



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

25 February 2026

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 **Tuesday, 17 March 2026**.

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Wednesday, 25 February 2026

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.

Ellnor Grassby
Motion of condolence

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep sorrow for the passing of former Minister for Housing and Urban Services and Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly, Ms Ellnor Grassby, and tenders its profound sympathy to her family, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

I rise this morning to pay tribute to Ellnor Grassby, a former member of the Legislative Assembly and a much-loved and respected member of our Canberra community, who passed away at the age of 89. Ellnor was an exceptional individual. As a young woman, she worked as a nurse and she started her own business in clothing and manufacturing, opening stores in Griffith and Sydney. Not afraid of a challenge in business, she also bought two pubs with a friend and even tried her hand at pulling beers. She moved to Canberra, where she dedicated her public and a considerable part of her private life to community-building, advocating on grassroots issues and helping to build the foundations of self-government here in the territory.

She served two terms as a member of this Legislative Assembly, from its inauguration in 1989 to 1995. She holds the honour of being the inaugural ACT Minister for Housing and Urban Services, portfolios, as we all know, that are challenging and engage the whole community. During her time in the Assembly, she was known for her commitment to local issues and for engaging with residents on matters that affected their everyday lives here in Canberra and in the surrounding region. Colleagues and community members noted her dedication to public service and her willingness to work constructively with others across the political landscape. Her contributions form part of the ongoing growth of the ACT's self-governing institutions, which have, of course, evolved significantly since the establishment of the Legislative Assembly in 1989. On behalf of the Labor Party, I acknowledge her contributions as a strong advocate for the community, for our party and particularly for her work in the early years of self-government.

On a personal level, Ellnor Grassby provided my very first job in politics as a teenager over the summer of 1992-93, where I filled in and did some relief work in her office whilst her full-time staff took some leave. I recall—and this is in an era before emails and a lot of technology—my jobs involved opening a lot of letters, logging a lot of correspondence, drafting replies to constituents, looking after some diary matters and all of those important tasks that a local member has. I will always be very grateful to Ellnor for that opportunity and for some of the skills that she taught me—and I will touch on this in a moment. She was one of the best organisers, in a community and party sense, that I have ever met. Her ability to work with people and to garner support behind a cause or an issue was remarkable. Through her time in this place and across decades of work in our community, she always expressed a deep commitment to the values of fairness, equity and compassion in public life. She often took up cases and causes of people who felt left behind. She did mix her faith with her politics and insisted that we all do more to make our society a better, kinder and fairer one.

After her time in the Assembly, Ellnor continued to be active in the community. In 2006, as a board member of Naming Australia Incorporated, she organised celebrations for the 400th anniversary of the Spanish contribution to the history and naming of Australia. In 2013, as part of the celebrations for the Centenary of Canberra, she was honoured by the UN Women as one of the 100 women whose contributions made a difference to Canberra. Ellnor was a crucial advocate for multiculturalism in the territory and was patron of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum. She passionately expressed these values through her membership of the Chief Minister's Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, the ACT Legal Aid Review Committee, the Status of Women Policy Committee, Friends of the Old Parliament House Rose Gardens, Women in Racing and Friends of Ireland, to mention but a few of the myriad of community organisations she was involved in across Canberra.

Those who knew Ellnor knew she was “the born organiser”. There was simply no function or event that was too big or complex, or too small or too important to a group in the community that she would not be involved in organising and getting a crowd along to. As a lifelong member of the Labor Party and perhaps the spiritual leader of the Belconnen sub-branch, her events were legendary. Many a great Belconnen sub-branch dinner was had at the Regal Restaurant, a Chinese restaurant in Belconnen, I recall. Her boundless energy and drive were instrumental in getting a whole range of celebrities to the various events and activities that she organised. Dancers, artists and TV stars were all part of her circle of friends and influence that she was able to attract to events in Canberra. She was active in pretty well every election—territory, state and federal—over her lifelong membership of the Labor Party and, perhaps most passionately, around her late husband, the Hon. Al Grassby's election campaigns.

Ellnor reflected the values and qualities that make the ACT such a great place to live. I think she leaves an enduring legacy and spirit of generosity, inclusiveness and cultural vibrancy for our community. As we reflect upon our contributions in this place—whether you are here for one, two or seven terms—and you look back at what you contributed, I think Ellnor would be very proud of what she achieved in her time here and as part of this community. On behalf of the members of the Australian Labor Party, the parliamentary team and all of Ellnor's friends, we thank her for that.

In closing, I offer my sincere condolences to Gabriella and Ellnor's extended family and friends for their loss. But I know they are comforted by the warmth of people's recognition of Ellnor's significant contribution. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition): I rise to pay tribute to Ellnor Grassby on behalf of the Canberra Liberals and to add my voice to those recognising her life of service to both the ACT and the wider Canberra community. I can distinctly remember the moment that I met Ellnor Grassby. I was working in radio here and we went to one of those community events where a bunch of people who are not really all that important go along and pretend to be important. I cannot even remember what the event was. Someone spoke and then we all gathered around and had a cup of coffee and a biscuit and whatever. I was drawn into conversation with Ellnor Grassby, and I had no idea who she was. I cannot even remember exactly what we spoke about, but we spoke for a period of time, five to seven minutes. Afterwards I can remember tapping someone on the shoulder who would know and I said, "Who on earth is that whirlwind of a woman?"—because she was able to just draw me into this conversation with such energy. The people that I have spoken to about Ellnor's life talk to me often about that ability to engage humans—and she was very good at it.

Ellnor Grassby's life story is one woven deeply into the social and political fabric of this country. Born in Griffith in the shadow of the Second World War, she grew up in a community shaped by agriculture, migration and the multicultural foundations that would later become central to her public life. In 1962, Ellnor married Al Grassby, whose connections with and impact on our city need no explanation, and together they forged a partnership that would shape Canberra for the better part of 40 years.

Before entering politics, Ellnor's commitment to community service was already evident. She worked in nurse accreditation, as a hotelier, as a volunteer fundraiser like no other—they tell me it was difficult to say no—and as a board member of several non-profit organisations and, as I expressed earlier, was just a complete whirlwind. When the ACT elected its first Assembly in 1989, as has been spoken about by the Chief Minister, it seemed almost inevitable that Ellnor would seek to serve the community in this capacity. She made it over the line in 1989 and was appointed the inaugural Minister for Housing and Urban Services in the first Follett government. Her ministerial service was ultimately brief, but she was returned for a second term and left this place in 1995. After losing her re-election bid, Ellnor remained deeply active in the community. She was a member of Jon Stanhope's Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, served as a board member of Naming Australia Incorporated and continued to be engaged with the Spanish Australian community. Her passing, I think it is safe to say, is not only a loss to her family, including her daughter Gabriella and son-in-law Lionel, but also a loss to the many, many people whose lives she touched through her service, her advocacy, her generosity, her leadership and her energy.

When I was preparing to deliver this speech today, I was struck by Ellnor's commitment to service. Her life was so obviously dedicated to serving her community. No matter where she was and what she was doing, community was genuinely at the centre of everything. Former Chief Minister Gary Humphries shared with me some of his memories of Ellnor, remarking that she was as colourful as Al's ties and that she could always be counted on for an eye-popping statement. Gary said that sometimes he was not sure whether she had actually workshoped this in her head or it just fell out of her

mouth that way. On one occasion, she told this place that, “A hairy man is a happy man; a hairy woman is a witch.” On another occasion, when the ACT was offered a single XPT train to operate the Sydney-Canberra service by the New South Wales government, Ellnor reported that one was not enough. With a memorable line, she said, “It is like knickers; you need one pair on, one pair in the wash and one in the drawer.” So there we go. Mr Humphries also shared with me that, during the alliance government, Ellnor was giving a speech in the chamber, outlining the opposition’s response to a bill that was introduced by Craig Duby. Ellnor was in full flight, delivering her speech with conviction, when Craig Duby stood up and delivered the same speech in unison with her, because it turned out that Ellnor was actually reading Mr Duby’s presentation speech not her response to it. God I wish there was video of that!

Both the Chief Minister and I have spoken about Ellnor’s life, but I think it is equally important to touch on her legacy—a legacy of service, of community, of multiculturalism and of steadfast belief in the capacity of the ACT to grow into a confident, inclusive, self-governing society. There is one last remark from Mr Humphries that I would like to share. It actually comes from a former volunteer in her office. This volunteer said that Ellnor was one of the better, retail politicians, but the big picture policy agenda was not at the forefront of her political operation. That volunteer in question was none other than the Chief Minister.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I extend my condolences to Ellnor’s family, friends, colleagues and all who knew her, and commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong): I want to pay tribute on behalf of my Greens colleagues here in the Legislative Assembly to Ellnor Grassby following her recent death at the age of 89. I also want to acknowledge Ms Grassby’s daughter Gabriella Davis, who along with her husband join us in the Assembly today.

As has been remarked on already, Ms Grassby was one of the Assembly’s founding representatives, serving as a member of this place from 1989 to 1995. She served as Minister for Housing and Urban Services in the first Follett ministry. It is now almost 37 years since the ACT’s independent legislative body first sat, and a lot has changed since then. The number of MLAs has increased and so too has the number of electorates. We now open our proceedings in the language of the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians, and the composition of the parties represented has changed.

There has been a lot written and, in some cases, colourfully retold about the early days of the ACT Legislative Assembly. As one of the Assembly’s pioneers, Ms Grassby weathered those early and occasionally somewhat rogue sessions. Eight of the 17 seats were then held by members of parties that no longer exist. I think all of us benefit now from the fact that MLAs such as Ms Grassby took self-government seriously rather than seeing it as a debate with the No Self-Government and Abolish Self-Government parties who made up almost a quarter of the chamber in that first Assembly. As the wife of one of Australia’s more colourful politicians, it seems reasonable to expect that Ms Grassby would have been pretty experienced at riding the wild bull that is politics some days. I imagine that she remained unphased by the paradox of four Assembly members getting elected on the promise that they would scuttle their own jobs.

In 1995, she was unsuccessful in contesting the new multi-member seat of Ginninderra, but by then the chamber had settled down quite a bit, and I expect she and her party considered that her most important work had been done in ensuring that the ACT had an effective and functioning self-government. I imagine there may also have been a great relief for her in moving on to other less contentious and less high-profile endeavours, such as her two years on the Chief Minister's Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs. In recognition of her own Spanish heritage, Ms Grassby also served on the board of Naming Australia, a community organisation dedicated to recognising the Spanish contribution to the history of the European colonisation of this continent and specifically in celebration of the 400th anniversary of Spanish explorer Luis Vaz de Torres sailing through the strait that still bears his name, and that journey occurred in October 1606.

In reading and researching for today's condolence motion, amongst the various articles and stories that are out there, it is evident that Ellnor Grassby had a full and rich life and made a strong impression on many people, which has been evidenced by both the Chief Minister's and Mr Parton's observations today. I was particularly struck by a photo in the digital edition of today's *Canberra Times*. It is a photo on the merry-go-round, just down the way here. It is a joyous and energetic photo but it is also a very Canberra photo. From all the things I have read and the stories we have heard, I think that sums up Ellnor Grassby's life and her contribution to this city and the impact that she made on people.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Assembly, I send my warm condolences to Ms Grassby's family and friends, and I support the motion from the Chief Minister.

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): I want to speak briefly on my own memories of Ellnor Grassby. I was thinking a lot about these during the eulogy that was delivered yesterday by Gabriella. It really was a perfect description of Ellnor. The words that the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have spoken today really brings to life somebody who was a small woman in stature but certainly fierce in nature. The comment that stuck with me the most was about Ellnor being able to be appropriate and inappropriate at the same time, and she truly could be that.

Ellnor was not a member of the left faction, which sometimes came as a surprise to me. She would come and speak to me often and provide me with her words of wisdom at various times along the way, from when I first campaigned to be in the Assembly in 2012. She came up to me during one of the Belconnen sub-branch meetings and made a donation, a generous donation, to my campaign, which again surprised me, sat next to me and, for the whole time during the meeting, whispered and spoke loudly about everybody else that was in the meeting and her thoughts about them. I just sat there and smiled and nodded politely beside her, because nobody shushed Ellnor. Every step of the way, I always found that she would make the effort to come and seek me out at various meetings just to tell me to keep going and that politics could be pretty shit sometimes, but it was a good job and the best job to have.

I think it is appropriate to acknowledge trail-blazing women like Ellnor, as politics is often harder for women, in looking back at a time in this Assembly, in the first

parliament, in 1989. It was a very interesting space in 1989 in the first parliament. One wonders how they were actually able to do anything at all in this place, while learning how to do things and at the same time being judged and politicked every step of the way.

Again, I just want to pay my deep respect to Ellnor. My deep condolences, Gabriella, to you and your family. Her memory will live very strongly in this place, that is for sure, and within the Canberra community as well.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

By Ms Clay, from 6,051 and 1,339 residents respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the community's mounting concern with the ongoing closure of Big Splash water park in Macquarie. Big Splash is a vital community facility where young people can be active, learn water safety skills, connect with others and support their wellbeing. Three summers have passed with the doors shuttered and the facility crumbling before our eyes.

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

- Terminate the Crown lease and restore public control over the site
- Commit to the redevelopment of the site with an aquatic facility at its heart, including a 50m outdoor public swimming pool, open lawns and family-friendly water slides, together with compatible community facilities.

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

Parkinson's disease—community nursing services—petitions 71-25 and 19-26

By Mr Emerson, from 216 and 1,239 residents respectively:

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that: It is estimated that over 3000 people live with Parkinson's Disease in the ACT.

The ACT is now the only jurisdiction in Australia where people with PD can't access a specialist nurse at home through the public health system. It further brings to the attention of the Assembly that: In October 2024, the Health Minister, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith committed that a re-elected Labor Government would establish a community-based Parkinson's Disease service for patients in the ACT through the Brindabella Day Service and establish an additional Advanced Practice Nurse position to facilitate integrated care for people living with Parkinson's.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to Call on the ACT Government to clarify with the Health Minister when this Election commitment will be met to provide Parkinson's Disease service in the community.

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

Tuggeranong—ice sports facilities—petitions 80-25 and 21-26

By Mr Werner-Gibbings, from 750 and 139 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the urgent need for progress on the Canberra Arena project in Greenway, Tuggeranong, first raised by the ACT Ice Sports Federation with the then-ACT Government in 2015:

- Canberra currently lacks sufficient ice sports infrastructure. The existing facility in Phillip is outdated, unable to meet demand, and nearing the end of its operational life.
- Tuggeranong deserves a world-class venue for ice sports (including dedicated curling ice pads and rock climbing).
- Delays to the project, extending well beyond initial expectations, have been deeply disappointing for Canberra's ice sports community and Tuggeranong's residents.
- The ACT Government has committed \$16.2 million towards the facility – when committed and announced, the largest investment by any state or federal government in Australia for a facility of this kind.
- This venue will bring the interest and investment that Tuggeranong needs and deserves, like job creation, increased visitation, and new opportunities for local businesses.
- Recent media reports suggest private partners may be shifting focus to other ice sports projects, while progress in Tuggeranong remains stalled. This raises serious concerns about their commitment to the Canberra Arena, to growing ice sports participation at a community level, and the future of the Tuggeranong site.
- The Assembly resolved on 26 June 2025 to provide quarterly progress reports on the development of an ice sports facility in Tuggeranong.

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

and its private development partners, Cruachan Investments and Pelligra Holdings, to:

1. Deliver their commitment to build a state-of-the-art ice sports venue, including two Olympic-sized ice rinks, curling lanes, and a rock-climbing centre,
2. Reconfirm Tuggeranong as the location for this landmark project and publicly support the long-term benefits it will bring to the region,
3. Conduct contract negotiations and development decisions transparently, prioritising the interests of the Tuggeranong and Canberra ice sports communities,
4. Work collaboratively to remove unnecessary red tape and ensure that no further delays hinder the progress of this vital community infrastructure, and
5. Provide regular public updates on milestones, timelines, and any changes to delivery, in line with the Assembly's resolution for quarterly reporting.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.24): Another year, another petition from our community to save Big Splash. And what a huge petition. This is now the biggest e-petition in this place, ever, and it is the biggest petition we have had so far this term. Congratulations to Amelia Tattam and the Save Big Splash group, who collected a total of 7,510 signatures: 6,053 online, 1,339 paper and 118 signatures that were incomplete or from people who lived interstate. That is how iconic Big Splash is. And thank you to Dani Hunterford, who first brought a petition to us in December 2024.

These petitions have been led by young people, and it shows how switched-on and engaged our community of younger Canberrans are. They want to have a say on their future, and it is up to us as elected representatives to support their views in our decision-making processes. Canberrans want Big Splash, and they want government to take over. People want public spaces that are accessible, fun and help make Canberra a great place to live.

We have seen this in all the other petitions relating to pools and shops, and even in the ice sports facilities petition tabled today. We all want good facilities—not just national institutions in the centre of Canberra but facilities all over Canberra. It is clear from this petition that people want government to make sure these facilities are accessible and

inclusive for future generations to enjoy. This is core government work—to provide services and public spaces where people can gather.

The ACT Labor government has become increasingly reliant on the private sector to deliver basic community facilities, and that approach is not delivering for our community. People are tired of seeing their facilities lost for private profit, and now they are taking action. That is why this petition has broken records, and it is also why the second biggest petition so far this term was the Save Phillip Pool petition sponsored by my colleague Ms Fiona Carrick.

At last week's community meeting, Minister Berry told the forum that she would like to see Big Splash reopened and returned to its glory days, and that was a really welcome sentiment in the room. I am pleased to see that Access Canberra is taking regulatory action. Canberrans are tired of lease-squatting, and the fear that someone is simply holding onto a site for a future windfall gain and redevelopment. It is good that we are finally seeing this action, but the community needs to see that the action is followed through.

Since 2023, Access Canberra has had a clear power to issue a notice to terminate a lease that has not been used for its purpose for 12 months, and that is the power that has been called up for Big Splash now. We want to make sure that this power is followed through and that we either get the people who hold the lease now to reopen that facility or we get lease termination. I did ask yesterday why the extension was granted; the minister could not tell me but has taken it on notice. I am very much hoping that the extension was granted because it was a request and because that request was reasonable, not because Access Canberra are simply automatically extending notice periods when they do not get any contact in relation to the first notice.

There are a lot of other powers that will encourage leaseholders to take action. Access Canberra can ask a leaseholder to fix up and repair the site, to put up fencing, to fix vandalism. Access Canberra can do these things for the leaseholder; then they can charge them. Access Canberra can issue fines.

I have asked a lot of questions about Big Splash, and I still do not know whether Access Canberra did any of these things. I do know that they did not issue fines. I think, from what I was last told, that they put in the fencing, but they did not charge the leaseholder for that.

Access Canberra, I believe, asked the leaseholder to fix up the site and some activity happened, but it does not look to the community like a lot happened. Enforcement is a hill; it is not a cliff. If you start at the bottom, you may never get to the top. We are glad to see the steps that we are seeing now about the notice for lease termination, but I think Canberrans want to see that steady climb on enforcement.

At the community meeting, I also presented the results of a survey and public consultation about what people want for the future of Big Splash. Overwhelmingly, people want their water park. They want it to be accessible all year round, inclusive for all ages, and they want it to be a community asset where people can gather and have fun. They want government action, and they want to make sure that, in a warming climate, people have somewhere they can gather and cool off.

These results are unsurprising, and it is what we have been hearing from the community since Big Splash first failed to open for the 2024-25 summer season. I look forward to the government's response, and I hope that this petition, with 7,500 signatures on it, gets government to act on the needs and calls of Canberrans.

I seek leave to table the Bring Back Big Splash listening report that my office has prepared.

Leave granted.

MS CLAY: I present the following paper:

Bring Back Big Splash—Listening report, prepared by Jo Clay, ACT Greens MLA for Ginninderra, undated.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.29): The government will be responding formally to the petition in relation to Big Splash tabled today. We acknowledge community support for action to be undertaken at Big Splash. The government wants to see this aquatic facility open to the public to meet community and recreational needs in Belconnen.

The government has made it very clear through a statutory instrument—the statement of planning priorities last year—that we expect the independent Territory Planning Authority, through Access Canberra, to enforce unused leases, particularly for community and recreational facilities, but also for unused shopping centre leases. We are now seeing unprecedented action being undertaken by Access Canberra on behalf of the independent Territory Planning Authority.

On 30 January 2026, Access Canberra, as a delegate of the Territory Planning Authority, sent a letter to the lessees of Big Splash water park advising that it was considering terminating the Crown lease for breach of lease provisions. This was on the back of new laws that came into force in 2023 under the new Planning Act. Access Canberra also provided a copy of the letter to each entity with a registered interest in the lease, such as mortgagees and creditors. The action followed the issue of a controlled activity order which was issued on 12 December 2025, requiring the owner to use the land for its intended purpose under the Crown lease by no later than 23 January 2025. This order was not complied with. The ACT government's interest continues to be bringing Big Splash into compliance with the legislation and their obligations under the provisions of the lease.

The lessee and entities with registered interest in the site must be afforded due process and the opportunity to respond to Access Canberra's letter. Given the complexity of the matter, timeframes for a response were extended by five working days to this week: Friday, 27 February 2026. We advise that the extension of time was granted in response to a request by a party. There are multiple parties to this matter. I cannot comment further on the specifics. Access Canberra continues to make these decisions according to the particular circumstances of each case, and it is important to let the independent regulator do its job in a way that affords procedural fairness. They must follow the law,

and, if they do not, it will be open to legal challenge. That could see circumstances where Big Splash does not open next summer or even the summer after, if it is subject to a court challenge. They must follow the law, and I am confident that they will in relation to this matter.

This is unprecedented action. We have not seen enforcement of a lease reach this stage, using the new powers under the Planning Act. This is the most serious action that the regulator can take under the Planning Act 2023, and they will continue to provide an update to the Assembly when it is appropriate to do so. The government will no doubt have the opportunity to do that in the government response to this petition. The government wants to see a public pool open for public use by the Belconnen community on the Big Splash site in Macquarie, and most serious and unprecedented regulatory action is underway now to enforce the provisions of the lease.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.33): I want to speak briefly on this and put on the record some of the comments that I made when Tara Cheyne and I attended the community meeting last week. I start by again congratulating Amelia and the Save Big Splash team, as well as all of the other supporters that were at that meeting. As I said at that meeting, I worked with Amelia Tattam on free period products in public schools and I am happy to work with her on this campaign to save Big Splash.

At the meeting, I talked about my memories of learning how to swim at the Kippax swim centre, which does not exist anymore. I know it is a real fear for people who have attended Big Splash that the centre would close and that it would turn into apartments, which was the case at Kippax. I know that caused a large level of fear and anger within the community at the time. That pool was never replaced, so there is a gap in West Belconnen for pool facilities. I have talked about that as part of the new aquatic facilities strategy.

I also talked about spending a lot of time at Big Splash as a teenager and that my kids have grown up at Big Splash too. For all of us who have spent any time at that pool in Belconnen, it is upsetting for it to be in the state that it is in. As you can imagine, I have also been copping some heat from my own kids about the closure of Big Splash. I am as committed as everybody else to bring Big Splash back to how we remember it, and even better.

Mr Steel has just spoken a bit about the regulatory action that has been taken by Access Canberra on behalf of the independent Planning Authority. On 30 January, Access Canberra notified the owner that they were considering terminating the Crown lease. Under the law, the owner has 15 working days to respond, which ended on Friday, 20 February. At its discretion, the authority can extend the time to respond, and on 19 February it agreed to do so for a further five working days. The proponent has the right to respond and comply with the proposed regulatory action. As I described at the community meeting, all of us are, of course, frustrated and angry with them, but they are still entitled to due process. Under the law, the owner is allowed to ask for an extension to 15 days, and that extension has been provided. The independent Planning Authority will then consider the owner's response over the coming days and weeks.

I know that is disappointing for everybody to hear. However, as Minister Steel described, this is the first time that the independent Planning Authority has used the new powers given to it under the 2023 Planning Act. These powers have never been used before. The Planning Authority is acting on legal advice every step of the way, being careful and considered in its approach. The process may seem long, and it is frustrating—I get that—but we have to make sure we get it right, because none of us want to see further delays through potential litigation, so it is important to be careful.

Of course, the government will respond in due course to the Big Splash petition. Our interest is ensuring that the operator complies with the legislation. They should not be allowed to get off the hook under this new power. One of the regulator's options is to terminate the lease. This is a serious power and action that has never been taken before. It is genuinely a landmark moment in the ACT.

In the meantime, as I said, the government will consider all options to get Big Splash back. I have been having some great conversations with various members in the community, including the original owners, the Sarri family, about their ideas and what could be a common-sense approach going forward. It is actually a very exciting time for everyone, but we will need some patience as we work through this issue going forward. It is clear that there is a fair bit of unity within this place and within the Canberra community, and particularly in Belconnen, to bring back Big Splash in a way that delivers for our community, but with modern facilities that meet the needs of everyone. I look forward to that conversation. It will be a very big conversation over the next couple of years.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.38): I rise to speak in support of this petition. I thank community members and Greg, who is in the gallery, for their tireless effort. It should not take this long. It should not take so much effort for something as basic as a community facility to be maintained. I thank Ms Clay for her advocacy. She has been on this journey for a very long time and brought forward several motions, a petition and then another petition. I thank Amelia for her advocacy as well. I do not know what I was doing at 18 years of age and I do not know that I would have had the courage to do such a big thing for my community. It is really good to see community spirit standing up.

Last week, I attended a Big Splash event. There were community members, individuals and organisers. Mr Cain and other members of the Ginninderra electorate were there as well. One thing that struck me was that Big Splash was not just a community facility; it was also part of growing up for a lot of people. It was school holiday relief for parents; it was a small break for teachers during school camps; teenagers earned their first pay there; and it was a safe place for young people to gather.

We talk about community spirit a lot. It seems that we are losing that community spirit. I can recall taking my son there when I had just moved to Australia. I cannot swim. I held my son on my arm. I could hear laughter and cheering, and I remember thinking to myself that I had won the lottery when I moved to this place. From Jamison, you could hear people laughing. You could be shopping and you could hear people being happy. We are losing that. We lose that when we lose facilities like Big Splash. If you are a young person here, what is there for you to do as a young person? We talk a lot about social isolation and we talk about youth mental health, yet, at the same time,

affordable and accessible recreational options keep shrinking. The community is calling on the government to hold itself to the social contract it has with its people and ensure that it maintains public facilities so that they are available for use.

As a young person or as a family, sports are expensive. Registration fees are high and equipment costs are high. Even when families can pay, the infrastructure is simply not keeping up. There are not enough fields, not enough courts and not enough facilities for a growing population, and we are densifying. We are densifying Canberra and we are densifying the Belconnen area. If we are going to push families into higher density living, then we must protect and expand plans for shared recreational spaces. You cannot increase the population while reducing the number places for young people and people in general to gather. Big Splash is one of the few large-scale, affordable outdoor recreation facilities in Belconnen, and, once it is gone, as we have seen, it is gone. It is not replaced.

This petition is not just about Big Splash; it is also about a community which, for several years, has been calling for the government to hold itself up to the legislation that it put in place. It has been three years since that power was put in place. It has taken so much effort from the community for the government to now start doing something about it. It has taken community pressure, it has taken the heat, and it has taken over 7,000 applications from residents for the government to move on it. People should not have to advocate so hard for basic amenities. This petition is also about families. It is pro family, it is pro young people and it is pro mental health. It is everything that a community should be and wants to be.

Once again, I thank the petitioner for bringing this petition together. I thank the community for their tireless effort. I thank Ms Clay for her advocacy. We will be watching. Everybody is watching to see what the government does. This will not be one of those things that are swept under the carpet. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

Parkinson's disease—community nursing services—petitions 71-25 and 19-26

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.42): I am bucking the trend. I rise to speak in support of the petition tabled in my name, calling on the ACT government to meet its election commitment of making community based Parkinson's disease nurses available to the over 3,000 people living with this disease in the ACT. The petition received over 1,200 paper signatures—I got a hand cramp from signing each page—which is a huge achievement and testament to the importance of this issue, not just to those living with Parkinson's disease but also to friends, family, other community members and carers who live this journey alongside them.

