up to the National Housing Accord and why we have an ambitious agenda of facilitating infrastructure delivery. It is why we are investing in the future Northside Hospital and new community health facilities. These are not nice-to-haves; they are essential infrastructure, just as vital as roads, power or water. This bill simply ensures that housing delivered by government or registered community housing providers are recognised in the planning system for what they are—priorities.

At present, the system for declaring Territory Priority Projects is slow, repetitive and inefficient. Each individual, public or community housing or health development must be declared separately—the unintended impact of this leading to a process that is excessively long, administratively cumbersome and duplicative. There is consultation, additional layers of paperwork and presentation in the Legislative Assembly—all leading to long delays before a Territory Priority Project declaration and the protections against appeals can even apply.

It is no wonder that Housing ACT projects are repeatedly held up. Since 2019, 20 public housing developments have been appealed to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, delaying the delivery of more than 100 homes. That is 100 homes delayed since 2019. As the minister indicated earlier, in three-quarters of those cases ACAT upheld the original approval or made only minor changes. The simple and undeniable reality of this situation is that dozens of people already experiencing vulnerable life circumstances remain without the stability and certainty of accommodation, not

because the planning system said no but because the process allowed a "not yet".

Following our committee inquiry, the standing committee recommended increased resourcing to support ACAT with monitoring and publication of data on planning appeals and to consider constructive proposals to address ACAT's role as an appeals body in planning outcomes. However, as the government then outlined in its response, while increasing resourcing may address some of the gaps, the recommendation does not serve as a way to underscore the community need for additional public housing facilities unencumbered by inefficient or, as identified at times, vexatious appeals.

The need for reform could not be clearer. This bill establishes certainty. Once a housing or health project has gone through the full development assessment process, including referrals and public consultation, it is treated as a priority and it is not to be subject to third-party appeals. The safeguards, however, remain. Planning requirements and outcomes, design quality and existing heritage and environmental protections are unchanged.

I want to emphasise that last point: environmental protections and design standards would not be lowered or removed, as some submissions to the inquiry and some discussion the public has suggested. This is absolutely not the case, and I want to assure the community that these safeguards will remain. The need for environmental impact assessment for projects that have significant environmental and heritage impacts under both commonwealth and ACT legislation remain. Importantly, the community retains its right to have a say during consultation. But the cycle of appeals that change little and, in many cases, only serve as a reminder of entrenched socio-economic stereotypes, will end.

For those on the public housing waiting list, this bill means greater certainty that projects will actually be delivered and, for Canberrans seeking community housing, it will aid in delivering much needed supply. As the minister highlighted, the sector is calling for this change. ACTCOSS told the inquiry, "The harm caused by homelessness and lack of affordable housing is profound." YWCA Canberra shared the example of a development for women leaving domestic violence delayed by more than 12 months and at an enormous cost for them to defend, when they could have been spending that money on developing or buying community housing. At a time when communities all over Australia are calling for action on reducing the rate of family and domestic violence impacts, we have parts of the community saying, "Yes, do more; just do not do it in my backyard." This bill directly responds to the human consequences of delay by making sure that, once approval has been given, the outcome is certain.

Reflecting on the YWCA experience and that of community housing providers, the government has included community housing within the bill to prevent a repeat of the experience shared above. It is why during the committee inquiry I recommended in my dissenting report the inclusion of community housing in this bill—because the evidence in that inquiry showed the need for it. So I am glad it is being adopted. I thank the Greens for their work in talking to community housing providers, but I recognise that this was in my dissenting report many months ago—the evidence was there for this.

This bill is also about fairness. Those who launch third-party appeals are almost never the people on waiting lists. They are almost without exception people who already have

housing. They are people who live in secure homes and enjoy access to amenity. They are often centrally located and they accept that these homes need to be built; it is just that they do not want them in their suburbs. Meanwhile, families, women escaping domestic violence and people with disability are left waiting. That imbalance is wrong. This bill restores fairness by ensuring that the voices of those in need are heard through delivery, not just through process. It also ensures delivery of housing in locations where access to suitable services and amenity is as real for them as their neighbours.

The bill is also trying to provide certainty for health projects, although I know that is up for debate. The new Northside Hospital, additional walk-in centres and mental health facilities are critical to a growing city. We cannot afford to let them be bogged down in a cumbersome process for a Territory Priority Project declaration to be given before a development application can be lodged. Just as with public and community housing, the principle is simple: hospitals and health facilities are undeniably priorities. But the current process says that these health facilities are not a priority until they have gone through the public consultation and the Legislative Assembly.

Some have argued that this bill undermines accountability, but the opposite is true. Through development assessment, accountability is provided through referral to expert entities, assessment of the planning requirements and outcomes that provide heritage and environmental protections and public notification. This bill does not impact that.

Others say that this bill diminishes the right to a fair hearing. We acknowledge that limiting third-party appeals does engage section 21 of the Human Rights Act. But, under section 28, such a limitation is valid where it is reasonable, necessary and proportionate. When appeals are disproportionately used to delay essential public or community housing and health projects, with little effect on outcomes, the case for carefully tailored limitation is compelling. This bill is targeted. It applies only to public and community housing and health facilities delivered by government. It does not extend to private developers or other classes of projects. It is a measured response to a specific, identified problem. Importantly, as has been resoundingly stated, we are not alone in this view. When community advocates, industry leaders and housing providers are all saying the same thing, that certainty is critical, we should collectively listen.

This bill is entirely consistent with the values of a fair and civil society, one where we back the provision of homes and health care for those who need them most. This bill is not radical. It does not rip up appeal rights across the board. It does not reduce consultation during the development assessment process. It does not remove heritage and environmental safeguards. It is a balanced, proportionate and values-driven reform that clears away bottlenecks without undermining trust in the planning system. This bill supports the fundamental principle that those in need should not be left waiting because of process for process's sake, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.06): Mr Speaker, the Labor Party believes that supplying housing is a moral imperative and it is a priority for our government. When we introduced this bill to make public housing a Territory Priority Project we asked the Assembly to also recognise public housing as a priority. Building more public homes is a necessity to support our city's most vulnerable people and this bill is a practical measure that we can take now to remove real barriers to

delivering more public housing. With around 3,500 people on the waitlist for public housing our Labor government believes that we must tackle the supply of public housing as a matter of priority and that it should be made a priority in our planning law.

Earlier this year the Assembly enshrined housing as a human right. Realising that right demands more than words, it demands delivering homes. And to respond to Mr Rattenbury, realising a housing target also demands delivering reforms to deliver homes. We took an extensive plan to the election that is now reflected in my Statement of Planning Priorities in terms of the actions we are taking to achieve the target. You cannot enshrine a right to housing and at the same time insist on expensive legal appeals that are used to stall or block public and community housing developments. Without reform to actually build more public and community homes faster, enshrining housing as a human right will not be a virtue, it will be a virtue signal. Today we take a step towards realising the right to housing through a practical bill, which by recognising housing as a priority in our planning law, will deliver the homes people with lower incomes need without delay.

Appeals of public housing and community housing projects, based both on planning and non-planning grounds, have been delaying much needed homes from being built in the ACT for years. These appeals in which vulnerable people on the public housing waiting list have no say, greatly affects their lives. Since 2019, there have been around 20 appeals on Housing ACT projects, delaying over 100 public homes. More than 75 per cent of those appeals were resolved with ACAT upholding the original approval or specifying very minor amendments. So these delays did not improve outcomes, they only denied those in need, often for up to a year.

Efforts to progress public housing projects in well located and well serviced inner suburbs in Canberra have seen the highest rates of third-party appeals. Appeals of public housing projects have been clustered in certain districts of Canberra with nearly 95 per cent of them occurring in the Inner North and Inner South. This is affecting the ability for Housing ACT to deliver our long held and community backed salt and pepper approach to achieve socio-spatial equality in building public housing across the territory, including in well-located areas close to services and the city.

Delays to already independently approved projects have affected Housing ACT's ability to grow the number of homes, not to mention the costs incurred in expensive litigation. Not just for them, but also for the independent Territory Planning Authority and the government, through the government solicitor. Without change, third-party appeals will impact the significant pipeline of future housing projects required to build Labor's commitment of 5,000 new public, community and affordable homes by 2030 to address waiting list pressures.

Removing third-party appeals is a proven and practical policy, based on evidence that has precedent in other jurisdictions. In New South Wales, just across the border, they have State Significant Development, SSD, which includes development by the Land and Housing Corporation, responsible for NSW's social housing portfolio. SSDs for housing are exempt from third-party appeal rights.

