



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

4 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 **Thursday, 22 January 2026**.

Thursday, 4 December 2025

Ministerial response to petition:	
Taxation—health levy—petition 38-25	3831
Trade mission—Thailand and Singapore (Ministerial statement)	3833
Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Our Booris, Our Way—update (Ministerial statement)	3835
Lakes and waterways—order to table documents—amendment	3838
Committees—standing	3839
Social Policy—Standing Committee	3840
Fiscal sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee	3853
Leave of absence	3863
Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee	3864
Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	3864
Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)	3868
Ministerial arrangements	3871
Questions without notice:	
Roads—St Clare of Assisi school	3872
Outlaw motorcycle gangs	3873
Roads—traffic and bus services	3874
Community sector—pay and conditions	3875
Sport and recreation—aquatic facilities	3876
Transport Canberra—bus services	3876
Budget—federal government funding	3877
Housing—Housing Supply and Land Release program	3879
City and Government Services—Christmas lights	3880
Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure	3881
Government—freedom of information	3883
Planning—rural leaseholds	3883
Public schools—Tharwa Preschool	3885
Gungahlin town centre—noise standards	3886
Migration—economy	3888
ACT Fire & Rescue—electric breathing apparatus truck	3889
Parking—Woden	3889
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Vocational education and training—skills funding	3891
Budget—federal government funding	3891
Roads—St Clare of Assisi school	3891
Papers	3892
Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025	3894
Public schools—senior secondary language courses	3897
Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee	3910
ACT Law Courts—trauma informed support programs	3910
Motion to take note of papers:	
Richardson shops—government response	3924
Roads—Commonwealth Avenue Bridge—government response and interim update	3924
Trees—urban canopy—government response—update	3926
Roads—Commonwealth Avenue Bridge—government response and interim update	3927

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Act—Thirteenth Report to the ACT Government.....	3927
ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028—Phase Three ACT Closing the Gap Implementation Plan	3927
Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010—reports	3927
Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre.....	3929
Payroll Tax Amendment Bill 2025	3929
Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Amendment Bill 2025 ...	3936
Statements by members:	
Sport and recreation—Australian championships winners	3942
Valedictory	3942
Valedictory	3943
International Volunteer Day	3943
Canberra Region Amateur Radio Club.....	3944
Public service—employment.....	3944
Adjournment:	
Valedictory	3945
Valedictory	3946
Maria Lucia Llauderres—tribute	3947
Valedictory	3948
Early childhood education	3949
Valedictory	3950
Valedictory	3951
Valedictory	3953
West Papua	3954
Valedictory	3955

Thursday, 4 December 2025

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

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

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

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

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

Petition Ministerial response

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

Taxation—health levy—petition 38-25

From **Mr Steel**, Treasurer, dated 3 December 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Castley concerning the repeal of the health levy from the ACT 2025-2026 budget.

The response read as follows:

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

Thank you for your letter regarding petition E-PET-038-25, submitted by Ms Leanne Castley MLA, which calls for the repeal of the Health Levy introduced in the 2025-26 ACT Budget. The petition requests the Assembly immediately repeal the Health Levy from 2025-26 Budget and prevent it from being applied during the term of the current government.

This response is provided in accordance with Standing Order No. 100 of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

What is the Health Levy?

The Health Levy is a new charge on all owners of rateable properties in the ACT, introduced for a period of four years with a review in 2029-30. This levy is legally implemented through the *Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable—Rates) Determination 2025*, a disallowable instrument made under the *Taxation Administration Act 1999*. The levy is set at \$100 for all residential and rural properties and \$250 for commercial properties and is collected through general rates notices.

The Health Levy is similar to existing ACT Government levies such as the Police, Fire and Emergency Services Levy (PFESL) and the Safer Families Levy, which are also included on the rates bill. These levies are an important source of revenue given the ACT's narrow tax base.

By incorporating the levy into general rates bills – the ACT's broadest tax base – all ACT property owners will contribute to ensuring sufficient and sustainable funding for our local health system. This approach spreads the cost as widely as possible across the community and keeps the amount paid by each taxpayer to a minimum.

The Health Levy is independent of public health programs such as Medicare. The Medicare Levy and Medicare Levy Surcharge are income taxes collected by the Commonwealth Government which funds a wide range of health services across Australia not limited to hospital activity.

Why is the Health Levy being introduced?

The Health Levy was introduced as part of the 2025-26 Budget, which was developed following the 2024 ACT election. Budget decisions are made through Cabinet considerations and based on updated economic forecasts. While the levy was not part of the Government's pre-election platform, it was implemented in response to emerging financial pressures from the health system.

Hospital funding in the ACT is underpinned from both the Commonwealth Government and the ACT Government, primarily through the National Health Reform Agreement. However, the Commonwealth's contribution to public hospital funding has not kept pace with rising costs and demand in the ACT. Since 2021-22, the Commonwealth Contribution Rate for public hospital funding has been in decline, falling from 44 per cent to an estimated 33 per cent in 2025-26, well below the nationally agreed target of 45 per cent. This shortfall has created a funding gap of \$189 million in 2025-26 which the ACT Government has to make up. In 2025-26, the ACT Government's total health spending is at \$2.9 billion, accounting for 33 per cent of the total budget. The Health Levy was introduced to partially address this shortfall and contribute to the financial sustainability of the Territory's public health system. The ACT Government continues to negotiate for a fairer share of Commonwealth health funding in the new agreement to reflect our population growth and service pressures.

Rates Assistance

The Government understands some Canberrans experience financial difficulty that may impact their ability to pay their rates bill including the Health Levy. A 50 per cent rebate on general rates (up to \$750) and the PFESL (up to \$115) is available for pensioners and the beneficiaries of special disability trusts. Pensioners, seniors, and other homeowners experiencing financial hardship may also defer part or all their general rates bill.

More information about general rates assistance is available on the ACT Revenue Office website at: <https://www.revenue.act.gov.au/home-ownerassistance/rates-assistance>

I trust this information is of assistance and provides advice on issues raised in the petition.

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

That the response so lodged be noted.

Trade mission—Thailand and Singapore Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.02): The government undertook a trade mission to Thailand and Singapore in October to promote Canberra's investment opportunities, our education sector, and strengthen bilateral relationships with our key ASEAN partners.

Coordinated by the Office of International Engagement and VisitCanberra, with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade, the program included a series of education and investor roundtables, hotel and tourism industry meetings, university alumni events, government-to-government meetings, and integrated development precinct site visits.

The trade mission demonstrated the ACT's commitment to playing a role in Australia's regional engagement, and our capacity to lead through inclusive policy, innovation and international collaboration.

This was the first ACT government trade mission to Thailand, a key market identified in our International Engagement Strategy. This leg of the mission provided an opportunity to forge new relationships and, importantly, create a foundation for future investment in Canberra.

In Bangkok, the delegation was hosted by Australia's Ambassador, Her Excellency Dr Angela Macdonald PSM, and, I note, received outstanding support from the extended team at the Australian embassy. The support of the embassy staff enabled quality interactions with a range of government and private sector leaders. This included a meeting with the Governor of Bangkok.

I have to say that the Governor displayed a deep understanding of Australia and Canberra, including its history, economic drivers, its leading climate action credentials, and even our recent success with aviation expansion and international access. The Governor knew more about what was going on here than some members of the Assembly. The candid discussion highlighted opportunities and challenges common to both Canberra and Bangkok. The Governor was keenly interested in the development of both the Australia-Thailand and Canberra-Bangkok relationship in the years ahead. We certainly appreciate the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's openness to collaboration, and welcome future dialogue.

With the support of the Australian embassy, I also met with Thailand's Commerce Minister and the Thailand Board of Investment Secretary-General. These wide-ranging discussions covered investment, higher education, health, tourism, culture, and climate resilience.

As members are aware, education is our number one export. It is worth more than \$1½

billion to our economy. We regularly take the opportunity to promote Canberra as a world-class study destination, and to support growing the value of this essential economic driver for our economy.

Thailand is the 12th ranked country of origin for international students to Australia, with nearly 19,000 students studying in our country. However, the ACT's market share of Thai students studying in Australia is only 0.5 per cent, compared to the national share of 2.35 per cent. Clearly, there is room to grow.

Working to grow enrolments, we hosted an event with leading Thai education agents to raise awareness of our education institutions, our city's academic strengths, and, importantly, to hear from agents directly about what is important to them in guiding student enrolment decisions. It was invaluable in seeking an understanding of how to work with the Thai market more effectively, to ensure that we are providing the targeted information and working strategically with our tertiary education partners.

Whilst in Thailand, I also had the opportunity to promote Canberra's investment offering to investors. Discussions focused on introducing a range of government infrastructure and development pipeline priorities, especially hotels and mixed-use precinct development. As an aside, Thai investors own our city's premier five-star hotel. The Hyatt Hotel Canberra is owned by Thai investors. A site tour of OneBangkok, a major integrated mixed-use development precinct, provided valuable insights into large-scale urban transformation.

We then took a short hop to Singapore, where we conducted engagements that focused around a number of longstanding commitments, notably the 60th anniversary of Australia-Singapore diplomatic relations and the 10th anniversary of the Singapore-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. As members would be aware, Singapore is a priority market in our International Engagement Strategy. The work that we have been engaged with over many years, spanning tourism, trade, investment and education, reflects a strong commitment to building deeper, more dynamic ties with this remarkable city-state.

Beyond all the economic and trade benefits, it is clear that relationships between cities are built on genuine people-to people connections, and the commitment to Singapore over the long term has enabled many productive examples. The short program in Singapore focused on furthering opportunities in trade, investment and tourism. This is, of course, underpinned by our big ambition to see a return of direct aviation services between Canberra and Singapore, aimed at accelerating and strengthening economic and education ties between the two cities.

At a business event hosted by Australian Alumni Singapore, I outlined Canberra's transformation into Australia's most progressive and creative city, and the vision for the future of Canberra. Alumni networks in priority markets provide significant avenues for positive advocacy and open a range of opportunities. These are people who are familiar with Australia, having had, often, lifelong connections to our country. They also reflect why international education is so valuable to the ACT and Australia.

At investor engagements, Canberra's strengths in knowledge-intensive industries, education exports and urban infrastructure investment opportunities were outlined,

including the development of the UNSW Canberra city campus, the National Convention Centre and entertainment precinct, the extension of light rail, and the new Lyric Theatre.

Singapore's vision for its future-ready economy aligns closely with Canberra's net zero ambitions. The government is committed to building partnerships that deliver shared prosperity, sustainability and innovation. In Singapore, we have a Trade and Investment Business Development Manager permanently based. Ms Nicola Kelly is working across the broader South-East Asian region, embedded with Austrade, to support these efforts.

The trade mission has laid the foundation for deeper collaboration in Thailand and Singapore, both important inbound investment markets for Canberra, and reaffirmed our city's role in the Australian context as a leader in innovation.

I want to thank all the Australian government officials and the organisations who supported this mission and contributed to its success. Particularly, I thank all the staff at the Australian Embassy in Thailand and the Australian High Commission in Singapore, particularly our ambassadors, Dr Angela Macdonald PSM in Thailand, and His Excellency Mr Allaster Cocks, the Australian High Commissioner to Singapore.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge the hardworking ACT government representatives, including staff in the Office of International Engagement, Economic Development and VisitCanberra, for their efforts in making all the arrangements for the short mission.

I present the following paper:

Trade Mission—Thailand and Singapore—October 2025—Ministerial statement,
4 December 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Our Booris, Our Way—update Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.11): I am proud to present this ninth update on the ACT government's progress in implementing the recommendations from the Our Booris, Our Way review.

I begin by acknowledging all the work of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee. Their guidance and expertise are so important in driving these important reforms in our child protection system.

As of 30 June 2025, there were 220 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in

out-of-home care, representing approximately 30 per cent of all children and young people in care in the ACT. This level of over-representation remains deeply concerning, and addressing it continues to be one of the government's highest priorities. However, it is important to recognise that progress has been made. Since June 2019, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care decreased by 11 per cent, from 247 children to 220. Within this broader reduction, we have seen a 36 per cent decline in children on long-term orders where the director-general holds parental responsibility.

The ACT government remains fully committed to delivering on the recommendations from the *Our Booris, Our Way* review. Our continued partnership with the implementation oversight committee keeps us accountable, ensuring we stay true to both the intent of the recommendations and the spirit of the review. Our work to implement the recommendations also aligns with our broader ACT government commitments, including the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*. These frameworks all reinforce the importance of strong families and culturally safe support systems.

Our progress is backed up by the ACT's results in the 2024 *Family Matters* report, which are a promising sign that change is occurring. This report found the ACT was one of only two jurisdictions that have reduced the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care. This went from 14 in 2023 to 11.7 in 2024. This is the lowest rate for the ACT since 2016. This reduction was partly driven by a significant drop in out-of-home care admission rates for children—from 13.9 admissions per 1,000 children in 2023 to 5.5 admissions per 1,000 children in 2024—with a greater focus on keeping families together.

As we continue reforms within the child and youth protection system, we also recognise the need to provide culturally safe and effective early support to families. By providing access to support sooner, we can help families stay together and reduce their contact with the system.

I am pleased to highlight some significant achievements from this reporting period that will contribute to improvements to the system across legislation, policy, practice and service delivery. Following consultation with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, a number of teams within Children, Youth and Families have been combined into one unit under the newly appointed Acting Senior Director, First Nations. This unit combines teams that implement culturally safe practice at specific points on a family's continuum when navigating the system.

From January 2025 to June 2025, the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team provided culturally safe support to 92 families with 195 children and young people. A new referral process has been designed and implemented for the Family Group Conference team to receive direct referrals from the Cultural Planning team following any entry into care. This means there are more referral pathways to a conference than previously and that practice, in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles, continues to be incorporated by ensuring the family are part of decision-making.

This year, the ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum was established and aims to bring together Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, service providers and ACT government officials working with Aboriginal families. The forum will drive improvement in systems, policies and practices so that Aboriginal children and young people grow up strong, safe and connected to their culture, families and communities. This will be achieved through consistent interpretation and application of policy and practices across the service system.

We have received significant positive feedback from the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and carers about the vital role of the First Nations Kinship Liaison Officer. Having heard this valuable feedback, an identified resource will be redirected to add an additional First Nations position within the Kinship Team.

Work is nearly complete on the production of a First Nations Children in Care reporting dashboard focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care. This dashboard seeks to display information about the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and continue to hold the ACT government accountable.

A new referrals team was established in March 2025 to align with the new service system operating under the Children, Youth and Families Preferred Provider Panel, specifically targeting early intervention for children and families and preservation supports. Currently, there are three providers for these supports, with a further two expected in the first quarter of 2026.

I want to reaffirm this government's continued commitment to working in partnership with the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Together, we remain focused on delivering the reforms necessary to reduce the over-representation in the child protection system, improve outcomes for children and families, and support family reunification wherever possible.

Finally, I would like personally to thank the members of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee once again for their leadership and dedication to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the ACT.

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to share our progress in this important work. I present the following papers:

Our Booris, Our Way Review—Implementation Update—January to June 2025, dated December 2025.

Government response to recommendations—Our Booris, Our Way Review—Implementation Update January to June 2025—Ministerial statement, 4 December 2025

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.17): I welcome this statement this morning providing an update on progress under the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations. Like the minister, I would like to acknowledge the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee for their immense work on this. I think it is a fantastic governance framework to ensure that shared decision-making continues to be playing a part and that there is that level of oversight from the First Nations community in relation to this important work along the way.

I understand that the community more broadly would love to continue to see proactive engagement across all of government to target these issues. They are complex issues. Of course, focusing only on the out-of-home care system is not sufficient to bring about the systemic change that is required to see an ongoing reduction not only in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out-of-home care system, but in their over-representation in that system.

I acknowledge the reduction in the number per 1,000 children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out-of-home care system. This is very rare across Australia. In most places that proportion is going up. I would note, though, that since the National Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now more over-represented within the out-of-home care system, which means that we are seeing a faster reduction or a greater reduction in non-Indigenous children in the out-of-home care system.

While the total number or the gross number, so to speak, has gone down, in 2019, 28.6 per cent of children in our out-of-home care system in the ACT were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Now, in 2024, in the latest Closing the Gap data, that figure is up to 31.3 per cent, and I believe the minister indicated it was around 30 per cent today. We have seen an increase in the over-representation, despite the Closing the Gap target to reduce not just the rate but the actual over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by 45 per cent by 2031. We have six more years to reach that target. There is a lot of work to get there, and I appreciate the minister's commitments today to ensure that work continues to occur.

I look forward to seeing genuine collaboration across government with the oversight committee and broader First Nations community to bring about the changes that we in this place all agree that we want to see in the long term.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Lakes and waterways—order to table documents—amendment

Debate resumed from 2 December 2025, on motion by **Mr Speaker**:

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

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

Omit “as reported by the Clerk”, substitute: “as circulated by the Chief Minister on 3 December 2025”.

Mr Barr circulated the following variation request on 3 December 2025:

1. In paragraph (2):

(a) omit “held by the ACTPS or”.

(b) Insert “a Minister or” before “the Executive”.

2. In paragraph (3), omit “an explanation of”, substitute “information regarding”.

3. In paragraph (6), omit “within 30 days”, substitute “by 27 February 2026”.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Committees—standing Establishment—amendment to resolution

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.21): I move:

That the resolution of the Assembly of 3 December 2024, as amended on 4 February 2025 and 26 June 2025, that established general purpose standing committees, be amended as follows:

- (1) in the last column of the third row of the table (which describes the Economic, Industry and Recreation committee), omit “6 Member committee” and substitute “5 Member committee”;
- (2) in the last column of the fourth row of the table (which describes the Social Policy committee), omit “5 Member committee” and substitute “4 Member committee”; and
- (3) in the last column of the sixth row of the table (which describes the membership of the Public Accounts and Administration committee):
 - (a) omit “3 Member committee” and substitute “4 Member committee”; and
 - (b) insert “1 Greens Member”.

The substance of this motion is in point (3). It updates the continuing resolution for the standing committees to add a Greens member to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration. Oversight of the government’s work on fiscal management is becoming an increasingly important area of work. Accordingly, the Greens are keen to support this work and having one of our numbers appointed to the committee.

For clarity on points (1) and (2) of my motion, they are corrections to the continuing resolution that the committee secretariat had hoped to be made at the next reasonable opportunity, which is therefore now. They clarify that the Economy, Industry, and Recreation Committee is indeed a five-member committee and that the Social Policy Committee is indeed a four-member committee, consistent with the number of members listed in this resolution. There is no substantive change in that respect. It is minor and typographical. I would like to thank the committee secretary for identifying what is essentially a drafting error and commending it for correction.

Lastly, I want to sincerely thank Mr Cocks, Ms Tough, Mr Milligan and Ms Cheyne for their sustained good-faith engagement. In a tough final sitting week of the year, they have been communicative, perceptive and willing to roll with the challenges of timing and engage with the substance of our motion. Thank you.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.23): The Canberra Liberals will not be opposing this motion today but I want to briefly note a couple of concerns. Number one is that the Assembly is increasingly at this stage moving away from the ratios provided for in the standing orders. There is a shift very clearly from some in this place away from the idea that there should be proportional representation across committee memberships towards “whoever wants to be on a committee should be on a committee”. I understand the intent of that and I understand the goodwill behind that. Clearly, there are a lot of people who want to engage with the very substantial and important matters that the public accounts and administration committee works through. At the same time, then there will be, I expect, a challenge if we are applying the same logic across every single committee, particularly given the number of different individuals who may wish to be involved. We could see potentially every committee having a representative of the major, plus the Greens, plus the two independent parties in this place. I do not think that would be sustainable.

The other problem is that, once again, we are in a four-person committee scenario. I really hope that this will be workable, as has been the case across many other committees. But we will be watching it and making sure that this committee manages to navigate the issues that are presented to it in a consensus approach in the same way we have seen in other places. If that is not the case, we may come back and seek to make some changes then. But today we will not be opposing the motion.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.25): I am very supportive of this motion and of somewhat unequal representation on the committees to ensure that different perspectives in this place are reflected. I would note that the two typographical changes in this motion relate to decisions I thought were made by the Liberals to remove members of the Liberal Party from committees as well as, of course, adding a Green to another committee.

Many members have heard me speak on when we bring motions like this of my interest in having an independent on the admin and procedure committee. I spoke with a couple of members about the prospect of trying to add that to this motion. I chose not to do so today. But noting that, yes, there is a shift in the committee dynamics, I just wanted to flag that that is something I am interested in pursuing in the future. I understand the concern around unequal representation. But the committees have been working well, working collaboratively and almost always reaching consensus decisions rather than not on any of the committees that I am on. So far that has not been required. I think having a non-party representative on the administration and procedure committee in relation to their business is actually quite important for the functioning of this Assembly. So I look forward to having some conversations about that in the new year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Reference

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) one in seven Australian women have endometriosis with an average length of time to receive a diagnosis being 6.5 years. One of the main symptoms of endometriosis is pelvic pain, however symptoms can be much broader and affect all aspects of a sufferer's life;
- (b) one in four Australian women report pelvic pain affects their ability to undertake daily activities. Pelvic pain conditions include endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome and many others;
- (c) many people in the ACT endometriosis community report difficulties accessing timely, affordable, multidisciplinary care in Canberra, and some feel they must travel interstate to access care; and
- (d) multidisciplinary endometriosis care is a collaborative model of care, which can include gynaecology, physiotherapy, pain management, mental health support, dietetics and other allied health or medical specialities, and improves the outcomes for endometriosis sufferers;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) the Government is committed to expanding gynaecology services, including through hiring more nurses and allied health professionals at the Canberra Endometriosis Centre at Canberra Hospital, which is a model some other jurisdictions look to emulate;
- (b) while a number of other jurisdictions have undertaken inquiries into endometriosis, women's pain and medical misogyny, an ACT-specific inquiry into endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions will provide ACT-specific evidence about endometriosis diagnosis and treatment rather than Australia-wide generalisation; and
- (c) gathering ACT-specific evidence would assist the Government to further expand gynaecology services and improve care for endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions;

(3) requests the Standing Committee on Social Policy to undertake an inquiry into endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions, including:

- (a) the number of women and other people in the ACT who suffer from endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome and other chronic pelvic pain conditions;
- (b) the barriers in the ACT to getting a diagnosis and gaining access to treatment including primary care, specialist clinics and ongoing pain management for these conditions;
- (c) the treatment options and supports available in the ACT compared to other jurisdictions, their evidence-based effectiveness and potential side effects and impacts;
- (d) the role of medical misogyny, underlying gender biases in healthcare and cultural norms that create barriers for women with these conditions;
- (e) the economic and social impacts of people in the ACT with these conditions, including education, employment and lost productivity;

- (f) education available to medical professionals, allied health professionals, young women and others, on these conditions and treatment options;
 - (g) research and trials currently being explored in Australia and opportunities for this to take place in the ACT; and
 - (h) any other related matters; and
- (4) requests that, should the Standing Committee on Social Policy agree to inquire into the matter, the committee report by the first sitting day of February 2027.

I rise today to ask the members of this Assembly to request the Standing Committee on Social Policy undertake an inquiry into endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions here in the ACT, not just on my behalf but on behalf of the one in seven women living with endometriosis and the one in four women that report pelvic pain affects their ability to carry out day-to-day activities—some of whom have joined us in the gallery today. I give a shoutout to Jess, who is here, for putting the call out and a shoutout to Barb who is watching online at home here in Canberra and could not make it in.

This motion asks us to recognise the scale and seriousness of endometriosis and chronic pain. As I mentioned, around one in seven women are estimated to live with endometriosis, with an average delay to diagnosis in Australia of around six and a half years. One in four women are reporting that pelvic pain affects their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. That is a lot of women. If we look around this room, that is many of us in that category. Applied to the ACT, it means an estimated 27,000 people in our territory might be living endometriosis. These are school students, apprentices, public servants, carers, casual workers, friends, sisters, parents and even members of the Legislative Assembly. Many of us are living with pain that is invisible to others but relentless in its impact.

This motion recognises that, while pelvic pain is most commonly associated with endometriosis, it includes a range of conditions—adenomyosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome and other chronic pelvic pain syndromes—which can overlap and compound each other. Multidisciplinary care needs to see the whole person and not just one diagnosis.

Endometriosis is not just a pelvic pain or reproductive disease; it is a whole-body disease. Although the most common symptoms are pelvic pain, heavy bleeding and painful intercourse, symptoms can be wide-ranging. It can be infertility; more frequent than normal periods; back pain; excruciating upper leg pain; sciatic nerve pain; trouble breathing when you are on your period; migraines; gastrointestinal symptoms—you name it. The list goes on and on. And why does it go on and on? Because endo has been found in every organ of the body—every single organ. While it is quite rare in the brain and the skin, it has been found there. It is found in lungs. It is found on the diaphragm. It is everywhere.

This motion asks the social policy committee to do what our committees do best: to listen carefully to the lived experience of Canberrans, to bring together the clinical and economic evidence and to make practical cross-party recommendations about how we can improve care and support people here in the ACT—Canberra stories for Canberra policy. I want us to recognise that no two endo journeys are the same.

Endometriosis and pelvic pain are not new problems but they have too often been treated as if they were. They really are not new problems. Endometriosis was written about in ancient Greece and ancient Rome thousands of years ago. While it was not understood in the way we do now, which is still quite lacking, medical texts from the time described conditions with pelvic pain, painful intercourse and infertility. Ancient Egyptian physicians are documented treating women with menstrual disorders. So this is nothing new. Even the term “endometriosis” has been around for nearly 150 years, having first been coined in 1886.

But still, in 2025, our understanding is lacking, although it is improving. It is much better even than when I was a teenager two decades ago. We now have a much clearer picture of how far-reaching those impacts are. National work led by the Australian Endometriosis Coalition has documented the economic burden of endometriosis—billions of dollars every year in lost productivity, health costs and foregone education and work.

The ACT round table held by AEC earlier this year as part of the National Endometriosis Roundtable series brought that picture closer to home. Participants, including clinicians, advocates and people with lived experience, identified familiar themes: long waits for diagnosis, limited access to multidisciplinary care, financial strain and gaps in culturally safe and inclusive services. I want to acknowledge at this point Mr Rattenbury for coming along to the round table earlier in the year. It was great to see you at that event—thank you. A truly integrated, collaborative, multidisciplinary model of care, reducing the cost of living with endometriosis and workforce education funding were all identified as priority areas for action in the ACT—and these are not abstract issues. I also want to acknowledge Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith for her ongoing engagement in this area. It really means a lot to me.

I am so privileged in this job to share the stories of women with endo and that they come to me and share them with me. But so many of these stories are so heartbreaking—the women who desperately want children but cannot because endo has made them infertile; the miscarriages; the IVF; the emotional pain; the women who could not do the job they loved or study the course they wanted because pain has stopped them doing it; the women spending all their income on doctors and surgery and treatment to still get nowhere, to still be in pain, to still not have the treatment that works for them. You are not alone. I see you, we see you and I am here for you.

I remember the first time I realised I was not alone with bad periods—and, bear with me, this is going to be a weird story. When I was 12 I went to Mary MacKillop Place in Sydney for a school excursion. For people who are not familiar with it, it is where the tomb of Saint Mary MacKillop rests. She was not a saint at the time. There is a museum, and in the museum there is a panel that talked about how Mary MacKillop had her period every two weeks and she would have a spoonful of rum or something like that each night to help her sleep because of the pain and was labelled an alcoholic and was quite cast aside because of this. I remember it stuck with me because, even though I was only 12, I was in year 7, and pain with a period was considered normal. I was getting painful periods at that point. So it just struck me that this woman who went on to do so much was also having painful periods. I remember feeling sorry that she could not do more for the pain at that time because there just were not alternatives. Fast-

forward two years after that and my periods started coming every two weeks. I remembered that and went, “Okay; well, I am not the only person this has happened to.”

I know I have said this many times here in the chamber and outside, but I never want another teenage girl to go through what I went through as a teenager. I missed so much school. At one point in year 12 I was only attending school nine days a fortnight because, with the pain, I could not actually go full-time to school. I saw so many doctors; I had so many ultrasounds; I tried so many different hormonal contraceptives as treatment; and I spent so many days and nights in emergency departments.

At 17, in an emergency department a few weeks before my HSC, I was diagnosed with IBS, which is a common comorbidity for endometriosis. That is the best that anyone could come up with at the time. I still remember it was about 4 am in the morning and mum and I had been there all night, and this lovely doctor was like, “It is just IBS. Go home; you will be right. Just watch what you eat.” But my mum believed me and that made the world of difference. I think I am standing here today because she actually believed that something was wrong.

Mr Cocks: On you, mum.

MS TOUGH: Yes, mum is the best. I was not diagnosed with endo until I was 24. I did my HSC when I was 17. That was a long gap. It was 10 years since I first went on the pill, it was 12 years since I visited Mary MacKillop Place and it was 13 years since my first period. But I have known women to wait even longer than that for a diagnosis. I know women not diagnosed until their thirties or even their forties. That feeling of relief when presented with a diagnosis is so real; it is so validating. But then comes the fear of what next? What does it actually mean? Where to from here? What are the actual options available? So that is a bit of my story.

I want to be clear that this motion is not brought in the spirit of criticism of clinicians or the health workforce at all. I know the Canberra Endometriosis Centre at Canberra Hospital is seen as a model by other jurisdictions and the ACT government is investing in gynaecology services, including more nurses and allied health staff as part of a broader commitment to chronic pain complex conditions and women’s health. Canberra Health Services are making solid progress in expanding public gynaecological services and strengthening capacity within the endometriosis centre. I want to say that I grew up in New South Wales and was diagnosed in New South Wales. So we can put the blame fairly on New South Wales on that.

Patient engagement and multidisciplinary care have been significantly enhanced. I understand there are twice-weekly patient workshops being delivered by a team, including an endo nurse, a physio, a psychologist and a dietician. Workforce capability is growing. Two nurses have completed the Australian College of Nurses course in endometriosis and pelvic pain. There are nurse physiotherapists follow-up appointments and there are psychologists permanently involved in delivering the group education sessions. But we do need to do more. We need more specialist doctors as part of that as well.

A few times when talking to people across the chamber about this motion, I have had

comments like, “Isn’t this something the government should already be doing?” As I have said, the government is investing in expanding services. But it is broader than just money going into public hospitals; we need to know where the gaps in care are and we need to hear the voices of individuals navigating endometriosis and pelvic pain. Are GPs pointing women in the right direction? Is pelvic pain being treated as normal in schools and girls are told to ignore it? Do women know of and have access to allied health, multidisciplinary support like physio, pain management, dietetics and psychology? Do we have enough pelvic physios? How long does it take to see a specialist? What is the cost of treatment? What is the impact on women’s lives?

That lived experience gives policy a better understanding. It means the social policy committee can make informed recommendations to government. I was talking to the CEO of SHFPACT earlier this week about the complexities of chronic pain and the need for a holistic approach. SHFPACT is operating one of the commonwealth government-funded pelvic pain clinics. But is it operating in tandem with the endo centre as well as it could? Who knows? Maybe this inquiry will help us figure it out and help with those pathways.

We know there is strong advocacy and leadership from community organisations. I am sponsoring a petition for QENDO around pelvic Botox that was discontinued in Canberra Health Services. QENDO are running peer support groups here in Canberra, nurse-led support with the telehealth clinic, mentor programs and workplace supports. Endometriosis Australia, which I have been fortunate enough to be an ambassador for for the last few years, has been delivering the Endo Academy Scholarship for endo nurses in regional, rural and remote areas—because endo does not care where you live. They have also started EndoThrive, a workplace accreditation program, helping employers support employees living with endometriosis.

We will probably hear some criticisms about the process from others in the debate, and I acknowledge that, while the Assembly often does send committees requests to conduct inquiries, just as I am doing now, it is up to the committees to decide whether to do them and it does impact the ability of committees to do their own self-referred inquiries. While there may be criticisms of me for referring an inquiry to a committee I sit on, other parties refer committee inquiries all the time but they have enough members that it is not just someone on the committee referring it away.

Mr Werner-Gibbings: Just get more members elected.

MS TOUGH: While I think my colleague Mr Werner Gibbings is great, and I know he would have moved this for me if I put it in front of him for him to sign and lodge, I do not know if it would have been taken as seriously if it came from the man who sits next to the woman always banging on about endo than if it came from the woman always banging on about endo. I just wanted to cement my reputation as the woman banging on about endo, from being just the woman in the Labor Party doing that, to the woman in the Assembly doing that, because I know my party colleagues have known I have been talking about pelvic pain since before I was even diagnosed. I think I was 19 or 20 the first time I got up in front of an entire Labor conference and started banging on about pelvic pain—much to the horror of some of the older men in the room. They did not know what to expect where I was going next.

Ms Cheyne: In your union.

MS TOUGH: Yes, in my own union, nonetheless.

MS TOUGH: I thank my colleagues for their support today, colleagues across the chamber, and for the women who have come to be in the gallery to be part of this. I know I am referring it to my own committee, and I think my committee colleagues are supportive. I will cop the criticism of process, but I think this is an important way for everyone to be part of this process. Considering all of that, I ask the Assembly to please join me in requesting the social policy committee undertakes this inquiry. I am so pleased to look around and see support. I will save more for my closing, because I am starting to run out of time. But thank you everyone. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (10.41): I rise to signal the opposition's support of Ms Tough's motion and to thank her for her personal story today. I recognise the concern about the workload for the committee; however, the timeframe of February 2027 seems more than manageable. So, yes, we are happy to support Ms Tough's motion today.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.41): The Greens will be supporting this motion today. I want to take a bit of time to thank Ms Tough for sharing her lived experiences. I think for a lot of women tuning in who feel like they are alone, to hear these kinds of stories talked about in the chamber is such an important step for those women out there who are feeling frustrated and hurt. So I thank her for that.

I want to clarify, as foreshadowed, that there are separate issues of play here: the issue of process and the issue of substance. For the Greens, these two issues are in conflict. On substance, this motion seeks to establish a very worthy inquiry into endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions. On process, for a sitting member of the committee to use a motion in the Assembly to refer an inquiry to their own committee was last term seen as problematic and ultimately voted down by the ACT Labor and Canberra Liberal members of this place, when the Greens sought to do the same thing. On balance, the importance of the topic at hand is such that we feel that we could not, in good conscious, vote against the establishment of an inquiry we wholeheartedly support in principle. But it does give rise to process concerns, which I will speak to first in detail.