I thank Jenny Miragaya, the principal petitioner, Parkinson's ACT, and the other advocates who are here in the chamber with us today. Jenny lives with Parkinson's disease. Her tireless community work and advocacy is an immense credit to her and is critical for people on journeys similar to hers. I also thank any advocates who might not be in the chamber today, community members and organisations who have been working hard to ensure these issues are not forgotten.

In the 2024 election campaign, the government committed to establishing a community

based Parkinson's disease service for patients in the ACT, with an additional advanced practice nurse position in the Brindabella day service able to facilitate integrated care for people living with Parkinson's. Over a year on from that commitment having been made and more than a decade since this campaign started, there has been little movement on this issue, from what we can tell. This has left many in limbo. Of course, it is an especially difficult feeling when it is already so difficult for people living with Parkinson's disease to navigate existing systems. That is why it is important to deliver on this commitment as a priority. I know budget deliberations are underway as we speak, and I urge the government to include this measure in their upcoming budget.

We know the vital role that nurses play in our healthcare system. They are the glue that often holds all things together. We also know we are the only jurisdiction where people with Parkinson's cannot access a specialist nurse at home through the public health system. Supporting someone to live in their own home as they age is a gift, and the research backs this up as well. Holistic, community based care significantly reduces the risk of poor health outcomes and takes pressure off our struggling healthcare system, but also, most importantly, receiving treatment at home can hugely improve people's quality of life and that of their loved ones. Surely that is what we are all here for: to work for our communities to improve the lives of all Canberrans, regardless of the challenges they face.

Once again, I thank Jenny and the maybe over 1,500 other petitioners for bringing this matter to the Assembly today. I hope to hear from the government soon—perhaps today from the health minister—with a timeline for the delivery of this commitment.

Debate interrupted.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent debate to continue for an hour.

Motion to take note of petitions

Debate resumed.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.46): I also wish to pass on my thoughts about the Big Splash petition, and I thank Ms Clay for sponsoring that very significant petition—perhaps the most significant petition that has been lodged in the Assembly's history, by number count and by speed of uptake.

It was my privilege to attend the public gathering last Thursday and to share my thoughts, as a member for Ginninderra. It was very good to see all the elected members for Ginninderra at that meeting. My colleague Ms Chiaka Barry was there, of course, the two ministers and Ms Clay.

I want to give a particular shout-out to Amelia Tattam, Amelia Condon-Cernovs and Isla Robertson. I think they are 18- or 19-year-olds; they are either at college or starting university. These young adults founded Save Big Splash. I am so impressed by their commitment and their energy, particularly Amelia Tattam, as the campaign leader, and for being the face of saving this much-loved aquatic facility in Belconnen—loved not just by people of Belconnen, but by people in Canberra and in our region. I think that is exemplified by the number of petitioners that have supported the Save Big Splash petition, and the pace at which their support was evidenced.

As has been touched on, when you have a densifying city, when you have a growing population, you do not need less community, recreational and green spaces; you actually need more. Unfortunately, under this government we are seeing a decline in such spaces. We are seeing a decline in community facilities, recreational and sport facilities, and green spaces. It does not line up with community expectations, in my opinion. We need more, not fewer, facilities for our growing population. Particularly in Belconnen, where we have expansion happening in west Belconnen and we have an increasingly densifying town centre which is not that far from the Big Splash site, we do not need to see these things lost; we need to see them maintained, enhanced and expanded upon.

I know that both ministers, the planning minister and Minister Berry, have touched on these powers from 2023, saying, “We’re using them.” 2023 is quite a few years ago. What took them so long? Was it only because of the number and weight of community support that they said, “We’d better do something”? “There’s a lot of people out there who are not happy; we’d better do something.” It took too long, ministers. We hope that you are not dragging your feet on these notices and requests for compliance, which come under very significant powers, not all of which you have utilised.

Minister Berry said that it will be a big conversation. Actually, it already is a big conversation. I hope that the government takes this community concern and support seriously and makes sure that our community gets the sporting and recreational facilities that it deserves.

I want to acknowledge the many others who have got behind this petition. I want to thank the community who attended the forum last Thursday. I thank the Sarri family for their input on the night, as well as Greg Kimball, who chaired the meeting, and who has just left the gallery. I want to thank those who have volunteered their time to see something that has been much-loved in Canberra’s and Belconnen’s history restored or enhanced and made even better. That would be a wonderful achievement. If it is something that is realised, it will have been achieved because the community has put pressure on this government to act on powers that they have available to them.

I commend the petition and thank the petitioners. I hope that this leads to action. Obviously, it is such a significant petition that it will be considered by the relevant committee, and we await their decision on that.

Parkinson’s disease—community nursing services—petitions 71-25 and 19-26

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

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.51): I rise to speak to the petition sponsored by Mr Emerson and brought forward by Jenny Miragaya in relation to the Parkinson's nurse. I want to thank Jenny and everybody else who signed and was part of this petition, people who have met with me numerous times to advocate for a Parkinson's nurse, and I thank Mr Emerson for sponsoring the petition.

First, I want to apologise to a number of people who wrote to me last year about this. The correspondence that I signed on 12 January this year, due to an administrative error, was not sent until sometime earlier this month. I apologise that there was an even further delay in the correspondence getting to people. In that correspondence I have assured the community that the ACT government does remain committed to strengthening support for people living with Parkinson's disease through a dedicated community-based service, and that a central part of this commitment is the establishment of an advanced practice nurse role.

The advanced practice nurse is intended to provide specialised clinical expertise, support care coordination and help to improve day-to-day care for people living with Parkinson's disease in the community. Of course, it will be really important that that position works closely alongside the fabulous Parkinson's nurse specialist employed with Parkinson's ACT, the Hospital Research Foundation Group. I had the pleasure of meeting Kath at a Parkinson's ACT community event in May last year, and it was great to hear that she had been appointed, and fabulous to hear about the work that she is doing in the community.

Canberra Health Services is progressing to introduce its own advanced practice nurse role, including defining its responsibilities and working with stakeholders to ensure that the role is well integrated, not only with Kath's role but with existing services in Canberra Health Services, and that it is responsive to patients' needs.

While this work continues, CHS is continuing to provide a range of services to support people living with Parkinson's disease. These include the neurology service at Canberra Hospital, which offers both inpatient and outpatient services for a range of neurological conditions. The movement disorder advanced practice nurse, which is actually quite a relatively new position, provides care and coordination across inpatient and community settings. This role is a really key coordination point for several Canberra Health Services clinics, including the aged-care outpatient clinics and the movement disorder clinics. The advanced practice nurse provides a Parkinson's phone clinic on weekdays and scheduled phone support for Parkinson's patients in the community.

In addition, Canberra Health Services provides Parkinson's disease group education, which occurs on a quarterly basis at the University of Canberra Hospital for people in the community living with Parkinson's disease, as well as their family members and carers.

The Brindabella Day and Ambulatory Rehabilitation Service at the University of Canberra Hospital provides services for people after they have experienced a change in their ability to complete everyday activities because of a medical or health condition or disability. Clinicians in this service see clients with a wide range of neurological conditions, including Parkinson's disease.

As Mr Emerson has flagged, it is an ACT Labor commitment to establish the advanced practice nurse role and a community-based Parkinson's nursing service. I apologise to the community that it has taken time to get to this position. As Jenny Miragaya said on radio, we do want to ensure that the nurse position is well supported and is part of an integrated team. We know, with previous services we have seen in Canberra Health Services where you have only one person, they tend to be vulnerable to that person either taking extended leave or finding other work. We want to ensure that there is support for that person in the role and that there is a sustainable service into the future. That is part of what we are doing more broadly with movement disorders and our neuromuscular services more broadly.

Again, I thank the community for bringing this petition forward. I thank Mr Emerson for sponsoring it. We will, of course, respond formally in due course.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.56): I rise to speak on Big Splash and to correct the record and set some facts straight. Most importantly, I begin by thanking the Save Big Splash organisers for their many unpaid hours of volunteering, the many hours of standing outside Jamo collecting signatures or referring people to the e-petition, and for the community meeting that was held last Thursday night. I think that all members who attended, including Ms Carrick, would agree that it was perhaps one of the best community meetings we have seen, in terms of how much engagement there was. The temperature in the room for the entire time was one of warmth and determination, and that is pretty special, when we are all very angry and frustrated.

Ms Clay stressed today that compliance action is a hill, not a cliff, but at the same time she and others, including Ms Barry and Mr Cain, have said that the powers to terminate the lease have been available to Access Canberra since 2023, implying that they should have terminated the lease there and then. That would have been a cliff. That would have been going from zero to 100. That is not procedurally fair or just. I think it is worth stressing what the timeline has been here.

First of all, 2020-2021: cast your mind back to those days. Some of us would prefer to forget, but COVID-19 was alive, and Big Splash had an operating plan that it published, against how many people it could have in there at the time, and it was limited to 1,250 patrons at any one time—far below the numbers at which it had previously operated. Mr Speaker, you can imagine that there was probably an operating hit there. Translink then bought the site in 2021.

In the 2021-22 season, it opened in mid-November 2021 for weekends only, due to the COVID settings that were in place then, and ticket caps. Its opening was then deferred by one week because we had bad weather. It ended the season early, on 6 February, citing COVID impacts, government changes prohibiting school carnivals, and continuing poor weather. It did open in 2022-23, on 16 December 2022. I am not sure when it closed, but I suspect it closed early in that season, too.

I am not excusing Big Splash here, but I think this indicates that there was both genuine

intent to open and that this was a business, and it was a business experiencing operational issues, including many circumstances outside its control.

Going to Mr Cain's question, "What took them so long?" the majority of the Planning Act only commenced at the end of November 2023, not the beginning of that year. It is not three years; it is just over two. That was also the first season that Big Splash did not open. It only became clear that Big Splash was not opening for the 2024-25 season when Minister Berry wrote to them, so I would contend that the timeline effectively began then.

The compliance team at Access Canberra conducted inspections in October 2024, and March and April 2025, and undertook urgent repairs to the perimeter fencing to address the safety and security risks, of which the lessee had been notified, and the lessee had been advised of their obligations to maintain the site. A controlled activity order was then issued on 9 September 2025, relating to the repair and maintenance of the lease. It was then found to not be complied with to the satisfaction of the territory. A rectification notice was then issued and that work needed to be completed by 10 November.

That did not occur, so Access Canberra has since undertaken regulatory action against the lessee in relation to the use of provisions under the Crown lease. A controlled activity order in relation to that was issued in December. It required a response by 23 January, and other people have explained what has happened since then. None of that is new. It is all publicly available information and, if that is not a hill, I do not know what is.

There also seems to be an impression being peddled that Big Splash has the same owner as it had last year. But just last month, it was repossessed by its lenders. It is public knowledge that the lenders are a conglomerate. I understand there are at least six trusts and superannuation funds, among others. While I have no knowledge of the engagement between Access Canberra and the lenders, I do not think it is difficult for a reasonable person to surmise that, with six lenders repossessing a business in January, it might require a little bit of time to understand the finances.

Tuggeranong—ice sports facilities—petitions 80-25 and 21-26

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.01): I am very pleased this morning to have presented a petition calling on the ACT government and its private partners, Pelligra Holdings and Cruachan Investments, to build an ice sports facility in Tuggeranong. This petition has been signed electronically by 750 people and in person with a real pen by 139 people. These 889 signatures represent citizens who care deeply about the future of ice sports in Canberra. They are participants, parents, friends and supporters of ice sports, as well as Tuggeranong locals keen to see a state-of-the-art facility in their backyard.

This petition asks the ACT government to deliver an ice sports venue in Tuggeranong as quickly as possible, along with giving regular updates to the community. This is not an unreasonable request. Canberra currently lacks sufficient ice sports infrastructure. The existing facility in Phillip is outdated, it is unable to meet demand, and it is nearing the end of its operational life.

I acknowledge and am grateful that the ACT government has committed \$16.2 million towards the facility, which, when committed and announced, was the largest investment by any state or federal government in Australia for a facility of this kind. But the delays to the project, which extended well beyond anyone's initial expectations, have been deeply disappointing for Canberra's ice sports community and Tuggeranong's residents.

We have not received substantial updates for some time, and this is not a surprise, because the government remains in negotiations with the private partners. But I want again to put on the record the depth of interest in our community in this project. The interest is not only from the ACT ice sports community, but from within Tuggeranong.

This petition was initiated by Sandi Logan. Sandi is the President of the ACT Ice Sports Federation and joins us in the gallery this morning. Sandi, on behalf of the Assembly, I express my deepest condolences about the result in the men's ice hockey on the weekend. French Alps 2030 is only four years away, and revenge will have to be served cold.

Sandi has assured me many times that the federation is firmly behind this project, not only because it will support professional sports training and possibly teams like the Canberra Brave, but also because of the many Canberrans who participate in the existing ACT ice sports of ice hockey, figure skating and broomball. The facility would also open opportunities for the further development of ice sports in Canberra, like curling, speed skating, sledge hockey and blind hockey.

I have long held the view that Tuggeranong needs a destinational centre of gravity that brings people in. The critical and major investment in Tuggeranong will make our community the destination for every ice sports enthusiast in the capital region and interstate. It will provide a permanent, state-of-the-art facility for the ACT's ice sports community, as well as generating significant, ongoing energy in our local community and for our local businesses, bringing considerable economic and social benefits.

I have heard criticism that some consider Tuggeranong an isolated location. To that I say: no, it is not. Nowhere in Canberra is far away. Canberra's only permanent and ageing ice rink in Phillip will close in the coming years. I can assure members that Tuggeranong will be a lot closer than the next closest ice sports venue, which, for the benefit of the Assembly, is 270 kilometres away, just under three hours drive. It is in Hoxton Park, or Macquarie Park in Sydney. Tuggeranong is the right place at the right time.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the effort behind this petition. 889 signatures is no small feat. 889 members of our community that we represent, standing up with ambitions for the place that they live in, is very motivating. It shows just how important this issue is. It shows that citizens are paying attention and that they are willing to speak up for what they want to see in Tuggeranong. We must continue to explore every option to get this project underway and delivered as soon as possible.

I commend the petition to the Assembly because it demonstrates the level of interest in the project and that the project could and can be delivered without further delay.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

Tuggeranong—ice sports facilities—petitions 80-25 and 21-26

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.05): I would like to thank Ms Amelia Tattam and Ms Jo Clay for bringing forward the Big Splash petition and note my strong support for it. An extraordinary 7,510 signatures were collected in under a month—what a massive effort; thank you. Together with the almost 6,000 signatures for the Phillip pool, this demonstrates the community's interest in keeping our pools open. I also acknowledge the newly formed Save Big Splash Committee and the way Canberra's aquatic community has united to defend the unique value of our local aquatic facilities. Whether it is securing a pool for Woden Valley, ensuring like-for-like aquatic facilities in Civic or calling on the government to terminate the Crown lease of Big Splash, Canberrans are clear: they want access to local, functional aquatic community facilities. While due diligence is needed on any potential Crown lease termination, I hope that the process works in favour of the community whom the system is supposed to serve.

I also wish to briefly comment on the petition calling for an ice sports venue in Tuggeranong, and I thank Mr Sandi Logan and Mr Thomas Werner-Gibblings for their advocacy. Of course, my preference is to retain the ice facility in Woden. We do not want to lose it. I am not really clear why we need to lose more facilities—but anyway. We could either upgrade the current rink or construct a new one, potentially co-located with the proposed outdoor 50-metre pool. This could enable an efficient heat exchange system similar to what currently operates between the Phillip pool and the ice rink. Regardless of location, continued access to ice sports for Canberrans is essential. The old Woden Valley High School site offers a centrally located option worth investigating, particularly since the developer asked the government about this particular site.

Finally, I want to support the petition brought forward by Mrs Jennifer Miragaya and Mr Thomas Emerson. In October 2024, ACT Labor committed to establishing a community-based Parkinson's disease service and funding an additional advanced practice nurse to support integrated care for the estimated 3,000 Canberrans living with Parkinson's. Not only is one position insufficient to meet this need but, 16 months later, these 3,000 residents are still waiting for the service they were promised. This needs to be rectified as soon as possible.

Tuggeranong—ice sports facilities—petitions 80-25 and 21-26

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.08): Tuggeranong has been waiting for this government to deliver an ice rink for 10 years. It is a commitment that Labor have taken to three elections—in 2016, 2020 and 2024; a three-time running, broken election commitment by this government in a community that seems to be little more than an afterthought to the Labor Party. It has been 10 years since Labor first promised an ice rink in Tuggeranong, and all they have to show for it is a dysfunctional relationship with their development partners. I want to thank Mr Sandi Logan, the principal petitioner, and I also want to thank Mr Werner-Gibblings for presenting this petition today. You are a brave man, Mr Werner-Gibblings—a brave man. It is very brave of him to do this, because it brings attention to ACT Labor's diabolical handling of this significant, decade-old commitment.

This petition lays bare the extraordinary breakdown in relationship between the ACT government and its development partners. The government has publicly vilified its

development partners in the media, blaming them for dragging the chain, when the truth all along was that it was the government who was dragging the chain. The government had not even handed them a contract. In fact, the contract was only handed to the developer in July last year, after I moved a motion with my colleague the shadow minister for sports, James Milligan, in this Assembly, forcing them to do so. At that time, the government had not even provided a value for the land yet. Has it done so now? I do not know, but I suspect the answer is probably no. If the land is not viable, as has been widely reported, then why has the government offered them unviable land and what is the government doing to make this project viable? There seems to be, after 10 years, an extraordinary lack of will in the Labor government to get this done in Tuggeranong.

I want to thank every signatory to this petition. I know how frustrated the community is. I know how frustrated you are at always being left behind by this government. Ten years is a very long time to wait for the government to deliver a project that has gotten nowhere. It should not be this way, and yet somehow it always is under ACT Labor.

MS TOUGH(Brindabella) (11.11): I too rise to speak on the Tuggeranong ice rink petition, sponsored by my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings. I want to echo his comments and just add some of my own about the importance of having the ice rink built in Tuggeranong.

My colleague and I were both reflecting this morning before the Assembly sat that neither of us are really built for ice skating or ice sports. We are a bit too clumsy. I suspect that, if I try ice skating again—I have not probably in well over 15 years—I will end up at the Tuggeranong walk-in centre again. But I do know that there are a lot of community benefits that ice skating and ice rinks bring to the community. From athletes in a range of ice sports, like we have recently seen in the US women's hockey, amazing figure skaters, especially the videographer at the Winter Olympics, our incredible Australian athletes recently at the Winter Olympics or people who have just gotten on board the heated rivalry bandwagon, recently we have seen so much inspiration for the next generation of ice sports athletes. It is important that they have a facility to learn and to practise and to have that community to encourage them to potentially be the future Winter Olympians for Australia. With the Woden facility getting old and going to be closed in the next few years, it is important we have that here in our community—and Tuggeranong is a great place for that to be.

Ice rinks are also a great place for the community to hang out. As a teenager, although I am not an ice skater and much preferred to sit on the sidelines eating lollies, we often hung out at the ice rink at the shopping centre. It is just a really fun place for teenagers to hang out and be together. I hear a lot from the community about how much they want to see the new ice rink built in Tuggeranong. Residents in Lanyon, in particular, bring up the fact that, although Tuggeranong town centre is a bit far away, it is not that far away for a destination to go to, for places for teenagers to hang out, to have fun and to be themselves.

So I am happy to see how much support this petition got. I want to thank every single one of the petitioners for signing it. I want to especially shout out to Mr Sandi Logan, who is here today, and the entire ACT Ice Sports Federation for continuously advocating for this facility to be built in Tuggeranong. I want to again thank the

community for signing this petition and thank my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing it.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Higher education Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.14): I rise this morning to update the Assembly on the strength, growth and future of the higher education sector in the territory. It is a sector that sits at the centre of our identity as Australia's knowledge capital and acts as a defining feature of our city's character, economy and future. We are a community built around education, research, ideas and innovation, and that identity continues to strengthen as our worldclass universities and tertiary institutions grow, attract talent and deepen partnerships that create opportunities for all Canberrans.

Each year, our institutions enrol more than 60,000 students. That is around one in eight residents in our city. This includes over 20,000 international students, with international education remaining the ACT's largest source of export income. The value of this to the territory economy is indeed significant. As I mentioned yesterday in question time, between 2015-16 and 2023-24, the ACT's export income from international education more than doubled, from \$633 million to \$1.541 billion, highlighting the sector's growing contribution to the local economy. These are big numbers. What do they mean? They mean hundreds if not thousands of jobs in our city. That is why this sector is critically important. It creates opportunities for both growth and collaboration and demonstrates how education drives economic activity across a wide variety of sectors, including hospitality, housing, retail and professional services, as well as enhancing the social and cultural life of this city.

Canberra's reputation as a highly educated city is well deserved. According to 2025 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, more than 46 per cent of people living in Canberra hold a bachelor's degree or higher, which is well above both the national figure of 34 per cent and our closest competitor state, Victoria, who reported a figure of just 37 per cent. Let me repeat that: 46 per cent of Canberrans hold a bachelor's degree or higher compared to only 34 per cent nationally and, with the next closest jurisdiction to the ACT, Victoria, way back at 37 per cent. This concentration of talent supports innovation, productivity, jobs and the social wellbeing of our city and, importantly, reflects decades of investment in education and research. We are very fortunate to be home to some worldclass institutions, including the Australian National University, the University of Canberra, the University of New South Wales Canberra and the Australian Catholic University—each of which sent representatives on our recent trade mission to India—alongside strong vocational pathways led by our very own Canberra Institute of Technology.

Pleasingly, enrolment numbers are showing growth and resilience across the board. Across the nation, total higher education enrolments rose by 4.7 per cent in 2024 to more than 1.67 million students, which was largely driven by growth in onshore international students. Here in Canberra, our institutions continue to see strong demand. The University of Canberra, for example, reported a significant increase in its domestic

undergraduate enrolments of 11 per cent in 2025, reflecting renewed momentum at the university. This growth matters. Each additional student represents a potential future worker, researcher, entrepreneur or community leader. They contribute to our city's energy and strengthen skills in critical fields, which we talk about in this place every time we sit, across health, education, the digital economy and public policy, just to name a few. We therefore warmly welcome the growth opportunities created by favourable commonwealth government policy settings around international student allocations. The increase in national planning levels from 270,000 to 295,000 international student places provides scope for growth, particularly for institutions that invest in student accommodation and support infrastructure. For Canberra, we welcomed increases for each of our institutions—a change that recognised what we have long argued: that planning for student growth must go hand in hand with housing supply and community infrastructure.

That brings me to the major campus projects that are shaping the next phase of growth for this sector. A landmark project is the development of the new University of New South Wales Canberra City campus. Members would see that construction is underway on this transformative precinct that will bring an additional 6,000 students and educators into the heart of our city centre over the coming years. This investment will strengthen research and teaching in areas critical to our nation's future, including defence, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and climate policy, while contributing, of course, to the revitalisation of the southeast corner of our CBD. I particularly acknowledge the University of New South Wales Canberra's vote of confidence in our city and our higher education sector through this very significant investment in Canberra.

At the University of Canberra, continued campus development and innovation are supporting new models of education and community engagement. The university's long-term projects and partnerships demonstrate how higher education institutions can serve as anchor institutions for local employment, research and social inclusion. The territory government recognises that growth in higher education simply must be matched by growth in student accommodation, with housing availability central to Canberra remaining one of the world's most attractive study destinations. At a national level, purpose-built student accommodation is expected to expand significantly in coming years, with thousands of new beds planned as part of broader sector growth. Locally, Canberra's universities and private student accommodation providers are actively expanding student housing options, including both on-campus and dedicated shared accommodation models. This work supports both domestic and international students and, of course, helps to ease pressure on the broader rental market in our city. Ensuring safe, affordable and well-located student accommodation remains a core priority for the university sector, and the government recognises the importance in impacting future growth in enrolments.

One of the most encouraging developments in the sector is the strengthening of partnerships across institutions—a prime example being the collaboration between the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology, including new agreements that create guaranteed pathways for students between vocational and higher education. These partnerships reflect a modern understanding of lifelong learning. Students no longer follow a single linear pathway. They move between vocational training, university study and professional upskilling throughout their careers. From the

government's part, we look forward to engaging in the work of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission on the development of a tertiary roadmap in this respect, work that is aimed at identifying the next steps to make it easier for students to move between TAFE and university and vice versa. By setting up a system to better support students in gaining qualifications matched to Australia's and Canberra's future skill needs, a more harmonious and integrated tertiary education system will boost our city and our nation's productivity and ensure our workforce is equipped for the challenges of what is and will continue to be a rapidly changing economy. We look forward to seeing how this work progresses to support more students to access and succeed in tertiary education right here in Canberra.

I think it is worth emphasising in this statement the social value of the higher education sector to Canberra. Universities and tertiary institutions and vocational education and training providers enrich our arts, culture, sporting and community life. I think it is important in the context of current debates about migration in our country to make this clear and unequivocal statement: international students contribute diverse and global perspectives and enduring international connections that benefit our city long after their graduation. Students from more than 100 countries around the world study in Canberra. They are welcome and we encourage more. The government remains committed to working closely with our tertiary institutions, the commonwealth government and industry partners to ensure sustainable growth that includes planning for transport and infrastructure, supporting research collaboration and ensuring that our city remains welcoming and affordable for students.

As we look ahead, the vision is clear: Canberra will continue as Australia's knowledge capital, a city where education drives outcomes, where research solves real world challenges and where partnerships across government, education and industry create opportunities. Our higher education institutions are not just educating the next generation; they are shaping the future of our city and our nation. I take this opportunity this morning to acknowledge our universities, our vocational education providers, our educators and researchers, but I particularly acknowledge our students—local national and international—who choose Canberra as their place to learn, to live and to contribute. Together, we are building a stronger, smarter and more connected Canberra.

I present the following paper:

Higher education update—Ministerial statement, 25 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.25): I thank the Chief Minister for his update. The Chief Minister mentioned that nationally purpose-built student accommodation is expected to expand significantly in coming years and that, locally, Canberra's universities and private providers are actively expanding student housing options, including on-campus and dedicated accommodation models. I wonder if the Chief Minister has heard from students currently living in student accommodation or have heard enough horror stories to instead opt for the private rental market, where very few, if any, houses are considered affordable for young people living on youth allowance.

More and more, we are actually hearing students choose the latter, because it is still cheaper.

While it is all well and good to commit to ensuring safe, affordable and well-located student accommodation remaining a core priority, I think it is also important at this point to speak to students and advocates directly, and more importantly, ask them what they think and how they are doing. They will tell you how much student accommodation costs, the fact that students with a disability often have to pay more for accessible rooms, how even maintenance issues involving only having hot water on the floor can take weeks to fix, how students are given rooms with someone else's rubbish still in them and are just expected to clean that up, how students are paying cleaning fees but cleaning is not happening and how students can be kicked out with very little notice or recompense. If we do not listen to them, I think it is emblematic as a broader problem where we are seeing students as young workers and future economic inputs before we actually see them as young people.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Malkara and Woden schools—storm damage Ministerial statement

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) (11.27): I rise today to give a statement on Malkara School and the Woden School following significant storm damage, and the hard work that has occurred to reopen both schools as quickly as possible.

As many of you would have experienced, significant storms hit the Woden region on the night of Saturday, 7 February. A number of ACT public schools, homes and facilities across the ACT were damaged by these storms and flash flooding in the Woden area. Duffy primary, Narrabundah early learning and Melrose High School all sustained damage, but Malkara School and Woden School experienced the most significant damage.

Due to the extraordinary amount of rain in a very short period of time at both schools, water pooled on the ground outside both schools and had to flow somewhere. The majority of the damage was from stormwater that flowed into both schools at ground level, particularly underneath the doorways and entrance points to the school. Unfortunately, this led to the need for temporary closure of both schools.