In Queensland, they have State Facilitated Development, SFD, which includes all development proposals with at least 15 per cent affordable and social housing with no

appeals. And in Victoria, they have the government-funded housing development, GFHD, which includes that development as funded through Victoria's Big Housing Build program and any development undertaken by or on behalf of Homes Victoria for social and affordable housing in a residential zone is not subject to third-party appeals. WA has never allowed third-party appeals.

All Australian governments have signed up to a national effort under the national housing blueprint to implement accelerated development pathways to support the rapid delivery of social and affordable housing. Today we give voice to the tenants and the community sector who say that we need more public housing and more community housing and give voice to people experiencing homelessness who need shelter now, not just at the end of a protracted ACAT process.

At the introduction of this bill in the beginning of this year I acknowledged that while the bill did not include community housing as a Territory Priority Project, I committed that the government would work with the sector to consider the inclusion of community housing as a Territory Priority Project if the bill was supported. The definitions of community housing needed to be worked through with the sector to ensure that we were capturing genuine community housing projects.

Consistent with this commitment, earlier in the year the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs, Yvette Berry, and I chaired a community housing roundtable with community housing providers to progress this work. This followed a dissenting report by my Labor colleague, Caitlin Tough MLA, who was the only MLA in this Assembly in the inquiry into this bill who recommended that:

> That Territory Priority Projects be expanded to include housing projects by the community and social housing sector.

Today I am pleased to provide Labor's support for making community housing projects Territory Priority Projects. We have heard directly from CHPs that their projects were also being held up in extensive, expensive ACAT appeals. At the roundtable this year we heard from CHPs about the extensive legal and other costs that ACAT appeals have had for community organisations delivering homes for their vulnerable clients.

We heard from CHPs about the risks that unnecessary and unfair appeals have had in delaying projects which had an impact on their ability to finance housing for the projects themselves and put at risk meeting requirements to access grants from the commonwealth government, particularly under the Housing Australia Future Fund. We have also heard from them and their building partners about what can only be described as the most vile campaigns against housing projects that have targeted women and children escaping family violence.

There was strong support from CHPs for community housing to be added as a default Territory Priority Project under section 216 of the Planning Act and making changes to the pathway under section 218 of the Planning Act, the declaration pathway, to make it possible to declare individual community housing projects as Territory Priority Projects.

It is for these reasons that the government prepared amendments to support the

extension of this bill to apply to community housing, which in discussion with the Green have now largely been reflected in the amendments circulated and soon to be debated by Ms Clay, which we will be supporting. I thank Ms Clay and the Greens for their extensive engagement with me on achieving this terrific outcome today because making community housing a territory priority is another practical measure to deliver more housing for our communities sooner.

This bill and the amendments to it introduces clearer criteria in governance arrangements giving the community and industry confidence that projects that are automatically territory priorities are genuinely in the public interest and those that have been declared under section 218. The amendments will streamline the delivery of these critical projects while maintaining the existing protections provided to environmental, cultural and community values under the Planning Act. By providing a more certain and transparent pathway the bill will help reduce red tape and ensure government priorities are implemented on time and within scope. Importantly, the framework still requires robust consultation and accountability, ensuring that priority projects balance efficiency with fairness and community input.

I want to be clear about what this bill does not do. It does not remove safeguards. Development applications for public and community housing and health facilities will still be subject to full assessment by the Territory Planning Authority, to public notification, to referral entities and to compliance and enforcement under the Planning Act. The bill does not waive planning rules, design quality, environmental safeguards or heritage obligations, including any necessary environmental impact assessment such as an EIS.

It does not expand appeal limitations beyond the three classes of public housing, community housing with the amendments and health care facilities. Canberrans will still be able to have their say on public and community housing and health proposals and to raise planning issues through the development assessment process managed by the independent planning authority. However, once those steps are completed, if the project is approved, it can proceed without being tied up in post-approval litigation that rarely leads to substantial changes.

This bill narrows litigation risks that can delay project delivery. It does not narrow community voice. The government considers the limitations proposed by the bill are reasonable, necessary and consistent with the broader objective of realising socio-economic rights and the public interest. If a decision is made on these TPP projects that is unlawful, of course it can then be subject to judicial review. This bill is a measured policy response to a clearly identified problem for projects of high public value. It is not a signal of intent to change the ACT's planning system's broader appeal framework.

Mr Speaker, in closing, let me be clear. The need to remove barriers to new housing and provide a smoother pathway for delivery of these vital developments is not just the government's view. The Property Council of the ACT put it plainly:

> Ensuring that more public housing can be planned with certainty and constructed sooner is a vital piece of the puzzle…

In 2022, YWCA CEO, Francis Crimmins, said:

> …we have seen firsthand how planning and development regulations and the appeals process can be weaponised by those with time and resources who concentrate their efforts against new housing developments, particularly social and supported housing.

They describe a small development for women leaving domestic violence that was delayed by over 12 months because of an appeal. That delay meant women and children spent another year in crisis accommodation.

In submissions to the standing committee's inquiry, ACTCOSS told the committee:

> …the harm caused by homelessness and lack of access to affordable housing is profound…The average wait time for standard public housing isover five years.

These are the people who see the human and economic cost of delay in their work and they are calling for certainty. Preserving appeal rights in the planning system that applies to public housing compromises the right for housing for our most vulnerable. These are people who do not have a voice in the ACAT appeals process. This bill restores balance. More housing supply is a moral imperative and the government's practical bill and the amendments to it that will be debated shortly will achieve it by removing unfair legal barriers so that more public and community homes can be delivered sooner. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.18), by leave: I move amendments Nos 1, 4 and 10 circulated in my name together *[see schedule 1 at page 3824]* and table a supplementary explanatory statement.

The amendments that we are discussing now are about whether public health should be in the fast-track, in section 216. That is the section that allows a project to be declared. Once it is declared, there are some environmental and First Nations cultural protections and there is a sunset clause. There are various protections. Once it is declared, provided it gets through those protections, it is then a territory priority project.

My amendments remove public health from that section 216 fast-track. We believe that section 218 is a perfectly useful pathway for public health facilities. We are delighted to see that the health minister has now made section 218 declarations for two public health projects. I have not seen any difficulties with those projects, so I think that pathway has commenced and I believe it is functioning. We had a bit of debate earlier in the piece, so I do not know that we necessarily need to revisit that, but I just want to make sure that members are aware of which part we are voting on today. That is what we are discussing at this second. I commend the amendments.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.20): ACT Labor will not be supporting the amendments. I take the opportunity now to speak in some substance, I am afraid, Ms Clay, in relation to these amendments, because my comments in the committee hearing have been significantly misrepresented in relation to this matter. Both Ms Clay and Ms Castley presented my comments as saying that we could use section 218, and that I was confident we would be successful in using section 218 processes for health facilities, as a reason to not enable health facilities to be automatically declared territory priority projects under section 216. This was a complete misrepresentation of the point I was making.

The point I was making was that it seemed so likely, under section 218, that public health facilities would be approved that it makes sense to streamline that process. I will go into a bit more detail about this. Ms Clay just said again, and has said multiple times, that I, as Minister for Health, have declared two projects to be territory priority projects. The Minister for Health does not declare territory priority projects. Territory priority projects under section 218 can only be declared by the planning minister and the Chief Minister, unless the planning minister is also the relevant portfolio minister for the project, in which case it is the Chief Minister and another minister.

The section 218 pathway requires the TPP declaration to be presented to the Legislative Assembly and the provision of two sitting days for potential refusal or support. It is not, in any way, an automatic process, and it is not entirely in the gift of the government. As others have noticed, this process is currently underway for two health facilities—that is, the inner-south health centre in Griffith and the north-side hospital in Bruce. This process is not concluded.

From the contributions earlier today and Ms Clay's just now, you would think it was already done, and you would think that including public health facilities would set some kind of outrageous precedent under the section 216 pathway, but section 216 already includes development proposals related to light rail. It is, frankly, astonishing to me that the Greens are quite happy for any development related to light rail to be considered a priority but are not happy for essential public health infrastructure to be considered a priority in the same way. I guess Mr Emerson agrees with that, given his earlier comments.

Ms Clay quoted me from a committee hearing, essentially pointing out that our intention, in the absence of this bill, would be to use section 218 instead. As I have said, the point I was making, which was grossly misrepresented by both Ms Clay and Ms Castley, was that Labor considers public health facilities to be critical community infrastructure and we want them to proceed as quickly as possible. Given this, it makes sense to streamline the DPP declaration process under section 216 for health facilities in the same way that the Assembly will today agree for public housing and community housing. The only reason not to do so is if the Assembly thinks that it needs to delay the TPP declaration process for public health facilities so that it can consider refusing TPP status for a public health facility—that it thinks public health facilities have less priority than light rail to get on with in a timely way.