We are concerned that the Assembly and the majority of members still in this place have previously concluded that committee members should not use Assembly business to refer inquiries to their own committee and that they should speak to the committee and establish a self-referred inquiry. Appreciating that neither Ms Tough nor I were in the building at the time, it is worth reflecting that, when my colleague Ms Clay sought to move a motion to establish an inquiry into zoning changes for missing middle back in 2023, both the ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals voted against her motion on the premise that it should have gone through the committee process first. With the hindsight of this week and the urgency that the Labor planning minister expressed for a committee inquiry into missing middle to conclude in order to pass legislation, it is perhaps a little bemusing in hindsight that they were not on board to conduct an inquiry on a matter of substance back in 2023.

In practice, when motions to establish inquiries come through the chamber, there is the risk that they undermine the secretariat's and, indeed, the committee's ability to weigh in on workload considerations. I think we are in an alright spot in social policy, but I suspect we will not have capacity for much, much, more. Members have the opportunity to refer as many potential inquiries as possible to committees irrespective of their current agenda. When this argument came up in the Fix My Street inquiry, my colleague Mr Braddock cited similar concerns and flagged that we would need to accept that committees would be more likely to decline to inquire. I appreciate that at the time Minister Cheyne agreed and acknowledged the independence of committees and that there is no guarantee that there will be an inquiry.

As I mentioned yesterday in response to Ms Barry's motion to establish an inquiry into specialist disability housing, there does remain the ongoing challenge that right now there are no hard and fast limits on the number of Assembly business items members may bring, which means that we could all technically call for as many inquiries as we want. Given the intense workload that comes with a committee inquiry, referred or otherwise, it is worth considering whether we might have to limit Assembly business slots the way we currently limit private members business, which necessitates similarly intense workload for minister and directorates.

On substance, however, we would struggle to vote down this motion, because the topics of endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions are extremely worthy and they are often overlooked by decision-makers. Only recently have systemic issues and biases against women and folks who are assigned female at birth in frontline health care and medical research been brought to people's attention—something that affects at least half our population.

Let me be clear: I am really glad that Ms Tough's motion specifically names women and other people in the ACT who suffer from endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovary syndrome and other chronic pelvic pain conditions. While endometriosis is still grossly under-researched, we do know that a small number of people assigned male at birth have also been diagnosed with endometriosis, and we know that many trans men will experience endometriosis across their lifetimes. So I am glad that this resolution adopts a definition inclusive of all women, plus trans men, cis-men, gender diverse people and all of those who often find themselves waiting for a long time to be invited into conversations about their health when they do not fit cisgender expectations.

Endometriosis and many other chronic pelvic pain conditions face a particular challenge in medicine because they are most commonly conditions faced by women. Women often feel like their healthcare professionals ignore the symptoms or are not believed—and evidence tends to back that up. Medical misogyny is very much prevalent in our community, and conditions that primarily affect women are severely underfunded and under-researched.

Women's Health Matters conducted their regular Our Lives survey earlier this year. Nineteen per cent of respondents had been diagnosed or had received treatment for endometriosis or adenomyosis. I feel awful, because I am a politically engaged woman and the Greens spokesperson for women, but I was stunned at how high that proportion was, especially knowing the lack of research into these conditions. Of those respondents, 50 per cent said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their

healthcare services. Similarly, satisfaction was also low with respondents who had sought treatment for persistent pelvic pain. Clearly, these are conditions that have major impacts on people's lives. Policy decisions and strategies to treat or diagnose endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions are overdue.

The scope of the inquiry that Ms Tough has proposed covers a wide breadth of factors that should provide some worthwhile recommendations. I want to highlight a couple of things that I reckon could fit under 3(h) "any other related matters". I think that further research is needed into fertility, contraception and menopause in relation to those with endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions. We have an overarching issue of a lack of specialists in the ACT. Endometriosis specialists are no different, and they are incredibly hard to come by. Considering endometriosis specialists are a key factor when trying to receive a diagnosis, this would contribute, you would imagine, to the insurmountable barriers that come along with endometriosis treatment.

Ms Tough mentions the government's commitment to expanding gynaecological services in the ACT. I do want to add the commitment to training, hiring more endometriosis specialists or introducing more incentives for specialists to move to the ACT, I suspect, would be a major help to resolve the barriers with diagnosis and treatment. We know that, despite general goodwill from generalised gynaecologists, we have seen gynaecologists operating and willing to operate on patients without the training required to surgically treat endometriosis to that gold standard. Across the board, there are skills and capability gaps when it comes to endometriosis in our system. The current system leaves many people affected by these conditions to fend for themselves. Possibly, if our committee decides to take on this inquiry—and without seeking to pre-empt the committee's findings—perhaps that could be one of the recommendations.

I want to thank QENDO and Women's Health Matters in particular for their guidance and feedback on my response today and to thank Ms Tough's advocacy in the endometriosis space. She is a very fierce advocate and ambassador for endometriosis and women's health. The work that she has done to raise awareness among members here has already made a genuine difference. Obviously, this is a significant step in the right direction. Personally, I am really eager to identify and implement evidence-based policies for women's reproductive health.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.49): I would like to add my support to Ms Tough for bringing forward this motion and sharing her lived experience, which shines a light on the realities of endometriosis and other chronic pelvic pain conditions that women in our community face. These conditions affect thousands of women in the ACT and yet diagnosis often takes many years.

This motion takes a constructive step by proposing an ACT-specific inquiry. It will help us understand how many people are affected, what barriers they face in getting diagnosed and treated and what support is currently available. With that evidence, the Assembly and the government will be better placed to improve care in ways that reflect the needs of people living with endometriosis and pelvic pain in the ACT. So, again, I thank Ms Tough for bringing forward this motion.

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

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.50): I thank Ms Tough for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, and I rise to support the motion. I want to recognise Endometriosis Australia, QENDO and Women's Health Matters, who have been strong advocates in this space, and particularly the individual ambassadors and advocates, including those who are in the chamber with us today, for ensuring that the issues of endometriosis and pelvic pain get the attention that they deserve. And of course, I particularly know Ms Tough's ongoing and enduring commitment and advocacy to address women's health and the burden of endometriosis and pelvic pain—which affects one in seven women nationally, but has been so often under-discussed, under-diagnosed, dismissed and poorly treated.

As someone who has, I think, attended every ACT Labor conference for the last 10 years, I can attest that ACT Labor is certainly much better informed about the impacts of endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome and other conditions that cause pelvic pain and the experience of women and people with uteruses who have this life experience. I am pleased, to some extent, to say that Ms Tough is no longer the only person speaking about her own experience at conference. She has given voice to others and encouraged others to use their voices in this space.

I am fortunate to not have this lived experience myself, but I understand, as Health Minister, and I have had many conversations over the last six years, how difficult it can be to access multidisciplinary endometriosis care, which provides a best-practice and collaborative model of care that applies holistic support and treatment. It can include gynaecology, physiotherapy, pain management, mental health support, dietetics, other allied health and medical specialties. If available, this type of multidisciplinary care improves the outcome for people with endometriosis.

But as Ms Tough's personal lived experience indicates, it is not easy for people to find those with enough expertise to bring together the support and care that people need. So, I do support the establishment of this inquiry, which will gather ACT-specific evidence that informs our investments in pelvic pain care and treatment, and gynaecology going forward—noting that a number of other jurisdictions have undertaken inquiries into endometriosis, women's pain and medical misogyny.

I also welcome the opportunity through this inquiry to provide a clearer picture on the number of women affected in the ACT; a clearer picture on the specific barriers that may be facing women in accessing diagnosis and care, including the role of medical misogyny; and an understanding of what advancements research can provide in progressing diagnosis and treatment—particularly given that our awareness and understanding of these conditions has increased significantly in recent years.

The ACT government continues our strong record in delivering more services and support for women in Canberra, including initiatives to address endometriosis and pelvic pain. But we know that there is more to do. We welcome the Australian government's recent commitments to support women with endometriosis, including boosting Medicare rebates for specialist gynaecological care, and establishing 22 endometriosis and pelvic pain clinics across the country—including one here in the ACT, through Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT.

With the support from this program, endometriosis services are currently provided

through Canberra Health Services and SHFPACT as public services. At SHFPACT, a team of nurses and GPs have undertaken additional training in pelvic pain management. They help patients to understand their condition and guide them through management options. They strive to be empathetic, inclusive and non-judgmental in their approach to care, offering longer appointment times to ensure that they can understand the individual's journey.

The team collaborates closely with GPs and other healthcare providers, and builds on the many connections they have in the community—as does the team at Canberra Health Services. We welcome commitments from the Australian government to deliver another 11 endometriosis and pelvic pain clinics across Australia and to expand the remit of all 33 clinics, including those in the ACT, to also provide specialist support for menopause and perimenopause.

Funding has also been promised for health professionals to undertake additional training in menopause and perimenopause, and the development of national clinical guidelines is planned. A national awareness campaign to assist women to have informed discussions with their doctor or health professional is also planned. This will be welcomed by ACT residents who may require greater support than is currently available from their GP.

Mr Speaker, Canberra Health Services continues to make solid progress in expanding public gynaecological services, including strengthening capacity within the Canberra Endometriosis Centre. Over recent months, the team has made focused efforts to reduce waiting times and improve service access. A dedicated project officer is assigned to the Canberra Endometriosis Centre until February 2026, and an extension for an additional six months is currently being considered, to continue driving this work—particularly in managing wait lists and improving data reporting.

Patient engagement and multidisciplinary care have been significantly enhanced. Twice-weekly patient workshops are ongoing, supported by a multidisciplinary team comprising an endometriosis nurse, physiotherapist, psychologist and dietitian. Workforce capability has also increased. Two nurses have now completed the Australian College of Nurses course in endometriosis and pelvic pain, and nurse physiotherapist follow-up appointments have commenced as part of the established care pathway. Two psychologists are now permanently involved in delivering patient group education sessions for those experiencing endometriosis and pelvic pain. Further work is underway to strengthen clinical resources and research.

An ethics application is in progress to support the project officer and endometriosis nurse in converting the initiative into a formal research project. Additionally, a handout for persistent pelvic pain is being developed for use in both the emergency department and antenatal ward presentations.

I do want to acknowledge explicitly the feedback that I do get from people experiencing flare-ups and endometriosis and pelvic pain, about the inconsistency of approach in our emergency departments. We are working hard to ensure that a more consistent and more sympathetic approach is taken right across our emergency departments at Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital when women present with pelvic pain.

I want to reassure all women with that experience that you are welcome and that you are seen in our service. I apologise to those women who have experienced poor responses from our hospitals when they have turned up in severe pain from endometriosis, flares and other conditions.

Collectively, the initiatives we are undertaking demonstrate significant and ongoing progress in expanding gynaecological services in the ACT and improving care for people experiencing endometriosis and pelvic pain.

We will continue to undertake work to understand the latest evidence-based care. That includes supporting a trial, should a proposal be put forward, in relation to the development of the pelvic Botox treatment as a formal course of treatment within Canberra Health Services, in a way that helps to develop the evidence base. We look forward to receiving further information should any specialist be interested in undertaking such work with Canberra Health Services.

The investments and service developments that I have talked about build on our strong commitment to women's health in the ACT. That also includes our maternity and focus strategy, our sexual health and family planning work, mental health, menopause and perimenopause, and specific services that support women with complex issues—including alcohol and other drug use, domestic family and sexual violence, and homelessness.

Mr Speaker, I thank Ms Tough for bringing this important inquiry proposal forward so we can better understand the ACT-specific issues and how the significant investments we are making in women's health in the ACT can continue to benefit women with these conditions, and continue to improve the experience that they have in our health system.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.59): Very briefly, I want to thank Ms Tough for bringing this motion forward today and for speaking to her experience—reflecting the experience not only of people in the gallery but more broadly across the ACT. Personally, I do not have an issue with Ms Tough using the motion as she has today, even if partly that is to stamp her authority on being the “voice of authority” for this issue in the Assembly. I think she has earned that title. I look forward to consideration within our social policy committee of this matter when it is referred to us.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.00), in reply: I just want to thank everyone for their contributions today; everyone who is in the gallery, everyone who spoke, everyone for their words of encouragement, and messages that I have just got through. Thank you for the support of the chamber. I completely understand the criticisms from Miss Nuttall, but I appreciate your support nonetheless for the substance of the motion and the inquiry. I think it will be a good inquiry in the committee, and I think you and I will learn a lot and hear a lot, and it is going to be a great inquiry.

Thank you in advance to Ms Barry and Mr Emerson. Hopefully, fingers crossed, we can do this. And, as Miss Nuttall reflected, neither her nor I were in the chamber at the time of that previous Assembly. This is a whole new world, this Assembly, so thank you. I want to thank Ms Castley for her support, not just today but during the week when I spoke to her about the inquiry—as well as Ms Carrick and Mr Emerson. Thank you for your support.

And a big “thank you” to Minister Stephen-Smith for your support. I particularly want to thank you for your apology just then to the countless women who have had poor experiences in our emergency departments over the years. I have not, thankfully, presented to a Canberra emergency department with endo, but I have presented to countless New South Wales hospitals and have had some pretty poor experiences. I know many people who have been to Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital with endo flares and have not had the greatest of experiences. So, thank you, minister, for acknowledging that work can be done in that space and for getting on and getting that work done. It will make a world of difference for how women feel when they present at emergency in excruciating pain.

I wanted to thank everyone who has ever shared their story with me or shared their story publicly. Thank you, Miss Nuttall, for sharing the concerns of trans men and people with uteruses who do not identify as female. As you mentioned, there are cisgender men diagnosed with endometriosis. There has been a handful. Maybe if there were more of them suffering we would have had a cure by now—probably had a cure decades ago—but right now we do not even really know what causes it, unfortunately, because it is wrapped up with medical misogyny and the lack of research into this area.

I wanted to reflect: in 2023 I helped host a breakfast with Endometriosis Australia at Parliament House for endometriosis awareness. It was attended by politicians, doctors, researchers, donors and endo warriors alike. I know there are some women here who were at that breakfast. My parents came along with me. They were super proud. It was the day I was announced as an Endo Ambassador. And my mum reflected in the car afterwards how great it was for federal parliament to be talking about endometriosis and women's health, and how this would not have happened in the past without more women in parliament and without women sharing their stories publicly. For that, I wanted to thank Gai Brodtmann, the former member for Canberra, who is also a former chair of Endometriosis Australia, and Nicolle Flint, the former member for Boothby, who together set up the Parliamentary Friends of Endometriosis many years ago up on the hill.

And to Nola Marino, who—yes—is a Liberal, but credit where credit is due in the endo world. When she was Liberal whip in the former coalition federal government, she had Greg Hunt, the federal health minister, in her car one day. She basically locked the doors, turned to Greg and said, “Right, there is this thing called endometriosis, and you are going to do something about it.” And, credit where credit is due, he did. He started the ball rolling at the federal level. And I am really proud of what happened under the coalition government to get endo funding started and the ball rolling, and for the Albanese Labor government for taking it and absolutely running with it. It is something that now has bipartisan support and there is more and more money going into research and funding and treatment because of that.

But I challenge anyone to listen to the story of Nola's daughter without bursting into tears. She gave a speech on it many years ago in federal parliament. If you can find it, I highly recommend listening to it. Her daughter nearly died because of endo. She was in ICU. She had been told to prepare for the worst. It was touch-and-go because of complications from endo. So, I just want to acknowledge Nola and her daughter in that experience, kicking off Nola's activism, getting Greg Hunt in that car and getting the

ball rolling—because the more we talk about it, the more people know we are not alone. This is not just something that happens to a few people over on the other side of society. This is happening to people all around us every day.

And it is so heartwarming now, as Minister Stephen-Smith said, that I am no longer the only person at ACT Labor conferences talking about women's health, talking about endo and pelvic pain. I am so proud we have created a space where it not only happens, but it is supported, and women feel they can get up and share their stories. It is no longer just me standing up, talking about it, getting into fights with my own union about it and getting into arguments. It is now just an ordinary part of our annual conferences.

There are so many more people I could thank and acknowledge who have come before me, to allow me to stand here and share my story and call for this inquiry. I want to thank Women's Health Matters, Endometriosis Australia, QENDO, the Australian Coalition for Endometriosis and so many other groups, doctors, my own doctors, people I have met, physios. There are so many out in the community who are working in this space, who are trying to get more done. And the more we talk about it, the more that is going to happen.

I admit I am feeling a bit overwhelmed right now, so I think I am going to end it there. But I just want to say, “thank you”. This is a big moment for me. It is a really big moment for so many women and for so many people in our community. I just really appreciate your support this morning.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Fiscal sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee Appointment

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.06): In conjunction with Mr Rattenbury, I move:

That:

- (1) this Assembly agrees to establish a select committee to examine the fiscal sustainability of the ACT;
- (2) this select committee shall be given funds provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the committee to facilitate the analysis of the Budget and the preparation of the report of the committee;
- (3) the select committee will call on a broad base of expert witnesses to:
 - (a) evaluate the fiscal position and sustainability of the ACT Budget;
 - (b) assess the performance of the Government at seeking and obtaining Commonwealth Government sourced revenue, with particular focus on health, housing and infrastructure;
 - (c) review the impact of the payroll tax concession given to the Commonwealth for their employees;
 - (d) assess effectiveness and fairness of own source revenue, including investigating new revenue sources;
 - (e) review the costs associated with managing and delivering government

services;

- (f) analyse the current and proposed capital works pipeline and its alignment to Government's overall strategic priorities;
 - (g) assess the effectiveness of the wellbeing framework at delivering on its intended objectives; and
 - (h) any other matter related to the financial management of the ACT; and
- (4) the select committee will produce an interim report on initial findings by 24 March 2026, with full findings published by 28 August 2026.

This motion aims to shine a bright torchlight into the deepening cavern that is the ACT finances. That is kind of why we are here, particularly on this side of the chamber and that part of the chamber. We are at an interesting time politically here in the ACT and in this chamber. Given that no party and certainly no individual has absolute power, this is the sort of motion that we should be collaborating on. I was most pleased to have worthwhile discussions with the Greens and to arrive at a form of words—albeit, they will be amended somewhat, but most of the amendment has been done through, again, collaboration and consensus.

Fiscal sustainability is not just a matter for accountants; it is also the foundation of every service that Canberrans rely on. That is what you have to get debates like this back to. When families lie awake at night worrying about the future, they are not actually thinking about credit ratings—unless they are really nerdy; I guess some of them are, but most of them are not. They are thinking about how to juggle the next round of bills or how their children will ever afford to buy their own home or how long they will need to wait and how much they will need to spend for health care when the unthinkable happens and they need it. That is what it is about. Right now, these worries are real. We want to get to the bottom of the things that have led to a strangulation of services and a rising of costs.

In September, S&P Global Ratings downgraded the ACT's credit rating from AA+ to AA, citing persistent large deficits, rising debt, health cost pressures and a bloated capital works pipeline. The ACT is now on par with Victoria as one of the most fiscally fragile jurisdictions in Australia. S&P expects several more years of operating and cash deficits. Don't we all expect that? I think we all expect many years of operating and cash deficits.

The latest financial statements tell the story of a net operating deficit of \$1.4 billion, borrowings of \$13.9 billion and net debt of \$11 billion. One in every five dollars of revenue now goes to servicing debt. That means that more than every dollar that Canberrans pay in residential rates goes to borrowing costs, not funding our hospitals and not funding roads or infrastructure. The money goes to banks and foreign investors—a dividend for the money they continue to lend the government because the government is losing control of the budget. Every dollar spent on interest is a dollar stolen from hospitals, schools and cost-of-living relief.

This is not just a short-term problem. At the current trajectory, borrowings will exceed the value of ACT's assets within 25 years, and that means intergenerational debt. Our children and grandchildren will pay for today's reckless spending. Although this motion does not necessarily call for specific changes to how we operate in that space, it gives

us the ability to see exactly how we have arrived at where we are and where we can go from here.

While debt explodes, families are being priced out of Canberra. It takes two full-time incomes to just keep a roof over your head in the ACT, largely because land costs 20 per cent more than across the border, and the government is the primary land developer in the territory. Rates and charges keep rising. In one year alone, Canberrans were slugged with 25 new or higher taxes. This government does not just spend; it also overspends, under-delivers and leaves families to pick up the bill. That is why this motion matters.

A select committee on fiscal sustainability will shine a light on the true state of the territory's finances. It will bring in external expertise, call on a broad base of witnesses and examine everything from revenue sources to capital works priorities. It will ask hard questions about whether the Wellbeing Framework is delivering real outcomes and whether the government is doing enough to secure commonwealth funding for health, housing and infrastructure. It is a genuine pleasure of mine, as the new leader of the Canberra Liberals, to collaborate with other sections of this chamber to make this happen in my first sitting week in that role.

Ms Cheyne: The Greens.

MR PARTON: Well, there is some collaboration from others here, Ms Cheyne. We all get along in here. We are all friends, aren't we?

Canberrans deserve a government that respects their hard work and manages their money wisely. If we fail to act now, the debt we ignore today will become the burden our children carry tomorrow. It is time to reclaim Canberra for the people, and that starts with getting our finances under control. I thank Mr Rattenbury and the Greens. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.13): I rise as co-sponsor of this motion to establish a select committee which will undertake a review into the ACT's finances and deliver recommendations to the government, as well as this Assembly more broadly. I thank Mr Parton for his collaboration and also Mr Cocks in the preparation of this motion for today. It has been a good discussion to think about: what is the conversation we need to have? One of the key issues we often discuss in the Assembly is our fiscal position, the state of the territory's finances and the sustainability of the ACT budget.

I do not intend to prosecute an entire discussion on that today, because that is in fact the very purpose of the select committee that we are proposing. What I will say is that it is incumbent on all of us in this Assembly to seek to find answers. The Treasurer will say that it is the government's job to deliver the budget, and that is true, but it is the parliament that passes the budget when you have a minority government, so my view is that we all need to be involved in this conversation and we need to explore options in order to think about the long-term pathway for the ACT's finances. We need to ensure a sustainable budget that delivers the services this city needs.

The Greens are very clear that moving to fiscal sustainability does not involve slashing public services. So many in our community are dependent on these services, and

education, health, community services and a range of other important expenditures should not be subject to a clumsy efficiency dividend. We note the recent review of Tasmania's state finances, which made the above point rather eloquently, I thought, while noting that achieving a sustainable fiscal position will undoubtedly be a long-term task. We anticipate the same for the ACT. The report also observed the need for support across the political spectrum for fiscal repair. That again underlines, in my mind, the value of this select committee. It is an opportunity to work together to build a path forward to identify solutions and, ideally, build a political consensus for those sustained efforts. That is something I believe many Canberrans would expect of this place.

Regarding the terms of reference that are laid out for the select committee, we certainly think there are some important topics, including the issue of assessing the performance of the government and seeking and obtaining a commonwealth government source of revenue. We very much work in the school of: "If you don't ask you don't get." There has been quite some public debate over whether the ACT is asking enough. We need to assess the performance of the government in undertaking that task.

We are mindful of the significant issue of payroll tax in the ACT. We have a large percentage of our community employed in the commonwealth public service. I note Mr Steel's proposed amendment, and I am comfortable with that. We obviously need to be mindful of constitutional constraints, but we also need to make sure that, given the unique position of the ACT, we are being given a fair adjustment with commonwealth funding.

We also believe the committee needs to look at own-source revenue. We need to evaluate whether we are raising taxes fairly and efficiently or whether other sources of revenue might be available to help pay for the services the territory needs. Colleagues will be familiar with the view we have put this year in proposing an amendment to payroll tax, which will be discussed later today. We are looking at the large corporations that are making a significant turnover from this territory and are not necessarily contributing to the needs of the territory through the payment of payroll tax. That is one example where we have been able to find additional revenue for the territory without placing an unfair burden on our residents.

When it comes to infrastructure, it is important that we build the Canberra we need for tomorrow, but it would be remiss not to investigate the government's proposed capital works program and its impact to determine if the priorities are, in fact, the ones this city needs, to make sure we are best leveraging commonwealth investment, and how we are ensuring that we have the right skills available to us to undertake those infrastructure programs. It is about whether we have the capacity in ACT industry and whether, for example, we have the specialist skills—and light rail construction is an example of that—to retain a consistent and well-sequenced pipeline of works across the city and not lose capacity and capability by not staging projects appropriately.

I am going to move an amendment. As has been flagged by colleagues in the Assembly, the initial version put forward in the notice paper on Monday did not address the issue of the structure of the committee. That was a question of timing. People will know this amendment is coming. It is an amendment moved my name. Whilst Mr Parton and I are co-sponsoring, you cannot co-sponsor an amendment. This is an understood—

Mr Barr: Well, there's a standing order problem!

MR RATTENBURY: Exactly. The amendment does not change the original motion, but it adds that the select committee be comprised of four members, with one Greens MLA who should be the chair, one Liberal MLA who should be the deputy chair, one Labor MLA and an Independent MLA. I understand Ms Carrick will be nominating, but, as it is the form of the place, I have simply specified an Independent MLA. Colleagues will be required to nominate by 4 pm today.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after "That", substitute:

- (1) this Assembly agrees to establish a select committee to examine the fiscal sustainability of the ACT;
- (2) this select committee shall be given funds provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the committee to facilitate the analysis of the Budget and the preparation of the report of the committee;
- (3) the select committee will call on a broad base of expert witnesses to:
 - (a) evaluate the fiscal position and sustainability of the ACT Budget;
 - (b) assess the performance of the Government at seeking and obtaining Commonwealth Government sourced revenue, with particular focus on health, housing and infrastructure;
 - (c) review the impact of the payroll tax concession given to the Commonwealth for their employees;
 - (d) assess effectiveness and fairness of own source revenue, including investigating new revenue sources;
 - (e) review the costs associated with managing and delivering government services;
 - (f) analyse the current and proposed capital works pipeline and its alignment to Government's overall strategic priorities;
 - (g) assess the effectiveness of the wellbeing framework at delivering on its intended objectives; and
 - (h) any other matter related to the financial management of the ACT;
- (4) the select committee will produce an interim report on initial findings by 24 March 2026, with full findings published by 28 August 2026;
- (5) the select committee be comprised of four members, as follows:
 - (a) one ACT Greens MLA, who shall be the chair;
 - (b) one Canberra Liberals MLA, who shall be the deputy chair;
 - (c) one ACT Labor MLA; and
 - (d) one Independent MLA; and
- (6) Members shall be nominated to the Speaker by 4 pm on this sitting day."

With that, I commend the amendment to the Assembly and the notion of this select committee, which I think will make a valuable contribution to the discussion going forward.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.19): I rise to speak to the motion brought forward by Mr Parton and Mr Rattenbury to establish a select committee on the fiscal sustainability of the ACT. I want to put on record that, when I first saw this motion, I had concerns that this committee could reasonably be seen as establishing a Tony Abbott style commission of audit. This is not hyperbole; the terms of reference for this inquiry are eerily similar to the commission of audit. Of course, that has been pushed by the Canberra Liberals for years and years. I hope that this is not the case.

The movers of this motion, including the ACT Greens, know that the government will be well into deliberations on the 2026-27 budget process by the time this committee has proposed to provide even its interim report. This is especially the case when you consider that the budget has been brought forward this year in response to requests from the community sector and a recommendation of the estimates committee. So I want to set expectations now. If matters are raised in March, it is too late for consideration in the 2026-27 budget. There may be a longer term consideration. Mr Rattenbury mentioned that this could inform longer term considerations about fiscal sustainability in the ACT.

Further to this point, the ACT already has a very lean and efficient Treasury. It is a Treasury that is fully committed to delivering the budget, particularly in the timeframe that the committee is intending to do its inquiry. While I ensure that the government will cooperate with this committee, it is not reasonable to expect that the ACT Treasury will provide extensive resources to the committee during a time when it is preparing the budget as well as engaging in very important negotiations with the commonwealth, supporting negotiations with the commonwealth in relation to the National Health Reform Agreement, and informing the government about the next stages of tax reform, so that we can make decisions in the budget.

For that reason, it is important that the committee does not rely on the Treasury as the sole source of information for their review, and that whatever is provided by the external expertise noted in the original motion adds value beyond what is routinely produced in the estimates committee through the regular Pegasus review of the budget. I have circulated an amendment to ensure that this is the case.

I also wish to note that there is a current parliamentary committee with responsibility for parliamentary scrutiny for the territory's accounts. As such, if we want to ensure effective and efficient delivery of services to the public, I ask that this committee genuinely differentiates its line of inquiries from that of the estimates and annual report processes. Also, to be fair on all members of the Assembly, both committees should consider the level of work that is currently being undertaken by members of both committees, of which there will be quite a bit of duplication.

I have also circulated an amendment to correct the assertion made in the original form of this motion that it is somehow a choice of the ACT government to not collect payroll tax from the Australian government for employment of the Australian public service. Firstly, to tax the commonwealth would take a change in the Constitution. It is currently unconstitutional. Secondly, the clear advice from the ACT Treasury is that the ACT

government would be worse off overall as the Commonwealth Grants Commission recognises the inability of the ACT government to collect this tax, through its allocation of the GST. The proposed amendment simply recognises this constitutional point and rephrases section 3(c) to look at the allocation and adjustments made through the Commonwealth Grants Commission process.

As I said yesterday—and I will continue to make this point in the chamber over and over again—there is a role for every member of the Assembly in addressing our fiscal challenges. The chamber cannot oppose and curtail every revenue measure, call on government to continue to spend more and more, oppose sensible savings and reprioritisation measures by the Executive, and then credibly argue that the government is not effectively managing the budget and the territory's finances. Nor is it the role of members to wear down the Treasury when its focus and the government's focus is on preparing a budget for the period ahead.

I put on the record now that I have concerns that this committee will be an entirely political exercise, but I hope to be proven wrong. I move the following amendment to Mr Rattenbury's proposed amendment:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) this select committee shall be given funds provided by the Assembly to permit the engagement of external expertise to work with the committee to facilitate an independent review of the Territory's finances, similar to the review undertaken into the finances of the State of Tasmania and suitably dissimilar to the review of the ACT Budget already undertaken by the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026;

(3) this review must be published by the Select Committee on its public website;”.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibbins): The question is that Mr Steel's amendment to Mr Rattenbury's proposed amendment be agreed to.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.26): I will say my piece here, in regard to all the amendments that are before us today. When Mr Rattenbury and I were scheming—

Members interjecting—

MR PARTON: We were not scheming at all; we were putting this together, because we think it is worthwhile to do so. At 10 minutes to 12, basically, we said, “We're going to put this in. We know that it's going to be amended because we haven't sorted out the make-up of the committee.” We were always of the belief that there would be a very solid amendment, which Mr Rattenbury has put forward today. Obviously, we are in complete agreement with that.

I genuinely take on board Mr Steel's comments. I reckon that was your most sensible speech of the week so far, Mr Steel; I really do. I take on board Mr Steel's comments regarding the constraints due to the size of the public service and, in particular, the timing of the establishment of this committee. I know that I speak on behalf of everyone in this chamber when I say that we do genuinely take on board those comments, and we

understand your fears about the impact on public servants. We will certainly take that into account.

Mr Steel also made some extremely good comments about the fact that this committee cannot just be another estimates committee. Indeed, that is why we are supportive of his amendment regarding the independent review of the territory's finances, similar to the review undertaken in the state of Tasmania.

It cannot be done in the same way as estimates, because we are examining different things. That is highlighted specifically because of the timing of this, and we certainly hear you loudly, in that findings that come from this committee will not have any influence on the budget that is being put together at the time. We are in support of all the amendments that have been put forward in this wonderful chamber thus far.

Amendment to amendment agreed to.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.28): I move the following amendment to Mr Rattenbury's proposed amendment:

Omit paragraph (4)(c), substitute:

“(c) assess the impact of the Commonwealths Grants Commission process regarding the adjustments made to the allocations to states and territories due to the constitutional inability of states and territories to tax the Commonwealth Government;”.

Amendment to amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Rattenbury's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibbins): The question now is that Mr Parton and Mr Rattenbury's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.29): I want to rise briefly, initially, to commend the amount of work that has gone into getting the motion to this place today. It is not just a matter of a week's worth of work; this has been a long time coming, particularly for those on this side of the chamber. I am very glad that Ms Lee is in the chamber today because Ms Lee has sought over time to try and raise the concerns around the budget and the potential trajectory that the ACT budget is on.

Ms Lee attempted to bring forward a motion around an audit of the ACT budget some years ago. During that debate, as has happened today, the spectre of Tony Abbott was raised—the idea that it would be some nefarious commission of audit to slash every possible service that the ACT provides. It was suggested that that was the underlying objective, the underlying narrative, when what we are trying to do across all these motions is get to the bottom of what is really happening, because the budget is not healthy. That is pretty clear.

On the government's numbers, it is clear; on the forecasts, it is clear; and, on the financial statements that we have been going through, it is clear that the picture that is

provided for each budget is not what we see by the time we get to the end of the year, let alone the end of the four-year period. That is why this is so important. There is only so much that an estimates process can achieve. There is only so much that we can achieve in this place without having that forensic approach to work out what is going on. That is why I am so pleased to see the collaborative work that has happened today.

I would say that it started, in a lot of ways, in the estimates process that I chaired earlier this year. In that process, all of us in that committee were able to sit down and sensibly work through the issues. We could see that there were problems that needed to be addressed. We were able to put aside partisan differences and acknowledge the reality of the budget situation and that something needs to change. I would say that this motion today, and this new committee, is the next step on that journey.

Again, I would like to commend everyone involved in this process because it shows that there is a path forward, and it is incredibly important to the people of the ACT that we get this right. It is incredibly important that we make sure we balance the need for services now with the impact that is being imposed on the next generation.

Mr Parton is right: it is an intergenerational impact. It is a multigenerational impact, if we do not manage to get things under control. It is not just about infrastructure. The numbers show that the ACT government is borrowing to pay for services that we are using today. We are asking our kids to pay for the services that we use today. That is why we have to make a change.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.32): I will make a few observations on this matter. Particularly, I think the motion has been strengthened by Minister Steel's amendments. I am particularly pleased to see, given we are authorising the use of public money here, even if it is through the Office of the Legislative Assembly appropriation, that there be a particular emphasis on not duplicating activities. I was very pleased to hear the Leader of the Opposition acknowledge that point, that in commissioning external expertise that is not then an exercise in paying twice for the same advice.