I went to both schools to see the damage for myself, and I was shocked by the power of the water in making its way up and under doors. At both schools, water damage impacts were mainly to the flooring and furniture. Malkara sustained damage to more areas of the school overall, while the damage at Woden impacted fewer spaces but more severely. An assessment of both sites took place on Sunday, 8 February and the difficult decision was made to close both schools to allow repairs to occur.

I want to acknowledge the challenge and the impact of this on both school communities, for students, for staff and for families. I know both of these school communities were heavily impacted by the action we had to take to remediate the impacts of contaminated

sand products in the school late last year, and they have been impacted again by these storms and the aftermath of flash flooding. I know that this was not the start to the new school year that anyone had hoped for.

Specialist schools do not have the same level of operational flexibility as other schools might have. Options like temporarily combining classes or moving to other learning areas are not viable solutions for meeting the inclusive learning needs of every student. Closure and repair of these schools was the only way to ensure repairs could occur, and learning and teaching could resume safely. The good news is that both schools are back open to all students. Our principals and staff were keen to welcome everybody back on Wednesday, 18 February and I know that everyone is happy to be back.

I would like to update the Assembly on the work that had to be done to achieve this result, because it was significant. At both schools, removal of furniture occurred, followed by removal of wet and damaged furnishings and flooring, including carpets. It also took a lot of time to dry the wet areas, including concrete slabs, using industrial dehumidifiers and fans before new carpets and flooring could be laid. Skirting boards and cabinetry also needed to be repaired and replaced. Bathrooms, offices and other essential ancillary places that support schools to operate throughout the year were impacted at both schools.

At the Woden School, flooring had to be removed and replaced in about a third of the school. This included a number of learning spaces, the front office, staff workplaces and administration areas. At Malkara School, storm-damaged internal walls and furniture were cleaned and, in some cases, replaced. Further clean-up was also required to address storm damage in outdoor play spaces.

At both schools, the teams had the added task of safely remediating some mould and asbestos-containing materials uncovered through the remediation works. All these works were carried out by licensed contractors and in line with safety requirements. Air monitoring and testing also occurred at both schools to ensure that the sites were safe for everyone to return to. Crews worked long hours to get both schools back up and running again. I thank the teams who worked across government and the contractors and tradespeople for working together to get this work done so quickly. Thank you for your professionalism and your effort.

I also want to acknowledge our newest public school, Strathnairn School, which has loaned new furniture, beanbags and other soft furnishings to Malkara School to support the return of staff and students before replacements could be delivered. It was a very kind gesture and a wonderful example of our fabulous public education community leaning in to support each other in times of need.

The Woden School has some changes to learning spaces which need more repair, and this is occurring at the school. Some of the school's learning spaces, along with the administration and front office areas, were closed when students returned to school last week. Spaces will be reopened as soon as repairs are completed, with several more spaces being made available early this week, and the rest will follow shortly. The remaining works have been arranged in a way to minimise any disruption to learning and operations of the school.

What we have seen over the last few years is that, when these kinds of unpredictable challenges arise, our public schools and our public school communities rise to those challenges with kindness and understanding.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the extraordinary Malkara and Woden school communities for their patience and understanding. I know that this is not the way anyone had hoped or planned to start the new school year. I wish everyone the very best for the rest of the school year, and I am looking forward to visiting again soon.

I present the following paper:

The Woden School and Malkara—Ministerial statement, 25 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (11.33): I note the Deputy Chief Minister's ministerial statement in relation to Malkara and Woden schools, and I want to put on the record my thanks to the minister and her office for keeping me updated on the efforts to reopen the schools and the supports that were made available to the families that were impacted. This was an incredibly challenging situation and, along with the minister, I also want to thank the crew and tradespeople that worked tirelessly to get the necessary work done.

Of course, I want to acknowledge and thank the incredible parents, carers, teachers and staff, and the entire school communities, for their patience and resilience in what must have been an incredibly challenging circumstance. The closure of schools is incredibly disruptive, and I know it placed unexpected pressure on the entire community. I had a number of parents and members of the community reach out to me during this time, and it was concerning to hear from them firsthand about some of the challenges that they faced. Of course, I contacted the minister immediately, and I thank the minister for being so responsive in responding to me and keeping me updated.

In the midst of all that, there was also concern raised by the parents and the families about the fact that maintenance had not been at the levels that it should have been—that that also had an impact. I think that is a concern that must again be drawn to the attention of this Assembly and the minister.

School maintenance and the ongoing issues that arise from time to time are the result of not having a proactive maintenance system in relation to not only the day-to-day aspects but also the issues that come up time and time again when it comes to infrastructure. It is not new, and I think it is important to note that, whilst the minister has done her best to ensure that the school communities are updated and informed about what was happening whilst the schools were closed, we should not lose sight of the fact that the bigger picture and the bigger problem in relation to ongoing maintenance issues needs to be addressed, and that must be done as a priority. We need to ensure that our schools are resilient, safe and able to withstand challenges. This is something that has been a reminder to all of us.

Once again, I thank the families who got in touch and were able to rest assured, through the minister's office and via me, and I hope that we can all move forward from this.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.36): I thank the minister for her update on Malkara School and the Woden School. I also want to echo Ms Lee in thanking her office for keeping us in the loop as the emergency event unfolded.

I would first like to acknowledge the children, families, carers, and teachers for whom this emergency event and disruption to schooling has been extremely distressing. I would also like to thank the people, both in the directorate and physically on the ground, who worked hard to get things in order for kids to get back to school last Wednesday.

As Minister Berry noted, specialist schools experience restricted flexibility in the face of emergency disruptions due to a higher reliance on specific equipment, learning support and accessibility features. But we might ask ourselves whether we did not already know this and whether we should therefore have better infrastructure and contingency plans for when these additional facilities are inevitably required.

I understand that the necessary steps to get students back in classes have now been taken, but the question that I think stands for the government to answer is: what has been learned from this? Despite everyone's best intentions, quite a few Canberra students with a disability lost their access to education for, I believe, eight school days, which is quite a few days. What will be put in place so that next time students at specialist schools will not be without learning and so that families are not put under immense pressure for over a week?

The reality is that extreme weather events and emergencies like this one that affected the families of Malkara and the Woden School are only set to become more frequent with climate change. Yesterday, in question time, we pointed out the need for climate readiness in our schools, and that includes readiness for emergencies like these.

In the Australian Education Union's 2025 State of Our Schools, ACT public school principals described significant infrastructure challenges, including buildings not fit for purpose, insufficient heating and cooling and, crucially, limited accessibility for students with a disability, and schools operating without enough specialist learning spaces.

It is not the first time that the AEU has raised these concerns. The writing has been on the wall for a while, so I think it is high time that we listen. Like any other school, specialist schools need a redundant capacity. We must learn from this experience and, while we await the government's public school resource review and look forward to the results of that, we should meaningfully consider how we want to value and invest in all of our kids.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.39): I would like to add my voice and thank the workers who did so much to get the schools ready and opened as quickly as they could. I would particularly like to thank the school community and Snezana Stekovic for her tireless advocacy for her community. The Woden School is not just an educational setting; it provides essential support for children with significant intellectual disability,

complex needs and neurodiversity.

Losing access to structured learning, allied health services, behaviour support programs and high-ratio supervision has had immediate consequences for students' wellbeing. Many rely on the integrated therapeutic and educational environment that cannot be replicated at home. Families have also been under considerable pressure. Parents have had to reshuffle work, take unpaid leave or reduce hours to provide full-time, high-needs care, intensifying financial stress and affecting mental health.

While any school closure is disruptive, the impact here is far greater due to the specialist supports involved. We need to ensure interim specialist education or care arrangements are in place and prioritise infrastructure investment, including access to a hydrotherapy pool. A constructive first step is active engagement with the P&C on practical, short-term solutions. Working with them will help to ensure students remain supported, safe and able to thrive.

I am also keen to understand the assessment of the school's infrastructure and their maintenance requirements, including what has been done and what is outstanding. I will put a question about it on the portal.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Woden area—storm damage Ministerial statement

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) (11.41): I would like to update the Assembly on the response and recovery following the severe weather event in the Woden area on the evening of Saturday, 7 February and into Sunday, 8 February. Areas of Woden received up to 68 millimetres of rain in a one-hour period and up to 85 millimetres of rain over the two-hour period. Clearly, this is a significant amount of rainfall in such a short period of time and it resulted in flash flooding and significant damage in the area.

This intense weather event led to over 120 calls for assistance to the ACT SES, numerous calls to 000 and a total of 42 Fix My Street reports. These were responded to by crews from the ACT State Emergency Service, ACT Fire & Rescue, ACT Policing, and Roads ACT. Calls were in relation to leaking roofs, blocked gutters and overland flow entering homes and garages from streets, leading to flooding inside residences. This event also caused damage to Yarralumla Creek in the Curtin area, along with some apartment blocks, like the Ivy residence, that were inundated due to the amount of water that passed through the area. High-capacity water pumps were deployed to assist with pumping water out of these locations.

On Sunday, 8 February, the ACT SES activated whole-of-government coordination to help with the assessment of impacts and identifying what needed to be done to support the community impacted. The SES and the City and Environment Directorate worked closely to ensure the damaged areas were safely cordoned off. Damage assessments commenced immediately and are still underway. Comprehensive and detailed

assessment of city infrastructure assets by CED will take a significant amount of time and resources to achieve. These have been facilitated with the assistance of footage taken by the ACT Rural Fire Service intelligence-gathering helicopter and ESA Intelligence Team drones. While these resources are usually used for bushfire intelligence and response, it has showcased how ESA has established these capabilities for use in all emergencies—in this case, used well to inform broad understanding of the impacts, waste and required clean-up and reconstruction activities.

CED advises that a significant amount of city and community based infrastructure has been impacted due to the velocity and quantity of channel and overland flows of stormwater. A thorough assessment of damage to street furniture, paving, water courses, embankments, pedestrian bridges, culverts and public lands is ongoing. Technical and engineering assessments will be required to some major water course and community infrastructure. A significant quantity of debris has been deposited across waterways and open areas that require assessment and removal. As Minister Berry said, there has also been significant impact on Malkara and Woden schools due to this storm damage, impacting students, families, teachers and wider support networks.

In the wake of this distressing event, one of my key priorities has been to meet with and listen to those who have been affected. Their experiences and insights will guide our ongoing response and ensure we learn from what has occurred. I have met with residents of the Ivy apartments and the Deakin community who experienced severe flash flooding in their basements and extensive damage to their homes. I have also spoken with small-business owners facing significant infrastructure losses to discuss the pathways available for support in their recovery. I would like to acknowledge the Deakin residents I have spoken to. I worked with the same residents two years ago, who all experienced extensive flooding in their homes. Many had to move out of their homes for many months as repairs were conducted. To have this happen again is, very simply, devastating for some of these residents.

I have also been engaging with CED as they develop a medium-term repairs program to address underlying stormwater and road pavement issues identified through inspections. While this event has been deeply distressing for many in our community, I am reassured by the expertise, coordination and collaboration demonstrated across government. Our dedicated teams stand ready to respond at any hour, providing vital support whenever and wherever it is needed. It is essential that our government resources work together to assist our community. This was evidenced once again in this incident, and I could not be prouder of the efforts of our personnel at the ACT SES, ACT Fire & Rescue, the ESA Intelligence Team, ACT Policing, Roads ACT and CED.

I would also like to acknowledge the ESA and CED communications teams, who work closely together effectively to keep the public informed. Their coordinated messaging included issuing timely warnings, reminding the community to avoid floodwaters and damaged paths, trees and infrastructure across the city, and encouraged continued reporting of damage through Fix My Street. While every effort is made to provide the community with early advice, storm events are dynamic and volatile. I encourage everyone to use the BoM website and/or app as their source of weather information.

On the night of Saturday, 7 February, the ESA issued two advice-level warnings which were aligned with the BoM warnings and New South Wales SES. In the lead-up to

every bushfire and storm season, the ESA works hard to increase community awareness, preparedness and readiness through the annual Be Emergency Ready campaign. I also encourage all Canberrans to be prepared and complete their survival plans for all hazard types as we are seeing more severe weather more often.

The ESA partners with Red Cross ACT, the Multicultural Hub and the Bureau of Meteorology ACT-NSW on preparedness sessions for culturally and linguistically diverse groups, including the Canberra Islamic Centre, the Gungahlin mosque and other faith groups. The ESA was also able to engage directly with community members through its participation in the ACT Multicultural Festival.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the distress of those in our community who were impacted by this storm event. I would also like to issue a sincere thankyou to every member across the ACT government, including our amazing volunteers, who contributed to the response and continue to assist in recovery efforts following this severe weather event.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.48): I would like to also thank everybody who responded to the floods. It was a significant event and there was a lot of clean-up to do. In addition to the areas of damage already outlined by the minister, I want to bring attention to the significant impacts experienced by residents in Garran. I visited a number of homes where properties were flooded due to a blocked drain near the Federal Golf Club. The force of the water was extraordinary. Fences were knocked over and outdoor garden furniture was damaged. The force of the water picked up wheelie bins and big terracotta pots and smashed them through areas as the fences were knocked over. It left a lot of debris in people's houses, and they are wondering whether they can get any help to remove the incredible amount of debris that is now covering everything.

I am concerned about the time it is taking to repair key parts of the active travel network. The C4 path at the end of Irving Street in Phillip sustained serious damage, and the bridge across Yarralumla Creek in South Curtin had its railing torn away. These are not minor links. The damaged section of the C4 is the busiest shared path in the Woden Valley and the bridge across Yarralumla Creek is a critical east-west off-road connection, linking suburbs to the west with Hughes, Garran and the Canberra Hospital. More than two weeks have passed since the storm, yet these crucial active travel routes remain unrepaired. The Woden parkrunners have been diverted onto the surrounding uneven grass to avoid the damaged path. This is dangerous for ankles. I would like to see these works treated with the same urgency that would be applied if similar damage had occurred on key parts of the road network.

The floods also highlighted the risks associated with locating residential buildings close to floodways. The disruption to residents of the Ivy apartments was substantial. Many were trapped in their apartments for almost two days because the lift shafts were inoperable. Directly across the floodway, the new YarraVale residential complex faces similar risk, sitting at the confluence of two floodway channels, yet a DA is in for towers close to the floodway. This is not a theoretical concern; it is a lived experience for

residents who are unable to safely leave their homes.

On 23 October 2025, the Assembly passed my motion calling on the government to update flood risk mapping for extreme weather events, refrain from selling land along the creek until the options report for naturalisation is complete and considered by government, look at the re-naturalisation options, and produce a report so that, when things like this happen and the concrete liner is ripped away, we can look at whether there are any alternative options to replacing the concrete. Can the banks of the river or the creek be stabilised with trees and shrubs? These actions remain critically important, and I hope this work is progressing.

We cannot continue to repeat the planning mistakes of the past by replacing residential buildings at high risk in flood zones. As we densify with more concrete, extreme weather events become more frequent and more intense and our responsibility to ensure safe and resilient development becomes even more pressing. The recent floods must serve as a clear reminder. Our planning, infrastructure and active travel networks must be designed and maintained with climate resilience at their core.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.52): I am pleased to provide a short update from the City and Environment Directorate regarding the areas for which I have responsibility. I acknowledge Minister Paterson's thanks to these crews as well. Specialist contractors were mobilised within hours of that freak storm event to support Roads ACT crews in removing silt and removing deposited soil and drainage overflow material from affected roads. There was rapid reinstatement of travel lanes that ensured access for residents, emergency services and waste collection vehicles. It is worth highlighting how quick that work was and the limited impact that the community felt travelling around the area because of it.

An initial targeted multiday deployment of street sweepers was undertaken across the most heavily impacted suburbs to remove the storm related debris, leaf litter and sediment from roads, gutters and intersections. This effort improved surface safety, drainage performance and general neighbourhood amenity. Crews undertook immediate clean-up and hazard reduction works along the Yarralumla Creek channel, including the removal of debris, clearance of obstructions, protection of the intact panels, and safety treatments around displaced or lifted channel panels. Anyone can look at the images or the video that I posted in the last day or so and see how quickly they worked to remove a lot of very heavy material that had made its way down the channel.

I can assure Ms Carrick that Roads ACT continues to undertake structural inspections of bridges and key assets along the Yarralumla Creek corridor and other storm-affected waterways, as well as road and drainage conditions. These inspections are to confirm the safety of critical structures and inform prioritisation of further maintenance and remediation activities where required. Reports received by the community are being triaged daily, but I hear loud and clear what Ms Carrick is saying about the C4 cycleway and the railing over the bridge. I will look at getting an update on what the timing is for those repairs as soon as I can. I appreciate it has been more than two weeks. There may be some complicating factors. I am always surprised about how long some things that

seem very simple can take, and I suspect that might be the case with the railing. The assessment of the damage in the area is ongoing. Remediation works, including to restore the channel integrity of Yarralumla Creek and what that looks like, will be planned once the damage assessment is completed. I certainly acknowledge Ms Carrick's advocacy in this place and further underline that the government has committed to reporting back, and that due date is later this year.

Place Management also undertook inspections and actioned safety issues at shopping centres, including clearing of fallen branches, leaf litter and mud and soil impacting pavement areas. Underpass and cycle path cleaning was also undertaken in impacted suburbs, and inspections across the region are being continued as needed, including the assessment of granite areas for deep washouts, which will be targeted. I acknowledge that this diverts our Roads ACT and Place Management crews from their usual schedule of proactive work, so some things can be delayed as a result, but, due to their quick actions and their coordination, they are, I believe, back on track.

I have a final update. As an area when we are in crisis situations that does not always spring to mind or get as much attention as you might expect, Access Canberra is constantly available to provide surge support to the SES during extreme weather and emergency events. The contact centre was stood up in the early hours of 7 February for that storm activity and they took 14 SES related calls. To highlight this incredible team, they had eight emergency events in 2025 where the contact centre was activated after hours. These teams spring into action and are ready to take calls. They assist and coordinate with the SES, and they responded to a total of 648 SES calls in 2025, which I think is pretty remarkable and worth stressing. In addition to all of the emergency response that occurred during this event, sometimes we forget about all the action that needs to occur after it and some of the behind-the-scenes support that occurs during it. I extend my sincere thanks to all of the crews who gave up their nights or disrupted their scheduled maintenance work to support this community.

I commend the ministerial statement to the chamber.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.58): I would like to thank the government for the update provided regarding the storm event in Woden earlier this year. It emphasises the point that, as we are entering higher risk as a result of climate change, it will mean we will have more frequent occurrences of extreme weather events such as these storms. Therefore, as a government, we need to be prepared to anticipate and respond to those events, but also do everything we can to prevent the likelihood of that happening, through our Climate Change Strategy and its mitigation efforts.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Heritage—government priorities

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.58): I wish to update the Assembly on the government's work to strengthen the ACT's heritage system and the new Ministerial Statement of Heritage Priorities made under section 18 of the Heritage Act 2004. Heritage places and objects, along with their traditions and

stories, connect us to our past. Heritage influences how our communities connect with their surroundings and how we understand the development of our city. As Canberra continues to grow, the heritage system must be modern, clear and well connected to the territory's planning, housing and sustainability goals.

Over the past year, the City and Environment Directorate and the ACT Heritage Council have progressed important improvements. These include governance and decision-making enhancements; stronger engagement with representative Aboriginal organisations and traditional custodians; and foundational work on a modern digital heritage database. This activity responds to the 2023 ACT Heritage Jurisdictional Review and is designed to improve clarity, consistency and transparency for owners, applicants and the community.

I have issued a new Statement of Heritage Priorities, and I am pleased to table it in the Assembly today. I want to acknowledge that this builds on the previous statement by the former minister, Rebecca Vassarotti, who undertook substantial work in responding to the review, including of the Heritage Council. The statement provides clear strategic expectations for the Heritage Council and identifies how heritage processes contribute to broader government objectives across planning, housing supply, climate action, First Nations partnership and system reform. The Statement of Heritage Priorities is a strategic guide and does not direct outcomes in individual matters. The council's statutory role remains unchanged.

The statement sets out nine priorities. Firstly, the statement asks the Heritage Council to have regard to housing policy and key national and territory frameworks when relevant to its functions. While decisions of the Heritage Council remain independent, the statement confirms the Heritage Council should consider relevant ACT government policy, strategies and legislative frameworks when performing its functions. These include the National Housing Accord; the National Competition Policy; the National Planning Reform Blueprint; the ACT's Planning Strategy; the Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Priorities; and the outcomes in the Territory Plan that apply at the time decisions are made.

The statement also recognises how appropriate adaptive reuse can support well-located housing while protecting and conserving heritage values. Heritage is directly linked to the planning and construction system in the ACT, and I have requested that the council should contribute to the ACT's construction productivity agenda, which is aimed at reducing regulatory burden, streamlining approval processes and supporting innovation in the construction sector. It is my expectation that the council will develop policies, procedures and practices that simplify information and guidance, reduce unnecessary processes of complying with the act and maximise certainty for property owners and developers while encouraging sympathetic and innovative development.

I have asked the council to continue to review their decision-making processes and the content of those decisions to, where possible, achieve efficiencies, to achieve timely decision-making processes and be responsive to heritage stakeholders to ensure that they get timely and appropriate updates regarding the status of their heritage requests. I requested the council provide advice to the City and Environment Directorate on specific actions to contribute to the productivity agenda and respond to any issues raised regarding heritage processes as part of that consultation. The statement asks the

Heritage Council to cooperate with ACT Heritage on the development of a modernised heritage database. The purpose is to improve data quality, timeliness of advice and public access to information across the system.

The statement also asks the Heritage Council to contribute heritage expertise to planning work associated with the extension of light rail to Woden, including integration of heritage considerations into land use planning along the corridor. This is known as the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. The State Circle and Adelaide Avenue corridor are an important part of the heritage of our city and formed part of the original Burley Griffin vision. This is an excellent opportunity for the council to provide input into the heritage aspects of the framework, including practical opportunities to incorporate yet unrealised heritage planning from the Griffins and the NCDC that contribute to this transit-oriented development plan.

Canberra is home to some of Australia's best examples of mid-twentieth century modern design. These contribute substantially to the architectural, social and planning history of the ACT. I suspect that was one of the main reasons why Kevin McCloud from Grand Designs joined Tim Ross in Canberra over the past week to celebrate our modernist heritage here in Canberra. While a number of these places have already been recognised on the ACT Heritage Register or are subject to existing nominations, many other key examples of modernist housing remain under-assessed or undocumented. With Canberra densifying through reforms like the missing middle housing reforms, it is critical that the preservation of key examples of mid-century modern homes is prioritised in the council's work. Noting the conflict of heritage and modernist values, I have asked the council to consider how protection can be achieved in a way that respects modernist principles, including adaptability, functionalism and progressivism.

The ACT has a rich and unique natural and Aboriginal heritage and places of cultural and political significance. A key priority for the government is the protection and conservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage and places through active engagement with First Nations peoples in a way that harmonises with the present and future development needs of the ACT. Traditional custodians must play a significant role in the conservation and management of their cultural heritage, the preservation and conservation of their cultural places and objects and in the planning and development of their traditional lands. I expect that the council will continue to engage with Representative Aboriginal Organisations—known as RAOs—and other Aboriginal groups and traditional custodians to ensure that heritage policies and decisions sensitively, genuinely and meaningfully consider Aboriginal history and culture. I expect the role of traditional custodians and the consideration of First Nations cultural heritage to be front and centre of the council's approach.

The statement also supports climate-responsive approaches in heritage contexts. It expects the Heritage Council to be aware of the National Construction Code 2022 liveable housing and energy efficiency provisions and to support sympathetic upgrades that improve performance and accessibility whilst maintaining the heritage character.

Following the review of the Heritage Council, the statement sets expectations for strong governance and communication, including effective working relationships with ACT Heritage and other agencies, a program of public communication and annual reporting on progress against the statement and the Heritage Council's Action Plan.

The priorities that I have outlined reflect feedback and themes identified through recent engagement and review processes. Consultation with the Heritage Council about the draft statement of heritage priorities has been undertaken in accordance with the Heritage Act, including with Aboriginal members of the council. The Heritage Council welcomed this direction and flexibility in the draft statement and provided supportive feedback. Its response emphasised early engagement in planning processes, participation in the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, opportunities for appropriate adaptive reuse and improvements to guidance and timeliness that support the construction productivity agenda. These priorities will support a well-governed and modern heritage system that is transparent, efficient and aligned with the territory's broader objectives, while supporting heritage values and maintaining independent decision-making.

Canberra's heritage supports community identity and a sense of place and connection to country. The Statement of Heritage Priorities is intended to ensure the heritage system continues to meet community expectations and remains responsive to the opportunities and challenges of a growing city.

I present the following papers:

ACT Heritage Council—Statement of Priorities, undated.
Heritage priorities—Ministerial statement, 25 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.07): I thank Minister Steel for his statement on heritage priorities for the ACT. However, I fear this is less a statement about prioritising Canberra's heritage and more a call for the Heritage Council to avoid standing in the way of development. Canberra's heritage is important. We are still a relatively young city, but our heritage tells the story of our growth, from the early years of the 1920s to the rapid expansion of the 1960s and the bold, brutalist architecture of the 70s and 80s. Our First Nations cultural heritage is the oldest part of that story. I welcome stronger engagement with representative Aboriginal organisations and other Aboriginal groups to ensure culturally significant sites receive the protection they deserve.

When done well, heritage listings and protections do not stifle progress; they enhance it. The adaptive reuse of places like the Old Bus Depot Markets, the Glassworks and even the potential of the Callam Offices shows how the old and the new can complement each other. The co-existence of old and new Barton and old and new Acton adds character. We should not become a monoculture of glass towers.

Heritage housing is also an important part of Canberra's story. Sympathetic additions can both protect heritage and support sustainability, climate resistance and liveability. These homes are also highly valued for their design and history and must remain part of Canberra's housing mix. The minister's call to reduce what he describes as "unnecessary processes" will understandably concern many in the heritage community. I expect they will review this statement closely to understand what protections will

remain.

I do, however, welcome the invitation for the Heritage Council to contribute to the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. As we densify, we must ensure that growth does not come at the expense of Canberra's unique heritage. We owe it to future generations to preserve the defining elements of our past. In Murrumbidgee we are fortunate to have outstanding examples of mid-century architecture, from Enrico Taglietti and Harry Seidler to Pettit & Sevitt, Ian McKay and Miles Jakl. I welcome efforts to protect the best of this remarkable era.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Cost of living—food relief organisations—update Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (12.10): I rise today to speak about an issue that touches the lives of far too many Canberrans—food relief. Canberra is often seen as a city of opportunity and advantage. For many that's true, but, for too many others, putting food on the table is a daily challenge. Food insecurity is a real and ongoing experience in our community. While that is deeply concerning, I continue to be encouraged by the generosity of the individuals, volunteers and organisations who show up every day to help those doing it tough. Last year, the Assembly agreed that we needed a clear, coordinated plan to guide food relief efforts in the ACT. We committed to developing that plan in partnership with the community sector and to bringing it back to the Assembly by March 2026. Today I am pleased to be tabling the ACT Food Relief Action Plan 2026-28.

The action plan has been informed by strong engagement with the government, the Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee and the Food Relief Network. Consultation commenced in July 2025 with the release of a discussion paper to both groups. Over a three-month period from July to October 2025, we held a series of face-to-face meetings and online consultation sessions, providing opportunities for members of the advisory committee and the network to discuss and share their insights and feedback to develop the action plan. Members of the advisory committee and the network also provided submissions directly to the government. In total, 25 individuals, representing 15 organisations, were consulted and contributed to the development of the action plan. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the advisory committee and the network for their valuable input and insights for the development process of the action plan. I would also like to thank VolunteeringACT for their role in coordinating the advisory committee and the network throughout the engagement process.

We took an iterative approach towards the development of the action plan, ensuring a balance between immediate actions and the longer-term strategies. This approach strengthens our understanding of the drivers of food insecurity and enhances capacity in the sector. The action plan outlines the ACT government's goals, guiding principles and focus areas to guide food relief in the ACT. It is structured around three areas: one, feeding our community; two, supporting our services; and, three, enhancing our service system.