We have a very real example of this before us now. I note that Ms Clay has pointed to the fact that we have two section 218 applications at present. The City and Environment

Directorate has been consulting on a proposed TPP declaration for the health centre in the inner south, in Griffith. Consultation on this project closed on 19 November, having opened in early October. That was six weeks of consultation that needed to be undertaken under section 218. I am all for consultation. We have already consulted the community about having a health centre on this site, and we will, of course, consult in detail on the development application. But, in order to do the TPP declaration, we require a minimum of three weeks of consultation. We have, in fact, done six weeks of consultation, because we take consultation seriously.

Under section 218, the planning minister and the Chief Minister could make a decision next week to support the declaration, but Infrastructure Canberra would not know whether the Assembly supports that until the Thursday of the first sitting week in February 2026, when two sitting days have passed, where the Assembly has the capacity to refuse to support the TPP declaration. That is another seven weeks before a development application can be lodged under section 218(2), which requires:

> A territory priority project declaration for a development proposal must be made before the development application for the proposal is made under section 166.

So, for Griffith, this whole process will have added more than three months due to using the section 218 process, compared with what would have been the case under the section 216 process. That is fine. If that is what the Assembly wants to do—add time to every health facility project in the territory—that is fine.

I know that this has been negotiated and that this amendment from Ms Clay will pass, but I want to emphasise that I never said that it was a pointless activity to include health facilities in section 216. What I said was that it was a helpful process to streamline the declaration of a territory priority project. It still seems that everybody in this place thinks that every public health facility will, in fact, be declared a territory priority project. If you think that, why wouldn't you just include it in section 216? It makes no sense. Anyway, it is of course now too late to use a section 216 process for the inner-south health centre or the north-side hospital, as both of them have had to progress on the section 218 track that was available to us prior to the debate of this legislation.

Finally, the entire hearing that I attended was extremely frustrating because it seemed to be a debate about whether we should have a TPP process at all. Most of the questions were about whether there had been ACAT appeals for health facilities and how many health facilities had been called in, when what we were asking to do was to streamline a process that everyone now seems to think we would use anyway. This has been a very confused conversation. I am really disappointed that the Greens do not think that health facilities are as important as light rail. ACT Labor thinks both of these major infrastructure investments are important. We will not be supporting Ms Clay's amendment.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.28): Public health facilities are a priority for the Labor government. I cannot think of a more deserving project to include as a default territory priority project than a new hospital, because of the massive difference that this will make to the lives of Canberrans, not just today but for decades to come, which we know—from survey after survey that has ever been

undertaken—is the top priority for Canberrans. Health is always the top priority.

Our motivation behind introducing this provision is simple: if there is a practical and reasonable measure on the table to support delivering more health services and facilities, then we should take it. Labor does not believe that it is reasonable for one person to appeal the development of a massive new hospital that provides a significant benefit for the whole community. Ensuring that one disgruntled community member cannot hold up the construction of hospitals, clinics and other health facilities, and more, is a reasonable step that has been undertaken in a range of other states around Australia for state-significant development.

These projects will, of course, still involve rigorous planning and environmental assessment. They will include things like requirements for an EIS, if entailed. Streamlining approvals for health facilities means services come online sooner, major projects like new hospitals are not put at risk, and the costs that come with third-party appeals are reduced.

ACT Labor believes there is strong community support for this position, and we will keep advocating for this. It is disappointing that the ACT Greens and Liberals do not share Labor's commitment to delivering the major health infrastructure that our growing city needs. The legislation is meant to be an expression of the territory's top priorities when it comes to planning, and Labor's view is that housing and health, in addition to light rail, both need our government's full support. That is why we cannot support the Greens' amendment to remove health facilities as default territory priorities.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.31): We understand that there are lots of priorities for a government: schools, hospitals, bridges, bike paths, and public and community housing. There are lots of priorities. It is really important that we give the government the tools it needs to build the facilities we need here in the ACT. I am delighted that there have now been commencements for two territory priority project declarations for public health. When we got evidence earlier in this conversation, we were told that section 218, as drafted on the books, was impossible to use for public and community housing, and we were told that it was possible to use it for public health. It certainly does look as though it is possible. We are partway through that process, so we will have to wait and see when that finishes.

I think most people in Canberra understand that, like schools, hospitals are also a priority for the government, and we definitely want the government to build the things that we need. We are really pleased to see that there are provisions to do that under the territory priority project system, as there are in the regular planning system, and we believe that the current amendments strike the right balance on how government should go ahead.

Amendments Nos 1, 4 and 10 agreed to.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.32), by leave: I move amendments Nos 2, 3 and 5 to 9 circulated in my name together *[see schedule 1 at page 3824]*

These amendments are about the balance of the section 216 and 218 amendments. I believe these are agreed by everyone here, so that is great. I want to take a moment to

say that, for a piece of legislation where most people have agreed on the content—and I thank Minister Steel for the great conversations and collaboration we had in preparing this—we certainly seem to have spent a lot of time correcting one another.

I want to address some of the things that were said about the Greens earlier. I think we have been misquoted quite a lot. Minister Berry talked about how the Greens were delaying housing because we delayed the HAFF. I want to go back to what actually happened with the HAFF commonwealth funding negotiations. The Greens' negotiations resulted in $3 billion being spent directly on housing, being allocated for that—six times more than was originally set aside. That was an extra billion dollars for social and affordable housing, and we have an extra $50 million for the ACT. That was what those negotiations were about, and they delivered a quite different round.

We have seen a lot of delays in public housing, and it is regrettable. I am still sad that the ACT government did not apply for any public housing funding in round 1 of HAFF. That was quite some time ago. That would have been one way to bring that forward. When funding rounds are passed, we need to apply as soon as we can. I know we have round 3 three out now, for January. I am assuming that the ACT government will be bidding for as much of that as they can.

We have heard about delays with territory priority projects. We have had these provisions on the books since 2023. Government took quite some time to bring forward amendments. Government told us that the provisions did not work. We have had a committee inquiry into that, and we have had a long conversation. Government did not bring forward the corrections for the main things that were cited as not working. The main problems cited were that, with the way the legislation was framed, apparently, it was impossible for public housing to meet it, and community housing was having a lot of trouble.

Government did not bring forward any amendments for community housing, and government did not actually fix the problems they were talking about in public housing. They did not bring anything forward until, I believe, the start of this year, when it was introduced; it could have been the end of last year. We inquired into that this year, and the Greens brought forward amendments as soon as we could. We worked with Minister Steel as quickly as we could. We were ready to debate these in the last sittings, so we would have had these in place a month earlier. That was a cause of delay, and we were trying, as quickly as we could, to get progress.

We have heard that, apparently, the Greens opposed Dickson Common Ground. That is just not the case. I want to read from some of the public materials we put out. I will quote directly from the material. I think the safest thing to do today is to quote directly, so you will be getting some quotes. I quote:

> The ACT Greens strongly support public and community housing, including the proposal to construct Common Ground Dickson and rezone the block to the Community Facility Zone.

We love Common Ground. I am delighted to see that we might be getting a Common Ground or some project like that in Belconnen. I made some pretty difficult calls to make sure that we are getting that. We have always been huge supporters of community

housing. We have done everything we can to encourage it.

The actual issue there was about a road next to Common Ground, and the community had some concerns about that road. I think it is important that we do not conflate a road with a Common Ground. They are not the same. They are not one and the same thing.

We also heard that the Greens put up our public housing plan ahead of the election for 10,000 built and bought public homes over a period of a decade. It was an ambitious plan. We did put quite a lot of detail into that. Minister Berry indicated that we had not thought that through, and that we had not given any details of where the homes would be. We did publish that. We put up a district-by-district breakdown of where those public homes were. We do not have a directorate to do a block-by-block analysis, but we did put out quite a lot of detail. It was probably more detail than we have seen about where the government's 30,000 homes by 2030 are going. I could be wrong on that, but I think we put more detail into our election commitment than we have seen from the government on their plan to deliver.

Ms Tough, I am so glad that you spoke up for community housing in your dissenting report. I will be very clear: I am not speaking for the committee right now; I am just speaking in my private capacity. The committee was equally concerned about community housing. I will read out what the committee's official report said:

> The Committee sees value in allowing social and community housing to have TPP status, as was clearly intended by the Planning Act 2023. The Committee is concerned about the Bill's removal of social and community housing from section 218 and the Bill's failure to reintroduce social and community housing in section 216. The Government does not appear to have properly considered the impacts of this removal.
>
> The Committee returns to this issue in its Conclusions …

The official committee report, in the conclusion, said, "Government, can you please legislate community housing into sections 216 and 218?" I was pleased that the Greens managed to work up a formula that seems to work for Labor, and we have legislated for that. I think that will be passed today. But it was the shared view of that multicoloured committee that had extremely broad representation that community housing did in fact need to be there, and it was great that we could all agree on that.