I will make some broader observations in relation to federal-state financial relations, vertical fiscal imbalance, horizontal fiscal equalisation and all of those very sexy terms that dominate discourse in this context, in that they are the major factors that are driving the ACT's fiscal position as much as Tasmania's or indeed any of the states and territories.

In the broadest context, the subnational level of government suffers from a severe vertical fiscal imbalance, inasmuch as our capacity to raise revenue nowhere near meets the expenditure requirements that are constitutionally required of our level of government. Our federal financial relations system does respect that to the extent that there are indeed a range of commonwealth funded programs or contributions that are made to each state and territory.

We then have an overarching commonwealth agency, the Commonwealth Grants Commission, who make an annual assessment of the distribution of the goods and services tax that reflects a very complex set of formulae to determine each state or territory's allocation in any given fiscal year. This does change over time. However,

there has been a politicisation of that process to the extent now that there are determinations that are made to top-up particular jurisdictions' allocations or to put a floor under a relativity. Perhaps the most egregious example of that from the perspective of the other seven states and territories is the arrangements that are in place for Western Australia. Saul Eslake, amongst others, has indicated that he believes this to be one of the greatest flaws and one of the worst decisions from a fiscal perspective in the history of the Australian Federation.

I certainly hope that the committee does devote some time to those matters. I would also, for what it is worth, advise the committee that there will be a lot in common with what has been and what was prepared for the Tasmanian government. Of course there will be jurisdictional differences but many of the underlying drivers are indeed the same. It is important in this debate to understand that the ACT is not standing alone here as a jurisdiction where the expectations for government service delivery exceed the capacity to raise revenue. That is a fact that every state and territory faces and one that is accelerated by demographic change. That is an issue that has been identified from space for many decades. I am afraid it gets worse before it gets better in relation to the demand on government services and particularly in the healthcare space.

I will conclude my remarks by just making an observation on something Mr Parton suggested in relation to interest payments and their alleged detraction from service delivery. The interest payments are interest on government bonds that were secured for the purpose of the delivery of infrastructure. Infrastructure from which services are delivered, for example, the Canberra Hospital expansion. We did not build the hospital as a building for nothing to happen within it. Services are delivered from that facility.

So the interest that we pay is part of the service delivery for an expanded range of services from a key piece of infrastructure. The same can be said for the CIT campus in Woden. Expanded skills training occurs from within that facility. That is a service to the community, just as much as a new road or public transport or houses that people live in, that we have borrowed for and pay interest on. That is a service. And if you do not believe that the public provision of that is a service, then think about all of us who borrow to buy a house. We pay interest on the mortgage, but we are consuming housing services, are we not? So this suggestion that interest is dead money or wasted money is absurd—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton.

MR BARR: —is wasted money is absurd because in the absence of that, then we would not be providing services, be that housing services, public transport, roads, fire and emergency service facilities, hospitals, schools, TAFE facilities, energy, energy services. Some of the debt that is incurred by territory entities provide electricity, water and sewerage services and it is entirely appropriate for utilities to borrow to spread the cost of that infrastructure over multiple generations. Are the opposition suggesting that the dam that was built to service this community for centuries should have been paid in cash by the generation at that time? No, of course not.

Every household, or nearly every household, at some point in its journey will have some

debt. People understand that. So when they lie awake at night, Mr Parton, thinking about how they will pay for things, they have also all, or most, have made conscious decisions to incur debt—for a house, for a car loan. Some people incur debt for a holiday. There are examples that people would be very familiar with where it is entirely legitimate to borrow for an asset or to borrow to build something that will provide services for a community. So I do caution against this narrative, which I know is popular amongst conservative parties. It is a very familiar, the oldest trope in conservative politics.

Mr Parton: Is it? You reckon?

MR BARR: I think it would be. It would be up there. It would definitely be up there. But take away that rather tedious line and you are not left with much in the end. Other than trying to defend a point that we should never borrow for anything. That we should never borrow for anything is the logical extension of this argument. But, nevertheless, this debate will rage on as it has throughout this century and last, and I will boldly predict it will continue centuries into the future.

Mr Parton: Let us see what the committee says.

MR BARR: Well, if the committee is able to resolve all of the issues in the Australian federal financial relations system and devise a way that every infrastructure asset is paid for in cash in advance, then you surely will be miracle workers. Good luck. I will make the bold prediction that you are not going to get there on that point.

But having said all of that, this process may or may not produce some useful outcomes. I hope it does. But there are no silver bullets out there. It is tough, grinding work. The Treasurer is absolutely right that every single day this Assembly sits there are calls for more expenditure and, more often than not, calls for less revenue to be collected. And that just does not add up. Mr Assistant Speaker, it is magic pudding economics that we have seen from the Liberal party most of this century.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.43): Thank you for that lecture, Chief Minister. I acknowledge that there was no silver bullet and that it is a tough grind, but nobody ever said that we will never borrow. It is legitimate to borrow, but the problem is the trend in the increase in the borrowings, rising from \$500 million to \$1 billion over four years. Sorry, that was the interest. The borrowings are going up to \$22 billion by 2028-29 and the associated interest rises from \$500 million to \$1 billion by 2028-29.

So I really hope that your loan, Chief Minister, that the interest on your loan does not double over four years, because while most of us do borrow to buy our homes, we do not expect that the interest we pay, that we are required to pay, doubles in four years. That is not sustainable in any household. So I did call for an independent review in my first annual reports hearing. When I noticed the increase in the interest, I did say that after 25 years we need an independent review of the finances of the ACT. So I welcome this select committee and I will nominate to be on it.

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence from 5 December 2025 to 3 February 2026 be granted to all Members.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.46): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to a new inquiry.

Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into the night-time economy in Canberra's CBD and town centres. The committee will examine opportunities and challenges affecting the night-time economy. This will include factors such as economic performance, the regulatory environment, the role of venues, opportunities for diversification and enhancement given changing entertainment preferences, governance arrangements and best-practice principles. The committee invites all those interested to make a submission. Submissions close on 27 February 2026.

Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.48): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to present the Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, to introduce key amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1997 and the Medical Treatment (Health Directions) Act 2006, as well as some consequential changes to other laws. Mr Deputy Speaker, in doing so, I want to acknowledge the presence in the chamber today of the ACT Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Marina Buchanan-Grey, and the team from the Office of the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer and the Health and Community Services Directorate who have done a power of work to get to the point of introducing this bill today. You will hear more about why this is so important and how long it has taken to get here in a minute.

The bill introduces two key amendments that will remove legislative barriers to nurse practitioners working to their full scope of practice. The first key change is to provide nurse practitioners the legal practice authority to issue a cause of death certificate in circumstances where the nurse practitioner was responsible for the care of the individual. The second key change is to enable nurse practitioners to authorise non-written health directions without requiring a medical practitioner to be the other witness. Nurse practitioners are highly educated and skilled health workers whose

clinical capability has not yet been fully realised in law.

Nurse practitioners are endorsed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia against specific criteria to hold the protected title of nurse practitioner. Nurse practitioners are practicing in every Australian jurisdiction, across both public and private sectors and in more than 50 specialty areas, and this year, Australia celebrates 25 years of having nurse practitioners. Currently, 3,194 nurse practitioners hold the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia endorsement, with 78 declaring the ACT as their principal place of practice. In the ACT nurse practitioners work across primary health care and general practice, acute and emergency care, including our fabulous walk-in centres, aged and palliative care, mental health and drug and alcohol services, community health and a range of specialist areas.

Following the presentation of petition 19-22 to the Assembly on 3 August 2022, the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing held an Inquiry into Recovery Plan for Nursing and Midwifery Workers. The petition, signed by 2,696 individuals, called for a clear and sustained recovery plan to support nurses and midwives in the ACT. The inquiry's findings highlighted a nurse practitioner's scope of practice, workforce planning and advanced clinical roles. The committee recommended:

...that the ACT Government supports and enables all nurses and midwives who have undertaken, or wish to undertake, endorsement with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, to complete endorsement, work to full scope of practice, and are in the appropriate employment positions to do so.

This reflects recognition of the clinical leadership, autonomy and advanced practice that nurse practitioners bring to the ACT health system. Through this bill, the ACT government is acting on that recommendation, fostering a more flexible and responsive workforce to provide care for our community. The bill also delivers on ACT Labor's 2024 election commitment to continue to support the Nurse Practitioner Taskforce, a cross-directorate taskforce that works to oversight, monitor and progress the nurse practitioner legislative reform agenda.

These amendments also respond to broader policy reforms at a national level which are consistently calling for health professionals such as nurse practitioners to work to their full scope of practice, as evidenced by the Australian government Nurse Practitioner Workforce Plan, the *Unleashing the potential of our health workforce – scope of practice review* and the removal of collaborative arrangements.

This bill will continue the process of reform to help ensure that the right healthcare professional is able to provide the right care at the right time for the ACT community and align with contemporary approaches to right touch legislation and policy for the nationally regulated nurse practitioner workforce. I take the opportunity to highlight the ACT government's commitment to upholding human rights, grounding legislation in evidence and stakeholder consultation, promoting the right to life and right to work and other work-related rights.

This is expected to make health care more accessible, deliver value by creating greater efficiencies in the health system and better enable the health workforce to flexibly meet

health system and community needs. The first of the two main changes proposed by the bill is outlined in part 5 which will allow a non-written health direction to be witnessed by a nurse practitioner and one other health professional without requiring a doctor to be one of the witnesses. This will allow the witnessing of a non-written health direction by two doctors, a doctor and a nurse, a nurse practitioner and a doctor, two nurse practitioners, or a nurse practitioner and a nurse.

Health directions are an integral part of health care, enabling individuals to have directions in place to ensure their preferences are respected and understood by their health providers at times when they are unable to communicate their wishes directly. In particular, health directions help to ensure that end-of-life decisions are made in accordance with the person's values and wishes.

By making the combination of health professionals who may witness a health direction more flexible, the bill will make it easier to make a health direction and better ensure care is provided consistently with an individual's wishes. The ability to make non-written health directions in aged care, community and palliative care settings where a nurse practitioner may be the primary healthcare provider is a positive step forward for Canberrans.

The bill will still require two appropriately trained and skilled health professionals with the necessary qualifications to witness non-written health directions and thereby does not change the substantive safeguards under the health directions act. The bill retains all the existing safeguards in respect to the witnessing of non-written health directions and in respect of health directions generally.

The second key change made by the bill is set out in part 2 and relates to giving nurse practitioners the practice authority to issue cause of death certificates. The issuing of a cause of death certificate is an important statutory requirement that documents the cause of death of an individual for legal purposes. These certificates support the registrar-general's function under the Births, Deaths and Marriages Act in issuing formal death certificates to allow families to finalise the legal affairs of a person who has died. The process also supports the proper referral of deaths to the coroner under the Coroners Act to allow investigation into deaths where a cause of death is in question. For a medical professional issuing a cause of death certificate can be the final stage of providing care for that patient.

Currently, section 35 of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act provides that a doctor is required to issue a cause of death certificate within 48 hours of the person's death and only a doctor is authorised to issue that certificate. The bill at clause 7 proposes to amend the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act so that a nurse practitioner is also authorised to issue a cause of death certificate within 48 hours of the person's death where the nurse practitioner was responsible for the care of the individual immediately prior to death and can form an opinion as to the probable cause of death of the deceased person.

Unlike the existing section 35 of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act, which applies to doctors issuing a cause of death certificate, the new section 35A will not require a nurse practitioner to issue a cause of death certificate, nor will it introduce a criminal offence if a nurse practitioner does not issue a death certificate. This is an

intentional policy position which ensures nurse practitioners are not compelled to issue a cause of death certificate in circumstances where doing so would be inconsistent with their scope of practice or clinical judgment. Additionally, it ensures that a relevant doctor continues to be responsible for issuing a cause of death certificate in circumstances where a nurse practitioner does not.

The new section 35A makes clear that nurse practitioners must not issue a cause of death certificate where a doctor or another nurse practitioner has either already issued the certificate or reported the death to a coroner. This approach maintains the safeguards that apply to doctors under section 35 of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act to ensure the integrity of the death certification process while supporting the safe and appropriate enabling of nurse practitioner practice authority. This approach reflects how caring for a patient may be shared among a treating team of health professionals working together as a multidisciplinary team.

The amendment is expected to have the most impact for nurse practitioners working in hospice or palliative care settings, both home and hospital, where the nurse practitioner has been one of the person's primary healthcare providers through their end-of-life care. It is also expected to have a significant impact for people in residential aged care facilities, where nurse practitioners regularly manage the health of elderly patients, particularly those with chronic illness. Nurse practitioners in those circumstances often have long-term relationships with residents and are well placed to authorise cause of death certificates where the person's health conditions are well understood and, indeed, death may be anticipated.

The bill will also make several technical and/or consequential amendments to ensure the effective operation between the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1997, Coroners Act 1997 and Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2020 with respect to the issuing of the cause of death certificates.

Clause 7 makes a consequential amendment to section 35 of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act to exclude doctors from being required to issue a cause of death certificate if they believe another doctor or nurse practitioner has done so. Clauses 8, 9 and 10 of the bill include a new definition of death certificate to contrast with the definition of cause of death certificate and improve readability of the act.

At clause 14, there are minor amendments to section 13 of the Cemeteries Act to correct outdated cross-references to the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration Act and the Coroners Act. Clauses 15 to 17 then make consequential amendments to section 42 of the Cemeteries Act to ensure existing key safeguards in relation to the issuing of cause of death certificates that apply to doctors are extended to nurse practitioners. This ensures that the requirement of the Cemeteries Act not to issue a death certificate where an inquest is required to be undertaken by the coroner or where the medical professional has a financial interest in the death will extend to nurse practitioners.

Clause 20 makes consequential changes to sections 13(1)(e) and (f) of the Coroners Act to prevent the necessary automatic referral to the coroner of every death for which a nurse practitioner issues a cause of death certificate or is the primary care provider for the person.

Finally, the balance of clauses contain highly technical changes to insert a new definition of cause of death certificate and properly signposting other key terms used in the bill to ensure clarity and functionality of the operation of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act and minor amendments to update and align the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act, Coroners Act and Cemeteries Act with the new terms used.

Mr Assistant Speaker, strengthening the role of the nurse practitioner workforce will have a positive impact on the ACT community, service providers and the healthcare system. It will enable more timely access to safe and efficient healthcare services, improve consumer and family experience and satisfaction and increase respect and recognition of the advanced scope of practice of the nurse practitioner. I am pleased to deliver on our commitment to nurse practitioners and the community today with the introduction of this bill. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

Ms Cheyne, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory 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) (12.02): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present this bill to the chamber. It is a significant bill that introduces a number of amendments that will help improve the community's engagement with the criminal justice system. The amendments support practices and procedures that are focused on personal safety, wellbeing and human rights and that are efficient and effective for all those involved in the criminal justice system. The government is committed to a criminal justice system that strikes the balance between the rights of victims, witnesses, offenders and the public.

The bill makes amendments to the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 to ensure it remains fit for purpose in achieving its objective of ensuring the safety of children. Under the act, offenders who have been convicted of certain child sex offences are registrable offenders and are required to comply with certain obligations. A key facet of the act is a prohibition on registrable offenders engaging in or applying to engage in child-related employment. Child-related employment includes employment, training or volunteer work in places likely to involve contact with a child—for example, daycare centres, educational or religious institutions, clubs, associations and overnight camps.

Earlier this year, I introduced a bill that amended the definition of child-related employment to prohibit registered child sex offenders from working at Legal Aid ACT. This is because children often come into contact with legal service providers, and in particular Legal Aid ACT. At the time, I made clear my intention that the bill was only

the first stage of work, with a second stage to consider whether further expansions were required to cover other child-related legal services and other professions more generally within the list of the child-related employment.

Further consultation and consideration of human rights implications has now been conducted through a statutory review, the report of which I tabled earlier this week. I certainly thank Mr Rattenbury for moving the amendment at the time that facilitated that review. The review made two findings. The first was:

The definition of “child-related employment” in the CSO Act should be expanded to apply to all legal services related to a child.

The second finding was:

Further consideration should be given to extending the definition of “child-related employment”, specifically relating to a broader range of health services, tutor services and disability services for children and further review undertaken on mobile, freelance and informal services for children. However, the definition should not be amended to extend to cover businesses employing children.

This bill implements the ACT government’s response to the first finding of the review and so that registered child sex offenders are not able to apply for or be employed in legal services related to a child, regardless of the employer. The specific reference to Legal Aid ACT will be removed through this bill, because the organisation will now be captured within the broader definition. The amendment is an important step to ensure consistent application of the legislation across all legal services related to a child, not just one organisation. Further policy work will be undertaken to address the second finding in the review, which is much more substantive. Depending on the outcome of that work, any further amendments will be brought forward in a future legislative reform vehicle as appropriate.

The bill will also amend the Child Sex Offenders Act in respect to the process for photographing registrable offenders. Under the act, a registrable offender may be required to have their photo taken to assist law enforcement, for crime prevention or child protection purposes. The act requires that the photograph must be taken in private and by a person who is the same sex as the registrable offender. Additionally, any police officer assisting the photographer must be of the same sex as the registrable offender.

The amendment in this bill will only require the photographer or assisting police officer to be of the same sex as the registrable offender so far as practicable. This will improve efficiencies for the registration process. The drafting of this amendment strikes the balance between the safety and dignity of the individual being photographed and the safety of police officers. This amendment is not an exemption from the preferred approach that the police officer be of the same sex as the registrable offender.

Amendments in this bill further protect various persons who find themselves needing to engage with the ACT’s criminal justice system. The bill includes amendments that respond in part to recommendation 31 of the Chief Psychiatrist’s report, which was made following an incident at the ANU which involved an inpatient residing at the Gawanggal Mental Health Unit. The bill will amend the Mental Health Act 2015 to authorise ACT Policing to return people who have contravened conditions of their Conditional Release Orders to reside at a mental health facility to that mental health

facility. The amendment will also create powers of entry and apprehension and search and seizure for police when they are returning anyone to a mental health facility. This amendment will improve safety for the community and for individuals on Conditional Release Orders.

To improve efficiencies and to protect the safety and wellbeing of witnesses in criminal justice matters, the bill amends the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1991. At present, the act allows the court to pre-record the evidence of a dangerously ill witness, but it can only be used if the witness dies or if the witness's condition has worsened. Even then, the court typically requires the witness to attend court to give evidence that their condition has worsened, which can be challenging when the witness is already very ill. This amendment will allow the court to determine when it is in the interests of the administration of justice to use pre-recorded evidence.

Further, the bill will amend the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005 to authorise magistrates and registrars to order a pre-sentence report for a defendant once the defendant indicates to the court an intention to plead guilty. A pre-sentence report is a document that is prepared by Corrective Services to assist sentencing, which provides information to the court about the defendant and contextualises their offending. By allowing this report to be ordered when the defendant indicates a plea of guilty, it will reduce court appearances for the defendant and, importantly, improve the functioning of courts and reduce the time matters will take to be progressed.

The bill expands human rights protections through improving the access of all commissioners exercising functions on behalf of the Human Rights Commission to a correctional facility and it ensures detainees' rights of access to protected contact with the Human Rights Commission extends to all commissioners. Specifically, the bill will amend the Corrections Management Act to enable all commissioners, under the Human Rights Commission Act 2005, to exercise important functions in communicating with detainees under the Corrections Management Act, including entering the Alexander Macchonochie Centre and sending protected correspondence to detainees.

This amendment recognises the range of functions of the Human Rights Commission and the number of function-specific commissioners within the commission, such as the Health Services Commissioner and Discrimination Commissioner, are directly relevant to the detainees' needs, and that statutorily limiting the functions to only the President of the Human Rights Commission and the public advocate is wholly inadequate.

The bill contains a number of amendments that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ACT's criminal justice system and to remove unnecessary administrative burden for those engaging with or operating in the system. The bill will amend the Magistrates Court Act 1930 to improve the administration of infringement notices. These amendments align the Magistrates Court Infringement Notice Scheme with administrative law norms by giving the administering authority powers to manage infringement notices and clarify arrangements when an application to withdraw an infringement notice is approved.

The bill makes amendments to the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act and the Victims of Crime Act to create operational efficiencies for police and the community by removing administrative practices that currently impede the ability of police to

participate in the administration of the criminal justice system in a timely and efficient manner.

The bill amends the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005 to legislate that the Chief Police Officer is a standing member of the Sentence Administration Board, instead of requiring an appointment process, and to enable the Chief Police Officer to delegate their position to an officer at the rank of superintendent or higher. At present, the Chief Police Officer is only able to delegate their role to commanders. These are among the most senior positions in the ACT Policing structure and, to paint the picture of why this creates such an issue, there are just two commander positions.

The Sentence Administration Board meetings are resource intensive. No-one can test this and no-one can test the reasons for it; it is simply the nature of the work. However, with commanders among the most senior operational policing roles and regularly having pressing operational responsibilities against the resource-intensive nature of the meetings, this limitation on who can attend is affecting the ability for policing to sufficiently engage. This amendment ensures that ACT Policing is able to regularly attend Sentence Administration Board meetings and provide valuable input, and that those attending are still at a sufficiently senior level.

The bill also amends the Victims of Crime Act to permit the Chief Police Officer to delegate their powers under the act to Victim Liaison Officers in ACT Policing without the requirement to have the liaison officers sworn in every 24 months under the AFP Act, which can be administratively burdensome.

Finally, the bill amends the Crimes Restorative Justice Act to remove unnecessary administrative burden and to simplify the reporting requirements for the Director-General of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate so that the Director-General is only required to provide a report to the restorative justice referring entities every year rather than every quarter. This will improve operations for the Restorative Justice Unit, who otherwise must extract the necessary data manually, and, ultimately, it will have minimal impact on referring entities who are tracking and reconciling matters as each matter closes.

I would like to thank all stakeholders for their valuable input to these amendments that this bill contains. It is my firm belief that they will provide tangible and meaningful improvements to the operation of the system and the realisation of justice in the ACT, and I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.14 to 2.00 pm

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): As members may be aware, Minister Paterson is away from question time today due to personal reasons. In this question time, the Deputy Chief Minister will take questions in the Women and Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence portfolios; Minister Cheyne will take questions in the

Police, Fire and Emergency Services portfolio; and Minister Orr will take questions in the Corrections and Gaming Reform portfolios.

Questions without notice

Roads—St Clare of Assisi school

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, my office has been contacted by concerned parents of St Clare of Assisi Primary School in Conder regarding high traffic volumes at pick up and drop off. The high traffic volumes have resulted in cars jumping the median strip, which is used as a pedestrian crossing for both students and families. The school has been advised by WorkSafe ACT that they have done everything they can to manage traffic and ensure the safety of their students, staff and families. Minister, has this problem been brought to your attention and what actions has your government, whether it be under yours or others, taken to guarantee the safety of students going to and from the school?

MS CHEYNE: I thank the opposition leader for the question. I am aware of this issue but regrettably I do have to take the detail on notice, simply because I do not have it in front of me and we have a few different things on with traffic movement around schools, but I think that I can probably come back with at least a bit more information by the end of question time.

MR PARTON: Minister, what avenues are open to you or other ministers in protecting the safety of students, staff and families of St Clare of Assisi, given that cars are jumping the median strip?

MS CHEYNE: Well, this is how efficient my DLO is! The School Safety Program is going to contact St Clare of Assisi Primary School to offer support to promote safe driving behaviours around the school. That will include education materials to encourage alternative transport options rather than collecting the students from the school carpark, as well as recommending parents arrive after the school bell in the afternoon to avoid queuing.

A traffic impact assessment was completed on Block 13, Section 228 in November 2023, which included a survey on 13 September of the same year and it noted that the roundabout at Box Hill Avenue, Heidelberg Street, Charterisville Avenue and the T-intersection of Heidelberg Street and Lowcay Street were observed to operate a satisfactory level of service during the peaks, am and pm, but noted that there is capacity at the intersection to support additional traffic with the development of the site. There has not been another traffic impact assessment.

The working hours for the contractor are between 7 am and 5 pm. The contractor does not allow deliveries to be received between 8 and 9.30 am and 2.30 and 3.30 pm. The contractor has also advised that there are very few deliveries between 3.30 and 5 pm and construction is expected to be completed in August 2026.

If there is anything in that information, Mr Speaker, that is contrary to the experiences that have been raised with Mr Parton's office, I am very happy to take that information and ensure the directorate is fully aware of all of the circumstances.

MR COCKS: Minister, what are you doing to deal with similar issues across other suburbs, such as those experienced in Pearce in my electorate?

MS CHEYNE: The short answer, Mr Speaker, is that it depends. On Pearce, I will take the detail on notice because I reckon I will get a 118AA—but I will take that on notice. I will not anticipate your ruling, but generally what I would say, Mr Speaker, is that it does depend. It really depends on exactly the configuration of the school, if it is on arterial roads or if it is on local roads or feeder roads. It depends on whether there is construction activity occurring around it. It depends on if there is one of site issues.

Certainly in my electorate in Belconnen, we have been progressively implementing a range of different methods to improve the safety around schools, including with Canberra High and Bowman Street and also at Melba Copland, where recently a new school crossing was installed. So there are options available to us, but it really depends on exactly the nature of the issue.

I will come back on Sacred Heart school, as I understand it to be, as soon as I can.

Outlaw motorcycle gangs

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, following the recent national run conducted by the outlaw motorcycle gang the Bandidos in Canberra—and noting that ACT Policing has had to monitor and engage with several OMCG events in recent years—why do OMCGs continue to meet in Canberra rather than in other jurisdictions?

MS CHEYNE: Look, the short answer is—and I don't mean to be cute—but in some ways you probably have to put that question to the Bandidos. I think the heart of what Ms Morris is asking is: "What are we going to do about it?" With my AG hat on, and currently speaking for Minister Paterson a little, I can confirm that we do have work underway, including considering—

Ms Morris: Mr Speaker, point of order is on relevance. The question was why they come to Canberra, not what the government is going to do about it.

MR SPEAKER: I think that is fair. Do you have anything further to add, Minister?

MS CHEYNE: I believe I have already answered that, Mr Speaker. I do not think I can speak for the Bandidos or the Commancheros. I have never met them or spent any time with them, so I do not go what goes through their minds when they are deciding to spend any time in Canberra at all. I would like to be helpful, and I am trying to be helpful, but I do not know.

MS MORRIS: Minister, has the government paid for external assistance to monitor and engage with OMCG activities?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Minister, why is the ACT the only jurisdiction that does not have a combination of anti-consorting laws, the banning of wearing colours or firearm

prohibition orders?

MS CHEYNE: I really appreciate Ms Barry asking the question, because that is exactly what I was getting to! We have been working through exactly what tools are available that we might not have yet legislated for or employed.

Equally, we still need to make sure that we are being consistent with human rights and the Human Rights Act. As I hope has been demonstrated already, through each piece of legislation that I have introduced this week, we do prioritise community safety too. We have some policy work underway in our directorates at the moment about exactly what else might be available to us that would leave us consistent with human rights and the Human Rights Act while also intervening to give police some extra tools when it comes to these matters.

Roads—traffic and bus services

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. At the last election, ACT Labor committed to several projects in the Murrumbidgee electorate. What is the current costing and project status for the commitments to improve traffic flow on Cotter Road, and increase service frequency on the R10 rapid bus line?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for this question. Of course, we will consider business cases for those projects in future budgets, where they have not yet been delivered. But work has already been funded in relation to the Cotter Road, under Minister Cheyne's portfolio as Minister for City and Government Services, and that work is underway—and got underway very shortly after the election. So, we have started delivering on our election commitments. Further election commitments will be delivered throughout the term and will be considered in the budget.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, are these and other government projects being delayed by the ACT's worsening financial situation?

MR STEEL: No. We are committed to getting on with the election commitments that we have made—noting that there are external factors that have already impacted on the traffic network itself. There has been a lot of construction happening outside of our control—particularly on the NCA bridge. So, as we consider the introduction of new rapid routes and our commitments around increasing frequency—in which we already made some improvements earlier this year—we would also need to take into account the traffic conditions. But we expect that construction work to be temporary, and so we can get on and deliver our commitments over the term.

MR PARTON: Minister, does Labor have any plan to begin repairing the territory's finances to prevent further project delays?

MR STEEL: We began that process in the budget, Mr Speaker, where we put the budget on a more sustainable footing. We did make tough decisions in the budget. The opposition rejected those decisions. But they were important decisions—not just on the revenue side of the budget but on the expenditure side of the budget with the whole-of-government savings initiatives that we are currently undertaking. It will not just be a process for one budget but a process over many years for directorates. We are engaged

in that process now, and as I say, every time that this is mentioned, every member of this Assembly has a responsibility to support the government's measures that we are taking to put the budget on a sustainable footing.

Community sector—pay and conditions

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, yesterday you indicated that the onus is on employers and employees to negotiate an outcome as part of the community sector multi-enterprise agreement. However, the Fair Work Commission indicated that the participation of government in the supported bargaining process was a reason for proceeding. Given the ACT government committed at election time to move towards parity in conditions for community sector workers through the agreement, how can employers and employees meaningfully negotiate an outcome when the government continues to refuse to provide any indication of what, if any, level of funding it is actually prepared to commit?

MS ORR: I reject the premise of the question that the government is not willing to provide input. The government has provided input, including explaining the reasons, the parameters and limits or opportunities within what it can consider. Given that this is an ongoing process before the Fair Work Commission, and it is also under continuing consideration by cabinet, I will not be going into the detail of those discussions or the input that has been provided.

What I would add to the answer is the same point I made yesterday. In politicising these ongoing negotiations in the chamber, it does not help to have the conversation. In answer to the first part of Mr Rattenbury's question, given that the government is not the negotiator, and it is there to support the negotiations between the two parties negotiating, that is the advice that has been put to me.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, how do you respond to the perception that your government has created that, by rejecting proposals without providing an alternative, without outlining acceptable parameters, and without offering funding this financial year, you are walking back from your commitment to support gender equity through the enterprise agreement?

MS ORR: Again, I reject the premise of the question that the government has not put in place parameters or provided feedback through the proposal. Again, I refer Mr Rattenbury to my previous answers, where I have stated that the government is not a negotiating party; they are joined to proceedings. We will need to work within the obligations that we have under our legislation, and the Financial Management Act, in our consideration of what we can and cannot support. We will continue to work through that. We are still at the negotiating table as being joined to proceedings. We are still providing our input to the ongoing negotiations. I reject the assertion that the government is therefore not progressing its commitments.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what instructions have relevant directorates received regarding the government's position on MEA funding, and why have officials at the Fair Work Commission hearings and related negotiations been unable to provide a clear statement to bargaining parties to date?

MS ORR: I am not going to enter into a commentary of what has or has not happened in negotiations at the Fair Work Commission. I am not there, so I am not going to provide a reflection, as someone who was not a party to them. I also think it is highly inappropriate for me to be putting on the public record those discussions which are happening in an ongoing negotiation and bargaining process.

Sport and recreation—aquatic facilities

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, in the annual reports hearings you said it would take 12 months to develop an aquatic strategy. Will work on the aquatic strategy start at the beginning of 2026, and will the work be completed by the end of 2026?

MS BERRY: Yes; it will probably take around 12 months. I do not have information on when the strategy will begin, but, once it has begun, I will make that public, of course.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will you undertake a needs analysis in consultation with the community?

MS BERRY: There will be a range of work in the development of a strategy and in our consultation on what that strategy will look like. It could be the case that a needs analysis will occur. Those decisions have not yet been made.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when will a draft aquatic strategy be available for community consultation?

MS BERRY: After it has begun and is completed.

Transport Canberra—bus services

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. I have fielded a number of complaints from community members about the lack of bus routes to the National Botanic Gardens and to the National Zoo and Aquarium. Can you please explain why there are currently no bus services to these destinations?

MR STEEL: The short answer is that many years ago when Transport Canberra assessed the patronage on a previous that serviced those venues, there was very low patronage. So, in prioritising the resources and the allocation of bus routes around the territory to balance both frequency and coverage in the network, a decision was made, I think, well over five years ago, to not service those venues and to focus on moving more people around the city where they needed to go.

I would not say that there are no plans in the future to potentially service those areas if demand is there. Transport Canberra reviews the bus network every year, takes feedback from the community and provides updates to the routes. We have commitments that we brought forward at the election around new bus routes, and that is what the government's priority is on delivering.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government introduce these new services or

consider doing so within this term of government given the mention you just made of election commitments to increase bus services that do not include these?

MR STEEL: It is certainly not a priority of the government, but we will continue to review demand and take feedback from the community in relation to the priorities. Our focus is on delivering bus services to move the greatest number of people possible. Based on previous data, particularly the patronage data collected when those routes were serviced, I have not been presented with any alternative evidence that there would be great demand for accessing those venues. I absolutely understand that some people may wish to use bus services to access those venues. But, based on previous data, there is no evidence to suggest that it would be a viable route at this particular point in time, and bus services need to be prioritised elsewhere.

I will be providing an update later on today, in the noting of papers, in relation to the update to the network and timetable for next year, commencing in term 1, which will be dealing with the construction impacts of the federal government's major bridge renewal works. So, in the next two years, we will be very much focused on making sure that we can provide capacity in the network to move people around at a time when there is significant construction impacts and delay on the traffic network.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how does the lack of connectivity with these vital community assets, which particularly impacts elderly people and those with mobility issues who might not have other transport options, align with the government's Age-Friendly City Plan and Disability Strategy?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Of course, there are a range of other transport options that are available to Canberrans. We are very clear that we cannot provide a bus service on every street in Canberra and that we do need to prioritise. We have a balance of both high-frequency services that encourage more patronage and move more people around the city and coverage services, the local routes, that tend to move fewer people and stop more often and are more circuitous and tend to service more areas of Canberra. But even those cannot go on to every street. We just do not have the capacity to do that, and so we do have to prioritise.

We have used the best evidence to us, the patronage data, to make decisions on that. It was well before my time as the Minister for Transport. We will continue to monitor and, if there is enough demand that can be demonstrated, that will then be reconsidered. But there are also other priorities that we outlined very clearly at the election and sought a mandate for.

Budget—federal government funding

MS CLAY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, thank you for reporting back on the outcomes of my September motion about commonwealth funding. The Board of Treasurers communique from 3 October 2025 says states and territories remain committed to the December 2023 deal to fund 42.5 per cent of public hospital costs by 2030, but under the arrangement now proposed by the commonwealth the actual share of commonwealth funding will be closer to 35 per cent. In the ACT that means we would miss out on over \$100 million each year. The Board is calling on the commonwealth to act in "good faith." A call from eight governments to the federal

government to act in ‘good faith’ gives the impression that negotiations are not going well.