These focus areas are supported by six key actions that reflect the foundational work required to progress more strategic and future-focused action in responding to food insecurity in the ACT. The actions include establishing a lived experience forum to gather insights from Canberrans accessing food relief, ensuring their voices inform service planning and delivery; supporting capacity building and workforce development by working with services to identify workforce and organisational development needs and assisting them to access training opportunities aligned with the food relief sector; establishing an ACT government policy position for the food relief system, informed by best practice evidence, research and lived experience—the policy for which will draw on national and local datasets to guide future strategic directions and investment; undertaking a comprehensive mapping of existing providers and service offerings to better understand the types of support available, access pathways and potential service gaps; collaborating with partners to analyse current food sourcing and distribution models and explore opportunities to strengthen these systems through partnerships with commercial entities and other stakeholders; and exploring and supporting the establishment of a shared warehouse model to increase our cold and dry storage capacity across the ACT, enabling more efficient and equitable distribution of food relief.

This action plan marks an important next step in what will be an ongoing collaborative process with the sector to better understand and address the needs of those with lived and living experience. The action plan reflects the government's existing commitments and outlines the initial actions the government will take to deliver meaningfully for the community. Together with the commencement of the Food Bank Fund this year and continued collaboration with our community partners, this action plan establishes the foundations of a food relief system that is accessible, effective and grounded in dignity and respect.

I want to end with a clear call to action. Addressing food insecurity is not something government can do alone; it requires all of us, government, community organisations, business partners and the wider Canberra community, working together. That is something that we will continue to do. I would also just like to take a moment to note that there has already been some commentary on the public record around this, and I note Mr Emerson was on the radio this morning speaking on the action plan. I would like to put on the record that I have appreciated Mr Emerson and his officers' continuing interest and engagement on this issue. As we noted, the Assembly motion passed in February 2025 and required that a final action plan be tabled by March this year. At the time the motion was debated—

Mr Emerson: Point of order, Assistant Speaker, I do not believe this is the statement that was circulated this morning.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Sorry?

Mr Emerson: I do not believe this is the statement that was circulated this morning.

MS ORR: No; okay. That is fine. I will finish. I encourage all members of this Assembly and all stakeholders across the territory to support this action plan and champion the organisations who work every day to make sure no one in our city goes

hungry. Together we can build a more coordinated food relief system, one that ensures every Canberran has access to the support, the stability and the dignity they deserve.

I present the following papers:

ACT Food Relief Action Plan 2026-2028, dated February 2026.

Food Relief Action Plan—Assembly resolution of 4 February 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 25 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.16): I rise to speak in response to the minister's statement this morning on the ACT Food Relief Action Plan. I firstly want to sincerely thank Minister Orr and her office for their ongoing engagement with me and my office, not just in relation to this piece of work but in relation to multiple issues. They have been very responsive and great to work with over the last year, and my team and I are really appreciative.

I do have to say, though, that I am deeply disappointed by the document that has been tabled. To be frank, it reads like a scoping brief that should have been developed in the first month after the motion calling for a food relief action plan was passed. This is not a meaningful action plan that will result in fewer Canberrans going hungry any time soon.

The first action in the plan does not appear until the very end of the second last page of the document. To have as an action, "Establish an ACT government policy position for the food relief system ..." after a year of work is mind-boggling, and it does not bode well for the remaining actions. Should the work going into the action plan not have been premised on a policy position for the food relief system! Other actions are similarly vague and non-committal, with no timelines, no targets, no detail and lots of exploring.

This Food Relief Action Plan, if we can call it that, is a serious disappointment. Surely ensuring Canberrans do not go hungry should have received greater attention and commitment from the government than what has been presented today. This is something we should get right and desperately need to get right, and we are not getting it right.

A year on from this motion, the level of unmet need in our community has only increased. VolunteeringACT's 2026 food relief Snapshot found that all food relief organisations they surveyed had clients that required more food than they could provide. All organisations reported that they must purchase food, as donations alone are not enough. Seventy per cent of organisations reported that their current funding is insufficient to meet demand and that the level of need continues to increase year on year, with no reprieve in sight.

These organisations are full of hardworking, dedicated people who volunteer their time, often their money and their energy to provide food to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. It is a shame that this plan does not respect this

commitment and does not act with the urgency needed. A plan for a plan is not good enough. Roughly 10 per cent of Canberrans are living below the poverty line, including, as of 2022, around 9,000 children—a number that will have risen since then, I am sure.

I want to be clear that I do appreciate the public servants who have worked on this. What I take issue with is that it is clear from what has been tabled this morning that this has not been made a priority by the government. This plan looks like an afterthought—a food relief inaction plan, if anything. This is the plan you come up with in an afternoon when you are scoping out the work program for an actual food relief action plan.

It is pointing to the right things, like consulting with people who have lived experience and exploring and supporting the establishment of a shared warehouse model to increase cold and dry storage capacity across the ACT. These are good things to point to, but it is not enough just to point to them. There is no commitment or any timeline in this document for actually doing these things.

I am not making these remarks for political reasons. I moved this motion because I care about this issue. This issue matters, and I believe many members of the Assembly feel the same way. Certainly, Canberrans do across our community.

There is an immense human cost to the lack of commitment and ambition represented by the document that has been tabled today, not to mention the financial cost of not addressing this problem in a meaningful way. We are spending billions of dollars on hospitals—understandably so—but we are doing so without anywhere near enough consideration of basics like ensuring people in our community have access to sufficient nutritious food—basics that, if not done right, cause huge issues and costs downstream, significantly increasing the burden on an already overburdened healthcare system that is draining the budget.

Unsurprisingly, longitudinal research on the impact of food insecurity on children shows children and young people who experience hunger are more likely to experience poor health outcomes and that repeated exposure to hunger is particularly toxic for long-term outcomes. We are definitely not immune to this in Canberra: 31.2 per cent of children in the ACT have been classified as developmentally vulnerable or at risk on the physical wellbeing domain. Almost a third of our kids in the physical domain are developmentally vulnerable. This is the second highest rate in the country.

According to a recent report from Nutrition Australia ACT, just 2.7 per cent of five to 17-year-olds in the ACT are now meeting their recommended daily vegetable intake, and this number is going down. Yet, we are only spending \$500,000 a year on food relief over the next three years and do not have a plan before us for maximising the impact of the funds that are available. We need to recognise the cross-portfolio impacts of this inaction and acknowledge that it is a dangerous waste of money not to invest in an action plan that actually involves meaningful action, a plan that takes food relief seriously.

I have also had concerns raised with me from community members and stakeholders regarding the \$1.5 million allocated to the Food Bank Fund, a funding commitment I did welcome warmly when it was announced in the government's last budget. This money must be going urgently to the front-line organisations feeding Canberrans—the

individuals, young people, parents and children who would otherwise go hungry.

In a fair society, the hungriest mouths get fed first. A year on from the passage of this motion, far too many hungry mouths in Canberra are not being fed at all. Again, while I thank Minister Orr and her team for their collaborative approach to engaging with me and my team, and I welcome her remarks this morning along those lines as well, I do remain deeply concerned by the so-called plan we have in front of us today. I hope to see the minister's statement this morning followed up with real action to create a comprehensive, systemic approach to actually address the growing issue of food insecurity across our community.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.22): I would like to begin by acknowledging the community organisations who work tirelessly, every day to ensure that people in our city do not go hungry. Their contribution is extraordinary and it deserves our full support. I would also like to express my support for Mr Emerson's views about this action plan. I am not seeing much action in there either.

The question Canberrans will rightly ask is simple: when will this be delivered and what are the timeframes? Food insecurity is not a fringe issue. National data shows more than a million Australian households experience food insecurity, and we know Canberrans are not immune. That is why strong ACT-wide data is essential so that the government can plan properly and ensure support reaches the people and communities who need it most. The government must establish a clear baseline for food insecurity in the ACT and commit to regular reporting so we can measure whether things are improving over time.

We must remember that food relief does not sit in isolation. It intersects with housing stress, health needs, education outcomes and broader cost-of-living pressures. That means the government needs to show real coordination across directorates and work closely with frontline services who understand these challenges firsthand. Firstly, if this action plan is to be more than a statement of intent, it must come with clear milestones, timeframes, accountability and follow-through on the investment already announced. Canberrans deserve more than promises. They deserve meaningful action and measurable progress. Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (12.24): I would also like to thank the minister for her statement, but, again, as Mr Emerson very eloquently put it, and Ms Carrick as well, I am concerned this action plan misses the mark. We do welcome any effort by the government to improve our response to food relief. Food is on the base of the hierarchy of needs. It is core to our survival. It is really alarming when more and more Canberrans, our constituents, report needing to access food relief services and the organisations that support them. I think a lot of the time a high median income in Canberra masks that a lot of people, increasingly more and more people, are doing it tough. The Canberra Food Relief Network has spoken of unprecedented demand in successive budget submissions.

In response to Mr Emerson's motion last year, I appreciate that the government undertook to develop and deliver a coordinated ACT food relief action plan, co-designed—and I will emphasise that word—with the community sector to ensure the provision of sufficient food relief services across the ACT.

I want to acknowledge that in the minister's statement she did talk about three months of consultation with the Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee and the Food Relief Network, informed by a discussion paper. I am certainly eager to hear from the committee and the network on whether they felt that that process met the threshold of co-design, given that in the minister's foreword, and any time we have seen this document referenced publicly, the minister expresses that she was pleased to consult with key partners in shaping the plan and that she thanked the Food and Emergency Relief Advisory committee and the network for their valuable guidance and advice throughout. Everyone is saying consultation happened; no one is disputing that. That is quite different to co-design. It is a shame that through this Assembly process we are not benefiting from comments from community organisations on whether this plan has hit the mark.

I think as Mr Emerson also pointed out, the plan itself is quite short. Three of 11 document pages are the title and index; one is a picture; one is a good, detailed foreword from the minister; and there are four pages of actual content. Don't get me wrong, a succinct plan is a good plan if it is hitting the mark. If it was giving us milestones, if it was giving us timelines, if it was giving us actual steps, it would be a great plan, but I don't know if we have that. I am eager to hear from the organisations themselves and the people who are currently struggling to find enough food to get by on a day-to-day basis, whether it is enough and whether it is clear enough for the government to get done what they need to do.

We do welcome the government's commitment to explore and support the establishment of a shared warehouse model to increase cold and dry storage capacity across the ACT, enabling more efficient and equitable distribution of food relief. We know that is a pain point for the community. I have spoken about the challenge previously. What we really need to see is some indication of where forthcoming funding will go and if government truly believes that that funding is enough to meet the demand in front of us.

I do not believe any of these actions go to the point that food relief providers have been making consistently throughout public advocacy, budget submissions and their own strategic plans. And I want to acknowledge that while the government did commit to the Food Bank Fund in 2025-2026, once again, as Mr Emerson said, we have not heard from them about how that funding will be allocated to food relief organisations over the next two financial years. There is no mention of food relief funding for community organisations outside of this Food Bank Fund, nor any evaluation of the quantum.

I would like to acknowledge previous Greens minister Emma Davidson's work in this space. She previously secured a significant uplift in food relief funding for food relief services, and this is the energy that we need to continue. We should be increasing funding until we can genuinely feed everyone. I also personally hope that action 5, a resolution to analyse current food sourcing and distribution models, takes the opportunity to see how we might bring some of our local farmers on board, or at least interface with the ACT's food and fibre strategy, to understand the value of local food in food relief efforts, especially with the low food miles.

I would also, again, love to know if there will be genuine, ongoing accountability

against this plan and what that accountability will look like. Will the government report back periodically? I hope they do, and I hope that when they do, they leave room for the community organisations that they consulted with to evaluate whether this plan goes far enough to help Canberrans who need food.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (12.29): I want to share the thoughts and disappointments that have been aired about this plan for a plan. Since February last year, over 12 months ago, the minister has had an opportunity to come up with some actions, and that is what this thing is supposed to be called. What we have are some rather obvious statements of things government should be doing all the time anyway—“to talk to providers and to consider developing a policy position”. I am just working from the summary within the minister’s statement.

There has been some press recently, where the Greens leader has questioned the competency of Minister Orr. What a moment for Minister Orr to come out fighting and just totally demolish that perception. What an opportunity. What has happened instead? What we have seen is that the minister, with over 12 months notice from an Assembly resolution, has come up with a document that says, “We’re going to talk to people. We’re going to develop policy. We’re going to consult. We’re going to think really hard about this area.” That is not a sign of competency.

A plan for a plan is not an action plan. This is such a disappointment. I speak in my relatively new portfolio of community services as shadow minister for community services: this is not a service to our community.

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) (12.31), in reply: In my ministerial statement, I got a little bit excited in trying to be efficient so we could all break for lunch and I provided a little bit of additional commentary. I would like to finalise some of the commentary I made and also reflect on some of the comments that have been made, before we finish the debate. As I said, I would note Mr Emerson already provided some commentary on the radio this morning, and I think it is fair to say that he reflected that in the comments he made today. Again, I appreciate the input of Mr Emerson and his office and the continuing interest and engagement on this issue.

As I noted, the Assembly motion that was passed in February 2025 required that a finalised ACT Food Relief Action Plan with associated implementation actions be tabled by March 2026. At the time the motion was debated, I provided the chamber with advice that the timeframes in the motion were inadequate and there would need to be compromises in the consultation and development process to comply with the timeframes set by the Assembly. In recognition of this, I moved an amendment allowing more time. However, this was not supported by the chamber. It is disappointing and it has been, I think, a continual difficulty in working through meeting the expectations assigned to the actions in the motion—not just from the chamber itself but also from the sector and from myself as well—and in doing that in such a way that still complies with the timeframe that the chamber set. This was, I think from memory, one of Mr Emerson’s first motions in an Assembly at the beginning of the term where we were all quite new. I hope that members can reflect on this and take away, I guess, the learning

or the reflection to perhaps sometimes listening to the minister, who is hoping to deliver something that meets their expectations, and allowing the time to actually do that.

Mr Emerson noted that he is not picking on officials in doing this, and I thank him for doing that because, for our officials, who are already working across a wide range of responsibilities, every new piece of work that is generated by motions from this Assembly requires a reprioritisation of ongoing work or for them to actually take on additional work. The timeframe for this did not allow us to go through budgetary processes to secure additional resourcing to progress the action plan, and officials have had to work within their usual business practices to do this. In saying that, they have not been doing this off the side of their desk; they have actually worked quite diligently on this action plan, in addition to their regular responsibilities to deliver both. I think it is important to recognise that they have put in significant efforts under very short timeframes to do this.

I think there is also been some commentary around the food fund being the only funding that goes to food relief in the ACT. That is not correct. As was outlined in the discussion paper that goes with this, there is actually quite a lot of funding that goes into food relief through many different avenues within our community. The Food Relief Fund has just been one commitment to allow for that additional surge funding, given the current pressures that we find ourselves experiencing as a community.

I also want to pick up on the commentary of “a plan to have a plan”. Based on some of the comments here, in varying degrees, that is certainly meant as a disparaging assessment. But the plan itself is intentionally short and a focused document. It contains the commitments to maintaining existing activities and identified six new actions. We took the lead from the motion itself to develop an action plan rather than a policy or strategic framework. Even so, policy considerations were, in fact, a significant point of discussion during the consultation and the engagement process. The paper that was put out to inform this process, which itself is quite lengthy and detailed, flagged a wide range of initiatives by government and community services addressing food insecurity and food access. There was variable feedback from stakeholders on the relevance of the broader picture. Some even rejected its relevance. Some stakeholders communicated that they did not want government focused on emergency food relief but on playing a detailed role as a broker and provider of food supply. Others clearly wanted this process to deliver more funding support for the services that provide emergency relief. But funding decisions are made through the budget process and are not something that can be determined through an action plan process.

Given the large range of divergence within the sector representations that came to us, there was a recognition that we needed a greater consensus on the policy considerations. That is why an action has been included in the plan to work through that and to do it in a timeframe that actually allows for the discussion and a reconciliation of the many different views and a consensus approach on that. So, again, I think while it is very easy to get up and to say that this is “a plan for a plan”, I do not think that properly acknowledges the work that has been undertaken. I also do not think it properly acknowledges that governments traditionally have not had a large role in food relief. It is something that I think the ACT government has done quite a lot of work on. I am the minister who established the ACT Relief Network. That was the first time that government really has gone in and provided food support to the extent that we did. That

was during COVID-19. It was quite extraordinary times. That has put, I think, a lively and constructive consideration as to what government's role should be. But that is not actually settled. There are different views, as I have already reflected in this process. That is something we will continue to work through in looking at how we actually get to that consensus view and an organised and structured way of how we do food relief.

It is also not a simple proposition to just say, "If we give people food we are addressing the need," because, as we know, food relief is one of those challenges where, if you are in a position where you need food relief, usually there are a lot of other things in your life that you are going to need support for. So simply giving people food, I am not convinced, is just the be-all and end-all of actually supporting Canberrans who are experiencing hardship in our city. Working through those complexities is not something that is done in a short period of time—and certainly not within a year. In putting our food relief response in place, it needs to also consider how that links into our other service system responses and providers' work, so that we are actually responding to the needs of the individual, not just saying, "Because we have given you food this week everything is okay."

As I said, there are quite a few complexities in here. It is how we get food to the ACT; it is how we provide food to people who want to get it out within the community; and it is how we support those who need food. They are all really complex matters that were never going to be resolved in 12 months. In putting together this action plan there was a choice I think, for government. The position that we took is, rather than putting up something that might have a particularly firm dates or very detailed actions that are not properly developed, that are not properly scrutinised and that have not gone through the co-design process that people wanted but we could not do because of the limitations on time put on us; there was an opportunity to say, "Instead of doing this, while that more strictly meets the expectations of what should be delivered, even though what it will be will be inadequate because it has not had time to be properly scoped, let's make the harder decision"—knowing it will draw criticism—"and actually put up a plan that says, 'This is all the work we need to do; this is the work that government is committed to doing and this is the work that we will continue doing, even though we know you are all going to criticise us for it.'" My strong view was that it is better to maybe have a little bit of argy-bargy and take a few criticisms than to compromise what is genuinely needed and important work.

So we will continue to work through that—and members are welcome to ask me for updates as we work through it—but it is not something that will be happening quickly. I actually think this will be a very long ongoing conversation with iterative approaches and understandings as we continue to get a better understanding of what it is within our community that we need to be responding to and how best to support that. Those learnings are not going to come instantly. They are not going to come overnight. But certainly the feedback I have received from the sector, through this process is that they are very excited the government is engaging in the concerns and the needs that they see out there and working through bringing together the very different perspectives across the whole range of providers—from your community volunteers to your more organised not-for-profit organisations—and how we can actually start to harmonise that into a service system that really gets to the core of the issues. We will continue to do that work. It would be helpful, if there are any further motions from the Assembly, that the timeframes allow for us to actually do it meaningfully and to put all of our effort into

the focused work and not just having to comply with things that nobody is going to be happy for.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Children and young people—Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030—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) (12.40): In the interests of time, I will table my statement. I present the following paper:

Update on Next Steps for Our Kids—Ministerial statement, 25 February 2026

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (12.41): I was hoping to speak to an additional data point that I think is quite relevant to the statement, but I will keep my remarks very quick in the interests of time. I thank the minister for his statement and update on the Next Steps for Our Kids project. I wish to provide an additional data point from the 2025 *Family matters* report, which may bring further context some of the figures Minister Pettersson provided, and echo his sentiment that we must keep doing better for First Nations children in the ACT.

Family matters is an annual report led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that monitors governments' removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from families and examines what governments are doing to turn the tide on overrepresentation. The findings from their 2025 report tell us that the ACT still has the highest rate in the country of Aboriginal children continuously in out-of-home care for five or more years. This is deeply concerning. It tells us we need to do more to get First Nations children back to their families and communities. It tells us that the long-term impact of child protection involvement on First Nations families remains profound in our territory.

I would like to additionally note that the drivers of harmful child protection involvement—including poverty, housing instability, family violence and systemic inequality—remain significant across the country and continue to shape who enters and stays in the system. These broader pressures do not disappear at the border of the ACT. They are present in our own community and they influence the likelihood that a child becomes involved with out-of-home care in the first place. We must keep working to address these issues properly and properly fund the critical community services who are already doing so. It is good to hear that some progress has been made with Next Steps, but we still have a long way to go. I will leave my remarks there.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Assembly business and Committee business scheduled for today being called on at a later hour this day.

Sitting suspended from 12.43 to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice Cabinet ministers—conduct

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, have you or any of your ministers been influenced by, or sought to change a decision of government by, individuals or entities who provide donations to the ACT Labor Party?

MR BARR: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. That is a very red-tie-like question, Mr Parton. The answer is no.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, has a trade union ever influenced a decision of government?

MR BARR: That is a broad question. In the history of Australian politics, I imagine the answer would be yes.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, can you categorically deny that you or any member of your government have engaged in conduct that may result in an adverse finding by the ACT Integrity Commissioner or the ACT Auditor-General?

MR BARR: I think that question is somewhat hypothetical, and it is also seeking an expression of opinion. To be clear, ministers operate under the ministerial code of conduct.

Public service—handling of staff complaints

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, following serious allegations reported concerning the former Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People. Will the minister outline when her office first became aware of concerns, what actions were taken, and why the government has declined to answer key questions about whether any public servant was disciplined, whether a formal investigation interviewed the commissioner, and whether she was informed of any outcome?

MS ORR: To answer Ms Morris's question, as advised to me, there is a lot that I need to consider around privacy and confidentiality, and employment law. I am hoping to provide a response to the questions that are being raised. I believe Ms Morris is asking about the incident of alleged sexual harassment that was reported in the newspaper. As I have already said on the public record, I was aware that the commissioner had made the allegation. I have been advised that it would be inappropriate to make any further

comment, given that it has been reported that the commissioner has now referred this to police and there is active consideration of that report underway.

MS MORRIS: What information can the minister provide to assure the Assembly that proper processes were followed, accountability was maintained, and that any investigation was thorough and independent?

MS ORR: Again, without being able to go into the specifics of individual cases—the advice to me is that that would be inappropriate—I point Ms Morris to the processes and procedures that we have within the public service for considering complaints of this nature and how that is stepped out through consideration by the standards group, looking at conditions of employment, the EA, and looking at how people have the right to bring a complaint and people have the right to respond. That is to be considered fairly and independently through to conclusion, against the policies and procedures that are in place. I point Ms Morris to that and say that the ACT government and the public service definitely have robust policies and procedures in place to consider these types of allegations when they are raised, in a way that is procedurally fair and in accordance with the law.

MS LEE: Will the minister commit to providing a full timeline of events and outcomes to the Assembly, including when concerns were raised, what steps were taken, and when the government will respond to a question on notice on this matter?

MS ORR: Given the complexities, I will take that question on notice and I will come back with the information I am advised I am able to disclose.

Food Relief Action Plan—Food Bank Fund

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. In last year's budget, the government allocated \$1.5 million over three years to the Food Bank Fund, with the Food Relief Action Plan to guide the allocation of these funds. Minister, has all of the \$500,000 for this financial year been allocated and, if so, how has it been allocated?

MS ORR: The ongoing allocation of the funds associated with the Food Bank Fund—the provision that was made in last year's budget—is something that we will continue to work through. As I previously said, we will be informed for years 2 and 3 of the fund by the consultations in the development of the action plan. That is something that we will continue to work through as to how best to direct that funding. I can certainly keep Mr Emerson updated as we progress through those considerations.

Mr Emerson: A point of order, Mr Speaker, on responsiveness to the question. The question was whether the funding this year has been allocated and, if so, how it has been allocated. I do not believe we got a response to that question.

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

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I would point the member to the part of my answer where I said that we are still working through those considerations.

MR SPEAKER: You are working through those considerations? All right.

MR EMERSON: Minister, has any of the Food Bank Fund funding been used to develop the ACT Food Relief Action Plan that was tabled today or otherwise allocated to purposes other than direct frontline food relief service delivery?

MS ORR: I will take the detail of that on notice and get advice from the directorate. My understanding is that the majority of the funding went to maintaining surge funding that had previously been provided, particularly to increased transport costs for getting food relief supplies to the ACT, and that that has been the bulk of the funding for the financial year that we are currently in—the first year of the Food Bank Fund. There was funding provided as part of the Food Bank Fund to the relief network in VolunteeringACT to continue secretariat support. So, depending on how you interpret Mr Emerson’s question, you could say that that funding would fit into the parameters of what Mr Emerson has said. But I am not quite sure that is exactly what he was going to—so I will leave you to make that judgement.

He was asking whether there was any funding put towards the public service budgeting from the Food Bank Fund to deliver the action plan. My understanding is that it was not—that the funding put elsewhere—but I will double check that with the directorate.

MS CARRICK: Minister, why does the Food Relief Action Plan not include timelines for any of the actions it contains?

MS ORR: The Food Relief Action Plan has a timeline for the 2026 to 2028 period that exists within. It is designed to be that shorter action plan to show that this is what we will be progressing during this time. That was set through a range of considerations, including feedback through the consultations we did on what was an appropriate period of time to work through these issues, to inform the matters that were raised by the sector and to get an adequate level of detail to inform future actions in looking at how government best supports food relief within the ACT.

So I do not agree with the premise that there is no timeline attached. There absolutely is. It is the timeline of the action plan, and we continue to work through those actions against that timeline.

Transport Canberra—bus frequency

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. I have received multiple reports from constituents about northbound R4 and R5 buses leaving the Woden interchange full and skipping subsequent stops between 8 am and 9 am on weekdays. It appears that capacity reductions on this route to cater for delays from the Commonwealth Avenue bridge works have been too severe. As well as leaving commuters stranded at bus stops, this reduction in capacity is creating its own delays due to overcrowded buses having to spend longer loading and unloading at each bus stop. Minister, when will you restore some of the cancelled services on the northbound R4 and R5 routes during the morning commuter peak?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Obviously, it is perhaps a discussion that we are about to have after question time with the motion before the Assembly

moved by Ms Clay and Mr Braddock in relation to bus services and the impact of the current construction works that are occurring by the NCA. There was a substantial update that was provided to the community that we are still seeing things bedding down on the traffic network and also in changes to behaviour on our roads and amongst bus passengers in adjusting to the updated public transport bus network. We are monitoring very closely the R4 service. We have seen some buses at capacity. I caught the bus—I think it was the R4, I think it was yesterday—through to the City and Belconnen, in fact.

Obviously on the earlier services there is more room for commuters but it is really those at that peak time that we are looking at, whether there can be some extra services added. We will look to do that as early as we can. We have indicated to the community, and I updated the Assembly earlier in the year, that that would be at the earliest in term 3, once we understand what spare capacity we have within the network to be able to then deliver extra services on those routes that need extra capacity. We are also looking at whether we can improve the level of service being provided to West Belconnen and particularly around both the 12 and 13, but also potentially the extension again of the R2 and R3 through to Fraser West and Spence. So yes, we are looking at this, and we are looking at making changes to provide extra capacity on the R4 route as early as term 3.

MS CARRICK: Minister, are Transport Canberra officials continuing to hold discussions with the National Capital Authority about extending the northbound bus lane south from Albert Hall to Coronation Drive to relieve the bottleneck?

MR STEEL: It is not an active discussion, but there has been consideration of that in the past as part of the work that the Disruption Taskforce had been doing at the time around exploring options for improvements to bus priority in the area. That did not progress because of the traffic modelling at the time.

City Environment Directorate, Roads ACT and Transport Canberra have been working closely with the NCA on their temporary traffic arrangements during the construction period. I do not believe there is any suggestion of any change to what is currently in place, noting that one bridge will finish work and the other one will need to close around 2027. So there will be some adjustments that are made to the temporary traffic arrangements, but I do not think that extension of bus priority through to Coronation Drive is part of that at this particular point in time.