I am pleased that we are following through with some good delivery tools today on ensuring that we can recognise housing as a human right, we can recognise the right to a healthy environment, and we can recognise cultural rights. We need to make sure that we give our government the tools and the accountability to recognise the rights that we make. We cannot simply make them and walk away.

It is good to see that we have made some real progress today. I am sorry about the delay, but we have been working quickly and taking this forward as fast as we can from the crossbench. We are always happy to have chats at any time with government about how we can progress things more quickly, when we clearly have such strong, shared interest right across the chamber on some of these issues.

I commend the amendments to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.40): I was not intending to speak again, but I want to say something in relation to Common Ground. I note Ms Clay has directly quoted in relation to Common Ground.

I would also directly quote the ACT Greens leader, Shane Rattenbury, who said it was "deeply disappointing that call-in powers were used for the development of Common Ground". Part of the reason that call-in powers had to be used was because the Greens engaged in an extreme level of scaremongering about the trees near the site that resulted in many community members ramping up their opposition to the project.

I know, because I was the minister for urban development, and I was closely involved in everything to do with Dickson section 72. I had a number of meetings with Mr Rattenbury in which I pointed out to him that the document that was being referred to in all of this scaremongering was an old document that was provided in all of the DA materials as a reference point, but that there was no proposal to build a road through the trees; that was included in the development application.

The Greens were using this issue to garner publicity, to scaremonger, at the end of the year, as we were going into an election year. I reassured Mr Rattenbury numerous times that there was no intention—that there was no road. There was no road on the plans. There had never been a road on the plans. There was never an intention to have a road on the plans. The scaremongering continued. It revved up the community in opposition to a critically important community housing project.

Of course, the Greens did not oppose Common Ground; they could not do that. They found another way to rile up the community in their own political interests. I was there, Ms Clay. I was there in many meetings. I was there in many community meetings. They then complained about the project being called in, despite their apparent support for it. It is now a great community facility. I want to put on record how proud we are to have delivered Common Ground in Dickson, which is serving people who need affordable housing and community housing, and of course, delivering the local heroes in the Australians of the Year Awards, who are running the café there.

I understand that Ms Clay has a point to make, that the Greens have always supported community housing. That is, to some extent, true. I also note they were pretty silent about YWCA's development in Ainslie at the time—pretty silent. I went out there and I stood at Ainslie shops, and I argued with local community members who were opposing that development. I told them, point blank, that I supported it. I told them, point blank, why I supported it. They did not agree with me, but I was there, and I was having the conversation. Other members in my electorate were not.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.43): When I introduced this bill, I spoke about the government's eagerness to include community housing projects as territory priority projects, but that more work was needed to ensure that only genuine community housing projects were included in the territory priority projects pathways.

Following introduction, my directorate consulted extensively with the community housing sector on how to draft legislation appropriately, particularly around the definition of what constituted a genuine community housing provider. We held a roundtable, and I was pleased to invite Ms Clay along to that. I would like to thank her for engaging productively in that process.

I would also like to acknowledge Ms Tough's contribution to the planning committee's report on this bill, for being the sole member of the committee to produce a dissenting report, endorsing the bill for passage and encouraging the expansion of the legislation, particularly the default pathway, to include community housing. Labor will be supporting the amendments by Ms Clay to expand the TPP bill on this basis.

These amendments represent a compromise position between Labor and the Greens, and we support them. They are an amalgamation of two sets of amendments that were circulated to the scrutiny committee, one set from Ms Clay and the other from the government.

I would like to thank Ms Clay and her office—in particular, Peter Johns—for their positive and constructive engagement on the amendments. I am pleased that our parties were able to reach agreement on both public and community housing being added to the legislation, under section 216, and enabling it to be declared under section 218.

The changes to section 216, the default pathway, narrow the scope of projects that will qualify. Public housing projects that end up requiring an environmental impact statement or that affect a heritage-listed or Aboriginal place will lose TPP status. Any public housing that is part of the growing and renewing public housing initiative from the previous term will be excluded. Labor believes that these are acceptable compromises that leave in place the main benefits of the bill.

Community housing projects will be required to have at least 15 per cent of a project to be social or affordable housing to qualify and must have a link to commonwealth or territory funding. This is the same rule that exists in Queensland, where they also have a 15 per cent requirement.

In negotiations with Ms Clay, the need to ensure public notice of when a development is a TPP under section 216 was identified. I can confirm that I will be asking my directorate to create a process for making that fact clear when development applications are notified for public comment, so that the community understands that they are a territory priority project, and they will not be subject to third-party appeal once a decision is made.

The amendments to section 218 require more advice to be provided to the planning minister before an individual project is declared as a TPP. Where there is likely to be a significant environmental or heritage impact, the Planning Authority will have to seek advice from the Conservator of Flora and Fauna and the Heritage Council. That advice will be provided to the minister prior to a 218 declaration being made.

Another very important amendment allows for TPP declarations to be made where they meet one, rather than all three, of the criteria listed in section 218. In 2022, following the Tenth Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services

inquiry into the Planning Bill, the government adopted Ms Clay's suggestions that, for any development to be declared as a territory priority project, all three criteria need to be met, in addition to having sufficient consultation.

The three criteria are that a proposal achieves a major government policy outcome of significant benefit to the people of the ACT, substantially facilitates the achievement of the desired future planning outcomes set out in the ACT planning framework, and is for significant infrastructure or significant facilities that are of significant benefit to the people of the ACT. Ms Clay, in her standalone comments to the committee's 2022 report, stated:

> These are good public interest tests, and I cannot imagine a territory priority that doesn't meet all three.

Adopting this position has in fact resulted in several public housing projects not meeting the criteria in the Planning Act, under section 218, and community housing projects face the same problem.

It has been claimed during the debate that the government has removed community housing from section 218 of the Planning Act. In fact, the bill, in its original form, omitted a note, under section 218(1)(c), that outlined that significant infrastructure or facilities included community, social and public housing projects of any scale. The reason that this was removed was not that we did not want community housing in; it is because this note caused confusion, with it being incorrectly interpreted that community, social and public housing projects automatically met all the associated criteria under section 218(1) to be declared as territory priority projects. The bill, in the removal of the note, clarified the types of housing projects that are automatically considered to be territory priority projects.

The reality was that community housing projects could not meet all three of those requirements, under section 218 of the Planning Act, even with that note; hence the reason why it was removed.

When all three were required, it set too high a bar and resulted in several public housing projects that were being considered for a potential declaration not being brought forward by Housing ACT as TPPs for consideration, because they did not meet all the criteria.

I think we all agree that this was not intended when the Planning Act was being introduced in 2022. With these amendments, a declaration will be available where just one of the three criteria is met. I thank Ms Clay for addressing this issue in her amendments.

As with the default pathway under section 216, I view these as very reasonable changes to secure the passage of this legislation. The amendments will introduce a sunset clause of 31 December 2029. Following a statutory review, the next Assembly will have to consider whether this legislation should be reintroduced and re-enacted.

Labor's position on these amendments shows our commitment to delivering the practical measures that address Canberra's top priorities. More housing for those who

are most in need will be supported by this bill and the amendments without delay.

I will keep looking for opportunities to make real, tangible changes to our planning system that support more housing throughout this term. I look forward to this Assembly's continued support for making the changes that we need to make to support and house our growing city.

Amendments agreed to.

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

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Statements by members

Canberra Honour Walk—inductions
ACT Australians of the Year 2026

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.52): Last month, I had the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of some great Canberrans, past and present. We held the 2025 ACT Honour Walk induction, where Mr Domenic Mico OAM, Mr John Hindmarsh AM, Mrs Mary Stevenson MBE, and Mr Richard and Mrs Maureen Tindale were inducted into our Honour Walk. Members would be familiar with the location of the walk, not far from this place, and it was a wonderful occasion to celebrate the contribution of some very significant Canberrans.

Later in the month, I had the opportunity, together with many members of the Assembly, to acknowledge the 2026 ACT Australians of the Year. The 2026 ACT Australian of the Year is Professor Rose McGready, a migrant and refugee health expert. Our Senior Australian of the Year for 2026 is Heather Reid AM, who members would know as a pioneer of women's football. The 2026 ACT Young Australian of the Year is Sita Sargeant, a historical storyteller and founder of She Shapes History. The Local Hero for 2026 is Ben Alexander, well known, I am sure, to many as a mental health advocate and co-founder of Running for Resilience.