In the budget you are preparing now, are you relying on the 35 per cent hospital funding figure or are you using a different figure, and if so, what?

MR STEEL: That is actually outlined in the budget papers. There is an entire section on the NHRA with a chart showing the commonwealth contribution rate in the budget, and indeed, in the budget we also effectively wrote down the level of funding expected under the NHRA based on what they had already provided in the one year deal and what was expected in the future. So I refer the member to the budget papers. It is outlined there but we are hoping for a deal, a five year deal would preferable, and we will continue those negotiations which, of course, mainly involve the first ministers. We are hoping to be able to get a five year funding deal where we can then provide an update in future budgets with further funding for our hospitals that meets the commitment that the Prime Minister made at national cabinet in accordance with the member’s question.

Ms Clay: Point of order on relevance, 118AA. I just wanted to know in the budget that is being prepared now, is it the 35 per cent figure or is it a different figure?

MR SPEAKER: Minister are you able to provide that?

MR STEEL: I am happy to come back on notice about that, but obviously it is over the forward estimates so I will provide some more information. It will not simply be one number.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, rather than rely on 118AA, the minister has committed to take that on notice, so he will provide that information to you at some stage.

MS CLAY: What was ACT senator and Finance Minister Katy Gallagher’s response in relation to your letter about reimbursement for the \$550 million of commonwealth funding the ACT missed out on due to population undercounts?

MR STEEL: I do not believe I have received a response to that letter.

MR RATTENBURY: Treasurer, have you spoken to ACT federal member and Assistant Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury, Andrew Leigh, who is also responsible for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, about the \$550 million the ACT lost out on due to this commonwealth population undercount?

MR STEEL: Yes, I have talked to Dr Leigh on a range of occasions in relation to the population undercount, which is by the ABS but used by the Commonwealth Grants Commission in its allocation of GST to the states, using that population data which is flawed for net interstate migration. It is a source of continued conversation between officials in the commonwealth government. Some of those conversations have been productive but while we have seen some of that population recognised, which was captured in the most recent budget—of around 5,000 people living in and around the ADFA campus—there are still tens of thousands of people who have not been counted. So we are continuing that advocacy and the papers that I tabled yesterday demonstrate

that we are continuing that advocacy on population at every level, which includes with the Treasurer, Jim Chalmers.

Housing—Housing Supply and Land Release program

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on key measures and government plans to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT government remains firmly committed to enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030 to ensure Canberrans have access to diverse, affordable and sustainable housing options.

We have done a lot this year, particularly on missing middle housing reforms, which have now gone to the Assembly's planning committee and are crucial to meeting our housing target. Just this week, we have seen the Committee for Economic Development of Australia release a report backing in missing middle housing reforms as a way of making sure that we have enough homes to support our growing population here in Australia and locally here in the ACT.

They are particularly focused on gentle density, and that is exactly how we have described this—providing more townhouses; providing dual occupancy, tri-occupancy and multi-occupancy housing; and providing terraces and low-rise apartments. The draft major plan amendment that has gone to the committee is based on the strong support and feedback that we heard from the community about the construction of missing middle homes.

The government has also undertaken substantial work on boosting construction productivity, which goes hand in hand with the zoning changes that we are making. Just last week, I announced a series of measures that will support noticeably shorter timeframes for building and development approvals to be completed—again, this is based on feedback from, in particular, the construction industry about what we on the government side can do to speed up approvals.

I welcome the Assembly's support for the legislation that we moved and passed yesterday to make sure that we can build more community housing projects and more public housing projects more quickly and without delay.

Together with the zone reforms around transport-oriented development that have been out for consultation, this will make a real difference to enabling 30,000 new homes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how is the government supporting more housing choice in existing suburbs across our city?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Through reforms to the Territory Plan, we are expanding opportunities for housing that was prohibited in existing suburbs over the last few decades. In particular, we were missing middle housing and also well-located housing close to transport stops, shopping centres and schools. Public transport is a major focus.

Key changes that we have made to the draft missing middle housing reforms, based on feedback from the community, also include refined subdivision policies to support appropriate residential block subdivision, with clearer and more flexible rules and without the requirement for a dwelling to be constructed first—that was a clear piece of feedback. There are strengthened solar access protections to safeguard sunlight for neighbouring properties, clarified dwelling densities and updates to tech specs to support good design and amenity. Additional heritage controls have also been added to clarify heritage requirements that need to be considered.

These changes will allow for gentle density—a middle path that respects urban character while providing more diverse and affordable options for families, downsizers and young people who want to stay in their community.

We are also enabling dual occupancies and better use of established blocks supporting high-quality design, sustainability standards and accessible layouts. Based on the advice of CEDA, the Grattan Institute, the New South Wales government and the work that they are doing—and a whole range of others—we will be considering further reforms that we will bring to the Assembly next year to support the streamlined delivery of missing middle housing.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you please explain how the government is supporting the construction productivity agenda to support more housing?

MR STEEL: Construction productivity is a key part of delivering on our priority of enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030. To build more housing sooner, we are streamlining planning and building approval processes and reducing building costs.

The first tranche of these reforms has been announced. It has a few simple ways that we can improve and streamline some of our processes to make it easier for consumers and industry alike. These reforms will support more efficient delivery of homes and other structures. The first tranche will be brought forward and includes: making greywater piping requirements in new homes voluntary, with a direct cost savings for homebuyers of around \$1,500; simplifying energy efficiency upgrades for extensions and renovations; recognising Passive House certification as a compliance pathway for energy efficiency requirements for new homes; and expanding exempt development for low-impact minor building works and the types of development that can apply for an exemption declaration.

This work will continue throughout the term under the National Competition Policy framework as well. I recently settled an ACT Jurisdiction Specific Reform Plan with the commonwealth Treasurer, Dr Jim Chalmers, which enables us to access some funding to be able to continue to progress this work.

City and Government Services—Christmas lights

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. The Huddy Street Christmas lights in Forde are an annual event which attracts residents from all across Canberra, particularly those from my electorate of Yerrabi. This tradition has been ongoing for several years without interference from the government. However, this year the community received a notice that they would need a permit to

put up their Christmas decorations. Minister, have the changes to the Public Unleased Land Act stolen Christmas?

MS CHEYNE: No.

MR MILLIGAN: Can the Minister confirm if a decision on these applications will be made before the 25th of December?

MS CHEYNE: I cannot, because it is made by the team in the public land use section of the directorate, and they are continuing to engage with event organisers and are actively considering the public land use application. It was only received earlier this week. I can say that we are committed to achieving a safe and enjoyable experience for the local community. But, as even some commentary in the local media has said, including on talkback radio, there are limits on what people can do within their property bounds and then what they wish to do on nature strips. So that is what is being worked through.

Also, I reject what Mr Milligan said earlier about years without interference. Actually, the ACT government has been engaging with Huddy Street residents and organisers for many years.

And, on the question, “by Christmas?” the whole point of the lights is the lead-up to Christmas, so I just found that quite illogical.

Importantly, the government is working through it, Mr Speaker, and I will just underline again that the application was only received this week.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, has any ACT resident been forced to pay fines such as this, and what is the government’s estimate of the total cost to the homeowner?

MS CHEYNE: I do not believe so. I know that there have been notices issued, where there have been some structures which have been put on public unleased land without having an appropriate permit yet. So, there are just a few moving parts at the moment. So, I think, at the state of play when those were issued, I do not believe that there was an application in place. Now there is an application in place and there is a time within which that notice would have directed the structures to be moved or removed. But while there is an application underway, and while we are working in good faith with the residents of Huddy Street, no fines have been issued as far as I am aware. If that is incorrect, I will correct the record—but I am pretty confident.

Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for the Night-Time Economy. Minister, were you consulted, in your capacity as the Minister for the Night-Time Economy, on the recent closure of the Theatre Lane car park? If so, what advice did you seek on the impact that the closure of the car park would have on the existing hospitality businesses that rely on that car park?

MS CHEYNE: I think we have been very clear with the community for some time now that that car park would be required to be closed. I have certainly been in those

conversations for a long time, both as night-time economy minister and, before that, as minister for the arts. I did not seek any modelling on what the impact would be because, ultimately, we are trying to reshape the city, and people's behaviours and how they are going to change are hard to predict.

I would note that there are some venues that have stated they are being really heavily impacted, but I also know that CRA has established a new grants program, with micro grants, to encourage more events. I have met with King O'Malley's, Mooseheads, the AHA and others very recently. The number one thing that they have mentioned to me is about how we ensure that there are appropriate places for people to be picked up after midnight. I should have an announcement about some of the further work that we have done there imminently.

MS LEE: Minister, again, in your capacity as the Minister for the Night-Time Economy, have you subsequently sought advice from either the Chief Minister or the minister for planning on the significant impact that the closure of the Theatre Lane car park will have on the viability of the businesses that rely on the car park? I know that you mentioned King O'Malley's, but I am talking about the businesses that rely on the car park.

MS CHEYNE: It is something about which I have had constant conversations with my colleagues. I think everybody is aware that there are impacts there. But I would also note that there are two venues opening this week and, with one of the venues that recently closed, the owner did not sell it. The venue rebranded and reopened as a different type of venue. It does show that there is still flexibility within our licensing system, and it also shows that businesses are responding differently to the conditions but that there is still confidence in the CBD for businesses to be there, including near that car park. While I mentioned King O'Malley's, I would note that it is relevant, because previously many people, if they were getting an Uber, would have got it near or adjacent to that car park. That is why I flagged that.

MR CAIN: Minister, do you support the total closure of the city lane car park, or do you support a partial closure, which is the preferred option of local businesses?

Ms Stephen-Smith: A point of order, Mr Speaker. This question is clearly asking for a personal expression of opinion from the minister.

Mr Parton: In response to the point of order, I think it is a question about whether the minister, as a minister of government, is supportive of this option or that option. I do not think it is—

Ms Berry: It sounds like an opinion to me.

Mr Parton: It is really asking the minister, as the minister. It is not—

MR SPEAKER: It is a fine line. I will invite the minister to answer the question, if she does have a response.

MS CHEYNE: Technically, it is only partially closed, anyway. There are parts of the car park that are open. It is certainly not half-open, but it is not entirely closed, and the

government has been working—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: Can I just answer the question?

MR SPEAKER: Don't get baited by them, Minister. That is my advice.

MS CHEYNE: Going to the direct question that has been asked of me, it is moot, because there is no other option, as we have canvassed extensively in this place.

Government—freedom of information

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. This year, federal Labor initiated reforms to the Freedom of Information rules. Is ACT Labor planning to follow suit with any changes to local FOI rules, including costs or narrowing the scope of what can be produced?

Ms Stephen-Smith: A point of order, Mr Speaker: this question is clearly asking for an announcement of policy.

MR SPEAKER: It probably is, to be frank, Ms Castley. Do you have a supplementary question that you can go to? It is asking about a change in policy, so it is out of order.

MS CASTLEY: Why is there no easily accessible determination of costs for FOI requests available online for ACT directorates?

MR BARR: I will take that on notice, Mr Speaker.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, how often do directorates review fees for FOI requests to ensure they are kept as low as possible and ensure maximum transparency?

MR BARR: I would imagine that would be annually. Determinations are normally an annual process, but, if I am wrong, I will correct the record.

Planning—rural leaseholds

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, succession planning is critical to the livelihoods of rural farmers. Intergenerational living is an important component of that, and often there are many generations working on-farm at any particular time. This poses a challenge for housing, as many young people want to live close to their families but not necessarily under the same roof. We have less than 200 rural leases in the ACT, but they are an important part of the ACT's community, environment and economy. Minister, are you willing to investigate the challenges and opportunities that our current planning system poses to rural leaseholders looking to build second dwellings on their properties for specific succession planning purposes?

MR STEEL: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I have met with rural landholders to hear about the many issues that they have—succession planning being one. I was

very clear to them that the opportunity to raise that issue and some of the broader changes that they would like to see in terms of the use of rural land, which currently may not be permitted, really needs to be a discussion that is around the refresh of the Planning Strategy.

The Planning Strategy is pretty clear that 70 per cent of new dwellings should be built within the existing urban footprint of Canberra and the remainder within greenfields areas in Canberra. If there is a proposal that more homes should be built in rural areas, that is a pretty significant change to the current Planning Strategy. We review that every five years under the new Planning Act. That will come up this term, and we will consider those views as part of that process. I was very clear to them that they should not have any expectations that there is going to be immediate change here but that we would be interested in their views as part of that process.

I know the party of Miss Nuttall has quite strong views on new housing being built in rural areas that are on the western edge of Canberra. If that is what you are suggesting, then that really needs to be considered as part of the Planning Strategy, because there is not support for it at the moment in the Planning Strategy.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what kind of flexibility do you think our planning system should provide to support innovative housing models for the needs of specific communities?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Of course, at the moment, we are looking at prioritising the reforms that we brought to the election. I outlined in my statement planning priorities which reflect those commitments. Our plan to get to our housing targets is through missing middle housing reform, transport-oriented development and shop-top housing—housing in well-located areas for people where we can get more housing built, meet those targets and meet the broadest possible needs of our community. Rural land will only, I think, meet a very small portion of that. So it is not a priority at the moment to focus on that.

Also, under the planning framework that we have, I cannot approve zoning changes that are inconsistent with the Planning Strategy. That is why actually looking at a refresh of the Planning Strategy is a first step, because it then leads to enabling other things to be considered, such as rezoning and changes to district strategies. There is no district strategy for some of these areas, particularly the western edge—if that is what you are asking about. We need to go through that process first.

We are interested. We will continue to have a chat with landholders about what their opportunities are. But we also do not want to constrain the agricultural opportunities in those areas. I was pretty clear to them that I did not see that Canberra's rural areas would turn into Royalla Estate. I do not think we want to see that kind of development happening with small rural blocks that mean that you cannot do other things with the land that is productive and is supporting food production and other agricultural uses. But we will hear from them as part of the Planning Strategy and we will consider those issues. But, at this stage, the Planning Strategy really does not support it.

MS CLAY: Minister, what are your next tangible steps to ensure that farmers can plan

for their families while looking after our rural lands?

MR STEEL: I have been clear to the rural landholders that, if they have things that they want to do on their lands within the current restraints of the planning system, they should bring those forward for consideration and that the City and Environment Directorate is there and that, if they want to seek advice through the Gateway Team, they can do that and bring forward proposals.

If their lease allows for a second dwelling to be added or the rural zoning allows for a second dwelling to be added, for example—amongst many other things that they raise that they want to do—they can bring that forward and that will be considered by government, through the independent Territory Planning Authority, based on the current Territory Plan and the law that we have at the moment. But, if they want to do stuff that is outside of that, that really requires another process, and that is where the Planning Strategy refresh comes in. It is not too far away. It is something that we will be getting on to. But the absolute priority at the moment is building more homes within the existing urban footprint.

Ms Lee: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the time was not running on the answer to the question.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Lee. He may never have stopped! So thank you for pointing that out.

Public schools—Tharwa Preschool

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, recently, the Canberra Liberals have been contacted by multiple constituents suggesting that the ACT government is seeking to close Tharwa Preschool by stealth. We are told that the public promotion of enrolment at Tharwa has been noticeably restricted, creating a perception that preschool was not being offered as an option for enrolment next year. Offers from the P&C to undertake their regular community promotion were rejected. Are you seeking to close Tharwa Preschool by stealth and if so, why?

MS BERRY: Absolutely not, and I have made that very clear to Mr Parton who has made representations to me about Tharwa Preschool. That is not the case. However, Tharwa Preschool had received only one enrolment application for 2026. Now I understand that there were some other families—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Ignore them Minister.

MS BERRY: That student has been enrolled with their priority enrolment area school at Charles Conder Primary School. I understand that there are some other parents and families who have identified that they have a wish to enrol at Tharwa Preschool in future years. However, a preschool program requires more than one, two or three

students for it to be viable or even a good outcome for students because the main purpose of preschool is to prepare them for primary school and to provide them with those social and emotional opportunities by engaging with other students. Three students are not enough to run a good, viable program that gives young people the best possible outcomes in preschool. So that is the reason a preschool program could not be run at Tharwa, because at this stage, as far as I am aware—I do not believe that information has changed—one student had enrolled. There is no benefit for that student by themselves in a preschool program. It is certainly not the case that the preschool would be closed. However, in circumstances like this because there are no preschool programs operating, it will not be operating in the 2026 year.

MR CAIN: Minister, why has the public promotion of enrolment at Tharwa Preschool been so noticeably restricted compared to previous years, and does that actually explain the low enrolment?

MS BERRY: No, I do not believe so. I think the Tharwa community is quite a small community and does not have the number of children of that age group to enrol and run a viable and successful preschool program. That does not mean that it is closing. Again, as I said, it is just not fair for those students and those families to run a preschool program that has one student in it.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you simply come clean today and admit that this was just a cost-cutting exercise from a directorate that is struggling to keep schools open in the way that the community expects them?

MS BERRY: I absolutely reject, absolutely reject the assertions that have been made in that question by Mr Parton. Frankly, I am disappointed that he would come in here and start spreading that kind of misinformation to our community about Tharwa Preschool when I have been absolutely clear that the preschool is not closing, but it will not be operating—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MS BERRY: —it cannot operate successfully with one student. That student is now attending another school and the directorate will continue to support parents who wish to enrol their students in our public schools. But one, or two or three students does not lead to a successful program for preschool education in any school environment. The school will remain a school, it just will not be operating in the 2026 year.

Gungahlin town centre—noise standards

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for the Night-Time Economy. Minister, the Territory Plan recognises areas within the Gungahlin Town Centre as an entertainment precinct. However, feedback from the community and businesses indicates that the regulations—particularly on noise standards—have not been updated to support the night-time economy in that area.

Minister, what is the plan and associated timeframe for the development of noise

standards for the Gungahlin Town Centre entertainment precinct?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question and his interest. When we were working through the entertainment precinct for the city centre, we also went through seeking consultation on the Gungahlin Entertainment Precinct—seeking to get enough views to help guide us about what appropriate noise standards might be. Regrettably, when consultation—which did canvass noise standard options including for different times of day—concluded there were only 24 responses received from people identifying as residents of Gungahlin, and no businesses responded. Because this is a pretty insignificant sample size, we made the decision to pause any further work on Gungahlin and focus on the city. But I would note that residents who did respond—those 24—were supportive of increasing noise standards there.

As I have explained a few times in this place, we wanted the City Centre Entertainment Precinct to be in place for 12 months before we evaluated it. It has now been in place for just over 12 months, and that evaluation is undergoing. The learnings and outcomes of that review are expected to inform a template or guiding principles, which I hope will be achieved soon. Then I intend to start using those to guide us on other town centres, including Gungahlin.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what are the government's plans to foster a night-time economy in the Gungahlin town centre?

MS CHEYNE: I direct Mr Braddock to the Territory Plan assessment requirements for developments that are in entertainment precincts. They include:

- Developments should help make the area more vibrant, including supporting entertainment and nightlife activity.
- Entertainment venues must consider how they manage loud music, especially bass sounds, through building design and venue management.
- Buildings must meet soundproofing standards to reduce incoming noise, including bass sounds.

Those are specific Territory Plan assessment requirements for developments that are in entertainment precincts.

On top of that, as I said, we will look at the noise standards for the Gungahlin Entertainment Precinct and anything else we might need to do to give effect to it being an entertainment precinct within my portfolio.

And, of course, there are a stack of initiatives that we have rolled out over the last two years that are available to licence holders. There really is something for everyone. If Mr Braddock is receiving representations, he can certainly share them with our office. Equally, there is a lot of information about all of the liquor licence fee discounts and encouragement for venues to have more artistic and cultural experiences and, in return, get a liquor licence discount if they wish to.

MS CLAY: Minister, which night-time economy businesses in Belconnen have you engaged with on this work?

MS CHEYNE: I have not engaged with night-time economy businesses on this work in particular, because, as I said, the City Centre Entertainment Precinct was the priority. Leaving that so that we had 12 months of data and experiences to draw from was exactly what we said we would do, and what we have done.

Now we are at the other side of those 12 months, and it is that work and that evaluation which will inform other entertainment precinct consultation. Then I intend that we will have intensive consultation with multiple town centres at the same time, because we will have the guiding principles—the guiding template—to work through what different entertainment precincts look like and what the appropriate noise standards are, depending on all the circumstances in an area.

More broadly, I think it is well known that I am a frequent attendee at all of the time-time economy venues in Belconnen! So I am regularly engaging, but just not quite on this at this stage.

Migration—economy

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, can you outline the importance of migration to the Territory economy, particularly our tertiary education sector?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. I will say from the outset that migration is fundamental to the territory's future and plays a vital role in strengthening our community and our knowledge economy. In relation to the tertiary education sector, as members are aware, this sector is the territory's top export industry. With this in mind, the recent federal government decision to increase student caps for ACT universities was a particularly welcome development, ensuring sustainability in growth of enrolments for our local universities. Canberra's universities and vocational education providers welcome international students, not only for their contribution to the territory's economic output, but also for the global perspective that they bring to our classrooms and research institutions.

Mr Speaker, migration strengthens the human capital of our territory, with many students remaining in Canberra after graduation, joining our workforce, starting businesses, and contributing meaningfully to our community and our society. This is essential for the future of our economy and aligns with the government's long term strategic priority to build the workforce capability in the territory.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how does migration help to address skills shortages here in the territory?

MR BARR: Skilled migration assists in addressing skills shortages right across the economy. We know that industries such as health, early childhood education, information communication and technology, and construction continue to face recruitment challenges driven by strong demand and competition for talent across Australia. So, through targeted migration pathways—including the state and territory nomination programs—we attract highly skilled workers into our city who meet specific needs. Skilled migrants contribute immediately by filling critical gaps in our workforce, supporting service delivery, and enabling local businesses to innovate and grow.

Enhancing our migration settings is about so much more than just population growth, Mr Speaker. It is about strengthening resilience and productivity across the territory's workforce and our economy.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how does migration contribute to the overall culture of our community?

MR BARR: I believe our city is a clear example of the success of multiculturalism in Australia. People from around the world come here to study, to work, to make a life. They enrich our culture and strengthen our economy. Canberra succeeds because we embrace the world, Mr Speaker, not because we shut ourselves off from it.

So, I take the opportunity this afternoon to call out this so-called mass migration rhetoric that has been pushed by some on the political right. Migration is not the cause of our challenges, Mr Speaker, it is a critical part of the solutions. It brings talent into our city—helping in our hospitals, our construction sites, our research institutions and our small businesses.

Let us be absolutely clear: this scare campaign is a political fiction at its worst. It bears no resemblance to the lived reality of Canberra, where we experience a skills-focussed migration program that supports our education institutions, sustainably grows our economy and our workforce, and, more importantly, promotes inclusion in our community and makes Canberra a better place to live for all of us.

ACT Fire & Rescue—electric breathing apparatus truck

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, on 23 October you advised the Assembly that the Volvo electric breathing apparatus truck, which had not been in service since it was delivered in August 2023, was finally operational. Minister, on what day did the electric breathing apparatus truck become operational?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Barry for the question, noting that I am acting for Minister Paterson during question time. I will take that question on notice.

MS BARRY: Minister, how many incidents has the Volvo electric breathing apparatus truck attended?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question on notice.

MS MORRIS: Minister, is the Volvo electric breathing apparatus truck fully operational?

MS CHEYNE: I refer Ms Morris to the advice that Minister Paterson gave about it in the last sitting period. Regardless, I will take it on notice, to confirm without doubt.

Parking—Woden

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, back in

October, I asked the minister for business about parking for businesses impacted by the government's construction of the Woden bus depot on the corner of Athllon Drive and Parramatta Street. The minister responded to the question taken on notice with figures from the Woden interchange on Callam Street and not the Woden bus depot on Parramatta Street. I ask again: how many parking spaces have been removed specifically for the construction and operation of the Woden bus depot on Parramatta Street?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. The two—the depot and the interchange—are often confused, mainly by the Liberals in previous years. We have done a lot of construction work on both. The depot has been finished. It was always part of the project to have Transport Canberra employees able to park next to the Woden depot, using not only existing car parks but also underutilised space that was not being used for parking previously. We were very up-front about that in the project. It was part of the consultation that we did with the community on the development application. I am happy to come back on notice to provide the exact number of parks that have been built, but I note that parks were built in areas where there were no parks previously.

I am sure Minister Cheyne would also be happy to continue to receive feedback from Phillip businesses in relation to parking. We have been very clear to Philip businesses over a very long time that, if they have a unanimous view about the improvements they would like to see about parking in Phillip, in terms of the current arrangements for parks that are publicly accessible, they should come to the government with a proposal for consideration. But we have not heard a unanimous view from businesses, and that is because they all have different views. In years past, when we have put proposals to them about changes, we believe they were initially supported and were then rejected, so they had to be reversed. That is why we have the position that, if they have a view, it should be supported by all businesses. We would be happy to hear that in the future.

MR MILLIGAN: What consultation has the government done with businesses in the areas that we are talking about since construction was completed?

MR STEEL: I do not know in relation to parking. It is not directly in the area of my responsibility. That is Minister Cheyne's responsibility, in the City and Environment Directorate. We have not done any consultation, from a Transport Canberra operations perspective, around the car parks that were built, because consultation had already been undertaken as part of the development application process for the project.

MR COCKS: Minister, what confidence can business and constituents around Parramatta Street have that their concerns are being properly monitored when you are dismissing any view unless, as you say, it is a unanimous view, given the long track record of advocacy from the Phillip business community?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. There is not a unanimous view, and the government will not be putting in place changes unless they have the support of the businesses that are using the area. Whenever a change has been put forward, it has had to be reversed because there was not unanimous support. We want to hear from businesses if they have a unanimous view around the traffic changes that they want to see in relation to parking in Phillip, but we have not heard that at this point in time. We look forward to receiving it if there is ever such a view.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, I have a feeling there is a unanimous view that all further questions should be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Vocational education and training—skills funding

MR PETTERSSON: I rise in relation to Ms Castley's question yesterday on an underspend in skills funding. My answer yesterday went to the number of apprentice and trainee numbers being lower in 2024-25 than the previous year. This constituted a minor underspend in the skills budget. More pertinent to the figures in Ms Castley's question, the variance between the figures found in table 9 of the CMTEDD budget papers for the 2024-25 financial year and the estimated outcome for that year as published in the 2025-26 budget papers, which I believe are the basis for Ms Castley's question, are largely attributable to technical adjustments, as detailed later in the budget papers. These adjustments were necessary in part due to negotiations with the commonwealth, including under the National Skills Agreement, taking longer than anticipated. This has resulted in the need to roll over funding from the 2024-25 financial year into 2025-26. To provide absolute clarity, there have been no cuts to skills.

Budget—federal government funding

MR STEEL: In question time I was asked about whether I had received a response from Minister Gallagher in relation to the undercounting population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. While I have not, to my knowledge, received a response to that letter from Minister Gallagher, I have received a response from Minister Leigh in relation to the issue of population undercount, which we received on 20 November this year. I acknowledge the work that the ABS have been doing around reviewing the population data and their continued engagement with the territory and officials regarding the issue.

MS CLAY: Mr Speaker, could the minister table those papers referred to that have not already been tabled under that standing order—the number of which I forget, but I am sure the clerk can help me out. It is 113.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, Ms Clay is asking for a request that you table some documents. Are you clear what they are?

MR STEEL: Yes. I have no problem tabling that, but I will have to come back to this. Sorry; I have just been informed it was already tabled yesterday as part of the documents.

MS CLAY: Already tabled—the same ones.

MR STEEL: So it is in there to have a look at. It was the letter of Dr Andrew Leigh of 20 November

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

Roads—St Clare of Assisi school

MS CHEYNE: As promised to Mr Cocks earlier, on Pearce and the Sacred Heart School, the advice that I have is that, ultimately, if motorists adhere to the road rules, particularly the 40-kilometre per hour school zone and children's crossings, the school environment should allow safe access for both pedestrians and motorists. However, the School Safety Program has been liaising with the principal of Sacred Heart Primary School about potential traffic calming treatments on Hodgson Crescent.

There has been advice that there is a project that has been out for design near Sacred Heart Primary School. That includes road narrowing on Beasley Street and at the intersection of Beasley Street and Hodgson Crescent. These improvements, once implemented, should help to reduce vehicle speeds in the area. Those designs, as I understand it, are going through a finalisation process. However, they are currently unfunded, and so that would need some further consideration against other priorities.

We are also working with other parts of the directorate, including Roads ACT, to consider if there are traffic calming measures that should be considered, and also with our enforcement bodies, both ACT Policing and Access Canberra parking operations, to see if there is some further support that we can provide at the beginning of the next term, which is standard. Access Canberra, in particular, usually does an assessment of where we have seen most of the noncompliance with schools across the ACT and provides, in conjunction with the school, extra support as the school year begins to remind people in vehicles about their obligations and how to achieve the safest outcomes for everybody.

Papers

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Act, pursuant to subsection 10B(3)—ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—Report from Hearings 12 -14 August 2025—Thirteenth Report to the ACT Government.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028—Phase Three ACT Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.

ACT Youth Assembly 'Our Voice, Our Impact'—

2025 Report, dated December 2025.

2025 Report—Government response.

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2024-2025—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate—Corrigendum, dated December 2025.

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the National Boards, reporting on the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme—Annual reports—2024-25.

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre—Bimberi Headline Indicators Report—December 2025.

Building and Construction Industry—Regulatory burden reduction—Assembly Resolution of 18 March 2025—Government response, dated December 2025.

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act—

Pursuant to subsection 12(5)—ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory—2024-25, dated 6 November 2025.

Pursuant to subsection 15(3)—Minister's annual report—2024-25, undated, together with a tabling statement.

Crimes Act, pursuant to section 442D—Statutory Review Report—The review of the operation of sections 50A, 50B 50C, 67(1), 67(2), 67(4) and 67(5), dated September 2025.

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025 (Vic), together with an explanatory statement, dated December 2025.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Justice and Community Safety Directorate—dated 24 November 2025.

Health (National Health Funding Pool and Administration) Act, pursuant to subsection 25(4)—Administrator of the National Health Funding Pool—Annual Report 2024-25.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—Report 2—Inquiry into the effectiveness of transparency arrangements for Members of the Legislative Assembly—Interim Report—Government response, dated December 2025.

Judicial Commissions Act, pursuant to subsection 61A(5)—ACT Judicial Council—Annual Report—2024-25, dated 12 November 2025.

National Health Funding Body, pursuant to subsection 25(4)—National Health Funding Body (NHFB)—Annual Report 2024-25, dated 18 September 2025.

National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner—Annual report—2024-25, undated.

NBN fibre to the premises rollout in Tuggeranong—Assembly resolution of 9 April 2025—Government response, dated December 2025.

Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator—Annual report 2024-2025.

Our Booris, Our Way—Out of Home Care Snapshot Report—1 July 2017 - 30 June 2025, dated December 2025.

Rail Safety National Law—National Regulations (Safety Management System)) Amendment Regulations 2025 (2025 No 520 South Australia) made under the Rail Safety National Law, together with an explanatory statement.

Richardson Shops Improvement—Assembly resolution of 24 June 2025—Government response, dated December 2025, together with a tabling statement.

Traffic congestion—Alleviation measures—Assembly resolution of 23 September 2025—Government response, dated December 2025.

Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility development—Quarterly Report, undated.

Tuggeranong Transport corridor improvement—Assembly resolution of 13 May 2025—Government response—Interim Report, dated December 2025.

Urban tree canopy coverage—Assembly resolution of 31 March 2021—Government response—Annual update.

Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act—Pursuant to subsection

64U(2)—ACT Container Deposit Scheme—Annual statutory report—2024-25, undated.

Woden Town Centre working group—Establishment—Assembly resolution of 20 March 2025—Government response, dated December 2025.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Braddock, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.15): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This parliament does a pretty good job at keeping its statute book updated. The Legislative Assembly is frequently presented with omnibus bills and subordinate legislation which modernises outdated laws and cleans up past drafting errors. Language gets updated for new vernacular and formatting gets improved for current standards. ACT public servants do an excellent job driving and guiding this work. However, there is one piece of legislation in the statute book that has barely been touched since it was first introduced in 2009 and passed in 2010, that being the Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act 2009. This is the act which regulates government advertising campaigns, with the aim of preventing the misuse of public funds for political purposes.

It is extremely rare for a new act which is not an amending act to be passed from opposition without the in-principle support of the government of the day. This was one of those acts—back in 2009. It was introduced by—would you believe it?—Mr Zed Seselja, back in a time when he was prepared to deal honourably with the Greens. The Stanhope government opposed the bill in principle. In fact, former Chief Minister Stanhope famously lost a bet that it would never get brought on for debate. So they were poorly prepared when the Greens supported the bill through the in-principle stage. It was at the initiative of the then Speaker, Mr Shane Rattenbury, that the bill was referred to a select committee. A wealth of recommendations were made and were amendments drafted, and, in a heated final debate over which amendments would ultimately be included, the bill passed in the same material form as we have it today.

This act requires government advertising campaigns that have an expenditure over \$40,000 to be reviewed by an independent reviewer, who checks for how partisan they are. That reviewer, currently the Hon. Bill Campbell KC, provides a report to the Assembly every six months on his work. Over the last five years I have been in the Assembly, I have gradually gained an understanding of how this regime is applied in practice. I met with Mr Campbell earlier this year and would like to pass on my appreciation to the Chief Minister and his office for coordinating that meeting for me.

What I have concluded along the way is that the government have become very accustomed to the rules that they are required to work within and found ways to navigate them almost seamlessly. They have found ways to push politically partisan advertising

through the gaps in the regime. I came to the view that our laws therefore need tightening. It is worth providing an example as to why. In April this year, the OurCBR newsletter contained a message from the Chief Minister, which I will quote from now:

In partnership with the commonwealth, the ACT government is increasing the amount of affordable housing available for Canberrans who need it most. This includes seven local housing projects, which will contribute 750 new affordable homes. Canberrans will also see work continuing on a number of local infrastructure projects to support the needs of our growing city. I wish everyone a happy and safe Easter break and for those who are travelling, please be careful on the roads. Andrew Barr.

While appreciating the Easter message, this message was accompanied by a smiling portrait of Chief Minister Barr.

Mr Barr: Do you want me to be frowning?