Obviously we are seeing delays on the traffic network as expected. The extent of those delays are slightly different to the modelling, but the delays are still there on the roads where we expected. But if there is spare capacity in the network, then we will return that through the provision of extra services as soon as possible. I will outline the reasons more fully in the debate about why that is the case in terms of the timing for the next update to the network and timetable.

MR EMERSON: Minister, is the government concerned that the deterioration in rapid bus reliability undermines your emissions reduction targets and mode shift targets?

MR STEEL: Reliability of the network is critical and that is why we updated the network and timetable to have a focus on reliability. If we had not made changes to the

network and timetable that took into account the modelled impact of the NCA's bridge closure, then the buses would have been incredibly unreliable right across the system. It could have been chaotic. So we had to make a difficult decision to update the network and adjust service levels right across the network to make sure that we could maintain as much reliability as possible.

Now that we have an actual understanding of what the real conditions are on the traffic network and the impact on the timings of bus runs, we can now make those adjustments that we anticipated we would need to make. That is the process that Transport Canberra is in at the moment, understanding how the network is operating as it beds down. We are now into the fourth week, so it is still relatively early days. Once we have an understanding of those delays in the network, we can then adjust the timetable again to make sure that the system is even more reliable than it is now, but the actions we have taken have prioritised reliability. That has been front and centre because we know that is what transport users really value, that when a bus is timetabled it shows up. That is why we have had to adjust the network and timetable.

There will be further revisions to make to improve reliability and that can happen as early as term 3 in terms of major updates, but there may be some tweaks that we can make before then, particularly for buses that are running early. We are looking at an earlier update to the timetable to adjust for those.

Aged care—federal government funding

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Health.

In a recent Senate estimates hearing, the Department of Health reported that the \$2 billion that was intended to go to aged care to address the issue of elderly people stranded in hospital due to a lack of available places in residential aged care is now not actually going to go to aged care after all and that it was the states and territories that requested this change.

Minister, what was the ACT's position on this issue during discussions about the National Health Funding Agreement?

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, you will be taking this one?

MR BARR: I will, given I was in the negotiations.

Certainly it was the view of a number of states and territories that they wanted flexibility in relation to the application of the additional commonwealth funding into the health system. I do need to be clear that no state or territory suggested that this was not a continuing priority that may in fact attract more than the commonwealth's notional allocation during the negotiations. But there was a view also that—given the different positions of different states and territories in relation to how big an issue this was in their respective health systems—there needed to be a degree of flexibility. Mr Rattenbury has, I think, sat around the table at these federation discussions in other portfolios and would be familiar with a common refrain—that is, that is that may well be an issue in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, but it is not in WA, the Northern Territory or Tasmania. So flexibility is often sought.

The ACT's position was that we recognised this was one of the priority areas, that we would dedicate a degree of resource to this, that we wanted the Commonwealth to do more in relation to aged care supply but that if we did not have aged care beds with which to move people into, there was a risk that the money being allocated to us could not be fully utilised. So we were agreeable with the other states and territories that there be flexibility, noting that we would still have this as a priority.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. My subsequent question then is how will the ACT allocate this money in light of the decision that was taken overall? Where will it be prioritised in the areas that were identified?

MR BARR: Obviously the Minister for Health and the ERC will work through the detail of that in the coming budget round, but it will remain a priority. But we are not going to ease up on the commonwealth in relation to their responsibilities for the provision of aged care and increasing aged care supply.

We are, however, very willing to work with the commonwealth in terms of land release and potential rezoning that would make the supply of increased aged care accommodation more viable by identifying sites for such accommodation to be built.

I would certainly encourage colleagues in the Assembly to have this in mind during in deliberations around future planning changes. Some examples include the potential for aged care to be built as part of the club diversification away from poker machines, Mr Speaker. That is one example, but there would be many others where we could identify more land for aged care, because undoubtedly our city will need more aged care places in the future.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you inform the Assembly how much a night in hospital costs for a patient waiting for discharge compared to a night in a residential aged care facility?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Ms Clay, for the question. I will take the detail of the question on notice, but this is a point that we have repeatedly made to the commonwealth government—that is, it is costly to have maintenance care patients in hospital. It also depends on the patient's condition, but when patients are medically ready for discharge and waiting to transition to an aged care residential aged care facility there is also a copayment in most cases that is paid by the patient as well.

It is obviously a very significant issue, as I indicated to Mr Rattenbury yesterday, and something that the states and territories, before almost every health minister's meeting, put out a media release on, detailing the number of maintenance care patients awaiting discharge to aged care before almost every health minister's meeting. Just before the last health minister's meeting it indicated that 79 patients were in ACT hospitals awaiting discharge to residential aged care. The cost of a hospital bed for a maintenance care patient will vary from patient to patient. So I will endeavour to provide Ms Clay with an average cost for a maintenance care patient. The actual cost will obviously vary from person to person versus a zero-cost for residential aged care facility which is funded by the commonwealth government and does not cost the ACT government anything. Therein lies the issue.

Higher education—enrolments

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you provide an update on the health of the territory's higher education sector?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question, and, yes, I can provide the Assembly with an update. I can say that following a very challenging 2025, things are looking up for the higher education sector. There is new investment. We are seeing growing enrolments, and the sector is, as I mentioned this morning, central to Canberra's identity as Australia's knowledge capital. Our institutions are now educating more than 60,000 students each year, so around one in eight Canberrans is, in fact, studying at one of our institutions, and that includes over 20,000 international students, reflecting sustained demand and global confidence in Canberra as a place to study.

Enrolments are continuing to grow. The University of Canberra, for example, has reported an 11 per cent rise in its domestic undergraduate enrolments for 2025. We are seeing significant investment in the sector, which is very pleasing, including what will be the biggest new project this century, being the new UNSW Canberra city campus, which will bring with it, upon completion, around 6,000 students into the city centre and hundreds of new jobs for our city. This growth is, of course, being supported by expanded student accommodation and strong collaboration between our higher education institutions. Taken together, it all demonstrates a resilient, high-performing sector that is creating opportunities for students, supporting jobs and strengthening Canberra's economic future.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what does the growth in enrolments mean for the territory's economy?

MR BARR: In short, it means jobs and opportunities, jobs and opportunities, jobs and opportunities. And that extends not just across the higher education sector but across our entire economy. International education alone is the territory's largest export industry—\$1.54 billion in 2023-24. It has grown; it has more than doubled. This matters for our city not just for the higher education institutions and all of the staff who work there but for retail, hospitality and all of the other areas of the economy where students, who come here from around Australia and around the world to study, either work in or spend their time in or spend their money in. It is a really critical sector of the territory's economy. As I mentioned this morning, each additional student is not only a potential future researcher, entrepreneur and community leader but also a direct contributor to our city—its social and cultural vibrancy, as well as its economic future.

International students and students from around Australia are warmly welcome in Canberra. I think it is important, in light of current political debates in this country, that we send that message loud and clear. We welcome students studying in Canberra.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how are our education providers working together to ensure choice for those choosing to live and study in Canberra?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. I think a really special part of Canberra's education offering is the close collaboration between our higher

education and vocational education and training providers. They work together. They are often not competing directly with one another; they offer complementary education opportunities. In the trade mission I led to India earlier in the month, they were all working together as part of a strong Study Canberra initiative, and I welcome that collaboration. I welcome the fact that they will work together on combined educational offerings and articulation pathways from one institution to the other. I welcome that they work together on research projects—ANU and UNSW, for example, in areas of space and defence and quantum, and other areas where we have nation leading and often world leading research capability. I look forward to that continuing.

Not only is the higher education sector critical to Canberra's economic future—when you consider one in eight people are studying, and then when you add in the people who work, it is around one in six Canberrans who have a connection to our higher education sector. It is the powerhouse of our economy. It reflects the values we hold as a city, Australia's knowledge capital. No other city in this country has that level of concentration of educational attainment and educational opportunity. It is a massive comparative advantage for Canberra and one that we are pursuing aggressively, nationally and internationally.

Vocational education and training—enrolments

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. A recent report by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research found that the number of government-funded students in training had fallen by 5.1 per cent for the period January to September 2025. Minister, why has current government spending failed to attract Canberrans to vocational training?

MR PETTERSSON: There is a wide range of reasons why enrolment numbers are not where we need them to be, as a city. I would first point to the very tight labour market that we are experiencing in the ACT. As many members would know and appreciate, it is easier now to get a job in the ACT than at any other time in self-government history. This means that, increasingly, people—commonly young people—do not need to pursue vocational education to attain jobs, as they have at other times. This presents, of course, challenges for the skills mix of the city, moving into the future.

The government is committed to ensuring that we do have the appropriate skills for our growing city, which is why we will continue to invest in and support learners in our city. In recent budgets we have increased subsidies for apprenticeships. We have provided cost-of-living payments. I will note that there are some positive signs. I note that CIT has recently held their enrolment season, and they are looking at an uptick in their enrolments.

MS MORRIS: Minister, how is it possible to announce a \$51 million increase in skills spending but end up supporting fewer students?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Morris for the supplementary question. A lot of this spend in skills is demand driven. We can only fund apprenticeships when there is an apprentice in place. We do, however, continue to invest in the wider skills ecosystem, to make sure that the systems, the networks and the facilities are in place and are there to provide the training opportunities that we need for our city. I do not accept there is a

clear link between the total spend in skills, as a pure measure, and the number of students. There is continued investment from this government in supporting vocational education, and that is more than just the number of students.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how does the government plan on translating spending into actual outcomes in this year's budget instead of repeating its mistakes?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Milligan for the supplementary question. I reject the premise of the question. This government has a strong commitment to our skills agenda. That is evidenced by our election commitments, and our work over many years in government.

I would urge Mr Milligan and the Canberra Liberals to get on board. I would observe that the Canberra Liberals are lacking skills policies. If the Canberra Liberals do have useful suggestions, I would love to hear them; but, as I understand it, they do not currently have any policies. If they would like to, they can get on board and support what we are doing, because we are committed to growing the skills mix of this city.

We acknowledge—and I am up-front about it—that, right now, we are in an incredibly tight labour market, and there are not the same number of people pursuing vocational education. That is a problem right now—also, into the future. It is a problem that we are keen to address, and we will continue to invest in and support solutions to improve that mix.

ACT Policing—hate speech laws

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries. As Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, do you support the actions of ACT police on Wednesday, 18 February when they removed artistic posters featuring political commentary and subsequently closed the venue, disrupting a live, ticketed music event?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Clay for the question and her continued advocacy for the arts in our city. The ACT government very clearly supports artistic freedom, and we also support the right for people to acquire and display art. I acknowledge the events on Wednesday last week were incredibly distressing for many members of the community—most certainly the performers and those who were seeking to attend that live music performance. That is a disruption to the arts but also small business. I appreciate the chilling effect that incident and the subsequent discussion and coverage have on artistic expression in our city. I think that is concerning.

I appreciate, however, that this is an ongoing matter. The ACT government has always been very clear within our own laws that we support artistic freedom. I note that the events relate to commonwealth law. In that spirit, I have written to the commonwealth minister, Tony Burke, to reiterate the ACT government's firm commitment to artistic freedom, but to also ensure his awareness of these matters.

Ms Clay: A point of order on relevance: I do not think it is an ongoing matter. Police have said that they are not pursuing any prosecution or charges. The question was: do you support the actions of ACT police on Wednesday, 18 February, given the matter is

now closed? I am wondering if that is a question that could be answered.

MR SPEAKER: The minister was broad in his response. He was not entirely specific. I think he went to the issue and expressed a view but has not necessarily commented directly on police action. Do you have anything further to add, Minister?

MR PETTERSSON: I am happy to, Mr Speaker. I am not going to run commentary on the actions of police. I appreciate that they have a very challenging role to fulfil each and every day, but I have spoken to the events of that evening.

MS CLAY: Minister, what discussions have you had with the police minister around ensuring police have training and education so that art is not unjustly criminalised?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Clay for the supplementary question. I have spoken to Minister Patterson about these events. I do not think those conversations went to education for police, but I appreciate the suggestion from Ms Clay underpinning that question. It is something that I will consider further.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, have you had any contact with the owner of Dissent Cafe and Bar since they were raided by police for hanging political art in their windows on Wednesday, 18 February? If so, what was the outcome of those conversations?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Rattenbury for that question. To the specifics of the question, I have not spoken to that individual. I would, of course, be very willing and happy to entertain a conversation with them, noting their passion for live music and politics. I am sure it would be an interesting conversation. I appreciate that they have gone through a very challenging time in recent days, and I appreciate they may have a desire to speak with me. I would very happily make myself available if that were the case.

Vocational education and training—enrolments

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to Minister for Skills. Fee-free TAFE at the Canberra Institute of Technology was intended to provide free training for people seeking to learn or upskill and is jointly funded by the commonwealth and the ACT government. Minister, is the program delivering measurable results?

MR PETTERSSON: Mr Speaker, could I get Mr Milligan to repeat that?

MR SPEAKER: The last bit or the whole thing?

MR PETTERSSON: It is the last bit he keeps dropping off on.

MR SPEAKER: So the actual question rather than the preamble.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay. Minister, is the program delivering measurable results—the fee-free training courses at CIT?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Milligan for the question. Fee-free TAFE is an important initiative, in conjunction with the commonwealth government,

that supports people who might not otherwise be entering vocational education to do so by providing access to VET without fees. This is, I think, particularly important for the priority cohorts that are identified in fee-free TAFE that we are seeking to further participate within vocational education. This is an important initiative that reduces barriers to entry that is wildly popular. It is oversubscribed, which I think speaks to the high regard with which it is held in the community.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how many fee-free TAFE graduates have moved directly into employment in areas of recognised skills shortages?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Milligan for the question. There are a couple of elements to that. Not all non-completions are inherently a bad thing for that learner. If they are transitioning out of vocational education midway but that is into the employment they were seeking, that is considered, I think, a positive outcome. There are of course some elements underpinning that that would cause concern. The future skills of our city requires those completions and the qualifications to exist.

I will take it on notice and do my best to provide an answer. I will note that free TAFE has only been in place for a couple of years. So we do not necessarily have full completion rates, because not everyone who has undertaken one of those placements will have been able to complete their qualification in this time. I will take it on notice and see what we can provide.

MR CAIN: Minister, will your government ensure that fee-free TAFE at CIT continues beyond its current funding allocation?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the member for the question. As the member would appreciate, I am not in a position to make announcements. I would also point to the fact that this is a partnership with the commonwealth. I acknowledge that the commonwealth have been very firm in their support in seeking to legislate free TAFE in this country, which I believe was not supported by all political parties in the commonwealth parliament.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR PETTERSSON: Believe it or not, Chief Minister, there is a particular political party that have not been supportive of free TAFE. So I genuinely appreciate this passion being displayed by the Canberra Liberals for the benefits of free TAFE. We here in ACT Labor will continue to support it, in partnership with the commonwealth. I take this may be as a sign of hope that maybe the Canberra Liberals will, but I am still waiting for their skills policy from the last election.

Domestic Violence Crisis Service—government funding

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Last week, the CEO of DVCS advised me that the government had informed the frontline service that the available funding for the next financial year was 20 per cent less than the current year. In a statement to the *Canberra Times*, you said the government would not be cutting their funding. If your statement to the Times is correct, why have DVCS been told that there will be 20 per cent less funding available

from 1 July?

DR PATERSON: The ACT government is very strongly committed to supporting our specialist domestic, family and sexual violence sector. DVCS plays a really critical role in that, in supporting victim-survivors but also working with people, men, who use violence to change their behaviour. So I want to acknowledge the critical work of their staff and their service. We are currently going through a core contract negotiation with three of the core services in the ACT, so DVCS, CRCC—so Canberra Rape Crisis Centre—and EveryMan. As part of those negotiations, both DVCS and CRCC have a funding cliff that is coming at the end of the June-July financial year. This is obviously something that DVCS and the ACT government is well aware of. I have raised this issue with my colleagues and worked to be able to provide a clear statement to DVCS and CRCC that that core funding, that drop off, will not occur for the 2026-27 financial year. We are just entering into a budget process now. So there will be a process that we will go through to understand the full picture of domestic family sexual violence funding in this next financial year and ongoing.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why is the government not making the same investments in frontline service providers as the significant commitments recently made by the New South Wales and Victorian governments?

DR PATERSON: I am not aware of the interstate commitments that are being made, but we went to the budget and we provided a significant amount, \$30 million, of new funding to the domestic family sexual violence sector in the last budget. We recognise that this violence is a complete scourge on our society and the ongoing need and support of these services to victim-survivors. As I said, we are going through a budget process as we speak and so this will be a matter for cabinet consideration.

MR PARTON: Minister, could you provide the Assembly with up-to-date data showing how much the government has spent on family and domestic violence, broken down by spending on ACTPS activities compared with frontline service providers, over the last five years?

DR PATERSON: Yes, I absolutely can. This is in the budget documents over the last five years and it is also in the ACT domestic family sexual violence fact sheet. This is a fact sheet that we put out with the budget last year. So this very clearly articulates the entire lot of spending and what has gone to each service or program. It also articulates that 100 per cent of the Safer Families Levy has gone to frontline services. So I encourage Mr Parton to go to the ACT government website and the information is all there. I also really encourage him to circulate this information to colleagues and community because it is a really helpful fact sheet that clearly articulates the government's priorities in spending to address domestic family sexual violence.

CBR 2030 ACT Strategic Economic Development Framework

MR BRADDOCK: The government's newly released CBR 2030 ACT Strategic Economic Development Framework fails to consider regional employment and economic activation of town centres that lack major employers such as Gungahlin. This is despite a recent Gungahlin Community Council survey of 1320 residents showing 82.8 per cent of respondents stating they believe the ACT government should

implement targeted strategies to attract commercial businesses to Gungahlin. Chief Minister, what consideration did the government make during the revision of the economic development strategy to generating employment in town centres that lack a significant employment base?

MR BARR: That was not the purpose of the strategy. The strategy is around the territory and its broader economic drivers in relation to specific regions within the ACT. Obviously the levers there are principally in the planning space. As it relates to distribution of employment across the ACT, we are the most polycentric city in Australia in terms of our employment nodes. But it is acknowledged that some town centres do not have the same level, particularly, of commonwealth government employment as others, and some town centres are at different stages of their economic development.

As it relates specifically to the Gungahlin town centre, the Suburban Land Agency will shortly be proceeding with the Gungahlin town centre east developments that include areas that are currently just vacant lots and including a series of lots that have a light rail stop central to their economic development opportunity. There will be further land release and further commercial development opportunities for the Gungahlin town centre specifically. More broadly, we are obviously pursuing inbound investment and we have had significant discussions with the Scentre group in relation to Woden and Belconnen and with the owners of South Point in relation to Tuggeranong. And the SLA is leading work in relation to Gungahlin and the minister for planning is of course leading work in relation to the future Molonglo town centre.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, are there any economic development strategies being implemented to increase employment in Gungahlin?

MR BARR: Yes, there are a number that specifically of course relate to both the prospectus that was issued around future commonwealth employment opportunities together with the work of the Suburban Land Agency around that future land release and the zoning that would attract particular investment. We do also have an outreach program where we do seek to engage with major retailers, for example, around establishing or expanding their network of operations in the ACT.

I think it is fair to say, Mr Speaker, that generally if there is only one or two outlets in the ACT, they will tend to have a north side and a south side. Where an entity might be large enough and have a volume of sales sufficient to have a presence in every town centre—supermarkets, banks, certain major retailers—then Gungahlin has increasingly seen that investment. But there is scope for more.

I think there is also a reality, though, that our economy is evolving and being reshaped and we do not know entirely the impact that artificial intelligence will have on the labour market in Canberra, let alone in Australia. But the only thing I am certain of is that it will change that dynamic. Some jobs will disappear; new jobs will be created. And given Gungahlin was the first area connected to the National Broadband Network, it has a significant advantage over other parts of the ACT that are still to be connected to that broadband network.

MISS NUTTALL: Chief Minister, how can the government say it is focused on giving

people back time while not addressing local employment opportunities?

MR BARR: Well, Miss Nuttall, with respect, I do reject the premise of the question. We are focused on both local employment opportunities, territory-wide employment opportunities, because often the question is not which part of Canberra will get the investment, it is where the Canberra will get any investment at all. And this is often a challenge we face as a very small economy, even within Australia, let alone in a global context.

Giving back time is also about transport investment and ensuring that people can move around the city effectively and I think we have a shared agreement and understanding that the work we did together in government to deliver light rail for Gungahlin, for example, was in fact an important project to give back time and to invest heavily in people's ability to move around the city in a sustainable and a low emissions way as well. So we will continue that focus. Investment in giving back time is more than just employment, but I do acknowledge employment is a factor. But clearly trends around working from home give back a considerable amount of time that would otherwise be lost to commuting in any circumstance, even if it were localised commuting.

Public schools—staffing

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Last year the minister promised there would be no redundancies for permanent staff in ACT public schools in 2026. In turn, we were worried that that has hung casual staff out to dry. We are already hearing of classes being split, collapsed and cancelled this year, so we clearly need to do more to retain our teaching staff.

Minister, how many classes have been split, collapsed or cancelled so far this year?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, if the directorate does not currently collect these figures or make them available publicly, when will they start doing so to provide a public record for how frequently kids are missing out on learning?

MS BERRY: I reject that students in our schools are missing out on learning. There is a range of different ways, and processes that our schools use, to manage vacancies when they arise. We have talked about teacher vacancies in this place a number of times, that COVID has a very long tail and that we require teachers and school staff not to come to work when they are ill. And that is appropriate. Unfortunately, over the last couple of years, we have seen an increase in the number of staff contracting COVID or having flu-like symptoms and being unable to work. The Education Directorate works very closely with schools to ensure that we can provide those relief staff when they are available. Also, schools work hard to provide alternative learning and teaching arrangements when those circumstances do occur.

I believe that that information is provided to schools at the school community level, which is appropriate. I do not believe that the Education Directorate collects that data. I am not sure of the purpose of it, given that schools provide that information to their communities.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, can you guarantee that class splits, collapses and cancellations will reduce this year? And if not, why not?

MS BERRY: That is very hypothetical. I do not know what the flu season is going to be like this year or whether COVID is going to step up again this year, so I cannot give that guarantee. What I can guarantee is that schools will work hard to ensure that students get learning in a range of different ways, if they have to make alternative lesson arrangements, should there be staff in our schools who are sick. Of course, I would hope that everybody in this place would agree that coming to work unwell is not a priority for our schoolteachers. We would want them to take the time off so that they are well enough to work when they are much better and in a healthy position. It is a challenging environment. Education is not the only space where managing increases in flu or COVID-like symptoms is becoming a challenge for us to manage as a society, but I think our schools do an excellent job in managing that in the circumstances when that does occur.

Economy—private sector

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Treasurer. The 2025-26 midyear budget review revealed that growth in gross state product was largely driven by government spending, with private investment lagging behind. Treasurer, why is government spending the only thing driving growth in gross state product?

MR STEEL: I do not accept that. Certainly, government spending, mainly by the commonwealth government, being the largest employer in the territory, does affect gross state product—and, of course, the ACT government as well. We do expect that, over the forward estimates, we will start to see a pick-up in private demand, which will contribute to that economic indicator in the future. Yes, there has been a substantial amount of spending by the commonwealth. Obviously, they are taking steps around constraining growth, and re-prioritisation, in much the same way that the ACT government is, and we expect that that will be replaced in the future by a pick-up in private demand.

MR MILLIGAN: Treasurer, what impact did your increased taxes on businesses have on private investment?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Obviously, we continue to monitor the performance of the economy, which is, of course, leading the nation in terms of GSP growth, and years of uninterrupted growth in the territory. With the decisions that we make, we do need to think about the implications of those, but we have been very careful about that. The decisions that we took in the context of an economy the size of ours were relatively small, so there was not a significant change, or a change at all, to economic forecasts as a result of the decisions that we made in the budget last year. Of course, in every budget we will need to consider the circumstances in which we are making decisions, and we will need to think about that very carefully.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, how does the government plan on reversing its terrible track record on incentivising private investment, given the latest economic indicator summary shows that private investment fell by 0.4 per cent in the last quarter and is

now down to, on those numbers, 55 per cent of the economy versus 77.3 per cent in other jurisdictions, and government consumption has now reached 63.9 per cent of total consumption?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We will continue the economic development strategy, some of which the Chief Minister has outlined in answer to questions in question time today—supporting a knowledge economy, continuing to invest in infrastructure that is required by our city and which also supports business growth and investment in the territory.

We will continue to look at our settings in every budget around taxation and a range of things to make sure that we remain competitive. We have the National Competition Policy agreement with the commonwealth, where we are looking at competition settings, particularly as they relate to planning, as well as the broader labour market and labour mobility. We are undertaking the largest updates to the Territory Plan since self-government to support more housing investment through enabling more supply. This is an economic reform as much as it is about a moral imperative to provide more homes for the people that need them. All of those are our focus, and will support continued investment in the territory.

Taxation—payroll tax

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries. A recent Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey revealed that businesses with 15 to 24 employees face stress because they sit near the threshold for payroll tax. Minister, how many businesses will be impacted by the government's rushed decision to reduce the threshold for payroll tax during last year's budget?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. As Mr Milligan would appreciate, tax policy does not sit with me, but I am happy to take the question on notice and see if we can provide a figure.

MR MILLIGAN: Will the minister apologise to small business owners for the government's ambush with its changes to payroll tax?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Milligan for the supplementary. I reject the premise of the question. The ACT government, in setting its tax policy, has consideration of a wide range of factors, so I reject the premise of the question.

MS BARRY: Minister, are you aware of any staff who have been laid off in anticipation of the payroll tax changes?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Barry for the question. No; I am not aware. In my meetings with businesses, no-one has raised that specific outcome with me.

Yerrabi Yurwang—government funding

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, your government has repeatedly acknowledged the need for culturally safe Aboriginal community-controlled health services in north Canberra. This includes commitments made in the

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-28 to build and strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, including health-related services, which includes the Yerrabi Yurwang Health Centre. Minister, is it not the case that your government has left Yerrabi Yurwang without the funding certainty it needs to continue delivering frontline health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Gungahlin?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure which part of the Leader of the Opposition's question was a direct quote. As I think I have indicated before, I met with some Yerrabi Yurwang board members in December. The organisation has been in ongoing conversations with our officials since then to understand what their short-, medium- and long-term requirements are to deliver a sustainable primary care service on Canberra's northside. I recognise the commitment of the board, the CEO and staff to delivering that service.

I wrote to Minister Butler about this matter, encouraging him or his office to meet with Yerrabi Yurwang to talk this through to understand what funding arrangements might be available from the commonwealth, given that both primary care and Aboriginal medical service funding are the responsibilities of the commonwealth government. They have recently met. In fact, just today I have received a response from Minister Butler outlining that there will be a new grants program that Yerrabi Yurwang would probably be eligible to apply for. That will be released in the next financial year. It is useful to have that confirmation. There was no confirmation of any short-term funding.

Our officials continue to talk to Yerrabi Yurwang about what may be required in the short-term. But what I have sought is an understanding of what the pathway to sustainability in the medium to long term looks like. The amount of funding that Yerrabi has been seeking for a very short period of time is quite a significant amount of funding. I am concerned that, if there is no pathway to sustainability, this is not necessarily the best use of our resources in that environment where there is not a sustainable pathway.

MR PARTON: Minister, in those discussions with Yerrabi Yurwang's leadership, did you indicate that the ACT government would steadfastly pursue securing ongoing support and, if so, why has that commitment not been honoured?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question. I did indicate that I would advocate to the commonwealth government to have these conversations to seek for there to be a sustainable funding solution in the medium to longer term in these areas of commonwealth responsibility. I have done that. I understand that Senator Gallagher has also met with Yerrabi Yurwang to have these conversations. I have also had advocacy from the member for Fenner, Andrew Leigh, and I have had a conversation with him about that.