Federal government—public service cuts

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.53): We often hear from the other side praise for the federal Labor government. I want to talk about the federal Labor government's secret and damaging push to cut the Australian public service, which would hit Canberra the hardest. Labor went to the election promising no cuts to the APS. They told public servants they would build capacity, not reduce it. Yet agencies have now been quietly directed to find savings of up to five per cent, a move condemned by unions and experts, and particularly devastating for smaller agencies.

These cuts are being hidden. The finance minister has refused to release the letter sent to agency heads. If the government is so confident in this approach, why is it keeping it secret from the people of Canberra, who will be most impacted?

Let us be clear: these so-called efficiencies will result in job losses, and we are already

seeing it, with more than 800 positions gone from CSIRO, 250 jobs cut from Treasury, and massive reductions to the Department of Social Services budget. These are Canberrans, and they are bearing the brunt. Our national institutions, research organisations and hardworking public servants have been betrayed by the Labor federal government, who are reneging on their commitment to the Australian public service.

Schools—demountable classrooms

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.55): Here is part 2 of Bonnie's speech:

> Studies performed by the University of Canberra have highlighted the importance of effective schoolyard spaces for students and the need to prioritise these open spaces as not just a luxury, but an essential good for student health and wellbeing. The study further describes how current schoolyard situations across Canberra are suboptimal, reinforcing the need for change moving forwards.
>
> Demountable classrooms are a valuable resource for our school system. However, we cannot overlook their negative impacts in certain cases. The impact on a school's outdoor spaces, play areas and sports communities can have significant consequences for students.
>
> So with this all in mind, I encourage the government to develop new strategies for demountable classroom deployment to reduce the long-term and mass use of these buildings in schools and focus on the development of quality school environments, both indoors and outdoors. We must look to provide students of the ACT with the best possible education and, by extension, educational environments.

Thank you very much, Bonnie, for your excellent speech.

International Day of People with Disability

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.56): I want to acknowledge that today, 3 December, is the International Day of People with Disability, or I-Day. The day is marked around the world on 3 December, and Australia has celebrated I-Day since 1992. In the ACT this year, I-Day is a community venture managed by people with disability and hosted by Advocacy for Inclusion and Women with Disability ACT—of course, supported by the ACT government.

There are some fantastic events happening, and I want to take this brief opportunity to thank everybody who has been involved in shaping these events. The interim steering committee for I-Day have hosted the "Our Lives Our Voices—shaping the future through voice, power, identity and self-direction" event that kicked off at 12 noon today. The theme for I-Day for this year was "Halting Hate, Finding Kindness—Rebuilding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the 2020s".

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Advocacy for Inclusion, Women with Disabilities and everyone who has been involved in bringing together the I-Day events for this year.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Bar Bulletin—35th anniversary

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.58): I want to take a moment this afternoon to acknowledge the 35th anniversary edition of the Bar Association's *Bar Bulletin*. The *Bar Bulletin* was founded in 1990 as an initiative of John Purnell SC, the first time he was Bar Association President, as a means of communicating across the bar. Whether tongue-in-cheek or not, there is a quote attributed to Ben Salmon QC in the inaugural *Bulletin* which states, "This bulletin's first edition will be a collector's item, as there will never be another."

Thirty-five years and 140 editions later, the *Bar Bulletin* continues, and John is still the editor. That is right; it is a role he has undertaken for more than three-quarters of his unwavering 45-year career of service to the bar.

The first edition, which he kindly provided in the 35th anniversary edition, recognised that Pamela 'Pam' Burton had joined the bar as the only female. That was in 1990. Thirty-five years later, I am pleased to say that women comprise 33 per cent of barristers holding ACT Bar practising certificates. For the first time in the ACT Bar's history, there are equal numbers of men and women on Bar Council.

The *Bar Bulletin* is unique, because there are many people in positions of authority who John ably gets to contribute to the *Bulletin*. Indeed, those include the Attorney-General, the Chief Justice, the Chief Magistrate, the DPP and the President of the Bar. I would note that every single one of those positions at the moment is held by a woman.

On behalf of the ACT government, I extend my congratulations to John and to the Bar Association. May there be at least another 35 years of the *Bulletin*.

Valedictory

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (6.00): I just wanted to make a few remarks to close out the year and also to quickly reflect on my time as Leader of the Opposition. I first want to start with you, Mr Speaker. A lot of people have had some opinions on you and I and how we go as a team and you in the deputy role. I just want to say for the record that you have been loyal and honourable as a deputy, and I believe we have made a great team. We have had a great year and done many good things that we can be proud of. I have supported you in becoming Speaker not because of what you have done for me but because I believe you are the best person for the job at this time for our Assembly.

I would also like to thank my Liberal team, the colleagues that I have been working with. Members, we do have some people who have gone above and beyond in their

hard work and their support of and their commitment to the team this year. We have really excellent staff, particularly the cohort that have joined this team during the term. I would like to acknowledge Ian Hagan. He has been a source of great advice and has always been kind and very patient with me over this last year. I also want to give Felicity a shoutout. She has always turned up and done so much hard work for us.

I would like to thank Mr Parton and his team and Deborah, the great new leaders of the Canberra Liberals. I am fully backing you guys and really believe that you will see out a great term. I thank you and all of your staff for having us in that hot little room for a few weeks and for just being the great team that you are.

I would particularly like to thank my team. If I have forgotten anybody I am so sorry, but I have gone with Liam, Devlin, Sarah, Jono, Gabby, Scotty, Edwin, Jack, Patty and, of course JD. It has been a remarkable year. We should all be proud of what we have done. I know it has been particularly hard for JD, but we have pushed through and we have done different things. I think our OPDs have upset most people, but we have given it a great whirl and have gotten much information out of the government that we are very happy to have.

Ms Cheyne: And still have not read.

MS CASTLEY: It is still going; we have left a legacy. Success is not easy and you need the full team behind you, and I am really happy to be part of this team and working hard.

I want to briefly chat about all of the Assembly staff. I miss someone every year; so I will not name each different section. Thank you for what you do, in all capacities, but I would like to give a quick shoutout to Richard and his team for moving us. They have done a remarkable job in these last few weeks. Also, to those opposite me: you have given us no end of work to do in holding the government to account. We have worked with the crossbench really well over these last 12 months, and I have really appreciated the conversations that we have had and working together on some particularly interesting things that we have been able to get information out of the government on.

It has been a great year. I am very proud of the work that we have done. It has been a long year and it is now over and I am ready for a break and I am sure most people in this place are. So, again, thank you to everybody for making it quite a year. Thank you.

Australian National University—Students Association Legal Services

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.04): I would like to speak today about the experiences of many uni students in Canberra. For someone who is newly an adult or not even an adult, navigating university can be overwhelming. There is a flood of new experiences and new expectations. For many, it is a brand new city or a brand new country to adjust to. There can be language or cultural barriers and it is going to be the first time a lot of people are living on their own or living with strangers. The point I am trying to make is that there are a lot of ways that students can find themselves in trouble when they do not know where to turn.

Thankfully, there is an organisation that is doing incredible work to help students at the

ANU, which is the Australian National University Students Association Legal Service. In fact, we are joined by three of their excellent folks here in the chamber today, and I would like to acknowledge them. Thank you for coming. This small but passionate group of four lawyers helps to protect and advise one of the most vulnerable cohorts in Canberra. Everything from dealing with dodgy employers to discrimination students might be facing to issues with housing both on and off campus, the ANUSA Legal Service is doing amazing work to ensure that students are not taken advantage of.

In addition, the legal service provides legal education to students and publishes legal information on the ANUSA website, ensuring students are as well informed as possible. On a personal note, as a student who has had to access community legal advice in the past about housing, the vulnerability you feel makes it really hard to know when to reach out and whether it is okay to reach out. The fact that these guys are so fantastic and approachable means that I think a whole lot more students will be getting the help that they need when they need it before things get bad.

This community legal centre is fully accredited with Community Legal Centres Australia, and I cannot stress how incredibly lucky Canberra and the ANU, in particular are to have the ANUSA Legal Service here. Every year hundreds of students who would have no-one else to turn to receive assistance through the ANUSA Legal Service, and I want to ensure that I make it clear that their hard work is noticed, deeply appreciated and heard about as widely as humanly possible. Thank you.

Valedictory

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (6.07): It is that time of the year when we conclude another parliamentary year. On the whole, it has been a pretty good year. There have been a couple of ups and a couple of downs but, on the whole, it has been a decent one.

This year my office has seen a couple of changes. I want to thank Harry for his work earlier this year. He has departed the Assembly for greener pastures in the trade union movement, and I still closely keep an eye on his activities. He has got a bright future ahead of him. He is an incredibly intelligent young man. So keep an eye out for his activities. I very briefly had Jasmine in my office depart and then return, which was a delightful surprise. I also want to thank for their work this year in my office, Max, Sarah, Dan and Paul. They are a tremendous team and it is an absolute delight to work alongside each of you each day. The office, every day, shares so many laughs, and I am always constantly amazed at their insights, their expertise and their passion. I am very fortunate that they continue to want to be a part of the team. I would be lost without them. I am absolutely grateful for their continued support, and I look forward to doing all the things we are going to achieve together next year.