MR BRADDOCK: The younger version of Chief Minister Barr.

Members interjecting—

MR BRADDOCK: It is the last sitting day of the year, obviously. I will come back to the significance of that later. Let's just consider the context of the timing of that message. A federal election was required to be called for no later than the middle of May, placing the April edition of the OurCBR newsletter predictably and squarely in the middle of the federal election campaign. The Chief Minister's message goes to the topic of partnerships between the ACT Labor and federal Labor governments on housing, a topic of very significant public debate in both federal and territory politics, which would be weighing heavily on the minds of voters in the federal election.

It was immediately and blatantly obvious to political operatives that we had before us a case of taxpayers' money being spent on a form of political advertising that was delivered to the letterbox of every Canberran. How did this happen? If we look at the rules as they are written, including in the disallowable guidelines, it was technically compliant. No political party is named; no election policy is mentioned; and Mr Barr presents in his capacity as the Chief Minister rather than as the leader of the ACT Labor Party. You might be able to argue that it violates section 17(e) of the act by mentioning the party leader by name—as per example 1 in the notes. However, these laws prescribe what the guidelines have to contain rather than being the guidelines themselves. We have to therefore look at the guidelines.

The guidelines are in the same form as when they were first published in 2010. That is right: they still use all the terminology of that era, including naming all the agencies that were in scope of the guidelines, such as ACTTAB Limited and the Department of Treasury—some very old entities. But I digress. If we look at guideline 3, it says that naming ministers is fine as long as it is not done in a manner that a reasonable person would regard as excessive. How convenient! If these guidelines were updated, even simply to modernise them for the aforementioned outdated list of ACT government agencies, they would come through as a disallowable instrument and could therefore be subject to amendment by the pesky opposition or the crossbench—and we can't have that now, can we?

My bill does three broad things to address the issues that have emerged over the years, including what I have outlined today. Firstly, my bill clarifies what constitutes a party political purpose. It will bolster the legislation's recognition of a core tenant of the ACT's electoral politics and the Hare-Clark system: name and brand recognition is everything. It applies equally from the Chief Minister all the way down to the prospective candidate and from the old parties to the new entrants. To name or depict a politician is to present their electoral brand to the public. Legitimate exceptions are retained for things that have to be done under law or for the Assembly. But, as a general rule, the government will not be able to slap a minister's face on something and call it non-partisan.

Second, my bill will clarify that, when dealing with a proposed government program, government advertising must be predicated on public consultation. Until a program is approved, such as through enabling legislation, it does not get advertised. That will include things like initiatives outlined in the budget before the budget has actually been passed. Ministers will still be able to talk about what is in the budget; just not backed by a publicly-funded advertising budget, such as in the recent July edition of OurCBR, which, for Gungahlin, was spruiking the artificial grass sports fields at Taylor, a proposed program contingent on the passage of the budget by this parliament—and, notably, contrary to the motion on artificial grass passed by this Assembly earlier this year.

Routine government communications, such as about bushfire preparedness and road safety, would of course be out of scope for those restrictions, as they represent ongoing and entirely reasonable public information campaigns of the government. I also note the current guidelines exempt public health and safety information from the operation of this act. There is nothing in my bill that is intended to change this—and, if needed, I am very happy to move amendments to clarify that particular point.

Mr Barr: You are going to have to.

MR BRADDOCK: Lastly, my bill will add additional restrictions to government advertising campaigns during a federal election campaign. The need for this should be self-evident. For a government advertising campaign to happen between the issuing of the writs and the polling day of a federal election, agreement from all party leaders in the Assembly will be required. Ensuring that any political party in the Assembly has an effective power of veto over a government advertising campaign will ensure that only truly non-partisan territory government advertising is occurring. It will become increasingly difficult for any territory government to politically influence a federal election campaign.

My bill does not shut down government advertising, but it does tighten our controls to prevent possible political partisan purposes behind it. The government will be compelled to issue new guidelines that account for the changes, which will give this Assembly the ability to scrutinise them properly for the first time in 15 years. The government might choose to cease certain advertising activities as a result of the tighter restrictions. That would be very telling, but it could also be a victory for the taxpayers. I commend my bill to the Assembly.

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

Public schools—senior secondary language courses

MS BARRY(Ginninderra) (3.25): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) following the closure of CIT Solutions, CIT will not be accepting new enrolments for its Year 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026;
 - (b) a petition signed by 560 petitioners calls on the Government to replicate the Year 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026 within the Education Directorate, starting with Year 11 students in February 2026, so all students can continue studying their chosen language at the ATAR level; and
 - (c) the Minister for Education and Early Childhood has decided not to replicate the CIT Solutions offerings for 2026, offering no long-term solution and only a limited offering for some currently enrolled students;
- (2) further notes:
 - (a) the importance of continuity in language training, taking years of continual study to attain competence in another language;
 - (b) the importance of having multilingual individuals in the national capital, which has a high demand for language skills for business, international relations and in supporting embassies and foreign affairs;
 - (c) that Canberra communities value recognition of home languages in the education system, and see this as an important measure of respect for multiculturalism; and
 - (d) that the teaching of languages is part of the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Education and Early Childhood to:
 - (a) ensure that all students who wish to study languages at Year 11 and 12 level in 2026 are proactively contacted and provided options to do so;
 - (b) ensure that the Education Directorate provides assistance to schools and colleges to ensure that options are discussed with parents and students; and
 - (c) develop a long-term language learning strategy to ensure that:
 - (i) students are able to continue studying a selected language throughout their attendance at ACT Schools; and
 - (ii) the range of languages offered expands to meet the needs of students and the broader community.

First of all, I want to start by thanking all of the tireless advocacy from parents regarding this issue. I want to thank Mr Frank Keighley, who is in the chamber today, for his work around this. He is really keen and interested in ensuring that our children get the best possible chance at being able to compete on the world stage. I also want to thank the crossbench and the Greens for their engagement in conversations around this issue and for your support for this bill. I want to thank Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick as well for

their contributions.

I am seeking today to ensure that year 11 and 12 students who wish to study ATAR language courses in 2026 have the opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, the closure of CIT Solutions has had a profound consequence on the ability for those children to be able to study languages. The ACT Education Directorate lost its key partner responsible for delivering senior secondary ATAR language programs.

What was already a significant problem has now escalated into a full-blown crisis, because the minister has chosen not to replace CIT Solutions language offerings with any substantive alternative. She has advised that “there are no plans for the directorate to provide a centralised language program in 2026”. This is an extraordinary position for an education minister to take, and it leaves many students who wish to study a language in 2026 without a viable pathway. Students, parents and educators across Canberra are rightly alarmed and frustrated at the Labor government’s failure to put meaningful alternatives in place.

I am proud to bring this motion forward with the support of the crossbench, as I have indicated. I understand deeply the challenges and the transformative benefits of having a language in your toolbox and also of learning a new language. As I have indicated in this chamber previously, I am bilingual and my daughter is also multilingual.

While the minister has informed me of a limited arrangement for current enrolled students who have contacted her office to continue their studies at a different college next year, this is simply not good enough. This band-aid fix does not constitute a centralised coordinated program, and it imposes a considerable administrative burden on individual colleges—burdens they are not equipped to manage. That is why, on the minister’s assurance to me, parents and students have made it very clear that they are not satisfied with the stop-gap solution.

Research from the Australian Foundation of Modern Language Teachers Association, through the National Language Plan and Strategy, identifies the ACT’s widening senior secondary language as a critical equity issue. National standards emphasise the need for centrally delivered supplementary programs, particularly where individual schools cannot guarantee language provision beyond year 10. These models are well established as best practice for promoting equity and inclusion. I believe the Labor government was committed to these principles but, unfortunately, the minister’s response has caused me to seriously have concerns for those commitments.

To test the depth of community concern, this week I tabled a petition by Mr James and petitioners. Despite it being open for only 33 days, it attracted nearly 600 signatures. This is a clear sign that the community expects action. My motion reflects these concerns and requires the minister and the directorate to identify a solution that ensures that every student who would have access to the CIT Solutions models can continue language study in 2026 and beyond. We must not underestimate the importance of language learning or the necessity of community to achieve true proficiency. The ACT’s current approach to language provision has created fractured learning pathways and inconsistent access. In a global and multicultural society, we should be supporting, encouraging and celebrating young people who aspire to be multilingual.

This is not the first time the Canberra Liberals have raised this issue. In fact, in 2018, we put forward a world-class language education plan to prepare the next generation for a global future, recognising our city's rich multicultural character and linguistic diversity. Our plan included a comprehensive audit of existing programs, identification of priority languages and a full stocktake of gaps in provision. Had we been able to deliver, the students would not be facing the uncertainty they face today.

Looking across ACT schools, it is clear that the current offerings do not reflect a commitment to excellence. Students are routinely confronted with long gaps between available language courses as they progress through school or move between campuses. These gaps seriously undermine proficiency and force students to start again from the basics. As I said earlier this week, if you do not use language, you lose it. I have lost half of my use of French because I do not speak it as often. We need a better and more consistent approach. Cutting opportunities for young people is neither progressive nor sensible.

I am also aware of the growing concern among multicultural communities and employers about the shrinking number of language courses. For new migrants, recognition of excellence in their home language is a powerful signal that Australia values multiculturalism. For their children, the ability to study their heritage language strengthens cultural identity and family connections. Employers, particularly embassies, global businesses and commonwealth agencies such as Foreign Affairs and Trade also rely on Australians with strong bilingual and multilingual skills. It is a competitive advantage that we should be nurturing, not eroding. I share the disappointment felt by many Canberrans regarding the government's unwillingness to act. To put it plainly, the minister's refusal to develop a plan is unacceptable.

I also note that the minister has misrepresented my position, suggesting that what we are asking for would require a new school. I do not think we are asking for a new school. My motion and the petition do not call to establish that; they call for the minister and her directorate to take responsibility and develop a long-term solution to the reduction of language programs in the ACT.

At some time in this debate, I will probably hear words from my colleague—if she is going to speak to this motion—about cognitive dissonance, or we will hear the fact that we are calling on the government to spend more while also asking them to be fiscally responsible. Actually, we got a lecture from the Chief Minister this morning around that. Let me make this really clear: every developed society carries sovereign debts. But sovereign debt must be matched by sovereign assets, by tangible public infrastructure and by strong social systems that serve the community. The problem in the ACT is that we have accumulated a huge debt; yet, when you look across the community, there is very little to show for it. Services tell us that they are chronically underfunded, facilities are run down, schools are struggling and people are paying more. But what are we getting for this debt? The Canberra community is simply asking for the basics. If the fundamentals of government were functioning as they should, we would not even be having this conversation. In a world-class city like Canberra, this should not be a conversation.

While I do not intend to tell the government how to perform their roles or duties, I do acknowledge that there are multiple pathways to address this challenge. I acknowledge

the work of Mr Frank Keighley, who has tirelessly advocated for reinstating the Canberra Academy of Languages, which delivered these services prior to CIT Solutions. That is certainly a credible option. It is telling, and perhaps reflective of Labor's ideological rigidity, that a public-private partnership appears to have been ruled out from the outset.

My motion is about delivering practical, sensible solutions for real community need. It is ultimately up to the minister to determine the model, but it should not take a motion of the Assembly for her to fulfil her responsibilities. My motion calls on the government to guarantee that ATAR year 11 and 12 language courses will be available in 2026 and to commit to a sustainable long-term plan for language education in our schools. This is essential to uphold the government's own policy principles, protecting language pathways for students who have studied languages in years 7 to 10, and ensure equitable access for all ACT students.

The decision by CIT Solutions to discontinue its program has left a significant void, one that directly contradicts the ACT government's stated priorities. With CIT confirming it will not accept new enrolments from 2026 onwards, students who rely on this pathway are left stranded. Restoring an in-house program through the directorate would provide the continuity and stability the government has long claimed to support. My motion calls for not only a short-term fix for 2026 but also the creation of a long-term language learning strategy to place language education on a firm footing for the future.

Finally, once again, I want to thank everybody who has been involved in conversations about this motion—the crossbench, Ms Jo Clay and Mr Emerson. I want to also thank Frank, who is in the gallery, for his tireless effort. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.36): I rise to speak in support of Ms Barry's motion. I have sent multiple letters and asked multiple questions both in this chamber and through committee processes about this issue, so I thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I am confident that Ms Barry and I are both aware of this issue, particularly because of two community members, who I would also like to acknowledge, as she did.

Jim Gilchrist's daughter is directly impacted by the winding-up of CIT Solutions, and his immense efforts have helped to bring public attention and the attention of members to this matter. I understand that he has communicated with multiple members in this place.

Jim's daughter is moving into year 11 next year. She has been studying French for 10 years, and she even spent six months in France last year to further her education. But because of the impending discontinuation of this program, she has determined that it is not feasible for her to continue her French language studies in 2026. Jim's daughter does not want to have to travel across the city to an out-of-area school, where she would have no continuity with her current cohort, and would have to spend hours on public transport; nor should she have to. Unless the government steps in, though, she sees no choice but to give up the subject she loves and that she has dedicated a lot of her life to.

I would also like to thank Frank Keighley for sharing with many members how and why he and his wife first established the Canberra Academy of Languages, which ran out of the Ainslie School, before the program was taken over by CIT Solutions. Frank has made very clear how soluble this issue really is, if the government have the will to solve it. The question is whether or not they do. I sincerely hope that this motion today and the petition tabled in this place yesterday make it abundantly clear that this Assembly and the people it represents expect the government to step in and solve this problem.

A high-quality public education system is core to Canberra's identity. Our community really believes in public education. On the whole, Canberrans want to send their children to government schools, and we need to see leadership, including on issues like this, that might seem like they do not affect that many Canberrans—leadership that ensures students in government schools in the ACT have the same access to learning opportunities as those in non-government schools.

The closure of CIT Solutions poses a threat to this kind of equitable access. The government has known about this threat since April. It is now December. I have heard from parents and other community members with complaints that there has been little information offered to alert them to these changes. There certainly has not been a public announcement yet. In fact, the reason we are debating this motion today seems to be because we found out through one of the founders of this program and one of the parents whose child is affected by this change, not through the government.

I think it is unacceptable that students who want to continue learning their language of choice in year 11 next year are still in the dark—and some of them do not yet realise that they are in the dark—as to what exactly will be on offer when term 1 starts in two months time. I am struggling to understand why the government has not simply directed the Education Directorate to take over running this program. It is a simple solution. A centralised specialist language instruction offering in an external school, as we have had, is a sensible solution for languages where teachers are in short supply, and it makes even more sense in a small jurisdiction like ours.

Even individual colleges might have only a handful of students keen to learn a particular language. It is smart to gather students from those schools together so that they can learn that language in a centralised location. Certainly, it is a far better solution than requiring students to travel to the other side of the city to attend a school outside their catchment area that is not connected to their community.

Without a centralised offering like this, the risk also remains that any given school could lose a teacher and suddenly be unable to offer a particular language, leaving the students who have invested in that language stranded. I understand this has previously happened in the last couple of years, and students have been able to jump across into the external languages school to continue their studies. The program operates on a cost recovery rate basis, so cost is not the issue. It can be run out of an existing school site outside normal school hours, as was previously the case when the program was first established here, so infrastructure is not the issue.

What is the issue? Why hasn't the government stepped in to take over the management of this program? And will it, on the back of this motion today? I certainly hope so. To

be clear, I have been critical in my remarks, but this is not intended as a beat-up of the government. It is a call from the rest of the Assembly—and I thank Ms Barry for bringing us together—for the government to come to the table and find a genuine solution that really works for students.

This is not unprecedented, either; far from it. Almost every jurisdiction in Australia has a dedicated external senior secondary language offering, and in multiple other states that offering is run by the government.

The ACT government has a Language Education Action Plan, as the minister raised in some of her earlier correspondence with me on this matter. The plan was published in April 2024. The fourth action in this plan is to “explore options for alternative delivery models for public school language education programs”. We are told this is to “provide flexible and innovative solutions for students wishing to undertake a pathway for proficiency”. The plan also says that this will be done by the end of 2025. Here we are, at the end of 2025, with fewer delivery models for public school language education than we had when the Language Education Action Plan was published.

Further correspondence that I received from the minister yesterday afternoon—and other members of this Assembly and our community, I believe, have received similar correspondence—indicates that, “at present there are no plans for the Education Directorate to take over management of a centralised language program for 2026”.

I implore the government to make such plans and, in responding to today’s motion, to bring the delivery of the centralised senior secondary language learning program in-house, into the Education Directorate. We know public school enrolments have been declining in the ACT. The Assembly must come together to do everything possible to ensure families are not driven away from the public system. Supporting this motion and taking real action on the back of it is a small but important way of doing that.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.43): I thank Ms Barry for bringing forward the petition and this motion. I think she has done a really good job with bringing this issue to our attention and putting together a practical way forward that will solve some problems for our kids.

Language is a difficult thing to teach, and it is a really difficult thing to learn. Teachers need to teach the hard, logical elements of the language—the grammar, the pronunciation—and at the same time they need to be gently introducing their students to the culture that the language comes from. They need to provide the context and the meaning for that drier part of the language study.

I have concerns about whether we are supporting our students to learn languages, given the context of what they need to learn. From a student’s perspective, it is hard to keep up with, particularly at high school level. Languages are like no other kind of study. You need to practice constantly. Ms Barry made this point really clearly. You need to accept that you will be very bad at everything related to the language when you start. For some languages, you need to learn an entirely new alphabet.

As we become a more international city, we have more students who go to school and are expected to learn, not a second language, but a third, fourth or fifth language. In

public schools, it is not surprising that, when year 9 comes around, students are finding it hard to pick languages and continue with them.

According to the minister's response to a question that I lodged about language offerings in Belconnen, in Ginninderra, some high schools, like Melba Copland and Canberra high, are only offering languages for select grades. There is the mandatory curriculum to provide language classes in years 7 and 8, but some of those languages are not offered as electives in year 9 and 10. It does not sound like we are delivering on the curriculum, from the way I am looking at it.

We have a similar situation in primary school. At Macquarie primary, for instance, you can study French, but only in grade 2, grade 5 and grade 6. How much are you going to forget in grade 3 and grade 4? What is the point of doing it in grade 2 and then skipping it until grade 5? It is no wonder that our students are struggling to study languages in year 11 and year 12, and that was before this change came through.

The reason I am trying to give all this context is to highlight how difficult it is, and what a huge tragedy it is, when we have students who desperately want to study languages, despite all these barriers, and they have just had that option taken away. It is hard enough to commit to, as it is. It is impossible if we are not giving them any reasonable options in year 11 and year 12.

Like Ms Barry and Mr Emerson, I was also pleased to meet with Frank and hear about the language school and the model he has put together. It does sound like one way forward. I spoke to Jim a lot. I spoke to him about his daughter, who is in year 11 next year, and who would like to continue her French studies. She has very good reasons to do so.

There are quite a lot of children in this situation. Ms Barry and I asked the minister how many kids were involved. We did not get a particularly good answer to that. I would have thought it would be fairly easy to estimate, based on past years data. You would know how many kids would be doing it, if you offered it. It looks like we have at least a couple of hundred kids in this situation. We certainly need to be working harder on this.

We have been told about the options that the minister has put together. They include enrolling for an out-of-area school, and hope they have capacity to accept them, beyond the current catchment area. That is really tricky, with travel for kids who may or may not be driving. That is particularly difficult if the out-of-area options are not on a good bus route and are not centralised. It will be difficult to organise, with schedules, if you are trying to go to a couple of schools at once. We heard Jim's pretty frank assessment of that option this morning. If you maybe have to go to two schools and try and make your schedules balance, that will be really, tricky.

We have this particular issue right now. I have to say that, over my short political career so far, I have been hearing a lot of concerns from Canberra parents about language training in Canberra. We need to work harder on this. We need to work harder across the board. We have a lot of families who would love to have their kids learn their first language—Hindi, Punjabi, some of these languages that are really common for parents. They would love their kids to be able to learn those. We are not offering those.

We definitely need to be offering languages in a more continuous way. There is not much point offering it for a year and then cutting it. We need to be working harder to make sure that we are offering these languages in a fair way, so that all of our students are getting the same outcomes and the same opportunities.

I really like what Ms Barry has put together. There is the option of making sure that the directorate is contacting everyone in year 10, to check in with them, rather than simply dealing with the few kids and parents who are strong enough advocates, like Jim, to be able to find a minister or find a directorate. We need to make sure that we are proactively contacting everybody, to check in and see where they are, and to see what offerings we can give them.

We need to remember that not everybody is great at doing advocacy. We have parents out there with English as a second language. We have working parents. We have single parents. We have parents with disabilities. We have parents who are carers or who need carers. It is not reasonable to expect our parents to have to fight tooth and nail to get access to something basic that should be provided in the curriculum.

I certainly heard the minister's distress and frustration with CIT no longer offering a solution that had been offered. I am sympathetic to that. I understand that CIT are not a government agency. They do get government funding. They do have some government oversight. A lot of us in the community would like to see government making sure that CIT is providing services that are useful. That is an issue that is bigger than the one we are talking about today. Again, simply saying, "CIT has stopped this program and there's nothing that we can do," is probably not meeting the expectations of the Canberra community.

I would love to see a centralised language school or some other practical, reasonable option. We need to have a quick option for kids in year 11 and year 12 next year, and the year after. We need to have something that is immediate, and it needs to be offered equitably, to everybody in year 10 right now who is studying a language. We need to have a longer term option to make sure that this is working.

I think that the alternative is the least fair. The alternative will mean that the only kids who can realistically study languages are those whose parents can afford private school fees. That is certainly not the education system that I would like to see in Canberra, so this is a problem on which we need to work hard.

Once again, I thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this motion. There are a lot of good reasons for us to address this issue. It is certainly in the interests of our parents and our kids who are studying for us to make sure we have good solutions for next year, and something that is a bit more long term, so that we are not in this situation again.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.51): I rise today to support Ms Barry's motion calling for continued access to year 11 and 12 ATAR language courses from 2026. I have heard directly from constituents, too, who have shared their concerns that students who have studied a language faithfully from years 7 to 10, or even in primary school, now find that there is no viable way to continue in years 11 and 12, simply because

their local college does not offer that course and there is no centrally run option.

This is fundamentally an issue of fairness and opportunity. A student's chance to study a language at an ATAR level should not depend on which college they attend. We should want more young people with language and intercultural skills, not fewer.

With a city the size of Canberra, I am shocked that the government does not ensure there is access to study languages. I note that, in the Canberra Institute of Technology Act, in the ministerial directions, section 7(1) says that the minister may give a direction to the CIT in relation to the exercise of the CIT's functions. Section 7(2) says that the CIT must comply with any direction of the minister.

It seems that there are pathways, so I urge the government to ensure there is a coordinated, accessible option, so that committed students can continue with the languages they have worked so hard to learn.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.52): I want to thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and for her interest in the external provision of languages education offerings for senior secondary students in the ACT.

I will begin my comments by saying that the ACT government is supportive of Ms Barry's motion and the "calls on" part of the motion, to ensure that students who wish to study languages in years 11 and 12 in 2026 are proactively contacted. We can do that. There is a call to ensure that the Education Directorate provides assistance to schools and colleges. We are doing that. Happily, we can develop a long-term language strategy as well.

The Education Directorate, the ACT government and I have no problems with committing to that now, as part of this motion today. That is because the ACT government is committed to an inclusive, equitable and high-quality public education system that recognises the right of every child and young person to learn and benefit from the opportunities that education brings.

Language education in ACT public schools occurs in various forms, from preschool to year 12. This year, 11 different languages are being taught across ACT public schools, which include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, Auslan, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish.

As members know, previously, CIT Solutions delivered Board of Senior Secondary Studies approved language courses for ACT college students via the Centre for Modern Languages, known as the senior secondary languages program. This program was conducted at Ainslie School. Students travelled to the school to be part of that program and participate in that senior secondary languages program.

The program was available to ACT public, independent and Catholic school students—all schools across the ACT. In April 2025, the Education Directorate became aware that, following a review by the CIT Board, a decision was made to dissolve CIT Solutions. In June, it was confirmed that the program would transition to CIT,

commencing from the start of semester 2, until the end of 2025. For the next year, the program will not be provided for new students. I am advised that CIT will continue to provide the previous program to the current year 11 cohort of 14 students next year, to support students who are seeking to complete a language major.

On the question of how many students were enrolled in this program this year, I am advised that there were 47 students. For Ms Clay's information, I put that on the record as well.

Students and families have been advised that this arrangement is contingent on the availability of suitably qualified teachers, of course. Next year, language education offerings for senior secondary students in our public college system will be solely school-based arrangements, and students will be required to access language courses via existing school enrolment options or the Board of Senior Secondary Studies specialist education provider, which is currently only provided for Chinese.

There are already solutions and options embedded at the local level, with arrangements between colleges to support students in continuing languages pathways. These are options that already exist that will continue to provide these options to students who want to continue their language education. These include enrolment at the student's priority enrolment area college, if the college offers their chosen language, an arrangement between ACT public colleges for a student enrolled at one college to access a language course that might be offered in another college, application for out-of-area enrolment consideration at a college that offers a student's chosen language, subject to capacity, and enrolment in a language course outside school hours with a BSSS specialist education provider, such as the Australian School of Contemporary Chinese, which is for Chinese language studies only.

Students and their parents or carers can discuss these options with their college directly. I know of examples right now where these arrangements are meeting the needs of these particular students in continuing their languages education. Communication was provided to all ACT public schools and a range of stakeholders this week confirming this decision and outlining options currently available across the system. I will find a copy of that correspondence to provide to Ms Barry, so that she has that, and can confirm that the "asks" that have been made in her motion today have been provided, as far as that communication is concerned.

The ACT government does have an ACT Language Education Action Plan, LEAP, and work is commencing on continuing this work across all action areas, with the intention of strengthening language education in ACT public schools. We can certainly update that, and work on a longer term language learning strategy, as is called for in the motion. The Education Directorate and I have no problems with that.

As part of the plan, the Education Directorate will continue to explore ways to strengthen and deliver the continuity of language education pathways across school years, with consideration of flexible delivery models, teacher recruitment partnerships, and curriculum. I am very happy to continue to do that work, and brief and advise Ms Barry, if she is interested, along the way.

The Education Directorate is working in partnership with the Teacher Quality Institute

and the Australian National University, as well as the University of Canberra, to support all of this important work. This includes efforts to attract more language teachers to ACT public schools. Unfortunately, language teachers are becoming rarer. We cannot magic them up, so the ACT Education Directorate is looking at continuing to promote scholarship opportunities for existing teachers to upskill into language education, and to collaborate with regulatory authorities to support teacher registration. Of course, the availability of appropriately qualified language teachers continues to remain a challenge, but we are continuing to do work in that space.

The directorate is also exploring opportunities to broaden the range of languages available to ACT public school students, particularly through offering languages not taught as part of the curriculum. Recently, we had a whole program of work, with the recent publication of Punjabi and Hindi language education listening reports. We surveyed a range of parents, families and others across the ACT to understand their requests for studying the Punjabi and Hindi languages in our schools.

There has been significant engagement from the community on that front. We will work with that community about what the next step is, when it comes to providing Punjabi and Hindi language education. Of course, we will need to ensure that we have appropriately qualified language teachers to conduct those lessons, and we will need to look at which schools will provide those courses.

The ACT government is committed to strengthening language education opportunities for all students across ACT public schools. I understand, of course, that the decision of CIT to discontinue and dissolve CIT Solutions is upsetting. It is certainly very inconvenient for me. I acknowledge the advocacy in this space with respect to operating a centralised languages school in the ACT. I acknowledge Mr Frank Keighley, who has advocated in this space for many years across the political spectrum. I acknowledge that, and I note that the decision of the ACT government will be upsetting for him, because it is a deep passion of his, and I recognise that. I also acknowledge all the other people who have been engaged in this issue to date.

We will continue to work on providing languages education in our public schools. Again, I thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, and for the work that she has done within our communities on engaging people in the petition that she has circulated. I know that there will be many more opportunities to study different languages and continue language education in a range of different ways that suit individual students and families across the ACT. I note that language teachers are becoming rare, and we need to do more work in promoting those scholarship opportunities so that we can get even more language teachers into our public school system. I will leave it at that. I say again that the ACT government is not opposing Ms Barry's motion in the Assembly today.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.02): Languages are an important part of every child's education. Every child in the ACT should have the opportunity to learn a variety of languages across their schooling career. I myself learned both Japanese and German in high school and, while my Japanese leaves a lot to be desired at this point, I still reckon I can confidently order a meal and a few beers in German.

Learning a language at school plays a vital role in a child's development. It enhances

literacy and improves memory and overall brain function. It can also build critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Most importantly, learning a language cultivates respect and understanding of other cultures. It nurtures curiosity and openness in our children, helping them build a genuine understanding and appreciation of cultures and customs different from their own. This has become more important than ever. We have seen growing divisions in our society, and there are forces that seek to deepen them. One of the strongest safeguards we can provide is to cultivate cultural understanding and thinking from a young age alongside teaching children to respect, value and remain open to diverse cultures. Every child should have the opportunity to learn a language and to immerse themselves in a culture different from their own.

Canberra is, at its heart, a multicultural city. We are also home to the Department of Foreign Affairs, multiple universities, international students as well as the Australian Public Service, which all call upon the use of languages. Therefore, our education system should reflect on that. Every high school student should be able to study the language they choose without having to change schools, leave their friends or travel unreasonable distances just to pursue the subject they love.

I understand it is unrealistic for every high school in Canberra to offer every language. Our language teachers are already working incredibly hard to service our current language classes. That is why the CIT language program was an excellent solution to this problem. It gave kids all over the ACT the opportunity to continue studying the language they had invested so much time and effort into learning. Unfortunately, since this program is no longer operational, kids do not have that opportunity.

That is why today's motion is so essential. We need a solution that guarantees every year 11 and 12 student can continue studying the language they choose. We also need a solution that provides the flexibility for students to access a broad range of languages here in the ACT. Given Canberra's size, there is an opportunity to provide centralised language training and to provide a broad range of language offerings efficiently that does not force students to choose another school on the basis of simply one class choice. CIT Solutions used to provide this function but, unfortunately, this is no longer. I therefore encourage innovative thinking to enable this to happen.

We also must ensure students are aware of the range of offerings, to enable them to take up the language training, and encourage them to do so. That will not only allow the students to enjoy the benefits that flow but also allow us to efficiently deliver this language training across the ACT.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to community advocates, such as Frank—who is behind me—who have worked tirelessly to ensure this issue remains firmly on the government's agenda. Let's hope this motion delivers both a short-term fix and a long-term plan so our kids can keep learning the languages they love.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (4.06): I rise to support Ms Barry's motion. Languages are increasingly being recognised as one of the capabilities that our young people are going to need in an ever-globalised world. We know that the future for today's school leavers is quite different to what we in this chamber have all experienced. We are living in an increasingly global economy. We are a trade-dependent nation and we rely on foreign

investment, foreign trade, overseas students and overseas job opportunities.

Figures from the last census show that the number of Canberrans who speak a language other than English at home is on the rise—up from 21.8 per cent in 2016 to 24.6 per cent in 2021. Mandarin continues to be the leading language spoken in homes in the ACT other than English, but we have also seen a growth in other languages too. The lingual diversity of our rich multicultural community should be reflected in language programs available across all ACT schools.

As shadow minister for education leading into the 2020 election, I released a very comprehensive policy to increase language teaching in the ACT. Our policy included at the time increasing investment in current and future language teachers with scholarships, exchange programs and travel bursaries, to undertaking an audit of the current needs of students and the skill of teachers and prioritising the teaching of strategic languages to equip our children for a global future. It also talked about the huge advantage that we have here in the nation's capital, where we are the home to, if not all, most of the embassies and commissions around the world and the reach that we have in this place that could be the envy of so many other cities around the globe.

Despite the rich multicultural community, despite the importance of language programs, the minister decided that this government will not provide a centralised language program for next year. This is not good enough. It is not good enough for those students who are currently enrolled in these language programs who are now being told that they will be facilitated to attend other language courses at other facilities; it is not good enough for those year 10 students who may wish to access year 11 language courses; and it is not good enough for those year 11 and 12 students who may wish to start language courses.

Supporting language education is an investment in global citizenship. It strengthens our schools, it enriches our culture and it prepares the next generation to think beyond our borders. For ACT students, learning another language is not only an academic advantage; it is a lifelong skill for understanding, for connection and for leadership. We know the benefits that come when children from a young age have exposure to more than one language, and we know the benefits are lifelong. There is ample research that indicates that, in old age, if you have the opportunity to study another language, it has a huge impact on staving off conditions and diseases like dementia.

The benefits that we have in this city, the nation's capital, of being able to have access on our very doorstep to the number of embassies from across the world and the fact that we have such a rich multicultural community that is embedded everywhere that we see around the city should give us the best opportunities possible, not just in Australia, but almost around the world, to be able to ensure that our children have the best opportunities to access a second language, a third language or however many languages that they wish to be able to learn.

One of the issues that I raised in my first term as shadow education minister was about the broken pathway in terms of language education in ACT schools. This is really critically important. While there is, of course, a huge advantage to learning any other language, to master a language you do need to spend many years doing that and making sure that you have access to it. To have the ACT government school system not able to

factor that in and not able to deliver that for our students is doing our next generation a great disservice.

I commend Ms Barry for bringing this important motion to the chamber. She is of course an incredible supporter of our multicultural community and understands very well the importance of language education. She has been an incredible advocate in this space, and I really support and commend Ms Barry's motion today.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.11), in reply: In closing, I want to thank everybody who has participated in this debate. Again, a huge thank you for the work that Frank has been doing in this space. He has been a fervent advocate and has met with many, many of us. It is pleasing to see that somebody is willing to take up this fight.

It is quite pleasing to hear that the minister is agreeing to my motion today. It gives us some comfort that there is interest and the minister is willing to take up this important issue. The one thing I would mention, though, is that, while the minister considers the options and also contacts the parents, she also ensures that the solutions that are provided are practical solutions. It is one thing to provide solutions but, if they are not practical, then they are no solutions at all.

Once again, I thank everyone who has participated in this debate, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee Membership

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Speaker has been notified in writing of the following nominations for membership of the Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT: Mr Ed Cocks, Ms Jo Clay, Ms Caitlin Tough and Ms Fiona Carrick.

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

That the Members so nominated be appointed as members of the Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT.