As I indicated in response to the first question, I have written to Minister Butler and my office has spoken to the office of Minister Butler. I received a response from Minister Butler indicating the pathways for Yerrabi Yurwang to potentially be funded by the commonwealth. I know that commonwealth officials have also been meeting with them about this. So we do continue to have these conversations. We recognise that there is a lot of passion and a lot of commitment, but we also want to ensure that there is a pathway to sustainability for this organisation, given the very significant amount of

funding that Yerrabi has been seeking from the ACT government, in a very short period of time—having first been made aware of the funding request and the quantum of it in December, if not January, in terms of the quantum.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you step in today and secure that Yerrabi Yurwang does not close up shop?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Barry for the question, but yesterday the opposition asked a number of questions about the operation of the Financial Management Act and the responsibility for officials to act within the law when spending ACT government funding. There was no specific program established in the last budget that could potentially fund this organisation. There are some related areas of funding where there is potentially opportunity to move some funding around—and that is the conversation I have had with Yerrabi Yurwang. There is also a funding opportunity that is currently open. That is \$1.5 million to expand bulk-billing for children and young people under 16, and we have ensured that Yerrabi Yurwang is aware of that opportunity. But, of course, the funding from that would not flow until next year.

The conversation we are having with them at the moment is to understand what the need is, to understand what the pathway to sustainability is and for our officials to understand whether there is any funding that could be made available for this purpose under the FMA.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR PARTON: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, in 2024, the ACT government awarded a \$444 million contract to JJ Richards of Hume for the provision of kerbside waste collection in the ACT. What involvement did the Transport Workers' Union have in the selection of the successful tender, including representations to the directorate, the minister's office, or the minister?

MR BARR: I will need to take that question on notice. I am not privy to every single engagement in relation to that, or indeed any, procurement. The Transport Workers' Union would of course have an interest in representing its members and in any transmission of business from one contractor to another. I have been around this place long enough to know that, were there any changes in the arrangements associated with their employment, from one contractor to another, that Mr Parton—or whoever was sitting in the opposition leader's chair—would be asking a different set of questions, and those in the media would be asking a different set of questions.

This appears to be a fishing exercise from the opposition in relation to this matter. We will take that for what it is.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, how can you ensure that your government ministers maintain arm's length from procurement arrangements, given the TWU's and unions' ability—given your answer in question time earlier—to influence government policy?

MR BARR: Well, there is a difference between policy and a procurement. I think

Mr Parton has been around long enough to know that. Government can set a policy, for example, that in a transition from one contractor to another that there would be no loss of conditions for the staff who are working in that context. So that would be a policy decision. The decision as to who wins a particular procurement is of course, entirely at arm's length from ministers, as it should be.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, given the ongoing issues with probity and corruption concerns, do you believe it is appropriate for trade unions to continue to have influence on government procurement?

MR BARR: I think organisations that represent employees—whether they are formally trade unions or indeed professional guilds—will always express opinions in relation to government services that would involve their members. I think the ideological bent of Ms Morris's question is that trade unions are inherently evil, but, of course, doctors associations—

Mr Cocks: Point of order. I believe the Chief Minister has moved into debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: It is arguable that he has. Chief Minister, have you completed your answer?

MR BARR: I will continue, Mr Speaker. I think I have made my point. It is clear that organisations that represent the interests of workers will advocate in relation to workers. Organisations that represent the professional interests of their professional membership will also do the same. So I think the tenor of the questioning here is to seek to demonise the union movement—

Mr Cocks: Point of order. I believe the Chief Minister is once again debating the question itself by straying into imputations about the tenor of the question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, he is. Chief Minister, if you would just stick to answering the question, that would be great.

MR BARR: The fact that Mr Cocks is so sensitive about this point I think proves my point, Mr Speaker.

Mr Cocks: I think that is probably imputations and debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, I would ask you not to provoke the opposition. I think if you just stick to answering the question it would be useful.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given your long experience in provoking, I take your advice—

MR SPEAKER: I hope you are not reflecting on the chair!

MR BARR: On the chair? No, certainly not on the chair, Mr Speaker. Your time in Mr Cocks's seat, maybe. But that is, of course, ancient history.

The fundamental point here is that organisations will advocate on behalf of their members. That is entirely appropriate. It is, of course, important though, that final decisions in relation to matters of government procurement are not determined by them. *(Time expired.)*

Justice—criminalisation of coercive control

MS TOUGH: My question to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly in relation to the criminalisation of coercive control?

DR PATERSON: I am very pleased to update the Assembly on the progress made over the last six months in relation to the work towards criminalisation of coercive control. On 13 August last year I hosted a round table on coercive control with community stakeholders to commence this important discussion. This meeting included a presentation from Domestic Violence NSW presenting their perspective of the offence in New South Wales and the perspective of their members in their frontline work with victim-survivors.

On 20 October, we held our first meeting at the Coercive Control Steering Committee, which also was attended by various members of the Assembly. This was an important starting point to start the dialogue. Since then, the steering committee has continued to meet and consider the scope and approach of the legislation at multiple meetings. The committee was briefed on the Victim-Survivor Voices Report on Coercive Control to ensure the expertise of those with lived experience is central to our consideration of the offence provision. This report was also publicly released on 22 November.

In February, the committee was briefed on technical legal aspects and opinions by the DPP and Legal Aid. This has allowed the committee to really engage with the detail of how the offence should be designed, the benefits and advantages of different approaches. Myself and the Chief Police Officer met with New South Wales Police to discuss their experiences of the criminalisation in their jurisdiction and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate have conducted targeted consultation with justice stakeholders, as well as engaging with the New South Wales and Queensland legislative frameworks and relevant other government agencies.

I have been working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group to understand the impacts and concerns for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Community organisations including Women with Disabilities ACT are conducting targeted consultation with their members in relation to the development of the offence. We will continue to work with the committee as we begin to progress the drafting process.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what can we learn from other jurisdictions who have already established coercive control offences?

DR PATERSON: We are carefully monitoring the experiences of New South Wales and Queensland jurisdictions, given both have just recently moved to criminalise this as an offence. As I said, ACT Policing have been engaging with their counter counterparts in other jurisdictions and in New South Wales. The Implementation and

Evaluation Task Force has tabled a number of reports which contain useful data in relation to the types of behaviour being reported to police in the first months of the offence in operation.

The most commonly recorded controlling behaviours of the 224 coercive control reports were harassment, monitoring and tracking, threats or intimidation, financial abuse, shaming, degrading or humiliating, and social isolation or cultural abuse. I am very focused on ensuring our offence adequately captures technology facilitated abuse, which is so often present in coercive, controlling relationships.

The New South Wales report also contains data in relation to the implementation in their jurisdiction, including training and community education. This task force will report again in July 2026 and we will continue to monitor these reports. In New South Wales just a few weeks ago we saw the first jail sentence imposed for a coercive control offence, a two-year custodial sentence with a 15-month non-parole period. The appropriate sentence for our jurisdiction is under consideration, given New South Wales and Queensland have taken different approaches in terms of the maximum penalty for this offence.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how does this work fit together with the government's broader response to domestic, family and sexual violence?

DR PATERSON: Introducing legislation to criminalise coercive control will strengthen the ability of our justice system to respond to domestic and family violence, particularly in circumstances where the violence is categorised by a pattern of controlling behaviour. It sits within the broader work of the ACT government in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

We are close to finalising updates to the ACT's Risk Assessment Management Framework to improve how it reflects dynamics of coercive control and ensure a consistent risk assessment approach in referrals and safety planning across government and non-government agencies. The RAMF is also an integral component of the information sharing scheme, which will support greater collaboration and coordinated support to people experiencing violence, including coercive control.

We are also in the final stages of developing the ACT's 10-year domestic, family and sexual violence strategy and its associated action plans, which will reflect many of the activities which support the introduction of a standalone offensive coercive control. The introduction of a bill to create a standalone offence is only the first step. We have observed in New South Wales it takes time for reports to be received, charges laid and ultimately convictions secured. Appropriate mechanisms and structures to monitor the implementation of the offence, how it is used and its impacts are already being considered and this work will continue.

As we move forward, we will continue to rely on the expert advice of the Coercive Control Steering Committee and other relevant stakeholders to ensure appropriate resources and structures exist to support the implementation of this offence. It is critical that we proceed carefully but with resolve to address this pervasive, harmful and dangerous behaviour and send a clear message to the community that coercive control is unacceptable and increase the tools available to our justice system to respond in a

way that promotes safety for victims and accountability for people using violence. Thank you.

Mr Barr: Mr Milligan is getting very concerned; he has somewhere to be. So I will ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper, Mr Speaker.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Government procurement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yesterday, Ms Morris asked the following question:

Is it accepted practice for the territory to enter into a contract for the supply of goods or services that have not been provisioned for in an appropriation bill?

I said I would take the detail of that question on notice. The advice I have received is that, as I indicated yesterday, the Appropriation Act is broad and provides for appropriation in the form of controlled recurrent payments, capital injection and payments to be made on behalf of the territory in accordance with section 8 of the Financial Management Act 1996, the FMA. Directors-general have responsibilities under the FMA for efficient and effective management of public resources for which the directorate is responsible, and they must manage their directorate in a way that promotes achievement of purpose, promotes financial sustainability and is not inconsistent with policies of government under section 31.

Further, directors-general under the responsible minister are responsible for ensuring money spent by the directorate is spent in accordance with appropriation and that, as far as practicable, the operations of the directorate are consistent with and comparable to the budget for the financial year. The reference for that is section 31(4), part 4. Section 31A of the FMA allows directors-general to enter into contracts relating to operations of the directorate. It is difficult, as I said yesterday, to be more specific without any specific references being made by those opposite.

I am sorry that the Speaker has left the chair, because, while I am on my feet, I was going to ask for the Speaker to review the *Hansard* in relation to Ms Morris's question which made allegations of alleged corruption. I think it would be helpful to review the language in that question as it seemed to sail pretty close to the wind in terms of imputation. If Mr Cocks is going to take offence at allegations that he is anti trade union, I think it is reasonable for us to ask for a review of allegations of corruption.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: So, Ms Stephen-Smith, the request is for the Speaker's review of the transcript of Ms Morris's question. Is that correct?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes. Thank you.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. I will put a pin in that and get the Speaker to respond in due course.

Food Relief Action Plan—Food Bank Fund

MS ORR: With regard to Mr Emerson's question on the allocation of funding for the

Food Bank Fund for this financial year, I can confirm that \$77,000 of the Food Bank Fund was allocated this financial year to support the work of the Food Relief Network, which is coordinated by Volunteering ACT. The network was involved in consultation for the Food Relief Action Plan. Within their remit, they also take on an operational and coordination focus with our food relief providers more broadly.

The remaining allocated funds from the fund were directed to frontline services through food assistance funding provided to two of our key food relief partners, FoodBank NSW & ACT and OzHarvest, as well as funding being provided through other service providers for emergency material and finance assistance programs.

Vocational education and training—enrolments

MR PETERSSON: I will provide some information on free TAFE placements. Tranche 1 enrolments: 2,576. Tranche 2 enrolments: 2,980. As at 8 February 2026, 43 per cent, or 1,106, of the students who enrolled in tranche 1 have completed their course. As at 8 February 2026, 861 of enrolled free TAFE tranche 2 students have completed their course. I will come back to the chamber if I have information on employment outcomes. I am not sure we will have something at this point, but I will check.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MS MORRIS: Under standing order 118A, I am seeking an explanation from the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services as to why my question without notice, which was taken on notice on 21 October 2025, has not yet been answered.

DR PATERSON: I will get some advice and come back to the Assembly.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street—reporting date amendment

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

That the resolution of the Assembly of 14 May and 26 June 2025, as amended 2 December 2025, relating to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services' inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street be amended by omitting "February 2026 sitting".

Papers

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

Planning Act, pursuant to subsection 218—Territory Priority Project Declaration—
Inner South Health Centre, dated February 2026.

Northside Hospital Project (Including Early and Enabling Works), together with
a tabling statement, dated February 2026.

Budget—headline net operating balance

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.21): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the:
 - (a) 2025–2026 Budget Review; and
 - (b) importance of accurate and complete budgeting and forecasts to trust and confidence in the Government;
- (2) acknowledges that the Budget Review shows:
 - (a) the General Government Sector Headline Net Operating Balance deficit for 2025–2026 is now \$499.1 million, compared with forecasts of \$146.2 million in the Pre-Election Budget Update, \$117.1 million in the February 2025 Budget Review, and \$424.9 million in the June 2025 Budget;
 - (b) the cash deficit for 2025-2026 is \$1.2 billion, compared with forecasts of \$956.7 million in the Pre-Election Fiscal Outlook, \$1.05 billion in the February 2025 Fiscal Review, and \$1.056 billion in the June 2025 Budget; and
 - (c) interest expenses for 2025–2026 are now \$648 million, compared with forecasts of \$580 million in the Pre-Election Fiscal Outlook, \$604 million in the February 2025 Fiscal Review, and \$629 million in the June 2025 Budget;
- (3) further acknowledges that the Budget Review headline figures do not account for the:
 - (a) full cost of ACT Labor election commitments;
 - (b) full cost of ACT Public Service pay rises anticipated under the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement; and
 - (c) cost of continuing community service funding arrangements that are due to expire during the forward estimates;
- (4) affirms that the Budget Review reflects a further deterioration in the Territory's budget position and does not represent a turnaround; and
- (5) expresses concern that continued deterioration of the Budget position presents a risk to government services, infrastructure and fiscal sustainability.

Each year in February, the government tables a budget review. The review updates revenue and expenditure projections. It announces new policy and spending decisions, and it updates the territory's financial statements. Essentially, it is what we see in the budget each year, updated partway through. The process that we have seen over the course of many years is that this would also be associated with a supplementary appropriation bill, usually to increase the appropriations, but not this year. There is no appropriation bill for additional spending before the Assembly, and therefore there was no significant opportunity for debate or discussion of Labor's budget update.

I hope this motion goes some way towards rectifying that, because there is quite a bit in this budget review and there has been quite a bit in the public commentary around it as well. As the motion notes, the general government sector headline net operating balance deficit for 2025-26 is now \$499.1 million. That is essentially half a billion

dollars in deficit. That is the amount on a headline net operating balance approach—the government’s preferred way of measuring the deficit. On that measure, once again, the ACT is sitting at half a billion dollars out the door.

Importantly, that compares with forecasts of \$146.2 million in the pre-election budget update, \$117.1 million in the February 2025 budget review, and \$424.9 million in the June 2025 budget. Similarly, the cash deficit for this year is now sitting at \$1.2 billion, compared with forecasts of less than a billion dollars in the pre-election fiscal outlook, and barely over a billion in the fiscal review in February last year. Interest expenses are now at \$648 million, just for this year. \$648 million is going out the door under this government. It is just going to interest. That is \$1.8 million gone every day—not buying anything; gone. That is enough to build up to three houses every day. It is gone on interest.

The amount that is going out the door to interest is phenomenal. It is more than what we were told it would be. The pre-election fiscal outlook suggested it would be \$580 million. Then it went up to \$604 million and \$629 million, and it is \$648 million now. Those are the projections for one year, progressively—as this government likes to talk about—making their way higher and higher.

The degradation of the budget under this government has been consistent. It is not a new problem. We have seen it year after year. If you go back to last year’s budget, Pegasus Economics, in their review of the budget for 2025-26, went extensively to this question, with a great big headline on page 11: “The promised return to surplus has once again been pushed back a year”. They go on to discuss this. There is a chart that shows that the budget forecast since the last budget is primarily degrading as a result of policy changes affecting both revenue and expenditure. So the government is driving the degradation of the budget.

If you look over the page, there is a fantastic chart. Pegasus say: “The medium-term outlook is worse than forecast in recent budgets.” The chart shows how, over recent budgets, the budget in forward estimates in any year has been worse than was forecast in the previous budget. There was the trajectory of 2022. Over the time from when it was introduced to when it was delivered, things got worse. If you look at 2023, it got worse and worse and worse. The budget in 2024 projects some pretty terrible numbers, but it gets worse. For 2025, it was consistently getting worse.

Every budget that this government hands down does not seem to be a statement of where the ACT can expect to be in forward years but a statement of how much the government thinks it has available to spend in addition. That is not what the budget is supposed to do. It is supposed to provide confidence to this chamber and to people across the ACT as to where the government intends our fiscal position to be. The Treasurer likes to talk about a surplus in the forward estimates, as did his predecessor, but those surpluses never arrived. We have talked about the 20 or more occasions on which the Chief Minister decided to promise a surplus, only to never get there.

When you look at the cash numbers, the situation is even worse, because the numbers that the government likes to rely on—the headline net operating balance—exclude things like how much money you are spending on infrastructure. All of the capital spending is not counted in what the government likes to include in the way it does its

numbers. This is why it is so important, when you are trying to understand this budget, to look at the cash. In the private sector, cash is king. The same thing applies to government budgets. If you want to understand what is going on in this budget, you need to look at the cash position, because the liquidity of the government is propped up by borrowings. The Pegasus Economics report talks about that as well.

The government is relying on borrowings to prop up its liquidity position, and that means that, over years, not only is the territory's net financial worth getting worse; its financial worth is also going backwards at a drastic rate of knots. That has consequences for the long-term. It has consequences in terms of the government's ability to maintain its credit rating, which means that, if that goes backwards, we end up paying more in interest. We lose more to higher interest rates. Everything has to start with budget honesty.

If you want to get the ACT's budget back on track, you have to have honest budgeting. You have to have disciplined spending and you have to have a credible path to fiscal sustainability. But the problem is that you cannot do the second two without the first. Unless you have a credible starting point, unless you have an honest budget, there is no possible way that you can have disciplined spending associated with it. There is no possible way that you can provide a credible path back from that position. At the heart of this motion, that is why we need to consider the underlying position into the forward estimates, not just this year. We have already seen what happened to this year's projected deficit, and I have no doubt we will see worse once the actual financial statements land. That is the path we see every year.

But we have to look into the future as well. That is why it is so deeply concerning that the budget update still does not include all of the election promises that Labor took to the people of Canberra at the last election. That is why it is so deeply concerning that there is not the full cost of the pay rises that our public servants are going to be provided with. That is why it is so deeply concerning that you have programs falling off throughout the forward estimates with no indication—even of the risks—of how much more it is going to cost the government to maintain the service levels that Canberrans expect.

An honest budget is fundamental to the pathway that we must forge in the ACT to get back in front. We are falling too far behind on borrowings and net debt. We are falling too far behind on the interest cost that is going out the door for no benefit. This is why it is so important that we genuinely affirm what we all know: fundamentally, the budget update represented a deterioration in the territory's budget position. It does not represent, as the government has tried to suggest, some sort of turnaround. This is not a turnaround budget; this is more debt, more deficit, more deterioration in the burden that our future generations are going to have to bear. The position we are in now cannot be returned to a balanced position without a lot of deep, hard work.

A deficit of half a billion dollars this year, even on the Treasurer's ambitious predictions, would take a decade or more to repay at the level of surplus that he thinks we are going to expect. Even that is not a genuine surplus, because that requires borrowing. It is not a genuine surplus, because all of the cash will still be going out the door.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.32): I would like to support Mr Cocks's views on

the budget. I think he has nailed it; it was a very good speech. I would also like to speak about the territory's financial position, as set out in the Auditor-General's 2024-25 financial audit report and the government's budget review.

For transparency, I refer to the total territory figures, because that is what both the Auditor-General and S&P ratings use when assessing our financial sustainability. If we want to have a truthful conversation about the territory's finances, we must compare like with like. S&P's September 2025 downgrade made the key issues clear—persistent deficits, high capital spending and rapidly rising debt. Under the government's current settings, the ACT's tax-supported debt will exceed 200 per cent of revenue by 2026-27. That is not a marginal problem; it is a structural warning sign.

The budget review confirms the pattern. Revenue minus expenditure is a deficit every single year. We face cash deficits every year as well, including a \$1½ billion cash deficit this year alone. Employee expenses remain the territory's largest cost, with most ACT public sector enterprise agreements expiring on 31 March 2026. The bargaining outcomes present a real fiscal risk, yet the government continues to assert that its fiscal strategy offers a path back to surplus.

On the numbers before us, the trends point the other way. Borrowings are projected to increase by \$5½ billion between 2025-26 and 2028-29, a rise of 35 per cent. Interest costs escalate even faster, rising 60 per cent, to more than \$1 billion a year by 2028-29. These are not trivial movements. They are fundamental shifts in the territory's long-term fiscal capacity.

The government argues that this is the necessary price of city-shaping infrastructure, but S&P has already cautioned that capital spending, averaging \$1.6 billion in coming years, may not fall as budgeted if major projects—and this is from S&P, not me—like light rail proceed. The budget review assumes a sharp drop in non-financial investment, from \$1.7 billion in 2026-27 to \$1.1 billion thereafter. That forecast is optimistic at best. Any upward revision will drive debt and interest costs even higher.

On the government's own figures, and consistent with S&P's concerns, this is not a sustainable budget. However, the government's narrative remains that its fiscal strategy shapes a clear pathway back to surplus and will ensure the continuing strength of the balance sheet. But when we look at the balance sheet itself, net financial worth deteriorates by \$2½ billion between 2025-26 and 2028-29. Total liabilities increase by \$6.2 billion. Eighty-nine per cent of that is the increase in new borrowings.

We simply cannot claim a strengthening balance sheet when debt is rising at 35 per cent, interest is rising at 60 per cent, liabilities are climbing, and we are running persistent deficits.

The government can choose different measures to mask the depth of the problem, but what it cannot change is the reality outlined by the Auditor-General, confirmed by S&P and evident in its own budget review. It is time that the government acknowledges the truth. The budget review reflects a further deterioration in the territory's financial position. The community deserves that honesty, and the territory deserves a plan grounded not in rhetoric but in financial reality.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.37): The ACT Greens will be supporting Mr Cocks's motion, and we will also be supporting the amendments from Mr Steel, but I will come back to those later. This Assembly's ongoing interest in the territory's fiscal position is important. It helps to ensure that we can continue to deliver services now and into the future, and it means that the scope for the government to make good choices increases, alongside the chance for all parties in the Assembly to better shape spending and tax decisions.

It is why the ACT Greens, the Independents and the Canberra Liberals have worked together to establish a fiscal review committee, chaired by my colleague Ms Clay, and advised by the independent economist Saul Eslake. I am looking forward to public hearings, which will take place in early March, when we will be able to hear from a range of experts, including economists and community organisations, and to seeing the committee's interim report, which is due by 24 March.

I am hoping that the interim report and the evidence will provide useful guidance to the government, as they consider the budget over the coming weeks and months. Certainly, in thinking about this fiscal review, one of the agendas for us, in looking at the work that Saul Eslake did in Tasmania, was his recognition that there is not an easy pathway back, but that we do need to see, across the parliament, a commitment to a pathway. I certainly think that this committee has the opportunity to help us to deliver that by working collectively as an Assembly to think about the ACT's fiscal position.

As part of the ACT Greens supply and confidence agreement with the ACT Labor Party, we will be working to ensure that the budget is focused on reducing inequality, ensuring that the right to housing becomes a reality for Canberrans on the public housing waiting list and those that are inadequately housed or need rent relief, seeing firm climate action and environmental protection, and ensuring that the essential community sector is adequately funded. By doing those things, we will be investing in ensuring that budgets become more sustainable in the future.

One of Labor's amendments was to note the outcomes of the National Health Reform Agreement and its impact on the budget review headline figures. As I said two weeks ago, we welcome this material commonwealth funding, but it cannot come at the expense of investment in preventive health, which is so underpowered at this point in time. With the lowest bulk-billing rates in a nation that spends less than its comparators on preventive health, we do have a long way to go. It does seem that the focus on health expenditure in Australia generally, and in the ACT, is at the acute end of the system, and we are not seeing the investment that we need in preventive health.

The ACT Greens moved the first private member's bill of this term to establish housing as a human right. A re-prioritisation across government to spend well will ensure that those rights are realised, and we will begin to see a change across our city as people are able to establish themselves in a safe and secure home. The result will be stronger communities, better study and work opportunities, and better health outcomes. Not only is this a decent thing to do; it is also more fiscally sustainable and will give every Canberran a chance to flourish.

Mr Cocks brings attention to the territory's interest payments which, for this year, will be \$648 million, compared to \$580 million in the pre-election fiscal outlook, the

PEFO—a \$68 million difference that could have been better spent on frontline services rather than paid to our creditors. This is being driven by increased interest rates and, in our view, it reflects poorly on the decisions of the federal Treasurer. It does invite the question as to why Australia’s inflation rate is so high—yet again today reported as 3.8 per cent year on year, and still one of the highest rates of any of the highly developed countries.

It begs the question: is it the tax cuts for the rich and for investors that is fuelling rents and mortgage repayment increases for everybody else, or is it a lack of competition and effective regulation to ensure that Australian consumers are not being ripped off and that companies are doing the right thing by Australian consumers? Frankly, it was hard not to choke on my lunch today when I read in the daily news updates that Woolworths’ profits rose 16 per cent year on year, all while prices for essentials were going up for all of us.

There is a real disconnect here. Big companies in Australia are making ever bigger profits. We see a lack of intervention on things like competition and effective regulation. Day to day, consumers are struggling, and we are not seeing the action we need.

Inflation means the Reserve Bank is likely to look at higher interest rates, in turn forcing the ACT government to pay more to service its debt. It is why it is doubly important to ensure that the government focuses its spending on community resilience, manages its procurement effectively, learns from mistakes and quickly implements those lessons.

In the weeks leading up to the 2026-27 budget, the ACT Greens will approach the task of engaging constructively towards a goal of fiscal discipline combined with social, environmental and climate justice. These goals must go hand in hand if we are to build a resilient, equitable and sustainable city for the long term.

In terms of the details of Mr Cocks’s motion, a key reason we are supporting it is that it is essentially a statement of facts. Similarly, we note Mr Steel’s amendments, which have been circulated, and I am sure he will speak to them in a moment. We are happy to support those as well because they simply add further factual information to the motion.

With that, I indicate our support for both the motion and the amendments.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.43): Canberrans are sick of being lied to. If there is a problem, we want to know the extent of the problem; don’t just pretend that there is not one there. When the midyear budget review is handed down in this place, there is not really a place to further discuss it at great length, and it is one of the reasons that we felt the need to bring this motion forward. I thank Mr Cocks for doing so, and for doing it so eloquently.

It is abundantly clear that the government’s own communication about the midyear budget review sought to hide the full position of the statement. There was an attempt to spin this as a positive release, and it is far from a positive release. They do not like telling the whole story, because it is not a good one.

I am reminded of a conversation that I once had with my father when I was 16 years of

age. It may not come as a surprise to many that, as a teenager, I occasionally got into a bit of strife. I sometimes made some questionable choices, and I found myself sometimes in tricky situations in regard to my relationship with authority. I remember my father saying to me once, “When it hits the fan, don’t BS me.” “If I’m going to defend you,” he said, “don’t tell me half the story.” He said, “I need to know.” He said, “I don’t care how bad the story is. Just tell me the whole story so that I know exactly what we are dealing with.” You can imagine him saying that to me, can’t you, Ms Carrick? That is all that the ACT taxpayer is asking: please tell us the whole story.

The midyear budget update is not a positive story. It does not account for the full cost of ACT Labor’s election commitments. It does not account for the full cost of the ACT public service pay rises anticipated under the EBA. It does not take into account the cost of the continuity of the community service funding arrangements. We need to come together today as an Assembly and very clearly affirm that the budget review reflects a further deterioration of the territory’s budget position, because it does. All we are doing here is just stating facts. In the words of the Productivity Commission report from late last week, this Assembly needs to clearly articulate its concern that the continued deterioration of the budget position presents a risk to government services, infrastructure and fiscal sustainability.

This is no longer a debate between politicians about numbers on a spreadsheet. That is not what it is about anymore. It has become a debate about basic services that are not being delivered to hardworking people out in the suburbs who are missing out because this government has spent all their money on other things. That is what it is about.

Jasper Lindell’s reporting of that Productivity Commission report in the *Canberra Times* last week read as follows:

Health, education and other recurrent spending in the ACT has been growing more slowly than the overall economy, but the Productivity Commission has warned apparently sustainable services may not be so if they get worse or unmet need increases.