To all my parliamentary colleagues of all political persuasions: it has been a delight to work with you this year. The chamber has been busy and it has been interesting to observe the dynamics play out in this term as opposed to previous terms. I think that, on the whole, this term is shaping up to be a positive. To my ACT Labor colleagues, in particular: it is an honour to work alongside each of you. Like the team in my office, I

am always impressed and blown away at your capabilities to make good and effect change in our city. I am honoured to be part of the team and so glad to be able to continue to work alongside you next year.

To all the wonderful staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly, attendants, committee support, chamber support, the education team, IT, HR, Broadcasting, Hansard, the Library and, of course, the cleaners, who do such an amazing job of looking after us. Thank you for everything you do and the important role that you play in our democracy.

I want to thank my constituents and the great electorate of Yerrabi for their continued support. They have seen less of me this year, and for that I profoundly apologise. I have been very busy attending to my new ministerial responsibilities and, as a result of that, I have not been able to keep up with my street stalls and door-knocking as I once did. I am doing my absolute best to stay out there, but it is a lot harder than I thought it would be. But I am definitely a lot more popular at street stalls, Mr Speaker, which is very pleasant. The frequency with which people want to stop and engage now is really wonderful. It is a change that I have been surprised about but I am getting used to.

I particularly want to thank the officials in the ACT public service that I now work more closely alongside. I am impressed by your professionalism and your commitment to advancing the government's agenda. It has been an honour to work alongside you, and I look forward to the work that we will undertake next year.

In closing, I am really looking forward to a bit of quiet time over the summer. I have been to a lot of events this year. I was going through arrangements and briefs that had been prepared for me this year. I was trying to count them all and I just kind of stopped at one point. It has been an absolute wild whirlwind of activity and I have loved every single moment of it. But, I must confess, I am looking forward to a bit of quiet. To all members: Merry Christmas. Please enjoy the summer break. I look forward to working alongside each and every one of you next year.

Cost-of-living

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.11): This week I had in my office work experience student Claire Akonji, from year 10 at St Francis Xavier College. She will be finishing her work experience time with me this week. Over the past few days, Claire has worked closely with my team, gaining insight into parliamentary processes, building her research and communication skills and drafting the speech I am about to deliver on her behalf. She chose to focus on an issue that is deeply important to her and to many young people across Australia: the cost-of-living crisis. Perhaps a budding economist is in my office for this week. I will read her words. Claire Akonji, from Year 10, wrote the following:

> Right now, in Australia, one of the largest issues is the cost-of-living crisis. It is a daily reality that affects families, young people, workers, and retirees across the nation. It is the quiet struggle happening in supermarkets to kitchens, at petrol stations and around dinner tables where many households are struggling to make ends meet.
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> Growing families that want to send their children to school are having to make impossible decisions between medical appointments or essential spending like

> food or housing. Selling items for money or borrowing from friends. No one should have to make a choice like that.
>
> It is not just an issue we can brush to the side and deal with later; it is the main problem that must be dealt with now. Young couples trying to buy their first home are faced with prices that climb faster than they can save. And when the cost of essentials rise, everything else feels like a luxury.
>
> However, this is not just an economic issue, it is a social issue as well. When essential needs become hard to afford, stress levels rise, mental health struggles, and as a result communities become vulnerable. Families across the country are simply trying their best to navigate their way through life amidst a crisis that is in no way fault of their own. Raising a family, finding a job, and travelling used to be an adventure that required little worry, now it feels like a financial seesaw, where leaning one way is the difference between a roof over one's head or a meal to eat at night.
>
> A survey discussed in the Cost-of-Living Report 2025 found that respondents were spending two thirds of their income on housing and food alone. 55% were unable to pay their gas, phone or electricity bills on time. 58% were unable to visit a dentist or doctor due to money shortage. 20% of respondents reported living in darkness using candles or torches for light to cut down their electricity bills. Alternatives that people should not be resorting to, in any circumstance. And most concerningly, 87% of households with children, were living below the poverty line.
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> Despite these negative consequences, there is hope. Because as Martin Luther King Jr once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that." Many communities around the nation are supporting those who are finding it challenging to keep up with the rapidly changing pace of the economy. Governments around Australia are developing strategies to boost wages, there are community food programs and support payments.
>
> However, we need to continue pushing for sustainable, long-term policies that alleviate the pressure on families and households. Because every Australian deserves dignity. Every Australian deserves stability. And every Australian should be able to build a life where dedication and hard work is enough.

Those were the words of Claire Akonji, a year 10 student in my office this week. Perhaps, as I said at the beginning, a budding economics career awaits her.

Indigenous Allied Health Australia—graduation and awards ceremony

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (6.16): On 13 November Indigenous Allied Health Australia, or IAHA, its members and IAHA board celebrated their trainees at this year's IAHA National Aboriginal and Torres Islander Health Academy graduation and awards night for the ACT. A huge thank you to Donna Murray, the Chief Executive Officer of IAHA, for inviting me to join the celebrations once again. It was great to celebrate the 10 graduating students and recognise the 16 students who are continuing their studies.

The IAHA ACT Health Academy is an innovative community-led learning model that

reshapes and redesigns how training and education are delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in high school. Students attend two training days per week, one day at the workplace and one day undertaking their certificate III training. Trainees are provided at income through an earn-as-you-learn model, supporting their self-determination, resourcing and their self-esteem. The model is unique, compared with other school-based apprenticeship programs. IAHA works collaboratively across disciplines and sectors, such as health, education, training and employment to increase engagement and retention.

This is a program that changes lives, offering immediate and long-term benefits to individuals, families and community. It gives possibility, hope and pathways to a productive future. Congratulations to this year's graduates, who worked hard over the last two years and have completed year 12 as well as a certificate III in Allied Health Assistance qualifications. They were so proud of their achievements. Well done to all of them.

Reading their profiles gave me an insight into how valued this program is and what it means to each of them and to their families. Every year at these celebrations, I also get the opportunity to speak with parents, who are just brimming with pride in the achievements of their young people. One of the mums of one of the young people graduating this year told Donna Murray that the program, she felt, had literally saved her son's life. He was lost before it and now he feels he has a purpose.

I was really pleased to see how many people are already passionate about careers in health care as well. I know that those young people will go on to play a vital role in shaping the future of our health workforce, whether they take on one of 30-plus allied health careers that are on the board at Indigenous Allied Health Australia or whether they choose a different health pathway. Congratulations also to the seven award winners. Each recipient demonstrated commitment across different skills, including leadership, personal development and community representation.

Congratulations to IAHA on the continued success of the academy in the ACT. The wraparound support that is provided by the dedicated staff recognises the central role of culture and the importance of community-based education and belonging. The psychosocial support that is provided to the young people is just as important for their success as the education and the placements that are provided by Canberra Health Services, CIT and other healthcare providers. Thank you, too, to the CIT teachers, family, host employers and the wider community for their support, encouragement and belief in these students. These collaborations play an important role in ensuring the student's success.

The ACT government is continuing to invest in our current and future health workforce to improve professional opportunities and workplace conditions, and to increase the accessibility and inclusion of health services in the ACT. The Health Workforce Strategy sets out a plan for a territory-wide approach to building a sustainable and diverse health workforce. The priorities have a focus on a culture of learning and development, leadership, innovation and inclusiveness. These priorities will help us deliver on our collective ambition to be the most capable health workforce in Australia.

The ACT government is committed also to ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander self-determination and leadership in health. We are developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Action Plan, funded in this most recent budget, that supports the broader Health Workforce Strategy and is aligned with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-31. Donna Murray plays a key role as an adviser. She has no trouble speaking truth to power and constantly holds us to account, and I thank her very much.

Rising Tide—climate activism

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.21): We are in a climate emergency. In the last week, we have seen devastating stories of climate impacts from around the world. We have seen Himalayan villages in India buried in landslides and flash flooding that scientists say are caused by increased rainfall and retreating glaciers. More than 1,100 people have been killed by extreme weather events across Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia after cyclones resulted in torrential rain and devastating flooding.

Here in the ACT, we are heading for above-average temperatures and a chance of unusually high night-time temperatures, which we know can increase the risk of heat-related health concerns. And we just had record low temperatures. The climate has changed dramatically and unpredictably, and we are all braced for a bad bushfire season. Meanwhile, the next ACT climate strategy is nowhere in sight. We have new federal nature laws that the Greens significantly improved, but Labor would not budge on including climate consideration in our laws, even though climate change is one of the biggest threats to nature. Australia will not be hosting COP31 in Adelaide. Overall ambition from Labor governments around the country on climate change is low.