ACT Law Courts—trauma informed support programs

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.13): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) culturally safe and trauma informed support for all court users is necessary to ensure fair and accessible justice;
- (b) such support mechanisms assist court users to meaningfully engage with the court process and reduce the risk of re-traumatisation;
- (c) the ACT Courts and Tribunal (ACTCT) continue to build capacity to support a client-centred and therapeutic approach for the individual

- needs and circumstances of court and tribunal users; and
- (d) the ACTCT facilitates a broad range of specialised services and programs (delivered by, or in partnership with, other stakeholders) designed to inform, empower and advocate for court users, including users from vulnerable cohorts;
- (2) further notes that recent reports and annual report hearing questioning indicate there can be challenges in relation to support service and program delivery, including the:
- (a) provision of thorough trauma informed practices to all client-facing staff; and
 - (b) availability of services to all court users;
- (3) acknowledges and affirms the value of, and that all court users are entitled to, culturally safe and trauma informed support to foster access to justice; and
- (4) calls on the Government to:
- (a) publish on an accessible website all support services currently available for ACTCT users;
 - (b) table, to the extent possible, what information and assessments have been undertaken which have evaluated the effectiveness of support services in the last five years and report back on the above to the Assembly by the end of June 2026; and
 - (c) investigate what further opportunities there are to enhance the current support framework and report back to the Assembly on this work by December 2026.

For many who walk through the doors of a courthouse, the experience is not only merely procedural; it can be frightening and overwhelming, surrounded by an unfamiliar language, formalities and strict protocols that dictate how you speak, where you sit and how your story is heard.

Those who use our courts do so for a wide variety of reasons. Some seek protections from harm; some face life-changing decisions; some are seeking compensation from things that have happened to them; and others are navigating complex legal, family or personal crisis. Many arrive already affected by past traumas or systemic disadvantages, and these factors can limit their ability to make sense of proceedings, communicate their needs or feel safe enough to engage in a system that can already seem intimidating and inaccessible.

How courts and tribunals respond to these challenges profoundly shapes the experiences of court users and influences the perceived fairness of the outcome. When the court environment respects cultural identity, honouring the values and communication styles that shape a person's life, supporting their trauma, not increasing it, it sends a powerful message: "You are welcome here. The system is here for you."

When support services operate with trauma awareness, they create space for people to participate without fear, shame or re-traumatisation. We cannot expect people to engage meaningfully in the justice system if the system does not first ensure their emotional and psychological safety. By embedding culturally safe and trauma-informed approaches into every stage of the court experience, we actively reduce harm and

encourage participation.

Together, these approaches ensure that every person, regardless of their background, language, ability, lived experience or role in the court process, is treated with dignity. That role is not just as a victim or alleged perpetrator; it could be a family of a victim or perpetrator. It could be a family of someone who has died. It is anyone who engages with the court process, no matter the reason. This is the ACT's vision for a justice system that is fair, inclusive and compassionate to all who interact with it.

The ACT courts and tribunals are committed to principles of access and equity by providing pragmatic, systemic and consistent support for all court and tribunal users and the support services and stakeholders operating across these spaces. The 2024-25 Justice and Community Safety Directorate annual report highlighted the ACT courts and tribunal's ongoing commitment to enhancing client services and improving access to justice by continuing to build capacity to support client-centred and therapeutic approach that is tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of court and tribunal users. Key initiatives include the development of clear information and resource sheets, specialised training for staff in client-facing roles, collaboration with specialist teams to support users with complex needs and the upgrading of client-facing positions to ensure staff have the appropriate skills and experience to support vulnerable and all court users.

These programs and services are designed to provide support to all court users regardless of their positioning in the court and aim to deliver a client-centred therapeutic approach to each individual need or circumstances of court and tribunal users, including systemic disadvantages or vulnerabilities that might impede their access to the justice system. For example, the 2025 Disability Justice Strategy Annual Progress Report highlights the government's dedication to creating a justice system that is inclusive, responsive and respectful of the rights and dignity of all individuals. We know people with disability often face a range of systemic disadvantages that increase their likelihood of coming into contact with the justice system. If we put the right support, services and programs in place to reduce this level of legal need, then the benefits will be felt not only for the people with disability but across the entire system, creating fairer outcomes for everyone.

While the 2019-23 action plan was impacted by COVID, an evaluation found that positive changes were occurring, that attitudes, process and practices were shifting in the right direction. But we are one year into the second action plan now, and we need to ensure that this progress continues for everyone, together with other stakeholders. ACT courts are continuing to try and implement inclusive and responsive measures.

We see the Justice and Community Safety Directorate working with the Community Services Directorate in continuing to provide funding and resources for agencies to create accessible materials. But we need to make sure that people know these materials are there, access them and know what is available. We see Legal Aid delivering internal training on disability awareness and trauma-informed practice and effective communication strategies for clients with autism, ADHD and mental health conditions, including one of my favourite things I have seen for court users—a guided tour of the court, so that, before someone needs to use the court, they can actually get an understanding of what is going on in that process beforehand. This is just one example

of something that is working, but we need to enhance that and expand it so there are supports for everyone engaging with the system. These are only a few of the supports and programs being implemented in this space. Their continued rollout should continue to be evaluated to make sure they are being delivered effectively and achieving their intended purpose and benefits.

Our courts work closely with other organisations, including the Human Rights Commission's intermediary program, playing a vital role in removing communication barriers, ensuring the justice process is fair and accessible for all witnesses and, after recent expansion, the vulnerable accused. The intermediaries often draw from allied health professionals, including speech pathology, social work, psychology and occupational therapy, bringing expertise and supporting court users with language delays, disabilities, mental health issues and other communication difficulties.

The courts work closely with Legal Aid, the Aboriginal Legal Service, DVCS, Victim Support ACT, Prisoners Aid ACT, the ACT Women's Legal Centre and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to assist people who interact with our courts. We know that, for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experienced intergenerational trauma and systemic disadvantage within the justice system, it can be hard to engage with the system and, in the absence of culturally safe supports, court processes can appear alienating and retraumatising. That is why there is work being done in collaboration with these organisations. But we need to make sure that the court system here is culturally appropriate, safe and considerate of the diverse identities and perspectives that make up our community.

Each court is presented with a unique set of challenges that manifest on its users in ways that must be identified and addressed. The coronial inquest process can have profound impacts on families who have lost loved ones and can be a highly distressing and complex process that may exacerbate and prolong grief. We heard last week during the social policy committee inquiry into men's suicide that the coronial process can be long and hard. It is retraumatising when dealing with the grief and guilt that comes with the death by suicide of a loved one and it is another part in the puzzle that they need to go through.

Providing trauma-informed support to these families is essential in maintaining engagement with the coronial process in a way that feels safe and respectful. It is why the work of the family liaison officers is so important. They are acting as a vital bridge between the courts and families, communicating sensitive information, answering questions and helping families understand each stage of the process at a time when clarity and compassion matter the most. Whether it is an explanation or a quiet space, a lot can make a difference during a highly emotional and stressful time.

To maximise their impact, these programs must be prioritised and elevated, ensuring that the service is delivered in a way that is culturally safe, trauma-informed and responsive to the individual needs of those engaging with our courts, something that is available to all people engaging with the system—but not just that; something that everyone knows is available when they engage with the court system. Sometimes there can be programs available, but people do not realise what is there for them. So it is important not only to have these programs but also to have people to tell you that they are there or to know where to find the information when you engage. By learning these

principles we can make our courts more accessible, reduce stress and re-traumatisation and ensure that every user feels supported and understood throughout their interactions with the legal process.

Just recently I had the pleasure of meeting with Guide Dogs ACT in New South Wales. We all know Guide Dogs provide support for people with vision impairment, but Guide Dogs also run a court support program here with the ACT courts and tribunals. The courts have a canine support program a few hours a week that aims at reducing the anxiety levels of court users with therapy dogs. I was lucky enough to meet some of the therapy dogs, and it really does reduce that anxiety having a dog there to pat and just to sit with. While this program is not run directly by the courts, it is the kind of ancillary program that helps our courts be more open and accessible to all users—something we should be supporting, enhancing and maybe even be able to assist with expanding to more people.

It is what this motion is all about: taking our programs and services, both current and what we all hope to see in the future, and ensuring they truly meet the needs of those who rely on them. For those who need these services most, ensuring accessible information about them is essential. Easy to find information ensures that court users can receive the assistance they need when they need it, leading to fairer outcomes and greater confidence in our court system. Simply knowing that options and supports are available can bring significant reassurance to all court users, no matter their role or position within the process. It is our responsibility to ensure that these services are not only available but also actively delivered and effectively communicated to those who may require them, so that everyone can engage with our courts with confidence and dignity.

By embedding culturally safe and trauma-informed approaches, providing clear and accessible information and delivering supports effectively to those most in need, we can enable a court system that is compassionate and empowering. I will wait until closing to speak on the amendments, but I welcome the amendments. I am hoping to see support across the chamber for this motion. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.24): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion, and I thank Ms Tough for bringing this issue to the Assembly's attention. Our courts need to be accessible and fair for all. Culturally safe and trauma-informed support important part of ensuring this.

Before I proceed, I want to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of a very good friend of mine. We both worked together at the Office of Public Prosecutions. She is a real advocate for supports in the courts. She worked in victims assistance in the DPP at the time. Thank you, Janine, for being here today.

For many, the justice system can be unfamiliar, complex and often confronting. Support that is both culturally safe and trauma-informed is not just an extra; it is essential to ensuring equitable access to justice. The ACT courts and tribunal already provide a number of supports, many of them publicly listed. They do good work but, as we heard in recent hearings, there are still gaps in the delivery of these services. Not everyone who requires support is able to access them or even know how they are available, particularly people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The

information sometimes is not readily accessible. These services are also facing increasing demand, which leaves our support services doing more with less. I think that is a common theme across hearing how services are stretched and doing more with less. This is why strengthening the delivery of court support services is incredibly important.

In this context, what this motion calls on the government to do is absolutely sensible. The first call is for the government to publish all support services currently available for ACT courts and tribunal users on an accessible website. It appears that there is a list of some support services already available on the ACT gov website. However, this motion will ensure that the government formally confirms that this list is complete and updates a register of all government-provided services. This will make sure that the information is accessible and provides the Assembly with a baseline to work from when assessing the effectiveness of the network of support and identifying any gaps.

This motion then calls on the government to table any information and assessments that have evaluated the court support service provided in the last five years. It will be incredibly useful for all of us to see where our support services are excelling and where they need more resources. Finally, it calls on the government to investigate what further opportunities there are to improve the current supports and feedback to the Assembly by December of next year. This will better enable the government and those keeping it to account to take what action we can to respond to the growing demand and current challenges that our court service faces. We need to do all we can to ensure fair and accessible justice in the territory, and this motion advances this aim. Once again, I thank Ms Tough for bringing this matter to the Assembly. For those reasons, we will be supporting this motion.

We will also be supporting the Greens amendments. We think that they are sensible amendments. They expand the scope of the motion, but I think it is important to note that, in the Jumbunna report, there were recommendations that talked about strengthening court processes and frameworks. So I think it is useful that that work is done through this motion. I also think the restrictions on what services ACT courts and users can access is a reasonable ask. Information about the ACT courts and tribunal for users raising complaints about support services is also a useful ask. I was often told when I was in practice that it was really difficult to understand the complaint process. So this would be really useful for people who wish to complain about the services that they are provided in the ACT courts.

Once again, I thank Ms Tough for bringing this motion to the Assembly, and I commend her motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.29): I am pleased that Ms Tough has brought this motion forward today. It is an important topic, and the Greens will be supporting her motion. As has been flagged, I do have some what I call “yes and” amendments, some additional points we thought were valuable to add, but I will come to those a little later. But, overall, we are very pleased to support this motion today.

I would like to thank Ms Tough, Lauren in her office, the Attorney, and Elsie in her office for the discussions about this private members business. I am also grateful to the leaders and experts in the community who turned their minds to this at short notice when we asked them for advice and provided us with their insights. Most importantly,

my thanks go to those with lived experience as users of the ACT courts and tribunal for their analysis of the motion and the fast, frank and fearless feedback that they provided in the days we had to prepare for this debate.

Like Ms Barry, I want to acknowledge Janine Haskins, who is in the chamber today. Over the years we have had many discussions about these issues, and I know that she is a very passionate advocate for improving support services in the courts. Additionally, to those who work day in and day out in and around the courts and tribunals supporting court users at times of great stress in their lives, your work is incredibly valuable and we thank you for it.

I am really pleased to see Ms Tough acknowledge that there have been challenges in relation to support services, because it is vital to consider the feedback from users of the ACT courts and tribunal. We know there have been challenges to the provision of trauma-informed practices and support to all client-facing staff and also challenges around the availability of support to families experiencing the coronial system. We do have some idea already of the services offered in the courts and tribunal. At the moment, we have court support, largely provided by Victim Support Service ACT, either by their staff or their volunteer justice program, which the Victim of Crime Commission is required to maintain and has about 12 volunteers now, who primarily do court support.

The Victim Support Service also have an Aboriginal outreach team and a multicultural worker, plus the Family Violence/Sexual Assault Program team in high-risk cases who provide court support. Court support is also provided by the DPP Witness Assistance Service and some by the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre through their Independent Sexual Violence Advisor Program and regular crisis callouts to court. There are some Aboriginal community-controlled organisations who provide support where there is a First Nations victim. Other supports are provided by Legal Aid's Community Liaison Unit and the First Nations and Domestic Violence Crisis Service. They have an office at the court and support with civil applications for protection orders and likely provide support in family and domestic violence criminal matters. I understand from stakeholders that there are too many of the latter for any of the services to cover the support needs. We are certainly dealing with a very stretched DPP Witness Assistance Service, Victims of Crime Commissioner and DVCS. They are all facing significant demand.

The issues with Family Liaison Officers in the Coroner's Court have been well ventilated by me recently in this place in forums such as question time and annual reports hearings and in numerous reports. This role has such potential, but its scope and limits must be clearly articulated so as to avoid additional harm to people already grieving the loss of a loved one and traversing the coronial system. These individuals and families deserve to be wrapped in support, including by Family Liaison Officers, not struggling to access support or partially able to access it in specific circumstances. I think this is a prime space for the duties of the Family Liaison Officers to be reviewed and their roles to be absolutely clarified.

I acknowledge here the tireless work of coronial reform advocates who show up constantly in the face of immense grief with admirable strength. They have much to share with those in positions of political and judicial authority. The systems should be designed to fit their needs and, if they do not, then it is the systems that need to be

changed to provide better support. To this end, I urge the government to work with these advocates in order to respond to and implement the recommendations of the Legge report, which I commissioned while I was Attorney and tabled in the previous Assembly. In particular analysing the pros and cons of separating the roles of Chief Coroner and Chief Magistrate does warrant early attention, as that has been a focal point of both that work and the advocacy. I think an early decision on that would be quite important.

The government risks paying only lip-service to the issue of court support if it does not put its money where its mouth is and adequately fund the services that already operate in this space, let alone those that perhaps might. The Sexual Violence Legal Service provides court support in both criminal and civil protection order matters, but demand, as I said earlier, exceeds supply.

The government also needs to look at funding a court-based coordinator so that people do not fall through the gaps. We hear from stakeholders that coordination is key. To summarise, the main coordination points are: case tracking for family and domestic violence matters—this happens weekly, but with a focus on communication with victims rather than court support; wraparound for sexual violence victims; a family violence and sexual assault program fortnightly coordination meetings for high-risk DFV cases; and regular weekly or fortnightly meetings between VSACT senior director and the Witness Assistance Scheme manager. This is not a perfect scheme, and those involved are aware there are people falling through the gaps; so having a court-based coordinator is potentially very important.

I must also mention the witness intermediaries. They are not support people but they are communication facilitators. It is a really vital role and it has been positively reflected on from a vast range of stakeholders. They play a really vital role in supporting vulnerable witnesses. We will be keeping a close eye on what is happening here. As came out during the estimates process, they have funding to 31 December 2025. We know, of course, there is no supplementary budget until after that point in time. While the Treasurer, in estimate hearings, did indicate that, of course, there are other ways to resolve that. But with only three weeks to go, I am not aware that there is any certainty attached to that program yet. I will be very pleased to hear confirmation there is certainty around that program, because we all know it is an incredibly valuable role.

On 23 October 2025, in annual report hearings, Mr Braddock and I asked the Attorney about the Public Advocate and ACT Courts pilot project, which highlighted a significant number of vulnerable court users who were disadvantaged in accessing justice. According to the annual report, the project led to improved outcomes for both court users and the court. But its funding ran out at the end of September and it has since stopped. Again—I do not know that it is a conflict, but to put my interest in it on the table—this was funding that I approved in the previous term of the Assembly as the Attorney-General out of the Confiscated Assets Trust Fund, or the CAT Fund as it is more commonly known. It was for the Public Advocate and ACT courts and tribunal to undertake a six-month service provision research initiative to explore ways the Public Advocate could further improve access to justice and the experience of court for persons experiencing vulnerability.

The Attorney indicated, in her response to Greens questions on 2 December, that the

Public Advocate would like additional funding to continue the program until 30 June 2026. The decision now rests with the Attorney on whether to make an allocation of funding from the CAT Fund for this purpose. It would be a shame if a project supporting vulnerable court users that showed a positive return on investment was not able to continue.

The motion calls on the ACT government to publish on an accessible website all support services currently available for ACT courts and tribunal users. This must include all those that are directly provided by ACT courts and tribunal themselves. I consider that the government, in examining what information and assessments have been undertaken which have evaluated the effectiveness of ACT courts and tribunal support services in the last five years, needs to consider whether such evaluations were independently undertaken and designed in collaboration with representative groups of ACT courts and tribunal users, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and those with lived experience.

I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(d), insert:
“(e) research demonstrates a link between targeted, appropriate therapeutic supports in courts and reduced recidivism rates and protection of the community;”.
2. In paragraph (4)(a), after “users”, insert: “including:
“(i) information about what support services are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities; and
“(ii) any restrictions on which ACT Courts and Tribunal users can access any of the supports as provided by ACT Courts and Tribunal; and
“(iii) information about how ACT Courts and Tribunal users can raise complaints about support services provided by ACT Courts and Tribunal, information about the complaints handling process, and guidance on any further review processes available if dissatisfied with the original decision;”.
3. Omit all text in paragraph (4)(c), substitute:
“(c) investigate what further opportunities there are to enhance the current support framework, including undertaking comparative research of models of therapeutic practice working well in other jurisdictions and consideration of how they can be adapted and implemented in the ACT; and
“(d) report back to the Assembly on this work by December 2026.”.

I am pleased to understand there is support for these amendments. As I said to Ms Tough and my team, our teams discussed these very much in-addition or further points that I think link closely to the point that Ms Tough is making and seek to, I guess, just draw

out some important points that were flagged with us by various stakeholders as we worked our way through this motion this week.

My first amendment is to acknowledge that research demonstrates a link between targeted, appropriate therapeutic supports in courts and reduced recidivism rates and protection of the community. This is an important point and one that I think is worth reiterating in this context, because it underlines the very important, central observations of Ms Tough's motion.

In terms of the information provided on the courts and tribunal website, it is important that it is clear what support services are available for what cohorts of people. That is why my amendments ensure that the information needs to include what support services are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

In addition, my amendments propose that there be information on the website that tells people about any restrictions there are around which courts and tribunal users can access the supports provided by the courts. Importantly, my amendments ensure that the details of where ACT courts and tribunal users can raise complaints related to support services as provided by the courts and tribunals—including an explanation of the complaints-handling processes—are published as well as the information about how users can seek further review if not satisfied with the way their complaint relating to support services as provided by the courts was handled.

My amendments also include a call for the government to undertake comparative research of models of therapeutic practice working well in other jurisdictions and consideration of how they can be adapted and implemented in the ACT. This will inform our understanding of what further opportunities there are to enhance the current support framework. I mention this because I think we have some terrific programs running already, but I am also a great believer that, frankly, if someone else has got a great idea we should just copy it and we do not need to try and reinvent things. It is also to make sure that we are not just missing out on something we can just pick up and duplicate if it is out there and we currently do not know about it or are not using it.

In conclusion, I look forward to the government updating its website by the end of June 2026 as well as providing an update to the Assembly by that time on the assessments of support services. By this time next year, the government will be reporting back about what further opportunities there are to enhance the current support framework, including cross-jurisdictional analysis of other opportunities that we could be implementing here. Thanks again to those with lived experience as users of the courts and tribunal system, who should be centred in this conversation, and to those on the frontline of client service delivery. I also thank Ms Tough once again for shining a spotlight on these really important issues. We are very pleased to support her motion today.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.42): I rise today in strong support of Ms Tough's motion and to emphasise the profound importance of

these services for victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

As the Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, I am deeply committed to ensuring that victim-survivors can access the right support at the right time, including when they engage with our courts. For victim-survivors, attending court is one of the most intimidating and stressful moments in their lives. They deserve not only justice but also safety, dignity and compassion.

Last week, I had the privilege of attending the launch of two reports from the Victim Survivor Voice Project delivered by Women's Health Matters. I met many of the extraordinary individuals who shared their lived experience and expertise to shape those reports. Their courage and insight should guide all of us. I would like to thank them incredibly for their contribution they have made to our community with their participation in this project.

The message I heard from victim-survivors was clear and overwhelming. The experiences of our justice system are often retraumatising. Victim-survivors described experiences can be disempowering and extremely stressful. Yet I also heard stories of hope, stories of individuals whose experiences were transformed because they encountered skilled, dedicated practitioners who understood trauma and walk alongside victim-survivors through every step. When trauma-informed support is available, the courtroom can be a place of empowerment and where healing can begin.

I want to highlight in this speech today one of the services doing this vital work, the Sexual Violence Legal Service. I had the privilege of representing the Attorney-General in the launch with the federal ministers last week. This is a partnership between Victim Support ACT and the Women's Legal Centre. This service provides holistic, trauma-informed support to people who have experienced sexual violence, including independent legal representation throughout court proceedings.

Similarly, for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, programs such as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service's Court Advocacy Program and the Family Violence Safety Action Program provide essential support and safety for victim-survivors. They ensure that those seeking a family violence order or navigating the criminal justice system are not forced to do so alone. While we continue to pursue law reform, education and policy improvements, these frontline services—and many others I have not named today—remain indispensable. They walk beside court users, translating complex legal processes, offering options and advocacy and doing so across multiple jurisdictions with sensitivity, skill and compassion.

I also want to acknowledge that the motion refers to "all court users". This includes defendants, many of whom carry a lifetime of trauma themselves. The staff of the ACT Corrections Court Transport Unit undertake incredibly challenging work with professionalism, kindness and integrity. I thank them sincerely for their ongoing commitment to the care of people in our custody. Expanding trauma-informed supports for defendants during their appearances in ACT Courts has the potential to begin rehabilitation earlier, improving individual outcomes and strengthening community safety. This is an investment in people and in a safer community for all of us. I will continue to work towards these goals with my colleagues in cabinet.

I thank Ms Tough for bringing forward this important motion. Ensuring that every court user is aware of the remarkable support services available and that they can access them when needed is essential to making our courts and tribunals as safe, informed and empowering as they can be.

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) (4.46): I confirm that the government absolutely will be supporting the amendments moved by Mr Rattenbury today. I certainly have, through his contribution, a greater understanding of the thoughtfulness that has gone behind them. I thank Ms Tough for this motion and her initiative in bringing it. I think it is timely. It certainly reflects questioning in annual report hearings.

Something that, since assuming the role of Attorney-General, has, if anything, kept me up at night is: you do not know what you do not know. The courts certainly can be complex. They have a reputation of being complex and, if you do not know what might be available to you to navigate through those systems and through those processes, you are disadvantaged from the beginning. Even if you are aware but then the information that you are getting about those services is contradictory or does not line up with what you might be expecting to experience that is just as troubling. I think that this motion certainly provides a vehicle for further interrogating some of the questions that were put to the government, an understanding of where that feedback is coming from and why and how to fix it.

I, too, wish to acknowledge Janine and Peter, in the chamber today. At the beginning of my speech, I said I was going to say, and I will say, that everyday Canberrans who enter through the doors into our courts are invariably experiencing one of the worst days of their lives or are about to relive one or more of the worst days of their lives, and in many cases both. Particularly in Janine's case, she is not just both but also, despite that, she has been an extraordinary advocate and continues to relive her own experiences in supporting others. That takes extraordinary temerity and courage, and it is no surprise to me that Janine is well known to many of us.

It is with that in mind that I fully endorse the terms of this motion and the terms of the amendments. Ensuring that persons who are walking through those doors into our courts are supported and do not experience further harm, particularly in an environment where justice is expected to prevail, is paramount. But there is more than that from support services, not just preventing further harm but benefits: reducing anxiety, improving engagement and supporting people to fully participate in proceedings. That is what access to justice looks like.

I want to acknowledge that there have been substantive changes and improvements across all aspects of the justice system, not just the courts, to support users of the courts, including considerable government investment, both ongoing and initiative funding. While Mr Rattenbury knows that I do not agree with every decision that he made as AG, I certainly agree with every single one that he flagged today. I also agree that copying good ideas makes sense. There is no point reinventing the wheel if there is something that is templated and that we can pick up and introduce in our own systems. That is certainly one of the reasons that I support the amendments today.

I do not think that Magistrate Theakston would expect me to be quoting from his *Bar Bulletin* article that came out this week—and certainly not around this. He was reflecting on complexities in our legal system. I think at the heart of what we are talking about here, these systems and these supports that we are talking about should be reducing that complexity, because complexity in and of itself causes confusion. Confusion, not knowing and not having the best possible experience when you are already in a state of heightened grief and anxiety creates further issues. So I really did appreciate some of the reflections that he put forward, including that he has been lamenting various complexities within our legal system:

... complexities that I often sense are unnecessary and, at times, unfair; complexities that often damage the human experience, create delays, uncertainty and inconvenience and invariably increase costs. The challenge is that complexity can also be seductive, exciting and even impressive. There is something gratifying in knowing and being seen to know the system, particularly when others do not enjoy that luxury.

It is easy to look brilliant and extraordinary in those circumstances. However, unnecessary complexity is performative busyness, which is invariably distracting and wasteful. It consumes our finite attention at the expense of other functions and does not support the key priorities of litigation; namely justice, timeliness, affordability, access and transparency. Its unclear features can lead parties and courts into error.

I thought that those reflections were remarkably candid. It is certainly an article that I have already written to Magistrate Theakston about to thank him for beginning a very bold conversation. It is those things that he mentions at the end that I think our support services do ultimately enable: justice, timeliness, affordability, access and transparency. In that vein, without speaking for coronial advocates, I also think that is exactly what they are wanting the outcome of their work to be: that the experience ultimately is better and that persons who have lost a loved one are supported through a system that is inherently complex but does not in all ways have to be. That is why the support services are so important.

I also want to reflect in the limited time I have available on just how many frontline service delivery agencies we have and how so many of them go above and beyond in supporting our court users, especially those that are community-based legal aid but also the initiatives that we have put forward and ones that have received recently a huge amount of attention in this place, like the Witness Assistance Service. All of these are amazing, and I also recognise that there are gaps.

With the authority that I expect the Assembly is giving us today, this motion, as amended, gives us something to work towards and to provide back at the end of next year and something that allows us to understand exactly what those gaps are, why something might not be working as we intended it to or as we are expecting it to; to be as transparent as possible about that and transparent as possible about what we are doing to address that; and, ultimately, to reduce complexity and to ensure that the experience of any court user is something that does not cause further harm and gives any person who is walking through those doors confidence in the system and confidence that they are accessing justice.

With that, I commend the motion and thank everyone for their comments. I think it has been a very helpful debate.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.56), in reply: I want to thank everyone for their contribution today. I will start with Mr Rattenbury. Thank you for your amendments. I really do appreciate the intention that they are “yes, and” amendments and what they have brought to light. I thank you and Kate in your office for your engagement on and support for this motion. I know Lauren in my office appreciated the engagement with Kate this week. So thank you and thank you for your knowledge and experience as the previous Attorney-General and what you could bring to this motion.

Thank you to the Attorney-General for your support on this motion and the assistance of Elsa in your office so that this idea we had could blossom into something that was actually tangible and concrete and making it something. I also thank, Lauren in my office for being given this idea and absolutely running with it. She and I have had a lot of, I guess you could say, fun recently, delving into different aspects of this and actually putting into words what this idea we had was.

I want to thank Ms Barry and her office for their engagement. Even though you became shadow Attorney at lunchtime, you have already been engaging with me. So thank you. I also thank other staff in the opposition offices who have engaged in the last couple of days before that announcement. I wanted to thank Janine and Peter for being here today. Although I am not sure if I have met Janine and Peter in person, I know that the work Janine does is really incredible. So thank you; I appreciate it.

I have been extremely fortunate in my life to never need to engage personally with the courts, although I have had many family members and friends who have had to, for a variety of reasons. My first real professional job after graduating uni was as a legal assistant in a personal injury firm. So every day I went to the court to do the court run, but every day I was working with people who were in various parts of the court process in civil proceedings. While many personal injury cases do settle long before reaching litigation and court, for many the court process added a whole extra layer of stress at a time when these people were already feeling pretty vulnerable and were already in a pretty stressed out and anxious state.

We often had clients who had past experiences with courts. Often they were with the criminal court, which was a different process to civil but that was their experience of court, and that brought a whole extra layer of complexity for them when engaging in civil proceedings and for us engaging with them to try and bring out a positive outcome for them when they have had such negative experiences in the criminal system at various points. Even those clients who would not otherwise be considered vulnerable often found the court process very daunting and stressful. Court supports for everyone truly make it a more accessible place.

Thank you again, everyone, for supporting this motion. I completely agree with what the Attorney said: that you do not know what you do not know. I truly hope this shines a light on what is happening in our courts and tribunals, that we can support all court users and that it will help us to improve, enhance and expand services for all, to make them culturally safe, trauma-informed and welcome. The legal system and the law are scary enough for so many people. Our courts and tribunals do not need to be. I commend my motion.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Richardson shops—government response

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.01): I just wanted to speak and welcome the government's response to the Richardson shops motion earlier this year, particularly that the government's position remains that it is unacceptable that the lessee of Richardson has not tended to the block or exercised the options otherwise available to him. There has been really no adequate response from the lessee.

However, it is welcome news that the lessee is currently in discussions with multiple areas within the ACT government about a future use of the site. While it appears that the lessee has been trying to find commercial tenants, but it is finding it unviable because of its proximity to Coles and Woollies at Chisholm and Calwell, I would note on a personal level that, in its current state, it is also not that attractive. It is boarded up, covered in graffiti and it is looking pretty derelict.

However, I do welcome the news that after my petition last year, signed by hundreds of Richardson locals and the motion earlier this year with my amendments to release the unleased blocks next to the shops, there does appear to be movement—slow movement, but movement nonetheless. I will keep pushing until the derelict shops are gone and a vibrant community space, hopefully filled with commercial, retail, hospitality and residential on the site and Richardson shops is a central part of the community again.

I want to thank the community for their ongoing advocacy about Richardson shops and thank the Minister for Planning for his engagement with the issue. I hope one day I can stand here and talk about the vibrant Richardson shops in the future.

Roads—Commonwealth Avenue Bridge—government response and interim update

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.02): I rise to talk to the interim response to update the Assembly on the National Capital Authority's bridge works and respond to the Assembly's resolution of 23 September 2025.

I previously updated the Assembly that the construction works by the federal government will cause significant and unavoidable impacts to our traffic network, including Transport Canberra's bus services, which the government has been preparing

for. The NCA has announced that the most significant and ongoing closures will now occur from 7 January 2026. The government has been working with the NCA to consider the impacts of the different traffic arrangements over the bridge during the construction period and the impacts on the transport network, including public transport. The NCA's bridge upgrades will halve lane capacity in Commonwealth Avenue. The NCA has announced the temporary traffic arrangements on the bridge will see two northbound lanes retained with one of these lanes being a dedicated bus lane. There will only be one southbound lane, which will be for mixed traffic.

As there is only one mixed lane southbound, our traffic modelling tells us that the southbound morning peak across Commonwealth Avenue will be most impacted by the changes, with the arrangements resulting in travel times increasing by around 13 minutes, and this reduces to around seven minutes by the afternoon peak. The congestion on Commonwealth Avenue will inevitably spill over to our other arterial roads, including Kings Avenue, where there will also be increased travel times. There will be flow-on impacts on major roads and the broader traffic network as well.

Transport Canberra have developed a construction bus network to commence from term 1 of next year, which anticipates the impacts on travel time of these temporary traffic arrangements based on the traffic modelling. This updated transport network and timetable will be in effect from 2 February 2026, while an interim summer holidays timetable will be in place over the relatively quiet holiday period, which is the standard practice every year.

A key goal of this updated network is to preserve service reliability by ensuring the timetable is realistic with the changed traffic conditions. As anticipated, there are reductions to service frequency and route changes that have been required due to the construction work impacts. We have sought to balance these changes across the network where possible whilst retaining as much capacity on highly patronised routes during the construction period as we can.

The government will revise the network for the second half of the year, based on actual travel time impacts experienced and commuter travel patterns. The government will also seek to increase services where there is capacity in the network. There will need to be adjustments based on the actual experience of disruption, and we will take feedback from drivers and listen to the experience of the community to inform adjustments.

Following two years of construction work on the bridge, Transport Canberra will return to normal frequencies and Rapid routes. We remain committed to further increasing frequencies above normal levels and adding additional Rapid routes consistent with our Labor election commitments.

The ACT government recognises the scale of this disruption to the Canberra community and concerns which may arise with changes to the bus network during the NCAs construction work. The government will continue to work with the Transport Workers Union and the community to ensure Canberra remains connected and mobile. We remain committed to clear communication and support for our community and workforce during this period. From January, Canberrans should allow extra time for their trip and consider the options available to them, including travelling outside of peak times or looking at other ways to travel to the city, if they can, such as using public

transport or using active travel options if they can.

The development of the new network design and timetable for the construction period has been a significant undertaking. I want to thank Transport Canberra and staff and Transport Workers Union delegates for their work. The NCA's bridge and renewal project will be disruptive for the road and public transport network, but we support the long-term benefits of this important commonwealth road infrastructure asset and the renewal work that will make sure that it can continue to be enjoyed for decades to come.

While it is unclear exactly what the impacts of the changes will look like until they actually come into effect and Canberrans' response in adjusting their travel patterns, the government is committed to revising the bus network once those impacts are known and regularly communicating with Canberrans as well. I encourage Canberrans to keep up to date with traffic advice and transport updates, whether they are commuting by car or by bus.