The Productivity Commission is reporting that, when it comes to the ACT, because of the way that this government spends your money, “apparently sustainable services may not be so” with a further deterioration. We all remember that the finance minister was absolutely stunned, rocked to her core, to discover, just after the October 2024 election—she was gobsmacked and she could not believe it; she said, “What?”—to learn that there was a blowout of more than \$200 million in the health budget of 2024-25. Who would believe that this only came to light immediately after the good folk of Canberra had cast their votes? That is a surprise!

It was not so much of a surprise, because the very same thing happened in the year 2023-24. It is kind of amazing that the pre-election update by Treasury did not pick up a potential lie, but that is the way it rolled out. Former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope is a good friend of all of us here, I think. We all know Jon; he is a good lad. Former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said, in his *CityNews* commentary on these matters—and I will quote him directly:

Needless to say, the minister must surely have known because of her role in the budgeting process.

Those are words from a Labor man. The people of Canberra are sick of being lied to. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.48): I want Canberra to be a place where all Canberrans can be prosperous, safe and free. I do not by any means subscribe to the idea that government is the answer to all of our problems. It is definitely not. But I do believe that government can play an important role in helping to create the conditions for human flourishing. A good government enables a strong economy and delivers financial stability and security through responsible and transparent economic management. But that is not what we have here under ACT Labor. Instead, we have a government that is saddling a generation of young Canberrans with record debt and an eye-watering deficit through reckless and wasteful spending.

I am often approached by young Canberrans—teenagers and young adults. Many of them are becoming disenfranchised. They worry about the future. They worry about their future. They are concerned about jobs. They are overwhelmed by housing and how they might ever afford to buy a home of their own. They worry about financial security and finding their place in a world that so often seems to them to be spiralling out of control. These young men and women are doing their best, but they deserve some transparency from the government.

All Canberrans deserve and expect an honest accounting of how their hard-earned money is being administered by this government. When the ACT government have embarked on a decade-long campaign of financial ruin, out-of-control spending and scandalous waste, the very least they could do is be up-front about it. In Canberra, every single man, woman and child, even the babies—even my seven-month-old baby—has a \$28,500 debt hanging over their heads. With every budget that this government hands down, that bar card of debt grows and grows.

Our credit rating has been slashed to AA due to widening deficits, and we are now equal worst to Victoria—Victoria, of all places. Yes, Treasurer, contrary to what you would have the community believe, deficits continue to get worse and worse.

I thank Mr Cocks for bringing forward this motion today. In essence, all this motion really asks for is a little bit of honesty. It is after an honest reckoning to affirm what we all know in this place. We need to be honest about Canberra's financial position. Canberrans expect nothing less. Twenty times, the Chief Minister has promised a surplus, and the record shows that, overwhelmingly, that promised surplus is little more than a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The government is still scratching around, searching for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—always elusive, always out of reach. We have not seen the “massive turnaround” that the Treasurer talks about. We are far from a turnaround.

If we were “on track”, as the Treasurer said, the cash deficit for 2025-26 would be \$1 billion, as per the February 2025 fiscal review forecast; or, if we were to look at the pre-election fiscal outlook, it would be \$956 million. But it is neither of those. Instead, the cash deficit for 2025-26 in this budget is \$1.2 billion. How is that a turnaround? Every single forecast that this government has made has been wrong, and we are in a much worse position than what we were all led to believe.

As Mr Cocks has so clearly and comprehensively laid out, this budget has excluded key spending initiatives, such as capital works, infrastructure, spending on election commitments—Labor’s own election commitments—public service salaries, and continuing community services. It is money that the government will have to fork out one way or another. It is very clear that Canberra’s budget position is deteriorating, and it is deteriorating fast.

The government needs to be honest about this, because dishonest and irresponsible economic management impacts everyone. It impacts the young Canberrans who are overwhelmingly left to pick up the bill while they watch their housing and financial prospects slowly erode. It impacts the Canberrans who rely on critical frontline services while they watch what seems to be the shutting down of a broke government—not enough ambulances, not enough police, not enough teachers, not enough nurses, not enough doctors, and so much more.

Canberrans are working hard to make ends meet, to support their families and to pay off the \$28,500 bar card debt. The very least that this government could do is show Canberrans the respect that they deserve by being transparent and honest. Let us affirm what we already know. I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this motion to the Assembly and I commend it to the Assembly.

Mr Steel: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Steel?

Mr Steel: I would like to ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to reflect on the comments made by Mr Parton in his speech. I think he said on two occasions that I, the Minister for Health or Treasury officials had lied. I think it is unparliamentary language and he should come in here and withdraw immediately.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Very well. I will review the transcript and return to that. Mr Cocks, on the point of order?

Mr Cocks: On the point of order, I believe the comments were broad in nature. I believe the comment specifically was, “Canberrans are tired of being lied to.”

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your comments are noted. I will return to the point after we have reviewed the transcript. We will return with a ruling on that point.

Mr Steel: On the point of order, presumably, they are being lied to by some person or organisation.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Fair enough, Mr Steel. I said we will review the transcript, and we will return with a ruling on the point of order.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.55): I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I appreciate that it is an opportunity for the opposition and other members of the Assembly to respond to the

budget review which was handed down this month. It is an opportunity as well to recognise the importance of the work that is being undertaken by the ACT government to continue to improve our fiscal position and to acknowledge a range of cost pressures that impact on service delivery by the government.

Mr Cocks has made some deliberate choices in putting together this motion, particularly in his use of the cash deficit in lieu of net cash from operating activities. Whilst not inaccurate, this only provides a partial picture of the territory's finances, as this figure is inclusive of borrowings for infrastructure investment. Cash accounting in this way does not recognise the asset created on the balance sheet from that investment.

Mr Cocks and Mr Parton may well argue that that is the way the commonwealth prepares its budgets, and that is fine, but states and territories are different. They deliver services and infrastructure very differently to the Australian government. Net cash from operating activities demonstrates our current operating position. If Mr Cocks is to argue that we should not borrow for investment, he should also be clear which infrastructure projects he would not have funded, and why he believes it is not reasonable that generational infrastructure, which will benefit Canberrans for years and decades to come, should not be debt funded. It is a totally unreasonable position to have.

Similarly, we see Mr Cocks and Mr Parton describing an improvement in the territory's bottom line of \$632 million as a deterioration. Mr Cocks is also of the view that a \$9.68 billion budget, tracking around 0.75 per cent of forecast, is somehow evidence of poor forecasting. Unlike Mr Cocks, I am incredibly impressed by the work of Treasury officials in bringing together economic forecasts that have consistently proven to be highly accurate. These economic forecasts feed into estimates from our key revenue sources which, again, have proven to be consistently accurate—where the Assembly, of course, does not change them, due to a change in measures prepared after the budget process. There is an update, of course, in the budget review in relation to payroll tax and the health levy.

The government has, year on year, committed to tax reform, which improves the reliability and consistency of our revenue forecasting, while increasing efficiency in our economy. This tax reform has been opposed by the opposition at every election. It is interesting that, in this context, Mr Cocks now raises the importance of reliable forecasting and transparency. Similarly, our Treasury officials are very talented at mapping our expenses in a service provision environment that is highly demand responsive.

It might be news to Mr Parton that no state or territory was able to effectively forecast the massive and unexpected increase in presentations and cost of delivering healthcare services that led to our government making an additional \$1.19 billion investment into the health system. We cannot perfectly predict the weather, which has a direct impact on capital works delivery, but we make our best estimates, and we continue to struggle with an outdated methodology used by the commonwealth, which bases net interstate migration on Medicare data which is inaccurate. We are making great progress, but we have to plan for school enrolments, traffic demand and community service provision in an environment of imperfect population data.

I completely agree with Mr Cocks's statement that accurate and complete budgeting is

critical to trust and confidence in the government, so I call on all members in this place to be accurate and use consistent measures of fiscal sustainability and accountability, and not unreasonably undermine confidence in what is otherwise very accurate and transparent data presented in the budget papers and, indeed, in the budget review.

The budget review showed that the government's fiscal strategy is delivering on its objectives to ensure Canberrans have access to the high-quality services that they expect, whilst the budget position continues to improve through responsible fiscal management.

The budget review showed a significant improvement of \$632 million in the headline net operating balance from the 2024-25 deficit of \$1.1 billion to a forecast deficit of \$499.1 million in 2025-26. Importantly, the budget position continues to improve each year over the forward estimates, returning to cash operating surpluses from 2026-27 and a headline net operating balance surplus from 2027-28.

Missing in Mr Cocks's motion was reference to the budget review showing that the ACT economy continues to perform strongly, growing faster than all states and territories. We have now had, of course, 30 continuous years of economic growth in the ACT, with an increase in gross state product of 3.5 per cent in 2024-25. This is supported by strong public demand—something about which we in the government do not have an ideological objection. It is also supported by continued real wages growth and very high labour force participation.

The budget review contained limited new initiatives, and it responds mostly to supporting the continuation of important initiatives and the pressures faced in the public school system. Unlike those opposite, the government knows that you cannot in the same breath argue for more services, lower taxes and a reduced deficit and be taken seriously.

The government's focus has been on ensuring the continued delivery of high-quality services that improve the wellbeing of Canberrans, without resorting to the approach of blind and indiscriminate cuts. The government's approach is practical and sensible. We are continuing the multiyear task of achieving the whole-of-government savings measures announced in the budget last year. This, and our broader fiscal strategy, has allowed us to make the investments in the 2025-26 budget.

I note Mr Cocks's motion outlines a range of potential pressures on the budget, and I appreciate that Mr Cocks has given us the opportunity to remind the community that ACT Labor took a detailed suite of costed election commitments to the 2024 election, with a plan to deliver them over four years. Those opposite did not. We will deliver our commitments in a fiscally responsible manner over the term of government. We have had one budget thus far, and we are looking forward to continuing to deliver our commitments that will be delivered in the context of each budget.

I disagree with Mr Cocks's assertion that the budget review does not appropriately account for outcomes of enterprise agreement bargaining. The government has appropriate provisions in place for a reasonable outcome of bargaining that are in the interests of the entire community and, of course, legal requirements to engage in good-faith bargaining.

While Mr Cocks outlined pressures in the budget review, he did not note that, since the decisions in the budget review, all states and territories have agreed to a new five-year National Health Reform Agreement with the commonwealth government. Given that health expenditure is the largest proportion of budget expenditure, this is very significant.

I appreciate that Mr Cocks has agreed to accept amendments to his motion, which I have circulated and will be moving shortly. The amendments to his motion will provide a more balanced picture of risk. This new deal will see the ACT receive \$4.1 billion over five years in commonwealth funding, including \$557 million in additional public hospital funding. This is a significant uplift in commonwealth contributions to our hospitals, which will now be at an estimated 37 per cent in the 2026-27 financial year. We welcome the significant contribution that this makes, which sees the commonwealth responding to the rising costs and demand in our public healthcare system that the ACT government has already been responding to with significant increased investment.

This new funding deal includes further funding of \$75 million in 2026-27, which recognises the cost that smaller jurisdictions face in delivering health services compared to our larger counterparts. We will work with the commonwealth to ensure that a more permanent arrangement to address this is implemented. This reflects the joint priorities of the Barr Labor government and the Albanese Labor government in supporting Canberrans to get the quality health care that they expect in their time of need. The full financial impact of the agreement is not reflected in the budget review figures and will be updated in the 2026-27 ACT budget.

Mr Cocks may not like to hear it, but there has been a consistent, clear message, whether it is from think tanks like the Australia Institute or from what it might be fair to say is a radically different organisation, the International Monetary Fund—that state and territory revenues have not kept pace with the economy. GST growth, as the single largest revenue source for jurisdictions like the ACT, has tracked well below economic growth. Vertical fiscal imbalance is being recognised as a continued universal challenge, and the ACT is not alone in revenues not keeping pace with cost growth; it is the case in all states and territories.

What is the Liberals' solution? Continue to put a disproportionate tax burden on home buyers? Make housing more expensive for those who are looking to get ahead? What else could it be? Of course, the opposition has opposed changes to payroll tax in the budget. In fact, his party has committed to fully abolishing the ACT's largest own-source revenue line, as a gift to the major supermarkets and banks. They are opposed to charges on landlords and developers. He has even opposed a levy on multinational firms like Airbnb that only levels the playing field with locally owned hotels.

The budget review was a practical, sensible fiscal update that showed the government is doing exactly what we said we would do—delivering on a path back to balance, without drastic cuts to public services and while delivering the infrastructure that our community expects, particularly as our population grows. It does not show the deterioration that Mr Cocks would like it to. The budget review shows stable, sensible and responsible fiscal management, while the government continues to deliver for the Canberra community, and the primary risk to government services and infrastructure

will always come from those opposite.

I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I move:

1. After paragraph (2)(b), insert:

“(c) the net cash from operating activities deficit for 2025-2026 in the Budget Review is \$15.7 million compared with a budget forecast deficit of \$129.6 million, \$132 million surplus in the Pre-Election Budget Update and \$128.1 million surplus in the February 2025 Budget Review; and”.
2. After paragraph (3)(c), insert:

“(d) the outcomes of the new National Health Reform Agreement;”

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.07): On the amendment, well, Mr Steel has just proved my point for me. Once again, what we have from the Treasurer is a whole bunch of spin, at the same time as he has dropped an amendment that goes further in terms of explaining what is going wrong. Because what this amendment shows is that not only was there a deterioration in the predictions around the HNOB deficit, not only was there a deterioration in the interest deficit and not only was there a deterioration in the cash deficit, Mr Assistant Speaker, there was a deterioration in the operating cash deficit.

This is the number that tells us that the government today is borrowing to pay for its ongoing operations. This is the number that proves the government is going backwards without considering any of the infrastructure that the Treasurer would like us to be looking at. He has just tabled an amendment which shows to everyone in the ACT, to everyone in this chamber, that the government is failing to actually manage its finances for day-to-day operations. So absolutely we are going to support that amendment!

Of course, the other part of this amendment is to include the results of the deal that we still do not see all of the details of, the federal government deal around health. I was quite prepared to not suggest that should have been included in a budget review that probably had been printed by the time that negotiation was taking place, but I do not have any objection to including both the upside and the downside risk. That is exactly what a budget should do. What it should not do is present a picture to people across the ACT that is incorrect. Indeed, the communications about that budget should not present an impression that does not align with the reality and that is what this motion is doing.

I also want to go to some of the other spin that the Treasurer has delivered. The Treasurer wanted to point to a whole bunch of so-called savings. Now, every one of those savings has already been spent. Every one of those savings measures that the Treasurer wants to point to has already been spent in this budget update. Things are going backwards. Indeed, the actual spending of the government got worse by more than \$70 million for the year. That is not an improvement. That is also going backwards.

There are many other numbers that we could choose to look at. You can look at the net debt that is going backwards. You can choose to look at, even from the budget, that the

deficit was going backwards. The fact that we have every figure going in the wrong direction from before the election until now is deeply concerning. You cannot pivot from the worst budget blowout and the worst deficit blowout, following on from the election, to claim some sort of turnaround. That is fundamentally what the Treasurer is trying to say in his speech. I note he did not indicate he is going to vote against the motion, which makes it very clear that is not the reality. If he does not believe it, he should vote against it. But that is the case. This is a deterioration. The budget is going the wrong way and the numbers show it.

I note Mr Steel also spoke about the IMF report. The IMF report was deeply critical of the position that state and territory budgets, including the ACT, are in. What it was saying in that report is fundamentally that currently the federal government is being used as a backstop for government debts in states and territories and that now state and territory debt is risking the federal credit rating. That is what IMF said, not that somehow we were being unfairly treated.

He also pointed in his speech to one of the Labor favourites, the undercounting of the population. I think it is really important to understand the scale of this issue because what we are talking about is that the ACT missed out on \$550 million. It sounds really big. That is \$550 million over the course of seven years. Seven years' worth of population undercounting did not come close to this year's interest bill. The scales are vastly different. The things that the government can control, it should.

Its population projections versus the commonwealth government population projections are a consistent source of disagreement. I understand that. I am not sure either of them have got it right. But surely in your risk consideration, you look at the fact that the federal government is going to predict a lower number than you wish they would. You cannot budget on hopes and dreams. You have to deliver a tangible, honest budget for people in the ACT, and the amendment that the Treasurer has just tabled proves that they are not, even on their preferred numbers.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.13): I am speaking to the motion as well as the Treasurer's amendment, which clearly I will be supporting.

I do want to register my concern about some of the comments that have been made by those opposite in relation particularly to Treasury's pre-election budget update. I note that the Treasurer has already asked the Speaker to review some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition. But I want to put on record again that it was ACT Labor that went to the election recognising that the ACT government was already facing a deficit for 2024-25 of more than \$635 million, and therefore we were quite careful in the promises we made. We did not commit to a massive, big stadium down at Acton Waterfront and a convention centre all to be delivered within some incredible timeframe of within the next four or five years. We did not deliver to massive spending commitments, as the Greens did. The Chief Minister was very, very clear in the lead-up to the election that the budget was in a challenging situation, that we were not—

Mr Cocks: Did he know something we did not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, he knew that the PEBU published a deficit of more

than \$635 million. We thought that was a problem. Everybody else seemed to think that it was not an issue and that they could commit to significant additional expenditure well beyond not only what ACT Labor committed to, but what we have in fact delivered. Now, there have been many allegations made and repeated allegations made, that somehow I must have known, Treasury must have known, the Chief Minister must have known, about the pressure on the health budget.

Well, I will say that Treasury did flag in the pre-election fiscal outlook and repeatedly referred back to the budget and the identification of fiscal risks in the budget. The identification of fiscal risks in the 2024-25 budget said:

Risks continue to present in relation to cost of living pressures, operational and ICT, labour and material costs across a range of sectors, including in relation to the health sector, with capacity and access to inputs continuing to face pressure.

That was in the 2024-25 budget fiscal risk statement.

There is also somebody in the chamber, not me, who was a member of the Expenditure Review Committee that put together that budget, and we are also very well aware of the difficult decisions that were made in the context of putting that budget together. The fact that, obviously, with a published deficit of more than \$635 million, the budget was under pressure. We were the only major party going to that commitment, and I include the Greens in that—in the context of ACT elections as a major party, a pretty old party in the context of ACT politics, actually. We are proud of being an old party. The Greens would try to deny being an old party in the context of ACT politics. Labor is very, very happy to be an old party and a party of the Labor movement.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rattenbury: Just mention the CPRS, Rachel. Then you will have completed the bingo card.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will not bother. I was sitting around that cabinet subcommittee table, Mr Rattenbury, and I saw exactly what happened in that process. But my point is, Mr Assistant Speaker, Ms Morris got up here again today and said there are not enough ambos, not enough teachers, not enough nurses, not enough police and more. More spending. The Greens, every time they come into this place, want more spending, including—and I recognise the Canberra Liberals would take that spending from the light rail, which they seem to think would save them hundreds of millions of dollars in the next five minutes. Clearly the rest of us know that that is untrue.

But we are the only party that has consistently said this is a challenging budget situation through the election campaign and through this budget. We know we need to make difficult decisions. And what we are faced with every time we come into this place is criticism and “you must spend more”. Criticism and “you must spend more”. So I just wanted to put my defence, really, of Treasury on the record—that I am really concerned about some of the comments that people have made around the pre-election budget update and some of the aspersions that have been thrown in the way of the then Under

Treasurer.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Transport Canberra—West Belconnen—rapid bus services

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.19): Together with Mr Braddock, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) on 2 February 2026, the government removed the Route 2 (R2) and Route 3 (R3) rapid bus routes from north and west Belconnen, replacing direct rapid services with less frequent local bus connections from the Belconnen interchange;
- (b) the changes are disrupting daily travel for a significant number of residents who have planned their lives around these rapid routes;
- (c) the changes have drawn strong opposition from over 1,400 petitioners, the Belconnen Community Council and affected public transport patrons;
- (d) Kippax is a designated group centre under the Territory Plan serving west Belconnen;
- (e) west Belconnen is one of the ACT's fastest-growing population areas, making reliable rapid transit connections to these areas a matter of strategic planning priority, not operational convenience. Despite this, north and west Belconnen were the only regions in Canberra to have rapid bus services removed under the 2026 network changes;
- (f) the government based this decision on patronage data from the decommissioned MyWay system, with decision-grade data having been unavailable since the launch of the MyWay+ ticketing system in 2024;
- (g) within weeks of the changes taking effect, the government was required to add additional Route 12 services to accommodate demand that its outdated data had not identified;
- (h) the government has not published any assessment of how the removal of these rapid services affects people living with disability, seniors, students and others most dependent on direct rapid routes; and
- (i) the removal of rapid services from north and west Belconnen is inconsistent with the ACT's legislated emissions reduction targets and the government has provided no evidence that it assessed the mode-shift impact of this decision for north and west Belconnen residents before implementation;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) ACT Labor's election platform:
 - (i) stated that "ACT Labor's progressive and practical public transport plan will see more rapid services";
 - (ii) committed to "deliver additional rapid bus services [including] a

- new rapid service to support growth in West Belconnen”; and
- (iii) committed to “increase services on the popular R2 rapid from Belconnen to the City to better meet demand”; and
 - (b) fulfilling promises on frequency and extent requires having a plan for bus procurements over the long term which meets the scale of commitments and accounts for expected major disruptions, such as the Commonwealth Avenue bridge works which were announced by the commonwealth government in January 2021; and
- (3) calls on the government to:
- (a) restore a rapid bus service to Kippax by the commencement of Term 2 in 2026;
 - (b) restore full R2 and R3 rapid bus services to their previous routes by the commencement of Term 3 in 2026;
 - (c) provide an update to the Assembly with a plan detailing how and when (3)(a) and (3)(b) will be met by the government by the second-last sitting day of March 2026; and
 - (d) present to the Assembly, by the first sitting day in December, a bus acquisitions and retirements plan for the ACT fleet through to 2040.

Over many debates regarding public transport, everyone in this chamber has been in furious agreement that our public transport system should be reliable, accessible and closer to where people live and work and come together as a community. Even the ACT Labor government MLAs agree with this. On the campaign trail, they promised more rapid bus routes for the region with a new route to service West Belconnen. Fast forward to today, and the Labor government has cut the only two rapid routes we had in west and north Belco.

These rapid buses service the almost one in 10 Canberrans who live beyond Belconnen town centre, from Kippax to Evatt and Spence, and they have been cut off from the rapid bus route system altogether. It is literally the opposite of the principles we all furiously agreed to and is the opposite of what Labor promised a year and a half ago at the election. It is the opposite of making our public transport system reliable and accessible.

I understand that there are disruptions from roadworks and that there have been adjustments across the whole system—no-one is disputing that—but the Labor government knew in 2021 that these disruptions would be coming at some point this term. The transport minister had five years to plan for this, and he went to an election and hand on heart told West Belconnen we would get a new rapid bus and then the plan turned out to be cutting both of our rapid buses. We did not just get reduced frequencies, like elsewhere across the system; we got a complete removal of our routes. Those rapids are the spine of our service. We have been told this for years by the Labor government. They are our fixed reliable route that everyone can plan their work, their home, their lives and their developments around—except in Belconnen where these routes can be cut, seemingly at any time, no matter what was said at the last election.

The Labor government has made a partial replacement with local services. It is a poor substitute. The local services like the 12 are less frequent. They do not run for the same length of time. So those using them on weekends or at the start and end of the day miss

out. They provide accessibility barriers for a lot of Canberrans. They are producing long connection waits for a lot of people. Many of us listening now are privileged that we can easily swap buses or wait a few extra minutes to get to where we need to go, but what about those who are vision impaired and learn their route and know where and how to catch that reliable rapid, who do not have it any more? What about those with a disability where swapping a bus becomes an epic feat? What about those cannot drive and now do not have their trusted reliable R2 to get them home after their shift at work?

The Labor government should have adopted the ACT Greens election commitment to deliver bus lanes that reduce bottlenecks in the system and congestion for all road users, and they should have acquired more buses. If they had done that, there would be no need to cut rapids for West Belconnen and North Belconnen, nor for anywhere else. Basic planning for core city services would have saved us from the need to make awful choices, which have led to shutting West Belco under a bus. I am sorry to focus on this loss so much, but I am doing that because the people out in West Belco are angry. I have angry people waiting for me at my Friday coffee club at the moment. They want to know why both their rapids were taken away. We do not understand why 50,000 of us matter so little.

Making this change, even for a short period of time, will push many out of our bus system altogether. If you can drive and your rapid has been taken away for a few months, you will switch to driving and you may not come back. That is how transport habits go. You will be locked into the high cost of petrol, parking and car ownership forever, and Canberra will be locked into more cars on our roads. It also means that we will be locked into higher transport emissions. Transport is over 60 per cent of our climate emissions at the moment.

Our Labor government missed its legislated climate targets for the first time. It let the Climate Strategy lapse and is only now starting consultation on the replacement. At the same time, the Labor government has cut rapid bus services for the one in 10 Canberrans in a way that may permanently shift their travel habits back to driving. We are in a climate crisis. I know I say this a lot, and I know that everybody in here knows this. I know that most of the people in here helped pass that declaration, but I struggle to see the evidence that people in here are acting on it.

My colleague Mr Braddock and I had briefings on this decision, and I thank the transport minister for providing those briefings. I am not going to speak for Mr Braddock's feelings. I was pretty shocked at the content of those briefings. There was a real lack of local knowledge and data that went into this decision. I pointed out the upcoming traffic disruptions we will get in the area because of William Hovell Drive and Drake-Brockman Drive and the major roadworks that are scheduled there. I was told that it did not impact their decision, because the rapids do not go on those roads. I had to explain to our transport directorate that, if you take away our buses, more people will drive and that will create more congestion on those major roads while they are being upgraded and while lanes are being affected. They had not thought of that.

We asked if they had factored in mode-shift, and we explained that many people who cannot conveniently catch a bus will start driving. They had not thought of that. Their assumption was that people will either work from home or will catch a local bus that is less frequent and less convenient and does not run very often outside those weekday

peaks. We asked if they had factored in increased climate emissions from the decision. They had not factored that in. We asked what data they had on current usage of the R2 and R3, and they did not have recent data because the MyWay+ rollout was so badly bungled, they cannot use that data. Further questioning from Mr Braddock and the chamber shows the minister was relying on legacy data from 2024 and anecdotal data from their drivers. That data was clearly insufficient and outdated, because only two weeks after cutting the R2 and replacing it with a local bus they had to increase that local bus to meet the demand that they had not realised was there. Did I mention that folk in West Belco are a little bit cranky about all of this?

I want to recognise the advocacy of Lachlan Butler, Chair of Belconnen Community Council, who has called for a full reinstatement of rapid bus services in Belconnen. The Belconnen Community Council highlighted that Transport Canberra initially told them the frequency of the 12 would match the R2 and the R3 and would run on 20 minute frequency. That is not the timetable that was released. Lachlan publicly said in the media in December 2025 that this decision:

... doesn't really pass the pub test. It does look that they sacrificed West Belconnen to beef up the rest of the network.

That is certainly the feeling that we have out in West Belconnen about this.

I am seeing the consequences from the real life stories that are coming to me when I chat to people and on my socials. I am going to read out a few of those stories. These are real people who have contacted me. Ben is visually impaired. He relied on the R2 since 2018 to travel around Canberra. He feels like people with a disability have been completely overlooked by the government in this decision to cut the rapids from West Belconnen. Megan is concerned about her neighbours who use the bus for work, hobbies and education. Megan herself originally switched from car to public transport because of how convenient those rapids were, but that is not the case anymore. Lauren relied on the R2 to get home from school and to attend her after-school activities, and she says those changes are impacting her and other teenagers in the area.

Janice and her husband use the rapid routes to access their health appointments and have streamlined their trip to the train station for interstate travel. Juanita, a 78-year-old public transport regular, has noticed that travelling from Kippax to Civic and CISAC is considerably longer following the timetable changes. She has also suggested light rail should be extended to Kippax. Yang has lived in the Belconnen region for over 20 years and finds the government's justification for this network optimisation fundamentally flawed, since the proposed solutions disproportionately impact residents in Fraser, Dunlop and Spence. He says residents in these areas are subject to mandatory transfers and increased travel times. They are now disconnected from a direct link to other regions, which impacts not only the community's convenience but also the long-term economic development prospects in West Belco.