In September, we debated a tax motion I brought to the Assembly, and Labor and the Liberals united to remove one element and only one element. Most of the revenue motion passed, but they removed the section that said we would like to ask our federal counterparts to call for a fossil fuel tax on big polluters to pay their fair share. I was really puzzled by that. We do not have time to waste. We need to reduce climate emissions. We need to adapt to the change that is locked in. There is a lot of work to do and it is going to cost a lot to do that work. The companies causing the problem should pay for it. I do not understand why we would not ask our federal counterparts to get those companies to pay for it.

It is no surprise that people are fed up with government complacency on climate change. We are letting big corporations take our resources for free, pay little to no tax and sell our natural resources for extraordinary profit, and all of that is causing our planet to cook. People in Australia are struggling with the cost of living; they are struggling with the housing crisis; they are struggling with the health system. Trust in government is at an all-time low. So what are people doing?

Last weekend, all of the Greens MLAs, including myself, headed to Newcastle to take part in Rising Tide. Rising Tide is Australia's biggest climate protest. It blockades the Port of Newcastle, which is the largest coal port in the world. Rising Tide has three simple calls. The first call is to stop new fossil fuel projects. I note the current government have approved 32 fossil fuel extensions. Last week, they completely refused to even consider climate implications when they are making environmental

approvals.

The second call is to tax fossil fuel export profits at 78 per cent. Norway does this. It is common sense. Australia should have a sovereign wealth fund from Australia's own natural raw resources. In the last 10 years, Australian nurses paid $7 billion more in tax than the oil and gas companies paid. Most gas exporters continue to pay no tax, and some of our biggest coal companies—Glencore, Whitehaven and Yancoal—paid basically no tax.

The third call is to end all coal exports from Newcastle, the world's largest coal port, by 2030. The CEO of the Port of Newcastle has acknowledged that the coal industry could close in the next 10 years. Rising Tide and climate activists are saying, "Let's transition the jobs for workers. Let's look after our people on the way through, rather than pretending that that dirty and dying industry will keep going forever. It won't."

Rising Tide is an incredible event. I have gone for the last few years. It is really fun as well as being really powerful. Friends and families gather together on kayaks in the water. There is a lot of singing; there is a lot of fun; there is a lot of laughter. There is the Oldies Rising crew and the Knitting Nannas. It is multigenerational. There are teenagers diving off homemade flotillas, swings and slides into the ocean. There is live music. We had Lime Cordiale and The Herd. There is a big communal kitchen. There are a lot of really important workshops, and there is so much fun. There are dress-ups, pantomime, live art, and so much to share.

The reason people are doing this is that they are taking action to try to get their government to act on climate change. A lot of people were arrested in order to try to draw attention to this and try to get the government to take action. In the face of government inaction, it is really obvious to see why people are doing this.

I am really pleased that I could be part of Rising Tide. I am grateful to the people who are taking action and I really wish our government acted in accordance with the climate crisis.

Lanyon dog park

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.26): On Saturday, Mr Werner-Gibbings and I spent the morning battling the rain at the newly-opened Lanyon dog park, located on the corner of Jim Pike Avenue and Woodcock Drive in Gordon, greeting many adorable dogs and talking to the owners about the new dog park. The Lanyon dog park was promised a couple of years ago and has been subject to community consultation about what the Lanyon and surrounding community would like to see in a new dog park. One feature that came through in the consultation was the complementary nature of this dog park, being side by side with the existing Point Hunt dog exercise area. However, you might remember that the construction of this dog park created some concerns about the future of the Point Hunt dog exercise area earlier this year.

Late last year, a community member reached out with concerns about the future of the area, because, for nearly three decades, it has been a cherished space where dogs can run free and neighbours can connect. But worries grew when it appeared that the Point Hunt dog exercise area may become an on-lead area once the new dog park opened,

perhaps due to the misunderstandings of some people regarding the purpose of the new dog park and the consultation that had been undertaken with the community.

The community responded immediately. My inbox was filled with messages. I met with dog owners, heard their concerns and looked for solutions. I wrote to Minister Cheyne requesting reconsideration. I acknowledge the work of Ms Morris with a petition in the area that quickly gathered more than 1,000 signatures, which is an incredible achievement for such a short period of time. It shows that the dog owners of Lanyon really care about the facilities that we have in the area. In June, Minister Cheyne confirmed the outcome we had all hoped for: Point Hut would remain off-leash for all dogs once the new Lanyon dog park opened.

Now that new Lanyon dog park is open, we can see these two neighbouring areas working together to provide dogs of all sizes fun and interactive ways to exercise and socialise, and their owners can get together and get to know their neighbours. On the first weekend it was open, I saw dogs and their owners using both parks at different times. Dogs and their owners would turn up and use the smaller park, throw a ball and check out the agility course, and then they would go to the big area, have a big run-around, tire the dog out, come back to the little dog park for some water and maybe a few more throws of a ball, and then head home. They really complement each other so well. Overall, the feedback on Saturday was really positive. The dogs all looked super happy together and checked out the park. There was a beagle that was absolutely adorable and so many fun puppies to pat and play with.

I acknowledge that there are a few teething issues, like the bindis that have grown in the grass recently, but I am assured by Minister Cheyne's office today that the directorate is onto it and has received advice that City Services is meeting with the contractor this week at the park to deal with the bindis. So, rest assured, hopefully the bindis are all gone by the time it heats up and they become very prickly.

This new dog park offers something for every Lanyon dog and their owner. As the Labor government, we are excited to have promised and delivered this great amenity for the community. I recommend everyone, no matter where they are in Canberra, to come and check out the new Lanyon dog park and the Point Hunt exercise area while they are there.

Valedictory

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (6.30): To round out the year, I would like to reflect on what a great year it has been. In my electorate of Yerrabi, the Budjan Galindji grasslands in Franklin have opened, the Gungahlin Community Centre is progressing well, and the 2025-26 ACT budget delivers a wide range of initiatives and improvements across the Yerrabi electorate, including works to progress the North Gungahlin Health Centre and a joint emergency services centre in Casey. In wrapping up the good things that have happened in the electorate this year, it would be remiss of me not to again note the opening of the Giralang shops. As everyone will know, it is a hard-fought for win for Giralangers.

Once again, there are much-loved local shops at the heart of our suburb.

My four ministerial portfolios have kept me well and truly busy this year. One achievement I am particularly proud of is the establishment of the Closing the Gap subcommittee of cabinet, which is designed to strengthen coordination, accountability and shared decision-making across the ACT government. I thank the Elected Body chair, Maurice Walker, all Elected Body members, as well as the Chief Minister and his office for their assistance in establishing this forum and reaffirming our joint commitment to genuine partnership and accountability.

As part of the budget this year, I announced a $10 million community sector funding boost on top of the more than $250 million allocated in funding for not-for-profit community sector organisations. This funding will support the sector as we move through an ambitious reform agenda in 2026. We know that 2026 will bring a continued focus on disability reforms. Work is already underway with our local community and advocates to inform the ACT government as best as possible as we progress through these changes, and I will continue to update the Assembly throughout 2026.

The appointment of the Landscape Architect is progressing behind the scenes, and, once appointed, I have no doubt they will get straight into work on the much anticipated ACT landscape plan, ensuring that, as our city grows, we can deliver the homes and services our community needs and, at the same time, achieve Labor's objective of a healthy and loved environment.

We also began work on a new Climate Change Strategy which will support us to meet our future emissions reductions targets, with a view to supporting the ACT community as we progress through some of the harder challenges in ensuring a just and equitable transition.

The feature that unites my four distinct portfolios is the opportunity they each provide for meaningful engagement and collaboration with highly motivated, intelligent and passionate stakeholders. Whether it be citizen scientists, carers and volunteers across the ACT, community advocates or service providers, including ACCOs and jurisdictional counterparts across the country, I thank them all for their engagement and contributions.

I also thank the ACT public service for their dedication and advice, particularly the ones that report to me. To the senior executives, including those who have since moved on, and the directorate staff behind them, I cannot express my appreciation for the frank and fearless advice that you deliver. While perhaps a bit unusual, I would like to single out Geoffrey Rutledge, who across my environment portfolio provided much wise counsel and advice in the early days of my appointment to ensure I could get up to speed as fast as possible in some pretty complex areas. Since Geoffrey's departure, in an effort to fill the void when considering complex portfolio matters, my office has adopted a practice of asking: "What would the ghost of Geoffrey say?" This demonstrates how well regarded his perspective was, not just for us but, I dare say, also for anyone who has the pleasure of working with him.