Roads—Commonwealth Avenue Bridge—government response and interim update

Trees—urban canopy—government response—update

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.07): Today is taking out the trash day. I know this is a regular celebration whereby, at the end of the sitting year, we get a stream of papers, hundreds of pages in length. Apologies; I have not had the chance to read all of them in depth, partly because I was sitting in the chair.

I want to share some of the more interesting details with the chamber. I refer, firstly, to traffic congestion, on which Minister Steel provided an update. I would like to thank him for that. I would also like to thank him for the briefing that his office provided to me over the lunchbreak.

I appreciate entirely that this is a change to the bus network that had to happen, following the NCA's decision to go ahead with works on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, which has had consequential impacts on the bus network. I would like to criticise some of the communication of this. We have not yet had a chance to see the details of the new network, which I understand will be announced tomorrow—conveniently precluding the ability to provide parliamentary scrutiny of that particular network and the changes that will happen.

What we do know, from the update which the minister has provided, is that some of those changes will not be very welcome. For example, the R2 and R3 services will now terminate at the Belconnen interchange, to preserve the capacity along the busy Belconnen to city corridor, with the remainder of the previous rapid routes serviced by new local routes 12 and 13, to provide network coverage to west Belconnen.

I am sure there will be quite a few residents of the west Belconnen region who will be disappointed to hear that. I will not steal the thunder of one representative for Ginninderra who I am sure will talk further about it.

I also want to talk about the tree canopy target and its measurement. This was the first motion that I brought forward in this place. It is heartening to see that reporting on that

is still ongoing. What I find most disheartening is that, despite the effort of the government in planting trees, and the fact we have had a number of wet summers, tree canopy cover has decreased over the past five years. We are going backwards.

In 2020, the tree canopy cover was 22.7 per cent. We are now down at 21.8 per cent. This is extremely disappointing, particularly in light of the fact that the Bureau of Meteorology is literally issuing heatwave warnings for the southern New South Wales region right now. We need to improve our canopy cover in our city if we are going to adapt to climate change, to ensure that we have a city in which people are able to live comfortably, to protect the health and safety of our residents.

I am sure that, as I dig further into that report, I will find more details which I will wish to talk to. I wish to highlight that the immediate figure that jumped out at me was that, in spite of all our efforts, we are going the wrong way, and we need to change that direction.

Roads—Commonwealth Avenue Bridge—government response and interim update

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.10): I want to speak briefly about the R2 and R3, the rapid services that have just been cut for west Belconnen and some of our suburbs out there. This will have a pretty devastating impact on a lot of people. The R2 currently goes to Fraser, Dunlop, Macgregor, Kippax, Holt and Florey, before it gets to Belconnen. Now, with all those west Belconnen suburbs, it will not be going to those anymore.

There is an Insta account called “I love the R2”. I sent them a heads up. They are going to be pretty upset. There are an awful lot of people who really rely on that bus. We have pretty poor public and active travel connections out in west Belconnen. This is not a good decision.

Similarly, we have lost some services on the R3. This will cause a lot of congestion out in Belconnen. If we had, a few years ago, invested in more buses and more drivers, we might not have had to cut services now. I imagine that the minister will be hearing from more of my constituents, when they work out quite how many rapid bus services have been removed and quite how long it will take them on the local bus network.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Act—Thirteenth Report to the ACT Government ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028—Phase Three ACT Closing the Gap Implementation Plan Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010—reports

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) (5.12): I rise today to speak to several reports tabled in my name. Two of the reports are in my capacity as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs—the 13th report to the ACT government by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement Phase 3 Focus Area

Action Plan.

I want to acknowledge the extensive work undertaken by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and across the ACT public service that sits behind both these reports. We recognise, respect and value the role of the Elected Body in working in partnership with the ACT government and in holding us to account for our commitments.

The phase 3 action plan represents the ACT government's updated Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan, shaped through shared decision-making with our partners. We acknowledge the significant delays that have impacted the progression of the phase 3 agreement. These delays have been challenging, but this phase gives us an opportunity to rebuild trust through transparency, responsiveness and stronger partnerships and engagement.

Mr Speaker, in acknowledging the 13th report, the hearings report from the Elected Body, it is fair to say that, when you read this one, it makes for some pretty sober reading. I would like to acknowledge the extensive work that the Elected Body have put into this report, the analysis that they have undertaken, and the framework that they have put in place to guide the work that will be there in pursuit of phase 3 of Closing the Gap.

This is quite a significant progression in understanding what it is that the community is looking to be delivered through these commitments, and how government can best track and show that they are delivering towards those. While it is a report that, on the first read, means that there is a lot of work to do, it actually sets us up to go forward and do that work in a way that we have not previously been able to do. Again, I acknowledge the work of the Elected Body, the time they have taken in taking this approach, and the work they have put in to get us to where we are now.

The ACT government will continue to work in partnership with the Elected Body and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to enact the transformational changes necessary to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. I commend both the report and the action plan to the Assembly.

I will also speak briefly to both the minister's annual report under the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010 and the ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 2024-25. I will also provide the Assembly with a statement on the ACT government's progress in addressing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The ACT continues to lead the nation in climate action. In 2024-25, we maintained a 100 per cent renewable electricity supply, continued to reduce emissions across transport and gas, and supported thousands of households in transitioning to clean energy technologies.

Last year's Greenhouse Gas Inventory showed that the ACT had already met its 2025 interim emissions reduction target. However, each year the method used to calculate greenhouse gas emissions is reviewed to ensure consistency with best national and international practices. This year's report used an improved method for calculating emissions from industrial processes and product use, including refrigerants used in

refrigeration and air conditioning.

There were also updates to the Australian National Greenhouse Accounts calculation of emissions from land use, land use change and forestry. With these improved methodologies, the 2025 interim greenhouse gas target of a 50 per cent reduction on the 1990 baseline was not met. The total greenhouse gas emissions for the ACT in 2024-25 were 1,658 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. This is a 47 per cent reduction on the 1990 baseline.

Although the 2025 interim target has not been met, both per-person and territory-wide emissions have decreased. Fossil fuel gas emissions fell by 10 per cent and ground transport fell by one per cent. Government policies and community actions are delivering positive results, but there is still more work to be done.

The statement I have presented to the Assembly alongside this report details how the government is taking action to get the ACT back on track to meet our future emissions reduction targets.

The ACT government acknowledges the long-term climate challenges that must be addressed. This includes meeting our emissions reduction targets and preparing Canberra for the impacts of climate change. The ACT community is central to climate action, and we are committed to working collaboratively to shape the ACT's next Climate Change Strategy.

I commend all the reports to the Assembly and reaffirm our commitment to a cleaner, fairer and climate-resilient future, as well as improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.17): Mr Speaker, I would like to note a motion moved during the year about Burrangiri, where the Assembly directed the Minister for Health, under paragraph (c), to provide the Assembly with an assessment of the adequacy of respite-care services in the ACT, the potential impact of the closure of Burrangiri, and the government's plan to ensure service adequacy by the last sitting day of 2025. We cannot see that in the papers. What happens now? It is not there.

MR SPEAKER: That is a matter for substantive action. You can note it here, Ms Carrick—

MS CARRICK: I would like to note it.

MR SPEAKER: and you can talk about it, but unless there is a substantive motion moved or a call to the minister, and the minister may respond, perhaps, there is no further deliberative action that the Assembly will be taking at this time.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Payroll Tax Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 3 September 2025, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.18): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the Payroll Tax Amendment Bill 2025. Let us be very clear about what we are looking at here, because this bill is not about good economic management, and it is not about tax reform. It is certainly not about any sort of vision for the future of Canberra's economy. It is fundamentally an invoice for a political deal, and it is Canberra's businesses and workers who will pay the price.

We know exactly why we are debating the tax hike today. It is a desperate scramble to plug a hole in the budget—a hole that the government has dug for itself. During the budget negotiations, we saw the spectacle of the Greens demanding changes to the health levy. Rather than eliminating the health levy, which they acknowledged was regressive, they simply managed to get it dropped to \$100—not removed, just reduced a little bit. And it remains there, just as regressive. That levy will still hit every household in Canberra, through either their rates bill or factored into the rent they pay. And the lower your income, the greater the hit.

The budget is in dire straits, so the government had to find cash—and fast. The Treasurer did the deal and decided to reach into the pockets of employers. They concocted this plan to hike payroll tax on the biggest employers, businesses with Australia-wide wages over \$150 million—not ACT wages, but Australia-wide wages, pushing the rate for those employers up to a staggering 8.75 per cent. This is not evidence-based policy. It is a political fix driven by budget chaos, introduced simply on the back of very rapid negotiation.

The Treasurer will probably stand up and tell us that this is just about big business. He will try to paint a picture of corporate fat cats who can afford to pay more. But that is not really what is going on here, Mr Speaker. Apart from the fact that it lands on top of payroll tax changes which hit small businesses quite significantly by lowering the threshold, the businesses targeted by this surcharge are our biggest employers.

Yes, it includes banks, but it also includes our major supermarkets—those that employ checkout operators, cleaners and trolley collectors. That was my first job—a trolley collector for a supermarket. It includes the large contract cleaning companies that clean our offices and our hospitals. It includes the security firms that patrol our streets, potentially. It could include aged-care providers.

It includes industries that employ thousands of Canberrans and, crucially, they employ some of our lowest paid and most vulnerable workers. We are talking about the people who serve us when we go for takeaway food, the people who serve Canberrans when you need the day-to-day basics, when you are out and about. We are not talking about payrolls for millions; we are talking about taxes on the wages of our lowest paid employees.

When you tax employment, Mr Speaker, you make it harder to employ, and employers end up employing fewer people. It is basic economics. By increasing the cost of hiring a cleaner, a shelf packer or a security guard, you are forcing those businesses to look

for alternatives. If you make hiring a person more expensive, you accelerate the push towards automation. It is very likely that we will see fewer people at checkouts and more machines, and fewer opportunities for less skilled workers. We will see hours cut for casual staff.

Mr Speaker, let us not forget our geography. We are an island in New South Wales. When you make the cost of doing business in the ACT significantly higher than across the border, jobs migrate. In this case, it is entirely possible that that is what will happen. Why would a large logistics or service firm base their operations in Fyshwick when their payroll tax bill is drastically lower just down the road in Queanbeyan? This bill puts a tax on jobs, and it puts a tax on the jobs of the people who can least afford it. With unemployment already on the rise, this is deeply concerning.

I know that we want to move on to other things this afternoon, but there are other points that are really important to make. I want to address the sheer administrative incompetence of how this has been rolled out. This bill proposes to start a new tax regime right in the middle of a financial year. Any payroll officer, any accountant or any small or large business owner will tell you: don't split the financial year if you can avoid it. It creates a nightmare for compliance. It requires two separate calculations for the same year, dealing with different rates, different thresholds and different reconciliations.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration pointed this out. When the committee looked at this bill, they listened to the evidence, and I commend them for that. And what did they recommend? They recommended that, if this bill has to pass—and we certainly do not think it should, but if it does—the rate change should not commence until 1 July 2026.

That would be more sensible, and a pragmatic approach that would align the tax change with the financial year. It would align the tax change with the tax year. It would save employers from the significant red tape burden that this Treasurer is going to introduce. It would simplify the system. But is the Treasurer listening? No. Instead he is bulldozing ahead with a 1 January start date, ignoring the advice of the committee, ignoring the pleas of industry and deliberately creating another compliance burden for businesses in Canberra.

This bill is bad policy. It is a revenue grab to plug a black hole, and it is the price of a political deal with the Greens. It threatens the jobs of low income workers by hiking the cost of employment, and it imposes a chaotic, split-year tax burden that the Assembly's committee warned against.

The opposition does not support this increase in tax, we do not support this increase in complexity, and we will not support this bill.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.26): Today's bill is the result of Greens advocacy. On 6 June this year, we launched our policy for a big corporations tax to protect essential services in the budget. We did that in the light of the Labor government racking up a \$387 million overspend on the health budget and indicating that they would need to make "tough decisions" to manage future spending.

We were worried about those tough decisions. We were worried about who those tough decisions would affect. It turns out we were right to worry, but worry does not pay the bills. We launched an alternative plan—a big corporations tax that would hit the likes of Coles, Woolies and big banks—to raise the revenue that we need for the services that Canberrans expect.

Big companies can afford to pay more tax. In just the first half of 2025, Woolworths pocketed a \$1.7 billion profit. Meanwhile, we have a record number of Canberrans turning to food banks because they cannot afford to eat. I will be packing food hampers this Christmas; I imagine many MLAs will be doing that, too.

When the Labor government released their proposed budget, we were shocked to see it. The budget took backwards steps, like cutting the Rent Relief Fund—a \$1.7 million per year fund in a \$9½ billion budget, a \$1.7 million per year fund that saves hundreds of Canberrans from homelessness each year. At the same time Labor brought in a new tax, the health levy. This was not a tax on big corporations. It was not a progressive tax hitting those who can afford to pay. It was a regressive tax on everyday Canberrans of \$250 per household.

The Greens spoke to the community, and we realised that most people shared our shock. It is not an acceptable way to raise revenue. We went into negotiations with Labor and, six days later, we had reduced that \$250 health levy to \$100 per year. We made a commitment that we are not backing it again, and that it needs to be removed entirely from next year's budget.

We also managed to receive support for our alternative revenue approach of a big corporations tax. That is where today's payroll tax bill came from. This bill offsets revenue lost from the reduction in the health levy. The bill provides an increase in the payroll tax rate from 6.85 per cent to 8.75 per cent for businesses that have a total wage bill of above \$150 million.

In September, a committee inquired into today's bill—the bill that implements the Greens' big corporations tax. I am not a member of that committee. I was not at the time, and I am really pleased to have been able to attend the hearings as a visiting member. I thank the committee for indulging me and allowing me to do that. The committee observed that the ACT government has limited options to collect revenue and needs to increase its revenue and/or reduce spending to prevent the further decline of the ACT fiscal position. The committee recommended that the bill be passed, but it suggested a delayed commencement. The committee did think that this bill should pass. The committee thought that there should be a different commencement date.

Government has explained that new revenue measures rarely come with much notice. In this case, this revenue measure has come with several months notice. If we were to delay it until July next year, we would forgo \$17 million in revenue. Seventeen million dollars in revenue is equivalent to 10 rent relief funds. That is what we would have to cut to delay the big corporations tax. We would need to find that equivalent in the budget and, frankly, that frightens the Greens. We cannot afford to do that. Pausing this would not be responsible fiscal management, and it would definitely hurt those who are most in need of government services.

I have heard a few people talk about being worried about the impact on prices. I would suggest that the additional amount is small enough that businesses setting national prices are not likely to alter their prices for the ACT. We have heard today some fears of automation. Again, we heard from plenty of witnesses in the hearing, and I think anyone who can use their eyes will see that businesses who can automate already are. That change is already happening. I do not think this tax will make any difference one way or the other. That change is already on foot.

As discussed by my colleague Shane Rattenbury yesterday, in response to Mr Parton and Mr Cocks's motion, there are other ways to help businesses, including ensuring that doing business here is as simple as possible. Alongside our universities and our highly skilled workforce, we need to make sure that Canberra remains an attractive place to invest and to do business, but we can still raise sensible revenue while doing that.

There was one really sympathetic piece of evidence that I heard during the committee hearings. It did not seem to make it into the report, unless I have missed something. There was a witness representing labour hire companies. They are in a slightly unique situation, as they may find themselves in that big business category by payroll, because their product, essentially, is people. They might be an organisation of a few people. They might have hundreds of people on their books, so their payroll looks as if it is for a big corporation, but it is not.

The committee did not make any recommendations about that, and I think the government has not heard that evidence. I am hoping that that industry will be fine with this change, and I would encourage them to reach out directly to the Treasurer. It was the only exception that I heard during those hearings that sounded like it was an unintended consequence.

There were a couple of broader issues that came up. They were extremely narrow in scope, and they seemed to apply in extremely rare and unusual circumstances. It was very difficult to tell what impact they would have, if any. There was not a lot in that hearing that suggested there would be major or generalised unintended consequences from this bill. That is pretty good, coming from a new tax measure, and it is also pretty good, coming from a committee looking at a bill.

The bill, of course, does not address one of the ACT's major sources of lost payroll tax. We cannot levy payroll tax on the commonwealth public service. No other state or territory can, either, but all the other jurisdictions have only around two per cent of their workforce in the federal public service; and here in the ACT, about a quarter of our workforce is in the public service. That means we are losing out on over \$550 million in payroll tax each year. We do get an adjustment from the commonwealth. That adjustment is around \$51 million; \$51 million in lieu of \$550 million is not the kind of deal that I would like to see for the ACT, so we are lobbying for a much better one.

That is a different payroll tax issue, and it is not one that could be addressed by this bill, so it was not. But we are pleased to see that the Treasurer is in negotiations to see if we can get a shift on that particular shortfall of half a billion dollars each year. I am pleased to see that the Treasurer wrote to the commonwealth Treasurer about that issue. I was disappointed that, in the letter, I am not sure that he pointed out that disparity, that we are losing half a billion dollars. I hope the commonwealth Treasurer actually has those

figures, and I would encourage our government to make sure they share those figures.

I will be sharing those figures directly, because I think it is quite stark, when we are talking to folk like our local representatives, finance minister Katy Gallagher and productivity minister Andrew Leigh, to point out the quantum of money that we are losing. It is not small-dollar figures for us, so we do need to see some movements there.

There are also other ways that we can raise money, particularly from commonwealth revenue, but the bill that is before us today is a perfectly good measure. It raises revenue that we need for our services, for our health system and for our environment. It is modelled to raise over \$150 million over the next four years. It is progressive. It targets big businesses with payroll over \$150 million. Those are very large companies. It was supported by witnesses like ACTCOSS, and it has been examined by a parliamentary committee.

We Greens will continue to advocate for other sources of revenue, particularly the missing \$550 million in GST shortfall from our population undercount, the lack of compensation in lieu of that commonwealth public service payroll tax, and various other sources. I hope I will get support from members across the Assembly to try and make sure that we are getting more of that commonwealth revenue that we are missing out on. The Greens are happy to support today's bill.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.34): I was not originally going to speak in this part of the debate, but I think it is important to clarify a couple of things that Ms Clay has said. It is important that we indicate here exactly what the committee's recommendation was. I will read it:

The Committee recommends that should the Assembly decide to pass the bill, it considers amending the bill so that the rate change commences 1 July 2026 to align with the 2026-2027 financial year.

The committee did not just come out and support this, and it did not come out and support the implementation of this bill. I think I am right in saying that we said that we would like it to be debated in this chamber and for members here to decide whether or not to support this bill. That is pretty much all that I wanted to cover. I wanted to clarify what the committee's recommendation on this bill was. We will leave it to members of this chamber to decide whether or not to support it.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.36), in reply: I thank members for their contributions, particularly those that spoke in support of the Payroll Tax Amendment Bill 2025, which implements a new payroll tax rate for large national firms from 1 January 2026, following changes to reduce the health levy for ACT residential and rural properties.

Payroll tax is an important tax base for the territory which funds services which are of significant benefit to the Canberra community. It is an annual tax that is paid monthly. The reconciliation is completed at the end of the financial year, based on employers and any applicable group members' annual wage figures.

The existing annual payroll tax calculation method does not facilitate a split period. It is calculated at one tax rate for the whole financial year; therefore, an amendment to the Payroll Tax Act 2011 was required to calculate payroll tax at one rate for the first half of the financial year and another rate for the second half of the year.

Although the bill will have a retrospective commencement from 1 July 2025, the new payroll tax rate of 8.75 per cent only applies to wages paid or payable from 1 January 2026 for employers or groups with Australia-wide wages of \$150 million. The existing annual payroll tax threshold amount for 2025-26 of \$2 million, the second-highest threshold before payroll tax is levied, will apply proportionally across the two split periods under the new calculation method. Therefore, the bill will not have a prejudicial effect.

The bill does not require impacted employers to apply or register. Employers will continue to declare monthly and annual wage figures using the existing online ACT payroll tax self-service portal. The bill applies only to large employers and groups with Australia-wide wages of more than \$150 million. At the time of the policy announcement, ACT Treasury estimated that the bill would apply to 340 entities. Importantly, employers with wages of \$150 million or less are unaffected by the bill. Their payroll tax liabilities will continue to be calculated under the existing legislative provisions.

The proposed rate changes for large national firms were reported in the media from 30 June 2025, six months prior to the proposed change coming into effect. As such, the firms affected by the higher rates have had time to prepare for this change. The government expects the effect of this higher rate on the small number of impacted businesses will be relatively minimal compared to their overall wage bill and profits. Any resulting impact on wages or prices is likely to be small. However, the government will monitor the impact of this change on the ACT economy.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration provided a report on its inquiry into the bill last week, and the government provided its response this week. I want to touch on this point, as the committee made a recommendation that made the purpose of this bill redundant, and that is why the government is not able to agree to it.

I will also respond to the fearmongering put forward by the Canberra Liberals in their opposition to this bill. Let me be very clear: this is a small change that will affect businesses with a national payroll of over \$150 million. It affects only the proportion of their payroll that occurs in the ACT. These businesses are large; they have the greatest capacity to adapt to change, and they are being asked to contribute slightly more so that Canberrans can enjoy the services that they expect and demand.

The only black hole is the Canberra Liberals' black hole. They oppose this change, and they have no explanation about how they would fund the services that Canberrans expect, particularly in our health and hospital system.

There are fiscal challenges facing the territory, and the government readily discusses them in this place. I remind members again that they have a responsibility to help ensure that the budget and the territory's finances are on a sustainable path. It is easy to sit on the bench, the non-Treasury bench in this place, in particular, oppose measures like this,

and come in here and criticise us for not doing enough on budget repair, as they have done this week. But we have to make difficult decisions. We have had to do that in the budget. This is one of the measures that we are taking which we think is reasonable. It asks large businesses to pay slightly more to help fund the services that Canberrans expect.

I thank members for their contributions, and the support of the ACT Greens for this bill. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question put:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 13

Noes 6

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

Chiaka Barry
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
Elizabeth Lee
James Milligan
Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 2 December 2025, on motion by **Ms Orr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.46): I want to start by expressing the support of the Canberra Liberals for the principle behind this bill. This bill seeks to close an administrative loophole that creates potential dangers in childcare, education and disability services. It will bring the ACT into line with other jurisdictions and fulfil a federal agreement to implement these changes. It will accomplish this by taking into account refusals issued to applicants—essentially, transferring refusals from other states and territories.

The Canberra Liberals absolutely support the intention of this bill. The Working with Vulnerable People check exists to safeguard the community. It is a provision and a

privilege. It is not a right. It entails serious responsibilities beyond those of the typical workplace. There is no good reason for a loophole or enforcement gap to exist which could potentially be exploited by a predator willing to move between jurisdictions to endanger our community's most vulnerable citizens. Absolutely, we shall be supporting this bill.

I do want to note, just briefly—and I know that we want to wrap things up nice and swiftly today—that this bill might have been introduced somewhat earlier, thus allowing for some degree of community consultation and some degree of scrutiny of a fairly important bill. It would not have delayed the delivery of this important change, and the consultation process might have addressed potentially unintended consequences or concerns, or it might have brought forth new provisions to strengthen the bill's effectiveness. That is why we have such a consultative process, and we have procedures in this place.

Indeed, it is concerning to note that this has become a little bit of a trend—to introduce a bill and to be debating it within a sitting week or two, to push things through amazingly quickly. I have to note that other jurisdictions have already got this done. Surely, in the ACT we could have had this in front of us sooner. Victoria had it done in August, New South Wales in September, and I think there was a similar date in Tasmania. There was potential for the government to move a bit quicker.

In this case we agree that it is an emergency bill that needs to be dealt with immediately. The importance of it does justify, to a great extent, the urgency in dealing with it in the Assembly. I simply wish to point out that it should have been possible to foresee this. It was not a brand-new issue. We do not want the government to become increasingly accustomed to leaning on its emergency powers as a matter of course. We have seen it too many times already this year. As I have foreshadowed previously, we do not want to see it next year, and we do not want to see it in the years after.

Notwithstanding all these concerns, I am proud to offer the Canberra Liberals' support for this important bill, which will make the ACT part of a national effort to give children and vulnerable people the safe and happy lives that they deserve.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.50): Following on from Mr Cocks, I am pleased to confirm that the Greens will also be supporting the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Amendment Bill 2025. I would like to thank Minister Orr, and Sara and Tim in the minister's office, as well as directorate officials, for the briefing and the open lines of communication in answering our questions about it. It is an important piece of work designed to protect children, and I am comfortable with supporting this expedited process to ensure it can take effect as swiftly as possible.

The bill amends the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011 and its regulations to implement mutual recognition of negative notices and registration cancellations issued under equivalent laws in other Australian jurisdictions. This ensures that individuals barred from working with children elsewhere cannot do so in the ACT. The bill reflects national standards and contributes to a unified approach to child safety across Australia. It gives effect to the agreement reached at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General on 15 August this year, where all jurisdictions committed to implementing mutual recognition of negative notices and revocations by the end of

this calendar year. The ACT's legislation is designed to meet this commitment as precisely as possible within the ACT context.

The bill addresses a real and immediate risk by closing gaps that allow individuals with adverse decisions in one jurisdiction to seek registration in the ACT. It also streamlines administrative processes, reducing duplication and delay, and enhances the integrity of the ACT's background checking scheme. The automatic ineligibility amendment ensures that decisions made in other jurisdictions are immediately recognised in the territory without requiring a separate risk assessment. It closes a loophole that currently allows individuals to apply in the ACT despite being barred elsewhere, and it prevents them from working with children while their application is pending.

The bill has been drafted to be consistent with the Human Rights Act 2004, promoting the rights of children to safety and protection, while proportionately limiting the rights of individuals who have been assessed as posing a risk. To ensure the legislation remains compatible with human rights, section 22A introduces a limited exemption mechanism. An individual may apply to the Commissioner for Fair Trading for an exemption from automatic ineligibility under section 17(2A) if certain conditions are met.

One such condition is where the applicant demonstrates that their automatic ineligibility would result in an unreasonable limitation on their rights under the Human Rights Act. This safeguard ensures that the ACT is not bound to recognise future amendments in other jurisdictions that may introduce disqualifying offences that are inconsistent with ACT human rights obligations. It allows for individual consideration in rare cases where automatic exclusion would be disproportionate or unjust.

It should be noted that the scope of this mechanism is extremely narrow—in my view, as it should be—and that Australian governments have committed to increasing alignment of disqualifying offences. I understand that the Human Rights Commission has been consulted and is comfortable with the safeguard.

The bill also preserves human rights for applicants through another targeted safeguard, being the five-year reapplication period, which ensures that exclusion is not permanent and aligns with existing ACT practice. The new section 22(5) sets out a reapplication restriction period which extends the existing five-year restriction on reapplying for registration after receiving an ACT negative notice or cancellation under our act to include applying in the ACT after receiving a negative notice or cancellation under corresponding laws in another jurisdiction. This means that a person with an interstate negative notice or cancellation will be entitled to reapply for registration in the ACT after five years.

That is the technical side of it. At a human level, we have all seen and, frankly, been made to feel ill by, the recent reports that have emerged in particular from childcare centres where those who seek to abuse children have used technicalities and loopholes to get around systems set up to protect against predators. It is essential that we respond swiftly and effectively to close down these gaps in our systems.

I am satisfied that this bill will contribute to help making Canberra's children safer by establishing a robust framework for recognising decisions to refuse or cancel

registration for working with children made under equivalent laws in other jurisdictions. There is nothing more important than keeping our most vulnerable safe from our most predatory. This bill protects children from individuals who pose an unacceptable risk to them and who try to move between jurisdictions to access them. Canberra children will be safer as a result of the passage of this bill, and that is why we are pleased to support it today.

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) (5.55), in reply: I rise today to speak to the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Amendment Bill, and I thank members for their contributions to the discussion, and particularly their indication of support for the amendment bill. The bill amends the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011. This legislation enables worker screening checks for people seeking to work or volunteer with children, or with adults experiencing vulnerability due to disability, social or financial hardship, or communication barriers.

I am pleased to share with the Assembly the important amendments contained in this bill, which will strengthen protections for children in the ACT. These changes demonstrate our commitment to child safety by ensuring we are aligned with national efforts to build a more unified system of working with children checks that operate effectively across the states and territories.

The bill proposes changes that will implement the ACT's obligations in national child safety reform. This work upholds an agreement reached by the Standing Council of Attorneys-General in August this year, which determined that all jurisdictions would urgently work towards implementation of mutual recognition of negative notices by the end of 2025.

I appreciate Mr Cocks's comments and concerns about the urgency of this, noting that the bill has been introduced and passed within the same sitting, and that standard scrutiny processes have not progressed through the usual timeframe. I believe some of his comments also went to the lack of public consultation. I appreciate all the points that he has raised, but I also point to the comments he made about the seriousness of this bill and the urgent need for the effects of this amendment bill.

The commitment was made, as I said, at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General in August this year, and it was to have the bill passed by the end of this year. A number of people have had to work quite extraordinarily hard and quickly to implement these responsibilities to meet those agreed deadlines in the interests of child safety, improving our system and having that national consistency.

Mr Cocks acknowledged the important nature of this particular bill. He said that the Liberals would be supporting the bill, so I hope they will understand that, with this issue, it is not a matter of laziness or wanting to disregard process. There is a genuine need for urgency. I note that the scrutiny process will still be able to continue and that the Assembly will still be updated on that process, too.

Through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, all jurisdictions agreed that this

work was urgent, and all jurisdictions have worked extraordinarily quickly to implement this change. Five jurisdictions now recognise interstate negative notices, noting that Tasmania recognises interstate negative notices for new applicants and will progress legislative amendments to fully meet this priority action by the end of this year. The remaining jurisdictions—the Northern Territory and Western Australia—are also introducing this change by the end of this year and passing it through their assemblies.

While the ACT has moved at a pace to develop and introduce this legislation, so too have other states and territories. Across Australia, accelerated processes have occurred to make this happen, in the interests of child safety. The bill will ensure that a person who has a Working with Children Check denied or revoked in one jurisdiction cannot obtain or hold an equivalent clearance in another. This is known as mutual recognition of negative notices. It supports a “banned in one, banned in all” approach to strengthen child safety protections.

The bill proposes amendments to support national alignment of Working with Children Check legislation. This work is happening across states and territories in response to recent reports of abuse within childcare settings in Australia, which have raised grave concerns about child safety across our community.

The bill enhances the ACT’s existing background checking system in three main ways. First, it makes clear that a person is not eligible to be registered to engage in a regulated activity involving children if they have been denied a Working with Children Check in another jurisdiction or had their registration revoked. Second, it requires the commissioner to refuse to register a person to engage in a regulated activity involving children if they become aware that that person has a negative notice issued or registration cancelled by another jurisdiction. Finally, it amends the regulation to the working with vulnerable people act to support these changes.

This government remains committed to promoting and improving child safety. The ACT already has a broader worker screening system than most other jurisdictions, as our Working with Vulnerable People scheme applies to people working with vulnerable adults as well as with children. The bill will make our worker screening system even stronger, ensuring a person who has had a Working with Children Check denied or revoked in another jurisdiction is automatically ineligible for Working with Vulnerable People registration to engage in child-related work, in most cases for a period of five years.

This approach will still allow an applicant to be assessed for non-child-related Working with Vulnerable People registration when appropriate, reflecting the wider scope of the ACT’s worker screening scheme. For example, an applicant who is ineligible for a clearance to work with children may still be eligible to provide peer support in an adult criminal justice setting, subject to a risk assessment.

In some limited circumstances, a person cannot reapply for Working with Vulnerable People registration, such as when they have an adult conviction for a very serious and violent offence, known as a class A disqualifying offence. Maintaining this automatic exclusion for people convicted of a class A offence ensures that the ACT is prioritising child safety by ensuring that those who seek to work or volunteer in child-related

activities in the ACT do not pose an unacceptable risk of harm.

In addition to amendments to the working with vulnerable people act, the bill also contains minor amendments to the regulation to the act, supporting mutual recognition of negative notices. These changes will strengthen how the act interacts with legislation in other jurisdictions. New wording added to the regulation will require applicants seeking Working with Vulnerable People registration to disclose any previous negative notices or cancelled Working with Children Checks through a written statement accompanying their application.

Other amendments contained in the bill will add a list of statutes to the corresponding law definition in the dictionary to the working with vulnerable people act. The act refers to corresponding laws made in other jurisdictions but does not currently prescribe relevant legislation. The bill will remedy this, providing more certainty about the interstate laws that the ACT will recognise when applying the principle of “banned in one, banned in all”.

Under our existing legislation, applicants in the ACT are generally allowed to work without registration while they are being risk assessed. The bill will ensure that this does not occur if the person has already had a Working with Children Check denied or revoked in another jurisdiction.

The bill will also reduce potential delays in existing processes by ensuring the automatic recognition of a negative notice from another state or territory. The existing process of conducting a risk assessment when a person has a negative notice from another jurisdiction can cause unnecessary delay in cases where the applicant will most likely also be refused Working with Vulnerable People registration in the ACT. The changes in the bill will commence quickly, one day after notification, ensuring stronger safeguards for children and young people in the ACT. Processes are in place, ready to go, to ensure that the changes are implemented from the day the bill commences.

We know that a proportion of people who apply for Working with Vulnerable People registration in the ACT also hold a Working with Children Check in another jurisdiction. This indicates that the workforce is somewhat fluid, as people in other states and territories sometimes cross jurisdictional borders to work or volunteer with children. In response, states and territories are being called on to ensure that their legislation and practice align with coordinated child safety reform efforts.

I am proud to acknowledge the ACT’s active role in contributing to this important national work. The bill will form part of a critical framework that is being established across Australian states and territories. It sends a clear message to people seeking to work with children in the ACT, shutting down potential loopholes for people who have already been assessed as unsuitable for a Working with Children Check in another jurisdiction.

The ACT government is working closely with the Working with Children Checks Reform Taskforce and the National Office for Child Safety to advance and improve national consistency of Working with Children Checks. All Australian governments have agreed to work together to enhance national arrangements for sharing child safety and wellbeing information, including to progress the development of a national child

safety and wellbeing information-sharing scheme. Child safety is everyone's responsibility and effective reform requires us to work together across government, across community and across jurisdictions. This bill is a vital first step to further strengthen our Working with Vulnerable People legislation to prioritise the safety of children in the ACT.