I thank our amazing directorate liaison officers. Our DLOs provide the most valuable support and coordination back to directorates, and they do this with a fantastic sense of

humour and an amazing threshold for organising what feels like chaos. I thank all my Assembly colleagues, my fellow Labor colleagues, as well as the vibrant crossbench and opposition and their offices, for their collaboration throughout the year. A give a particular shout-out to and congratulate the new officers who are finishing their first full year in this building.

I will read the next bit exactly as my staff very kindly wrote for me. They have titled it with a heading that says "VIPs". It says: "Against their wishes, I would like to thank my staff who have been"—and this is underlined—"incredibly insistent I do not name any of them." Members of this place will know them and I trust they know how grateful I am to them for all they do to support delivering for the ACT government. Many of them, by their own disclosure, have been diagnosed or undiagnosed with ADHD, but they operate the best they can to be responsive. Importantly, they are kind, honest and always willing to collaborate with others. I appreciate the approach they take to getting things done in this place, and am certainly very grateful for everything that they do and the commitment that they show.

Finally, I wish everyone a very safe and happy festive season and New Year. I am looking forward to 2026 and continuing to progress important policies and reforms for the Canberra community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.35 pm

Schedule of amendments
Schedule 1

Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025

Amendments moved by Ms Clay

1
Clause 4
Section 216, definition of *territory priority project*, proposed new paragraph (c)
Page 2, line 14—

omit

2
Clause 4
Section 216, definition of *territory priority project*, proposed new paragraph (e)
Page 2, line 15—

insert

(e) a development proposal related to community housing.

3
Proposed new clause 4A
Page 2, line 15—

insert

4A New section 216 (2) and (3)

insert

(2) However, a development proposal mentioned in subsection (1), definition of ***territory priority project***, paragraph (d) or (e) is not a territory priority project if—

(a) an EIS is required for the proposal under section 105; or

(b) the development application for the proposal is required to be referred to the heritage council by a regulation made under section 170 (1) (a) that relates to the impact of the development on an Aboriginal object or place.

(3) In this section:

Aboriginal object—see the *Heritage Act 2004*, section 9.

Aboriginal place—see the *Heritage Act 2004*, section 9.

4
Clause 5
Proposed new section 217A
Page 2, line 18—

omit

5
Clause 5
Proposed new section 217B (1A)
Page 5, line 9—

insert

(1A) However, a development proposal is not related to public housing if the development is undertaken as part of the government program known as the 'Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program'.

6
Clause 5
Proposed new section 217C
Page 5, line 11—

insert

217C Meaning of *related to community housing*

(1) For this Act, a development proposal is ***related to community housing*** if the development to which the proposal relates—

(a) is proposed to be undertaken by, or on behalf of, a registered community housing provider that is an ACNC registered entity; and

(b) may facilitate the construction, ongoing operation and maintenance, repairs, refurbishment or replacement of community housing; and

(c) is wholly or partly funded by the Territory or the Commonwealth.

(2) However, a development proposal is not related to community housing if—

(a) it involves more than 100 dwellings, including any dwellings not used for community housing; or

(b) less than 15% of all dwellings in the development are used for community housing.

(3) In this section:

ACNC registered entity means a registered entity under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (Cwlth).

community housing—see the *Housing Assistance Act 2007*, dictionary.

registered community housing provider—see the *Community Housing Providers National Law (ACT)*, section 4 (1).

Note The *Community Housing Providers National Law (ACT) Act 2013*, s 7 applies the Community Housing Providers National Law set out in the *Community Housing Providers (Adoption of National Law) Act 2012* (NSW), appendix as if it were an ACT law called the *Community Housing Providers National Law (ACT).*

7
Clause 6
Page 5, line 12—

substitute

6 Declaration of territory priority projects
Section 218 (1)

substitute

(1) The Chief Minister and Minister may jointly declare that a development proposal is a territory priority project (a ***territory priority project declaration***) if the Chief Minister and Minister are satisfied that—

(a) the proposal—

(i) would achieve a major government policy outcome that is of significant benefit to the people of the ACT; or

(ii) would substantially facilitate the achievement of the desired future planning outcomes set out in the planning strategy, a relevant district strategy, the territory plan or any relevant zone; or

(iii) is for significant infrastructure, or significant facilities, that are of significant benefit to the people of the ACT; and

(b) the proposal has been the subject of sufficient consultation under subsection (3).

8
Proposed new clauses 6A to 6G
Page 5, line 14—

insert

6A Section 218 (3)

after

Minister

insert

must

6B Section 218 (3) (a)

omit

may

6C Section 218 (3) (b)

omit

must

6D Section 218 (3) (c)

omit

must

6E New section 218 (3A)

insert

(3A) Before giving advice to the Minister under subsection (3) (a), the territory planning authority must—

(a) consult the conservator of flora and fauna, if the authority considers the proposed declaration is likely to—

(i) have a significant adverse environmental impact on a protected matter; or

(ii) affect a protected tree or declared site; and

(b) consult the heritage council, if the authority considers the proposed declaration—

(i) relates to a place or object registered, or nominated for provisional registration, under the *Heritage Act 2004*; or

(ii) may impact an Aboriginal object or place.

6F Section 218 (5), new definitions

insert

Aboriginal object—see the *Heritage Act 2004*, section 9.

Aboriginal place—see the *Heritage Act 2004*, section 9.

6G New sections 220A and 220B

in chapter 8, insert

220A Review of amendments made by Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Act 2025

(1) The Minister must, as soon as practicable after 1 December 2028, review the operation of the amendments made to this chapter by the *Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Act 2025*.

(2) The Minister must present a report of the review to the Legislative Assembly not later than 30 June 2029.

(3) This section expires on 30 June 2030.

220B Expiry—territory priority project amendments

The following provisions expire on 31 December 2029:

(a) section 216 (1), definition of ***territory priority project***, paragraphs (c) to (e);

(b) section 216 (2) and (3);

(c) sections 217A to 217C;

(d) section 218 (3A) and (5), definitions of ***Aboriginal object*** and ***Aboriginal place***;

(e) this section;

(f) dictionary, definitions of ***related to community housing***, ***related to public health facility*** and ***related to public housing***.

9
Clause 8
Proposed new dictionary definition of *related to community housing*
Page 5, line 19—

insert

related to community housing—see section 217C.

10
Clause 8
Proposed new definition of *related to a public health facility*
Page 5, line 20—

omit

Supplementary answer pursuant to standing order 118AA
Club closures—loss of community facilities

Dr Paterson *(in reply to a question by Mr Cocks on 3 December 2025)*:

I advise the Legislative Assembly that there is no "hit to the bottom line of government" which will necessary result from the upcoming closure of the Vikings Club venue in Chisholm. Club groups are permitted to relocate gaming machine authorisations between venues within the group up to the maximum number of authorisations approved for each venue. Other venues within the Vikings Club group can accommodate the gaming machine authorisations operating at the Chisholm venue.

Authorised premises	**Maximum authorisations**	**Authorisations held**	**EGMs in operation**
Chisholm Sports Club	164	60	60
Lanyon Valley Rugby Union & Amateur Sports Club	154	90	90
Town Centre Sports Club	201	133	133
Tuggeranong Valley Rugby Union Club	251	193	193

Moreover, a decline in community contributions is unlikely to result in a material direct cost to government because gaming machine licensees largely meet their community contribution obligations through cash or in-kind contributions to community groups for community purposes permitted under the Gaming Machine Act 2004, part 12. The permitted purposes are broader in scope than the kinds of activities typically funded by the government. The annual minimum requirement for community purpose contributions is 8 per cent of net gaming machine revenue from all authorised premises in a club group. It does not relate to individual venues.

Mandatory direct payment of community contributions to government comprises, for each reporting year for each venue, only 0.4 per cent of net gaming machine revenue to the Chief Minister's Charitable Fund and only 0.4 per cent of net gaming machine revenue to the Gambling Harm Prevention and Mitigation Fund. Money paid into the Chief Minister's Charitable Fund is managed by Hands Across Canberra and paid out in grants to the community.

I can nonetheless advise that for 2024-25 the Vikings club venue in Chisholm reported gross gaming machine revenue of $4.515 million resulting in gaming machine tax of $0.873 million.

Whether closure of this venue will reduce gaming machine tax and community contributions will depend on business decision made by the Vikings Club about whether it will relocate gaming machines at Chisholm to its other venues. It is relevant to note that in circumstances where the Vikings Club does relocate gaming machines to other venues, any resulting increase in gross gaming machine revenue at these venues will be taxed at a higher tax rate than when operating at the Chisholm venue because the progressive tax rate is assessed at a venue level.