I would like to thank Mr Rattenbury for his kind reflections on how hard my staff work. I would echo those. They have certainly put a lot of effort into what has been a very rapid process of delivering this bill. I would also like to acknowledge all the ACT public servants who perhaps are not as well known to those in this place, but who have been working just as hard in preparing and getting this one up in the short timeframe that was sought.

I commend the bill to the Assembly, and I thank members for their support.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Statements by members

Sport and recreation—Australian championships winners

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (6.06): I rise to pay tribute to two outstanding ACT sporting teams who have recently had incredible wins and whose success may not have made the headlines.

First, I congratulate the ACT under 10s Cougars girls Oztag team, who recently competed in and won the Australian national championships, which were held in Coffs Harbour in October. This is a team that did not win a game at the same tournament just a year ago, and now they are Australian champions. What an incredible achievement, and a testament to all their training and hard work. Congratulations to their coach, Narelle Quigley, all the players, and the dedicated parents who cheered on from the sidelines.

Going to the second team, I congratulate the ACT over 60s Eight Ball team, who recently won the 2025 Australian over 60s team championships, which were held in Rockhampton in Queensland. It was an incredible achievement for all the team members—Phillip, Jack, Ron and Sid—who finished on top of their ladder at the end of the tournament and went on to win the grand final.

On behalf of myself, Ms Lawder, who actually brought my attention to these incredible teams and, I am sure it goes without saying, the entire Assembly, I say well done to both these ACT teams. Their hard work, dedication and team spirit have done the ACT very proud.

Valedictory

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.07): I want to say a few words, following the end of my

first year in this Assembly. I am incredibly grateful to all my colleagues who have supported me through my 12 months-plus in this place. I want to give a special shout-out to the Assembly committee team and the Assembly team. You do incredible work to support us, and I have benefited from the incredible work that you do.

To the committee secretariats—the social policy committee, the legal affairs committee and the scrutiny committee—I thank you very much for all your patience and all the work that you did to support me in the last 12-plus months.

I also want to thank my team. The work that we have pumped out in the last 14 months has been incredible, considering that we are a very small team. I say a special thankyou to Andrew. I always wonder what I would do without Andrew, but he said, “You would do just fine.”

I also want to thank Mij. Mij has been incredible. She supported me prior to my campaign, and she is still supporting my office. A special thanks to her. They are all amazing. I want to thank Elizabeth, who has just joined our team as well. They are all amazing.

I say to you all: merry Christmas, and I hope to see you all, healthy and strong, next year.

Valedictory

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (6.09): I want to say thank you to all the ACT government public servants, and particularly those in the directorates who work with me across my portfolios. 2025 has thrown many challenges our way, and issue upon issue across a range of different areas. Everybody has worked so hard, well over and above what would be required, to support me and my team. I want to thank them for continuing to deliver for Canberra.

I also want to acknowledge all the team in this place, who keep this place, the Legislative Assembly, operating like a well-oiled machine and continuing to support the work of government. Thank you all as well, from the cleaners, all the way up to you, Mr Speaker. Thank you all for the work that you do. To my neighbours, my friends, families, and constituents of Ginninderra, old and new, thank you all for supporting me.

I want to thank and acknowledge my team, Team Berry, who, oftentimes, do much more than I could ever ask of them, and continue to show up. If I can quote from the *Avatar* series, “Don’t let the hard days win.” I hope that they all, and everyone here, have a safe and happy Christmas and festive season. I look forward to seeing some of you here next year.

International Volunteer Day

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) (6.10): I rise

today to acknowledge the impact of International Volunteer Day, celebrated annually on 5 December.

Volunteering underpins and enhances the lives of Canberrans in so many ways, helping to foster quality of life and enable greater social inclusion, participation and connections across communities. We know there are different types of volunteering; volunteering can be formal or informal, coordinated through an organisation or just helping someone in our community.

In the ACT, we are fortunate to have one of the highest rates of volunteerism in the country. The most recent data from the ACT state of the volunteering sector report indicated that 75 per cent of people over the age of 15 in the ACT volunteered, either formally or informally, in 2023. This equates to around 279,000 people.

The top three ways that ACT residents volunteer are social or wellbeing support, event support, and environmental or animal protection. The top three motivations for volunteering in the ACT are to help others, for social and community connection, and for enjoyment.

Volunteers are at the heart of Canberra. Volunteers coach kids' sport, plant trees and run sausage sizzles. Volunteers visit people in hospital and provide support to people who are doing it tough. Volunteers assist our veterans and help to run celebrations across our city. They are the quiet champions behind our emergency services and schools. Volunteers are the backbone of so many of our community groups and not-for-profit organisations.

Canberra Region Amateur Radio Club

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.12): I have spoken about the Canberra Region Amateur Radio Club previously, but I want to touch on another aspect of their operations. As members may know, it is one of Australia's largest amateur radio clubs, with about 200 members across the ACT and southern New South Wales. The volunteer organisation provides vital services, from training and licensing of aspiring amateur radio operators to supporting community events and emergency communications, including bushfire response.

The club operate from a very modest scout hall facility, which does limit their capacity to expand and safely store equipment. They have identified and brought to my attention the former naval transmitting station in Belconnen as an ideal location for their club, offering a radio-quiet environment, more space for antennas and equipment, and a centralised hub that could service a heritage museum.

I want to urge the government to consider lobbying the relevant commonwealth government department to see whether this facility could be made available to this really important community organisation. That would make use of a pretty much abandoned site and bring some heritage things back alive.

Public service—employment

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (6.13): I rise today to highlight the news out of Victoria

that the Victorian Labor government will cut 1,000 public service jobs, with an independent review calling for twice that number, to deal with their spiralling debt problem. This is a direct consequence of years of waste and an unsustainable budget, and precisely the path that we seem to be on, under Labor here in the ACT.

An unsustainable budget has consequences, and Victoria is learning that. Here in Canberra, Labor runs scare campaigns at every election, telling Canberrans that they should fear for their jobs. The Victorian experience shows exactly what happens when Labor breaks the budget and people do see the real consequences for their everyday lives through their jobs.

What happens in Victoria seems to foreshadow what happens here in Canberra. In Victoria, Labor's first instinct was to increase tax, but it was not enough. It then cut consultants and other relatively easy expenses, like travel; it was not enough. Now, Victoria has to cut deep. That is the path that I am worried Canberra could be on as well. Thousands of job cuts under Labor: that is what you have to expect when Labor breaks the budget.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Valedictory

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (6.15): Well, it has been quite the year. It is a unique place, this Assembly. Only a few weeks ago, I was talking to a friend of mine who is not in politics, and she said, "We all have bad days at work, but when I have one it is not splashed across the front page of the *Canberra Times*." Within the midst of some of the hardest days of my time here in politics—I do not need to rehash them now—there have been a few highlights. I came into this place nine years ago quite starry-eyed and optimistic, hopeful and, frankly, quite naive. I have seen the true colours of some, especially those that I thought were friends, but I have also been incredibly moved by the unwavering support of others.

I acknowledge my long-suffering staff Kelli and Albert, who have been by my side through hell and back—and sometimes I do not know where we are—for their hard work, their loyalty and their tower of support. I continue to rely on my former Chief of Staff Bronwyn, whose advice, support and counsel are things that I will always value and be grateful for. I acknowledge Ben, who did some work for me this year in all things technical and digital as this generation—I do not even know what generation we are up to now—tend to do. I give a shout-out to Tim, who has been doing some work experience in my office. He cannot say that he has not had an interesting few weeks while he has been here. I have been really heartened by the friendships that I have struck with members from the crossbench—especially when it looked like for a moment that I might join you; is that too soon?—in a very, very different dynamic in the Assembly than previous terms.

Despite my lower profile and period of leave to look after my health, I am proud of what my team and I have been able to achieve this year for my constituents. I had the pleasure of working with Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury to shed light on some of the issues that the residents of Oaks Estate have been fighting on for years, continuing the great work of my predecessor Mr Doszpot. My work does not end with a motion of course; it is a matter that I continue to engage on. I was also proud to be able to play a leading role in advocating for the businesses and service providers significantly impacted by the closure of the entire Theatre Lane car park. This is another issue that is ongoing, with a petition that I have sponsored having garnered, as of today, 790 signatures.

But it is not just these issues that have made the news. For me, it is about helping Margaret from Griffith with her rates bill, Jeff from Narrabundah about illegal rubbish dumping, Daniel from Watson worried about crime at the local shops and Dom from O'Connor needing help to get a dangerous tree removed—the very reason that I am here and the very people that I am here for.

Mr Speaker, congratulations on your election. I wish you and your family a very happy Christmas. To all my colleagues in the chamber, the opposition, the government and the crossbench: thank you for an interesting year. Let's all come back next year and do it all over again. To all of the OLA staff, our democracy, while most unseen, cannot be taken for granted, and it takes the effort of many people behind the scenes. Thank you for all you do. To the Canberra Liberals: thank you for your ongoing support of me.

Finally, to my family: my parents and sisters, who thought they had seen it all when I started on this crazy journey into politics, you continue to always have my back, and your unconditional support and love keeps me going even when I think I have hit rock bottom. Thank you.

Nathan, I did promise that this year would not be quite as crazy as the last four, and I am sorry that I broke that promise. So let's try again: I promise that next year will not be as crazy as this year. Thank you for your love and unwavering support and for stepping up time and time again for our family.

To Mia, who finishes kindergarten this year—where did that time go?: you are growing up into an amazing young lady who is strong, confident, sassy and so full of zest. Stay just the way you are, because the way you are is perfect. To Ava, who keeps us all on our toes: with your whip smarts, your daring spirit and your cheeky nature, I can already tell the world that it better watch out. Never ever change.

Merry Christmas to all of you. I look forward to seeing you all in a brighter and happier new year.

Valedictory

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.19): I, unbeknownst to myself, promised my team an Avatar reference and I started panicking, and I really wish my comms adviser, who was frantically covering for me, had said “Riverdale” instead of “to sell the ruse”—but,

hey, that is rough, buddy.

It is my solemn duty to inform this chamber that, by the next sitting day, we will have lost an absolute real one from the Nuttall office. Our resident capybara, former Greens Senate candidate and likely a more prolific writer than RL Stine's entire ghost-writing team, Jo Locke, will be setting off from this place at the end of January, and we are all pretty bummed about it. You have probably seen the gregarious Jo around the place and you would know their voice and smile from the choccy runs and great chats. You might know him by the Pokemon plushie collection that raises the cool factor of our office tenfold. Even if you have lived under a rock—and people like me in this building do—you would be well familiar with his voice in the chamber, because Jo has written as many, if not more, speeches than I have, all excellent and all full of heart and a deep care for the community that they live in.

Jo has been my advice for education, youth, disability and sports and recreation. I really hope Jo does not mind me saying that education is his real passion, his background and, I suspect, in many ways his calling. Jo has been a teacher both here and in Japan, and it is something they have brought not just to explain things patiently to MLAs but also to foster the joy of politics in all of the young people that engage with our office.

I think chief among the many things that have really impressed me about Jo is their drive to get young people involved and embedded in the political system. They have engaged so many work experience students, helped them find their passion in the ACT political landscape and done everything humanly possible to fan the flames of change. He has put so much time into the valuable political education work that is never really a cold hard KPI that the electorate sees or expects, but it is one that the electorate benefits from exponentially as we see young people start to get excited and hopeful about politics. He is the one who makes sure that we engage directly with young people as a matter of course and not just do policy on their behalf but actually with them, bringing them into the fold. At the end of the day, Jo is a connector. They look out for the team, they build them up and they celebrate the brilliant work they do.

Wherever Jo ends up, people would be incredibly lucky to have him. My personal hope is that, at some point, an electorate out there, whether that is Kurrajong or Canberra or the ACT, will be as lucky as we have been in the Nuttall office. On behalf of the Nuttall office and the ACT Greens team more broadly, through you Mr Speaker, I would like to thank Jo sincerely and wish him all the best. Bon voyage, Jo. You have done us all incredibly proud.

Maria Lucia Llauderer—tribute

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.22): I do not want to dampen the celebratory notes in the chamber, but I thought it would be really good to acknowledge my friend, Maria. Today, I rise to honour the life of one of my constituents, turned friend, Maria Lucia Llauderer, who sadly passed away last week. First of all, I want to acknowledge in the gallery, her partner Scott.

I met Maria last year, shortly after being elected as the local member for Ginninderra. From the moment I met her, it was clear that she was a woman who had spent her life giving and caring. She spent all her heart as a nurse for ACT Health Services. Maria

dedicated herself to the wellbeing of others, often placing their needs before her own.

Maria's family remembers her for her gentleness, her selflessness and the remarkable courage she showed through her illness. She carried a beauty of spirit that filled every room she entered. Her kindness, her generosity and her warmth left a lasting imprint on anyone who knew her. Even in the most difficult moments, she thought first of others. Her empathy, resilience and quiet strength were the foundation of who she was.

In her final years, Maria faced unimaginable challenges. She lived with stage 5 kidney failure, relied on regular dialysis and battled access to support she desperately needed—housing, transport, essential medical care. Despite a lifetime spent caring for our community, she fell through the cracks. I visited Maria many times in hospital right until her last days, and I made several representations on her behalf.

Maria's story has shaken me. It has reminded me of the reason why I came here in the first place: that it is important that we have those social safety nets for when people need it. Most Canberrans will go through their life needing nothing from the government except for safe roads, the ability to register their car and to move in the streets safely. People do need the system to work and, for when they can no longer stand on their own, our society must be there. Maria was never a burden. She was a contributor, a carer and a pillar for others. But, when she needed support, she could not get it.

But today I do not want to remember Maria for the hardship she endured. I want her to be remembered for her courage, for her fight, for her zest for life and for her lifelong commitment to caring for others. I give this condolence to her partner Scott, her children, her friends and her loved ones. May her memory be a call to action, reminding us that dignity, compassion and care are not optional; they are essential. May we commit ourselves to building a community where no-one else slips through the gaps, as Maria did. Rest in peace, my dear friend. Thank you.

Valedictory

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.25): It has been quite a year, and I am sure all of us could say the same. I believe the year has tested all of us in many expected and unforeseen ways. For the people of Ginninderra and for Canberrans more broadly, it has been a year of challenges, change and, at times, uncertainty. Across our community, families have faced hardships—some visible and some hidden—and, through it all, the resilience and spirit of Canberrans has shone brightly. In this chamber we have debated and deliberated, sometimes passionately and sometimes with difficulty, yet always with the knowledge that the decisions we make affect the lives of real people who trust us to act with integrity, fairness and dedication. That trust is sacred and it is a responsibility we must uphold each day and in every decision we make.

This year has reminded us that public service is about more than policy or process; it is ultimately about people. It is about mothers and fathers who work hard to provide for their families, seniors who rely on support, and young people who seek opportunities to build their futures. It is about recognising that behind every statistic is a human story and that our work, our debates and our commitments in this Assembly must always reflect that truth. So, as we close this year and look forward to the next, let each of us

carry with us the lessons we have learned this year. Let us commit to serve with integrity, act with courage and listen with humility.

To the people of Ginninderra, I say thank you. I thank you for your trust, your patience and for the opportunity to serve you. That will be my commitment going forward. To my Canberra Liberal colleagues, I say thank you for your dedication and collaboration, even in some very challenging times this year. I look forward to working with all of my shadow ministry colleagues to bring about greater accountability of this government, expose its lack of transparency, and ultimately see a Liberal Chief Minister elected in 2028.

I thank the staff of OLA as well—the wonderful team of people who work here. Thank you for your dedication, your professionalism and your respect for what we do and for supporting us in what we do. I thank my team, of course—the Cain Train. This year I have seen Sophie and John move on to roles in other locations. I thank them for their service and their commitment to my agenda. I have Swan and Jess working hard with me and making sure that I am equipped to provide the services that the community expects of me.

I acknowledge as well two work experience students, last week and this week: Sophie and Claire. I trust this experience for them has been elevating and illuminating. Ms Lee mentioned an intern, Tim. I am very pleased to say that Tim will start working for me as a staffer, hopefully very soon.

And, of course, I thank, my wife of 45 years, Claire. She is my chief advisor. I have a senior advisor and I have advisors. I have people I trust but do not work for me; they volunteer their counsel. As they all know, there are moments when they say, “You need to ask Claire about this,” and I go home and I do. As we all do, I look forward to time with family over the Christmas break.

I finish each year with a thought for all of us: think about what the approaching season means and why it means anything. Think about the first syllable in “Christmas”. Think about what it means in the year 2025. As has often been said, I encourage all of us to look for the reason for the season. Irrespective of your views philosophically, faith-wise or religiously, I hope all of us have a wonderful Christmas and New Year season. May you enjoy family and friends and be refreshed for 2026.

Early childhood education

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (6.30): Today I want to talk during my adjournment speech about the ACT’s early childhood sector. It has been an extremely difficult year for this critical sector, and I would like to acknowledge how distressing and confronting the reporting about child harm in early childhood settings has been for everyone. I feel deeply for the children, families and educators affected. I know that many early childhood educators and providers are still feeling shocked, worried and upset by the reporting. The early childhood education and care sector has been tirelessly calling out for urgent reforms,

including to pay and conditions, for decades.

Every child deserves to feel safe and feel loved. This starts in early childhood settings with strong, trusted relationships and a culture of accountability. This is only possible and achieved when educators feel safe and supported in their workplace. I am so proud that the ACT has a very strong culture in reporting, leadership, learning and continuous improvement. I know, though, that we have much more to do.

In the last six months, I visited early childhood centres across the ACT and held roundtables with parents, educators and stakeholders, and, during these visits and discussions, I have consistently heard about the challenges, including high educator-to-child ratios, unscrupulous training organisations and providers with limited early childhood experience on boards, that can make it very difficult for educators to provide the standard and quality of education and care that we expect and they want to provide. It is unacceptable and it must change. I have advocated for national changes on these critical issues. I will begin consultations next year on reducing educator-to-child ratios and requiring early childhood expertise on boards here in the ACT. I take the chance now to thank families, educators and stakeholders for the time they have taken to speak with me and meet with me.

Finally, I thank educators for the critical work that they do each and every day with children to set them up for lifelong learning and success. I am grateful for their courage, professionalism and commitment, and I look forward to continuing to work together on the critical and urgent reforms required to keep children safe and the sector thriving.

Valedictory

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (6.32): Thank you, Mr Speaker. You obviously saved the best for last.

Ms Cheyne: Excuse me!

MR MILLIGAN: Except for Ms Cheyne! Looking up there and seeing you in that chair will take a bit for me to get used to, but I am sure that you will rise to the occasion. You are one of only a few members who have had such a position on this side of the chamber. You have been the leader, the deputy a few times, possibly the whip, and now you are Speaker. The only position that you have not had is on that side of the chamber, but who knows what 2028 will bring, right? I bet those on the other side of the chamber are happy that you are up there. That being said, I think that Ms Cheyne, Ms Berry, Mr Steel, Ms Tough and particularly the Chief Minister will secretly miss that bit of banter that you bring during question time. I think it will be up to us on this side of the chamber to pick up our stamp and make sure that the void is filled. That has taken me a long way from what I was going to mention here. I will have to speak quickly to get through the rest of this.

It has been a really good year. We have done a lot of electorate work. We have made a lot of hot chocolates—free of charge, may I note—in Forde, Casey, Kaleen, Giralang and Taylor. We are proud of some motions that were brought forward in this place, particularly with the unanimous support that we got in asking the government to support businesses on London Circuit, as well as unanimous support for the inquiry into Fix My

Street, which, may I say, multiplied. There are two inquiries now: we have the Fix My Street inquiry into the tool and also the inquiry into how the government is delivering on the maintenance requests that are put through Fix My Street.

The next thing is something that Ms Cheyne absolutely loved and adored and thought was absolutely brilliant: the barbecue tax campaign that I ran. Ms Cheyne asked, “Is it or is it not a barbecue tax?” but the campaign was really effective and it is good to see that the tax is no longer applicable.

There are numerous people that I must thank for contributing to the success over the last 12 months. My wife, Katrina, is my rock. She keeps me grounded, and who knows where I would be without her. Then there is Josh, my senior adviser. He joined my office this year. We are good friends. We debate a lot. We bought timers for the office. Leandra Peiris first bought timers so that we can flip them over, actually stay on topic and not debate all day. Strangely, two or three of them have gone missing, so we have to keep replacing them. Josh has done a fantastic job since joining my office. We have Harry. Harry has stepped up a number of times this year and has done an extremely good job, particularly when Leandra went on leave and Josh was on parental leave. Harry stepped up both of those times and has done an exceptional job. And we have Ewan Brown. He has been in my office since 2016. He has tried to retire about five or six times and he keeps coming back. I think that this time he has actually retired. I do not anticipate that he will come back. I wish him good luck with everything that he does into the future.

There are the residents of Yerrabi. I thank everyone who has supported me, including, of course, all the volunteers that have supported me, week in and week out. I thank everyone in this chamber. We have a different chamber this time. We have the Independents and the Greens. We have seen different results this time. We have had quite a few wins, so I look forward to what 2026 will bring. And I wish those opposite us all the very best. Of course, we do not see eye to eye every time, but they are here to represent their issues, their values and their constituency, and they do it well. We do the same thing. That is our job here.

There is Ms Tough and Ms Carrick, and we have Ms Clay joining our Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration. Thank you for everything this year. It has been a fantastic year. I thank our secretariats, who have done an amazing job in putting all of our reports together. And may I say that I hope Santa comes to visit everyone this year. He definitely has a naughty and nice list, so let’s see who actually gets a gift this year. Merry Christmas.

Valedictory

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (6.37): Mr Speaker, you will be glad to know that I will be relevant to the question. It is rare in the adjournment debate that a member is. I think it should happen more often, particularly before Mr Cain gets up and does his adjournment. The question should be debated properly—and there are very good reasons at the end of the year why this Assembly should adjourn.

The Assembly must adjourn to allow the hardworking members of the government to govern for the rest of the year. There are still a lot of decisions to be made before Christmas. I have already been called the Christmas Grinch as Treasurer by Ms Berry. But I hope my Labor colleagues have a Merry Christmas and a bit of a break, and hopefully a summer free of natural disasters.

This Assembly must adjourn also to allow my hardworking staff to have a break over the holidays—notably, my Chief of Staff, David Ferguson; Martin Greenwood; Grace Buckle; James Everly; Talitha Holihan; Emily Bias; Curan Diamond, who has unfortunately left us for the feds; Meg Inman; and Brodie Pherson. They have been incredibly hardworking, because we have delivered a lot this year—major planning reforms, missing middle, TOD reforms, building reforms, budget review and my first budget as Treasurer, amongst the highlights. They should be proud, and so should Anton Gallagher, who has been promoted and is therefore no longer currently my longest-serving and most trusted and loyal advised. But we are looking forward to still having him running government communications through the CMO.

I want to thank my community of Murrumbidgee for their engagement this year. It has been a year of almost constant sickness for me, possibly linked to my daughter starting daycare at the beginning of the year. This has limited the opportunities for engagement with the community, but I have enjoyed mobile office catchups and attendance at events.

I have been proud to deliver the commitments to Murrumbidgee that we took to the election in the first year of the term, including finishing the Woden Bus Depot, the largest electric bus depot in Australia at the moment, securing funding for upgrades to Mawson Shops, funding stage 1 of construction for the Molonglo Playing Fields—amongst many others

I want to thank our officials, both departed and continuing. Thank you to our amazing department liaison officers; CD's Liana Brozic; CMTEDD's Carolina Ross; Access Canberra's Jenna Huggett; and Michelle O'Donnell from CED. I want to thank Chief Planner and Director-General Ben Ponton, who is departing us earlier in the year. I also want to thank Deputy Directors-General, Ben McKeown and Erin Brady for the very significant contribution that they have made to the ACT government and the ACT community over such a long period of time. I wish them well in their next steps.

I want to thank the new Chief Planner, George Cilliers; Director-General, Dave Pepper; and Sam Engele and her teams for working really hard this year, particularly in responding to the government's agenda on planning and housing. I welcome Bruce Fitzgerald, and Jeremy Smith to Transport Canberra. I want to thank their teams for their hard work on preparing the bus network over the upcoming period to keep our city moving and their work on improving MyWay+, which has been a massive effort.

Treasury is a small team in the ACT government, in a small jurisdiction. But they are very capable. I want to thank Under Treasurer Russ Campbell for his leadership and his dedicated team on preparing the budget review earlier this year and the ACT budget, in what were quite challenging circumstances. I thank them for their good advice on managing the ACT's finances with us. This puts us in good stead for 2026.

That is why we must adjourn to work, rest and bring in the new year. Merry Christmas to everyone in the Assembly and the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

Valedictory

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.41): This really is my favourite time of the year. Being a summer person, I love the fact that it is getting warmer. It is a time when we get all of the end of year events, which are not only fun but a terrific opportunity to catch up with people that you do not sometimes see during the year and swap the tales of the last 12 months. It is a time of year where we begin to slow down, which I think many of us need in a modern busy world. It is a time when you have a lot more family gatherings. For those of us in this place, who perhaps do not always have as much time for family as we might like, it is a terrific opportunity to catch up with them. It is also a time of reflection, where we get a little bit of space to perhaps sit back, do some thinking and do some reading and the like. It is also a time of thanks. So I will join in with others and offer my thanks to some important people in my life.

I particularly want to acknowledge my three Greens Party Assembly colleagues, Jo, Andrew and Laura. We are all quite different characters, and I really enjoy that because we operate as a team where we really understand and acknowledge each other's strengths and work together really effectively in our different ways of going about things. I think it makes for a very successful team, and I am very grateful to work in a team like that.

I want to thank all of the Greens staff. There is a real sense of teamwork and support amongst our group. Across the four offices, whilst people work for individual MLAs, they support each other and they support each of us. Again, it makes for a terrific working environment where there is a real sense of comradery and of common purpose—and I value that very deeply.

I particularly want to acknowledge our leadership team: Guy, as Chief of Staff; and Jen and Ali, in their job-sharing as the comms director. They do a terrific job for us. Many of you know them, because they are often the people that interact with other offices. We value their expertise, their compassion and their leadership a great deal. I want to thank the staff in my office this year: Jordan, who brings the show biz; Tony and Jo, who job share so seamlessly and keep my diary and me in order; Kate, who is our star baker volunteer coordinator and “we wear pink on Wednesdays” coordinator; Cody, our new climate warrior; Ella, who moved to the Senate this year, and so we miss her but we thank her for her contribution; Tamara, who has joined us to fill that gap; and Melissa, our long-term star volunteer and writer extraordinaire.

I join others in thanking the Assembly team. This year I do not need to thank directorate staff, DLOs and the like, but I am very grateful to the Assembly team, right across the board: the committees, the attendants, the Clerk's office and associated roles. We thank you for your role.

I want to congratulate Mr Parton on his elevation to the Liberal Party leadership. Mr Speaker, what I had not anticipated at the start of the week was that, in you taking on this role, there has been more comedy gold than I really expected. It has been quite a fun week. I again congratulate you on your election to the role and wish you all the best

next year.

I want to put a shout-out to Louise, who is far better and stronger than she was this time last year, for which I am very grateful. I want to thank colleagues across the Assembly who have asked after her throughout the year. It was a tough time through the election last year. Elections are a tough period anyway, and that sort of health scare during an election campaign was very extraordinary. I am grateful that 12 months down the track she is still with us and she is better and stronger than she was this time last year.

Today is Spotify Wrapped Day. My No 1 song for the year turned out to be Laced Up, which is a slang term that means to be prepared for a challenge, a competition or a fight. I do not like the last part of that so much, but I certainly think it is a terrific reflection on the sort of role we have. It is a constant challenge and it can be quite competitive. So I found it amusing that it would end up at the top of my Wrapped list this year.

I want to finish up by acknowledging and thanking the people of Kurrajong, who continue to elect me. I want to assure them that every day I come to work I feel privileged to hold this role and I remain very conscious of the enormous responsibility that it carries. The greatest challenge in this is that there are always more things to work on than we can possibly achieve. I beg your forgiveness for the things we do not get to but I assure you that we do our very darnedest to get to as much as we can.

Let me close by simply wishing all colleagues in the Assembly a terrific festive season. I hope you get to spend time with your family, do things you enjoy and come back rejuvenated in the new year.

West Papua

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.46): Monday 1 December was Independence Day for West Papua. The problem is that West Papuans are still waiting for their independence. There are West Papuans who live and work right here in Canberra. They make our city a better place, and I would like to thank them for that. I also feel that I owe it to them to recognise their history.

In 1962, Indonesia invaded West Papua to claim the western half of the island of Papua for itself. After an agreement negotiated between the Netherlands—as the original colonial power—Indonesia and the United States, West Papua was given to Indonesia. Ironically, no West Papuans were involved in that agreement. The so-called Act of Free Choice in 1969 involved the Indonesian military rounding up around 1,000 West Papuans to vote for or against Indonesian colonial rule—I think you can guess where this is going—and there was a unanimous result for Indonesia to continue its occupation.

Since then, up to half a million West Papuans have died in what experts describe as a slow-motion genocide. This genocide has entrenched intergenerational trauma amongst West Papuans. They have lost their homes. Their culture is under attack. They are banned from raising their flag, the Morning Star flag, in public. There is also an ecocide currently underway in West Papua. Mass deforestation is destroying some of the oldest ecosystems in the world and leaving West Papuans to deal with a home and environment constantly under siege.

So, on this West Papua Independence Day, I want to say to Canberrans with connections to West Papua that we stand with you. We stand for a free West Papua and we stand for all Indigenous people to exercise their right to self-determination.

Valedictory

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) (6.48): Mr Speaker, if a week is a long time in politics, this year has felt like a lifetime. I was looking back at my speech this time last year and, gosh, a lot has changed, and much has been a surprise. I am confident that much of what occurred this year was not on any person's bingo card. To be fair, a lot of what occurs in here makes little sense to people outside it, at the best of times. This year, to be fair, I think that also goes for most of us inside as well. I think there will be a whole lot of reflection for many of us in this place, as we look back on a year of a very different parliament, some very different dynamics, and think, "What just happened?"

However, I reflect on the hope and the gratitude that I had this time last year. I want to stress that I am so deeply humbled to be a minister and, frankly, still a little surprised that I am the Attorney-General. even after a year. As seems to be quite a focus in the media, or at least in the commentary, I do not have a law degree, but I have certainly worked very closely in and towards the achievement of justice, and I think I have a strong sense of justice. I hope that, for any stakeholder or community member who may have doubted my commitment to this portfolio, they are at least starting to reassess their opinion, now that we are at the end of my first year.

I have certainly learned so much, especially in my portfolios; there is always more to learn, always more that we are doing. The breadth of responsibility across the public service, and especially in our frontline workers, is just unbelievable. The depth of knowledge, experience and commitment to our community makes me so proud and, again, so humbled to work for them and to serve them, and to serve the community. I certainly have learned that I regret taking on the role of Manager of Government Business; but, in the interests of stability, I will stick to it for at least another little while.

I make no secret of the fact that I am both driven by and feel the overwhelming weight of opportunity in my portfolios. I am ambitious for reform. I do agitate. And I unapologetically live my life without relying on the promise of tomorrow. I do not resile from how I do my work or the way I go about achieving that. I am a details person. I care, and I cannot seem to help forming a view on anything and everything.

These qualities usually serve me well in delivering reform and change, but sometimes I take "crash through or crash" a little too literally. I recognise that it can be hard to understand how I have arrived at something, or why I am so involved or feel so strongly, or what the urgency is or why I needed it yesterday. I will take time over this break to reflect on this, and on the unintended impact that it can have on those around me, including my colleagues, and especially the public service.

In the same vein, those qualities mean that I can misstep or needlessly involve myself. I obviously made a mistake earlier this year which cast aspersions, and I accept

responsibility, sincerely regret it, and I have learned from it. I also wish publicly to affirm how deeply I regret that I cast aspersions on my Labor colleagues and the distraction I created, and I am sorry for letting my own team down.

We are nothing without the people around us. First, in this place, I just cannot believe how everyone has kept a straight face over the last three months, as there has been so much change around them. Again, it points to the absolute professionalism, kindness, care, impartiality and just getting things done. It is remarkable that, for such a small Assembly, so much happens here and so much is achieved, and that is really because we are enabled. I did reflect that I promised Dennis that I would not move my microphone as much this year, and I think I have moved it less, so hopefully that is true. (*Extension of time granted.*)

I want to acknowledge other people around us: our directorate support, Mr Speaker—Jen, Ash, Scarlett, Anna, Angel, Beth, Steph, Lauren and Cam—and those who have provided extra support or cover during periods of leave—Liana, Andrew, Sean, Danny, Sarah, Kim, Michelle and Megan. I think you saw today in question time just how good they are. They make us look good. Certainly, I am so proud that so many of our DLOs have committed to us for more than the usual year. I know that it is a lot, but the fact is that they have given so much of themselves to us. I greatly appreciate everything that they do to make us look competent. And any time we do not look competent, it is certainly not them, it is me.

I acknowledge my team, Mr Speaker: Elise and Sean, who stepped up to assist us, Kaarin, who I miss every day, as she has gone up to the big hill, Mick and Anton, Elsa, Pete, Amy, Bill and Rhys, all of whom trusted me and took a chance on me, and they are still here, which is great. I say to Michael and Nai, who have my back at every moment—my ride-or-dies—that I am very lucky. All these people create an environment that is safe, happy and fun, and I am so proud to work in an office that lives those values.

Of course, life does not get put on hold for this place. Even though—and I did get the calculations, Minister Berry—I have signed 1,142 things this year, I say to the person who last week said the Speaker signed more things that I do not think that is true. But life does not get put on hold for this place, as much as it takes a lot of time to get through all the things we need to sign, let alone things we need to think about.

Of course, it has been a very big year for me personally. I have a husband, and we had a Christmas miracle today. I could not find any of my Christmas dresses. I thought they had gone, and James, who can never find anything, found them. We will mark that occasion, and now it is in the *Hansard*. I regret that I have not been as present in my electorate, and I look forward to changing that. It is the privilege of my life to stand in this place representing the community that shaped me and continues to ground me. I remain extraordinarily grateful, and I wish everyone a very merry Christmas and a safe, restful and joyous period.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.56 pm until Tuesday, 3 February 2026, at 10 am.