A lot of people in West Belconnen do not have other public transport options. Light rail to Kippax looks to be at least a decade off. We are worried about whether it will come to Kippax at all under Labor. Cycling infrastructure is yet to be delivered. West and north Belconnen just had the buses, and now our rapids, cut and reduced. It is not good enough for a city that says it wants a great, reliable public and active transport system.

So it is no surprise that almost 1,500 people have signed the community petition calling on the government to restore the R2 and the R3 to its former route. People want West Belconnen to remain well connected to the Belconnen town centre and to the rest of the ACT. They want a reliable and accessible public transport system, as was promised to them by the Labor government.

I am looking forward to seeing the rapid routes return to West Belconnen and up towards Evatt and Spence. Mr Braddock and I have had some really productive conversations with the transport minister, and I thank the minister and his office for that. We hoping very much that, as a result of this motion and the amendments that have been circulated, if all of these pass, that what we will actually get is a restoration of the R2 by term 3 and all steps taken that are possible, including network scheduling, bus fleet planning, bus leasing and bus acquisitions to restore a full R2 and R3 by term 3 2026, and the restoration of enough northbound R4 and R5 services in the morning peak to meet the actual demand for our commuter services.

I would have preferred to get our rapids restored sooner. I actually think even a break of two months is pretty serious, particularly when you are looking at the people it affects. It has a disproportionate impact on people who have a disability. We have seen multiple times that, every time the government is looking at its buses, it is not properly considering the impacts on people with disability. We saw that with the rollout of MyWay+, which disproportionately affected those with disabilities, those who were neurodivergent and those who are visually impaired. We saw that with the slow upgrades of our modern bus fleet, which for a long time did not meet our basic requirements under disability legislation—and I feel like we have had that again. Any delay is a problem because it can cause people to permanently shift their travel habits. That is not great for congestion or for climate change, nor is good for peoples hip pockets.

But I am really pleased that we do at least have some progress today. We are also looking forward to seeing the future planning—and we have put that in this motion too. Please do your future planning for your bus fleet now and publish that future planning so that we do not find ourselves in this situation again the next time there is an expected or perhaps an entirely predicted network interruption and so we do not find ourselves once again choosing between which area of 50,000 people in Canberra should lose their services.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.31): What we have just heard from Ms Clay was a heartfelt conveyance of the anger and anguish being felt by the people of her electorate, particularly those in West Belconnen. We need to reflect on why it exists. I articulated this in question time last sitting week, but I think it is worth repeating here today. The ACT's Transport Strategy was published in 2020 by Minister Steel. It introduced us to the bus network as we knew it up until this last month. It said the following:

High frequency rapid routes lie at the core of the new network to service those corridors with highest demand and destination points. They include a total of 10 rapid routes (including light rail) to provide a frequent, reliable and fast journey into and across the city. The rapid routes comprise our long-term framework for public transport and will largely remain fixed. This will provide certainty for businesses, employers and individuals to make long term decisions on where to live, work and invest.

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I want to dwell on those last words, because they really are at the core of the point that we are trying to make today: “certainty for business, employers and individuals to make long-term decisions on where to live, work and invest”. Imagine you are someone who took the government seriously. You have put down your roots within a two-minute walk of a rapid route—let’s say in Melba. Between yourself, your partner and a teenager who is learning to drive, you decided you could make things work with just one car, because you can be confident that fast and frequent buses into town will be available now and into the future, and then suddenly it gets cut. Sure, there is a local bus to replace it, but it does not quite run quite as often and you need to change buses in the town centre, making it a much longer trip to work each day and your partner kind of needs the car. Before you know it, you are compelled to break the household budget and spend at least another \$10,000 on a second-hand car. Oh, and now you are also paying for parking. There go all of these plans, even if it is only for a break of two months, all because a bus route that you thought was stable and reliable, that you could build your life around, suddenly was not. There is a technical term for this, “mode shift”, meaning a change in the mode of transportation you use on a daily basis. It is unfortunately something that the government have demonstrated that they are not good at thinking about. Ms Clay has already spoken to the blank looks that we received when the questions were asked.

To add to that story, if I go back further and look at the early business case studies from light rail stage 2—this was in 2019 before COVID and before it split into stages 2A and 2B—the business cases were premised on the assumption that no mode shift away from cars and onto light rail would occur. Light rail stage 1 comprehensively demonstrated that that was a bit more than just naive. So I would have hoped that the government have learnt a bit more about this topic in the intervening years. Unfortunately, the indicators are lacking. In fact, I sometimes worry that the government get stuck in the mindset of just managing the network they have, rather than building the one that we ought to have.

Canberra’s public transport network is a shade of what it could be and what it should be. We have never come close to achieving mode-share targets and do not even have them at the moment, and bus investment has never truly caught up to our population growth. In 2023, Ms Clay did an excellent job of drawing our attention to how we had only 456 buses in 2023 compared to the 479 we had in 1990. Even after considering the commencement of light rail services and the introduction of articulated buses with a higher capacity, this was not a good comparison for our city. The population has grown over 60 per cent since 1990 and the city has also spread geographically. Today, if you look at the Transport Canberra website, you might be forgiven for concluding that Canberra only has 219 diesel buses. We know that the fleet information on the website is not complete. Many of the buses we have are not listed. What we do know is that the number of buses as of June 2025 was 467. I think the number is closer to about 490 today, but I would be happy to be corrected by the minister. Either way, we have not

seen the sort of investment required to get our fleet up to the size that our population growth has demanded. If we had grown our fleet by even just 50 per cent since 1990, which is less than the population growth we actually had, we would have close to 720 buses by now.

We have seen this problem coming over a course of a generation. Labor, over the 25 years they have been in government, have made some effort to keep up, but that investment has not been sufficient to inherently improve the network. It has been fiddling to make the most of what we have got, and that attitude has carried us through to decisions we are talking about here today. It is a decision to sacrifice one part of the network, in this case West Belconnen—and we will also start talking about Tuggeranong and the R4s later on in this motion—in order to manage a disruption in another, because there is not enough latent capacity to absorb the shocks under current demand. As anyone who comes from a bigger city will tell you, when you have a major road disruption, you need more people using public transport, not less. If you need to find spare minutes across the network, you need to have enough services to draw on to get these minutes in a distributed way without having to entirely mutilate any of the routes, which is fundamental to maintaining public transport utilisation. That means your investment in public transport infrastructure needs to rise to the moment.

One of the questions people in the ACT will now be asking themselves is whether they can believe Labor can rise to this moment. The Labor-Greens Supply and Confidence Agreement commits Labor to “Increasing the frequency of key existing rapid bus services and introducing new rapid bus services before the end of the term.” However, on the performance to date so far in this term, we have now gone backwards. We cannot claim we did not know that this bridge work disruption was coming. We knew that would be happening at some point, since as early as 2017, and that the timelines starting firming up when the 2021 commonwealth budget included \$137 million over five years for the refurbishment work. There have been a few delays, but we have known for years that these disruptions were coming. Either the government knew what was coming and were dishonest about it to us when they promised to increase the rapid services, or they were simply severely disorganised. I usually try to presume ignorance or incompetence.

By the way, there is also a commitment, as Ms Clay mentioned, to net zero emissions in government operations by 2040, which I hope this Labor government has not dropped. To reach that goal, it strictly requires having a plan for bus acquisitions and retirements right through to 2040. You would expect that plan to take into account, to the best it can, any expected disruptions and bumps in the road, such as bridges. The evidence before us is that such a plan does not exist in a public-facing form, but it could, hence its inclusion in the Greens calls today. This is all a long way of saying that the government need to plan properly, they need to invest in the necessary infrastructure, they need to get the buses and they need to meet their commitments to the people of Canberra.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.39): I thank Ms Clay and Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion. It rightly highlights the importance of and the need for seamless rapid services if we are to achieve the mode shift that Canberra urgently needs. So I support the call for the government to restore the R2 and the R3 to their previous routes. Without convenient, reliable and frequent services, it is difficult to attract people to buses and meaningfully reduce emissions from transport—our single-largest local

emitter.

The government's own definition of a rapid route is one that runs at least every 15 minutes between 7.00 am and 7.00 pm on weekdays. But a 15-minute service is not enough during peak times. On our major trunk corridors, frequency is only achieved when multiple routes operate together along our arterial roads. But, further out, on individual rapid routes, frequency has dropped back to the bare 15-minute minimum—for example, the R7 in Weston Creek. On non-rapid routes, the frequency is lower still. These cuts are having real impacts on people's daily lives.

We are seeing the consequences most clearly on the Woden to Civic corridor. During the morning peak, R4 and R5 buses are often full as they leave the Woden interchange. They are coming full through from Tuggeranong. Commuters are being left stranded at stops, unable to get to work on time. Just last week, a constituent told me she stood at the Melrose Drive stop opposite the Phillip pool for 50 minutes, watching multiple full buses drive straight past. She was not alone. This is not an isolated experience. It is becoming common. Right now, on the Woden to Civic rapid corridor, there are only 16 services between 7.00 am and 9.00 am. It is evident that the reduction in capacity introduced to account for delays from the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works has been far too drastic. The system simply cannot absorb that level of cut without serious consequences for passengers.

This motion is about transfers and travel times when it comes to the R2 and the R3. My motion from last year asked the government to provide the concept of the network when the tram is delivered to Woden. It is about how many times people will have to transfer and how much longer their trip will take. Ideally, we would have modelling on what impact the change in the network will have on mode shift and emissions. I will give an example. If you live in Chisholm, do you have to catch a local bus to Erindale, change onto the pink rapid to go to Woden and change onto the tram to go to Civic? If you have to change twice—two transfers—on your 15 kilometre trip to town to work, it does not attract people to use public transport. This is why I am very keen to understand the concept plan that is due in June. How many transfers will we have to take? How long will it take? Are we attracting people to public transport? I thank Ms Clay and Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion that highlights the issues with transfers and travel times.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.42): The Canberra Liberals are supportive of the motion brought on by the ACT Greens. We were working on something quite similar, but we are friends with the Greens. We appreciate what they are trying to do here and we are happy to support. I think Ms Clay and Mr Braddock make a really solid point here: that this is, as much as anything, about forward planning. The closure of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge or at least the partial closure, the closure of lanes, did not sweep upon us like COVID. It was not that we found out one day; we have known it for a long, long time. We have known it for a long, long time.

Ms Cheyne: You have no idea

MR PARTON: Thank you for your support, Ms Cheyne. I appreciate your kind words. We think it gets down to planning. Ms Stephen-Smith, in the earlier debate about numbers and fiscal sustainability, suggested to the Canberra Liberals that, similar to

Ms Cheyne, we had no idea and that somehow we clung to a perception that, if we were not building the tram, everything would magically be okay. That is not our perception. But decisions have been made over a period of time—quite a long period of time—about priorities for spending. The provision of hardware and the provision of infrastructure around buses has been pushed back because of a fixation on some other transport modes.

This is a fairly simple motion. It just asks the government to restore the bus service that they cut at the start of the new timetable. We can understand entirely where the government came from with these changes. On paper, the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works were going to cause some massive headaches for the bus network. As I understand it, there was a forecast 13-minute delay in northbound services, which is closer to nine minutes now. What we fail to understand is how the decision was made to gut services across the network to cater to this delay instead of adjusting the timing of the old R2 and R3 so the West Belconnen section could remain.

I think it is also timely to note how ill-conceived the network changes were and just how widely they impacted people's commute. I think Ms Clay makes a really good point about the lack of sensible, usable data here—because we do not have much of it. I had numerous emails, calls and Facebook comments about the changes. Unsurprisingly, they were all negative—did not get many fans out there on this one. The R4, while not the subject of this motion, consistently leaves the Tuggeranong interchange completely full and often must skip stops between Tuggeranong and Woden, because the bus simply cannot fit any more passengers in it. I note that Mr Steel has made the point that he is actually out there riding the bus and checking it out for himself—which I am pleased about and as I would expect as the Minister for Transport—and I pay credence to him for that.

The R2 and R3 are fascinating routes, as I am sure we will be reminded of. They are among the longest routes in the Transport Canberra network. I can appreciate that; even the truncated routes are quite long. But it seems that the timetabling of 12 and 13, the new suburban services to replace the West Belconnen segments of the R2 and R3, do not even meet the rapids anymore. Once you lose a bus passenger to the private vehicle, it is incredibly difficult to get them back. So we hope that Mr Steel and the directorate appreciate just how mammoth the task will be to get them back.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.46): I am pleased to speak today on the motion brought forward by Ms Clay and Mr Braddock. I welcome the opportunity to outline the government's approach as we continue to build a bus network that is frequent, reliable and responsive to the needs of our growing city.

It is important to note that at this time our city is experiencing significant disruption that is associated mainly with the construction, by the federal government and the National Capital Authority, of upgrades to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. This, of course, is the key reason that we have had to make temporary changes to our bus network and timetable—to respond to that disruption and to make sure that Canberrans can rely on the bus services that Transport Canberra delivers.

It was critical that we responded quickly to the NCA's construction methodology. That construction methodology came incredibly late. It was not known that there would be one bridge closed and only one lane available, particularly heading in one direction, for buses and general traffic. That was determined very late by the NCA and communicated through to Transport Canberra and the ACT government.

Government, of course, tried to work very closely with them to try and optimise the methodology for the construction, particularly—we got the benefit of the inclusion of a dedicated bus lane heading northbound on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge—but it has been very difficult to respond to that quickly. It has been very difficult to be able to respond in terms of the suggestions of buying new buses. They simply would not have been available by the start of term 1 this year to be able to keep the level of frequency that the previous network offered. Of course, we had already made improvements to frequency in the previous year to start delivering on our election commitments.

What we have had to do is respond to the construction by updating our transport network so that we can focus on reliability. Transport Canberra built the updated network and timetable, which commenced at the start of term 1 and was based on the modelled impact of the NCA's bridge closure, to maintain the reliability of bus services across the city—by protecting core frequencies, prioritising key corridors and ensuring we can maintain key routes across the city to keep Canberrans moving during this time.

We are now in the fourth week of real-world operation of this construction network. The traffic network is operating mostly as expected compared to the modelling, following the return from school holidays and the commencement of the NCA's bridge closure. Delays are being observed where expected in the traffic network, and the extent of the delays is generally aligning with the modelling undertaken last year, being approximately eight to nine minutes southbound compared with the 13-minute delay that was modelled, with a two-to-three-minute variance in the northbound delays compared to the modelling.

We are seeing steady improvements in the performance and reliability of the network, though, again, we are just into the fourth week of operation, and there is a need to allow a little bit of extra time to see what happens in terms of commuter behaviour change—to see them settle into new routines and adjust to changes in the road network. It is important that we allow this to occur so that, when we next perform a network update, it can be built on real-world conditions rather than the modelled conditions.

The amendment I have circulated seeks to provide this time by aligning reinstatement of services, or changes to frequency, with an update to the bus network occurring for the commencement of term 3 2026. I have provided regular updates to the Assembly about the impact of the NCA's bridge closures, and I have previously committed that we would make updates to the bus network and timetable in the second half of the year. The amendment I have circulated aligns with that; it is important so that any improvements are implemented in a manner that is reliable and responsive to the realities of a city undertaking major infrastructure delivery. Introducing these services prematurely before construction-related traffic patterns stabilise would risk widespread unreliability across the network.

The most important consideration has been the reality of the timeframe required to

implement a new network and timetable. A new network cannot be built overnight. There is a process, and it takes time to ensure it is done correctly and adequately checked and to ensure services are arriving when and where they are expected for passengers, including students and schools. This involves confirming all route design and, for any new routes, confirming all of the run times and directions over a three-to-four-week testing period. This involves five to six weeks to build the network in HASTUS, factoring platforms, timing points, routes, stops, relief periods, run times, which are physically checked by our drivers, and then building these into trips across the four scheduled types, which are weekdays, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Plus, we need to make sure all school services within the network have their routes and connections into other services designed and checked, which includes consulting with the schools to line up services with bell times and student pick-up and drop-off locations, adjusting for any traffic around schools at bell times and confirming all arrangements with schools.

Once the draft network is built, everything needs to be checked again, including all of those connections between rapid and local services, plus school services, for all four of those scheduled types. The updated network then needs to be built into the vehicle schedule, which can take up to another month, to make sure that every service has a bus allocated to it, starting with our rapid services, and to make sure we have the capacity to meet the peak demands and we are running our fleet across the network in the most efficient way possible and not overloading our interchanges or layovers.

Then the driver shifts need to be built into this network for those four different schedule types. Each crew schedule run in HASTUS can take up to 70 to 100 hours to complete, with up to ten to 12 being run at any one time, so this can take up to another month. If all goes well, and no revisions are required at any of the aforementioned stages which return the network back into the drafting process, time needs to be allowed—and there are mandatory timeframes under the enterprise bargaining agreement—for the shifts to be “on the benches”, so to speak, and for shift-pick to occur with the driver workforce. This careful process of planning and testing upholds our responsibility to the community in ensuring that changes strengthen the network and do not destabilise it, particularly during a complex construction period.

Mr Speaker, we understand the importance of the R2 and R3 corridors to communities across both the north and south of Canberra. We also recognise the value and community expectation associated with restoring a rapid connection to Kippax, which has been put forward in the motion; I appreciate that. Transport Canberra is actively monitoring the day-to-day performance of the construction bus network to inform changes, which will be made as soon as possible in the second half of the school year; in this amendment to the motion, we will commit to this from term 3.

We are already making adjustments, where possible, in line with demand and conditions. I think one of the speakers mentioned—sorry, I forgot who—that we have already made some adjustments with very minor spare capacity to put some extra runs on route 12 to support extra capacity there. Those were added in the first week of operations to alleviate some of the capacity pressures being experienced on inbound services between Kippax and into Belconnen. That is clearly a segment of the route that we need to focus on.

We also acknowledge that there have been some instances of bus services running early, and we have been working with our drivers to make adjustments to service timings where possible to ensure that buses arrive at stops when expected. We will continue to monitor the network performance in West Belconnen, and we will work with our drivers and operations team, alongside our passengers, to make necessary adjustments.

We are also committed to reinvesting any available spare capacity or spare minutes in the network into service improvements as soon as possible in the second half of the year—so, from term 3. Improving services in West Belconnen will be a focus, including extending the rapid service back to Kippax, which will be a priority in that revised timetable, but, obviously, we are going to do everything we possibly can to return to the R2 and R3 routes if that capacity allows.

We have also—and I have been speaking with Ms Carrick about this this morning—seen capacity issues on other routes that we need to look at as part of a revised timetable and network from term 3, particularly looking at routes like the R4 which has also been experiencing some capacity issues, with pressures on inbound rapid services between Woden and the city. We need to respond to that with increases to service capacity.

My amendment to Ms Clay's and Mr Braddock's motion acknowledges that the network needs to work for all Canberrans, and we need to consider service improvements holistically to ensure any changes are not at the detriment to commuters elsewhere in our city.

Mr Speaker, the government is committed to taking all steps possible to deliver a revised construction bus network in term 3, which is reliable and responsive, to keep Canberrans moving around our city during these major infrastructure works. We will keep the community updated alongside this work progressing, and I look forward to updating the Assembly by the second-last sitting day of March this year with any update that I can provide on how we are progressing with that.

As I said at the beginning, we remain committed to updating the current temporary construction bus network and timetable, based on the real conditions that are being experienced by Transport Canberra buses on our network and the traffic conditions as we see them bedding down. This is a disruptive time for our city. It is perhaps an unprecedented disruption in terms of the work that is occurring, not just on the NCA's bridge works—although that is the most disruptive element—but on other projects as well, and we did need to respond to that with an updated network and timetable. We had to do that incredibly quickly because that construction methodology had not been provided as early as it might have been by the NCA.

I want to put on record my thanks to Transport Canberra and the network planners, as well as the drivers, the employee representatives and the delegates that have been involved in creating that network. It was an incredibly difficult task to respond so quickly, given we did not learn about the exact construction methodology from the NCA until such a late period last year. I also want to thank them for the work that they have already started to do to start preparing for another update so quickly after we have just implemented this updated network and timetable from term 1 of this year.

There is going to be a little bit of change here, but we had to act, and we have acted

based on a focus on reliability to make sure that Canberrans could rely on the services that Transport Canberra provide. We will continue to improve those services. This is a temporary period, and it is going to be a disruptive period, but we are confident, with what we are seeing in terms of the traffic conditions, that we will be able to have some spare capacity to return and improve services from term 3.

Beyond the period of construction, Labor remains absolutely committed to the election platform for transport that we brought to the 2024 election: to increase the frequency of our local bus routes and to deliver new rapid services; and to increase the frequency of key rapid bus services, including the R2. It is unfortunate that, after we had taken steps to deliver on part of those commitments last year when we implemented the previous network and timetable update, we now have the disruption of the NCA's bridge works. But once that is over, we will use all of the capacity in the system, and the additional capacity that we are procuring through the delivery of extra buses that were funded in the budget last year, not only to restore services but to increase services in line with our election commitments and the commitments that we have made for this term in our supply and confidence agreement with the Greens.

I seek leave to move both amendments in my name.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I move:

1. In paragraph (3)(a), omit "Term 2", substitute "Term 3".
2. Omit paragraph (3)(b), substitute:
 “(b) take all steps possible to restore the full R2 and R3 rapid bus services to their previous routes and increase other services that may be in need, like the northbound R4 and R5, by the commencement of Term 3 2026, without reducing overall service levels across the network;

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.02): I too rise to speak in support of this motion. As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, we had been contemplating something similar, so it shows that this is a really important issue and that there are significant concerns around it. I want to thank Ms Clay for bringing this motion and Mr Braddock. It is very topical and since 2 February, I have received numerous emails and calls and complaints about the cut of this service. These are not abstract complaints; they are real stories from people who rely on this service. They are real stories of people who have had their independence and routine disrupted because a government cannot plan, cannot test and cannot model services.

I would like to share and put on record some of those real-life stories, because I always say that everything we do here has a human impact, and it is really important that, every time we make a decision, the human impact is considered. One of the elderly residents has told me that because her stop was missed multiple times, she had to change her travel plans entirely. Instead of taking her usual bus that drops her directly in front of her nursing home, she now has to be collected by her carer from Kippax. This is not an improvement in public transport. This is a loss of independence. It is a system that has made her world smaller and less connected.

I was also contacted by a young professional who relies entirely on public transport. She told me that when she first moved to Canberra ten years ago, it was known to be a liveable city: accessible, efficient and easy to get around without needing a car. All of the data and facts that Mr Braddock has put on record indicating that our bus fleet has not increased to population proves that point. Today she feels that this has changed. She cannot afford a vehicle—not everybody can. Not everybody can afford a vehicle, Mr Speaker. She depends on the bus to manage her expenses, yet the recent changes have increased her travel times and, ultimately, somewhat, her costs. What was once a system that helped her keep money in her pocket now feels like one that is taking money and time out of it.

She has raised with me the concerns that these disruptions have caused her, with stops being missed and longer wait times between services, especially at night. She now has to think carefully about whether it feels safe to travel. When journeys require additional transport and longer walks, particularly in the context of rising concerns about crime and vulnerable residents, especially women and students who are less able to participate in work and study in the community, we must rethink our policy settings.

Mr Speaker, this is not just a transport issue; it is a barrier to independence and economic participation. Anna, who has a son who is visually impaired, raised with me, at one of my mobile office stops, that her son relies on the bus to get to work but now cannot, so she has to drive him to work every day. That is two people whose productivity has been disrupted by the government's inability to plan, to test, to model.

West Belconnen continues to be an expanding, rapidly growing area and should see stronger bus transport connections, not weaker ones. Reliable rapid transit is not an optional luxury, it is essential infrastructure that supports independence, opportunity and community life. Removing rapid services from West Belconnen is a significant issue, and more than 1,400 petitioners to the Belconnen Community Council petition have expressed that concern. They are not seeking special treatment. This is basic government infrastructure. They are just asking for connectivity that works. They are just asking for the government to do what it set out to do.

When public transport becomes harder to use, people revert to their cars, as has been mentioned, and the consequences are predictable: increased congestion, longer commutes and greater peak hour pressure. That outcome runs counter to a lot of the progressive measures, or somewhat progressive measures, that this government has patted themselves on the back for—the reduction targets and the goal of easing traffic across Canberra.

Mr Speaker, this motion calls for something very simple. It is fundamentally a very simple ask. It calls for practical and reasonable action to provide enabling infrastructure to help people participate in their economy. West Belconnen residents, who have been ignored for so long with diminishing infrastructure and aging infrastructure, now have to accept that getting around is harder today than it was before 2 February. Growing communities deserve better connectivity, not reduced access. For the residents of West Belconnen, for the growing Ginninderra community, and in the interests of a genuinely efficient, reliable, and fair public transport network, I really urge the government to plan, to test, to model.

I understand that there are unforeseen circumstances, as the transport minister mentioned, and I appreciate his comments that it was not known that there would be only one route when the bridge construction was contemplated. It was not contemplated that there would be one route when the bridge construction work was put together. However, I do not think it takes a genius to know that you have to plan for unintended consequences. I do not think it takes a genius to know that you would have to test and model and actually plan for unintended consequences.

I am not a transport expert, but I would think there would be provisions—for example, what if all the buses were to burn down today? What is the contingency plan for that? How do we manage that scenario? For the minister to say, “We can’t just buy buses,” I think is a lazy excuse. There are ways that you can plan for things to happen when you do not know. I commend this motion to the Assembly, and I thank Mr Braddock and Ms Clay for bringing it to the Assembly.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.10): So many important messages have been delivered this afternoon from the opposition and the crossbench. I do want to thank the Greens for bringing this important motion. It kind of makes me wonder: “Where are the government members for Ginninderra on this? Where is their voice for the community that elected them?” I still do not hear it. I hear a chuckle; that is all I hear—a chuckle.

Mr Steel has admitted, “Well, we thought the patronage was low and then within a week or two we realised that, no, we had the data wrong.” Again, Chief Minister, you deliver a significant infrastructure service, transport, to the minister for failures and the minister for icebergs, what do you expect? What is going to happen here!

Mr Barr: A point of order. The member was referring to Minister Steel, I believe, in an unparliamentary way.

MR SPEAKER: He did indeed, Chief Minister. On the point of order, I would ask—

Mr Barr: He should withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: He will withdraw. I would ask you to withdraw and address Mr Steel either by the term “Mr Steel” or by his title, in this case, “Minister for Transport”.

MR CAIN: Yes, the Minister for Transport, of course—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, I have directed you to withdraw. I ask you to withdraw.

MR CAIN: What am I withdrawing, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: You are withdrawing the unparliamentary term, “minister for icebergs and failures”, or words to that effect.

MR CAIN: Which one, Mr Speaker? Both or just one?

MR SPEAKER: Both, Mr Cain!

MR CAIN: I will withdraw. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Again, we have another example of something that is really important for the community to contemplate. We have a growing population. We have population spreading in parts of our city—in this case, West Belconnen—and an expansion in the urban footprint that will go over the New South Wales border. What is the government response? “Oh yeah, we’ll cut some services to that part of Canberra.” It does not line up with reality, let alone the fact that the data they used was flawed—clearly flawed. Again, that is something under this government’s watch.

The Minister for Transport should really apologise to the community of West Belconnen and North Canberra. He should apologise, as he has done in the past for mishaps and government wastage.

I do thank the crossbench for bringing this forward for us, and I think, as has been alluded to, it is something that we are very supportive of as Canberra Liberals, both within the portfolio that Mr Parton holds and as the two local Liberal members. We support this important service being restored as promptly as possible to West Belconnen and North Canberra.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.13): First of all, yet again, we are going to have to clear up quite a lot here. There are a whole lot of things that have been said. I do not know where some of this fantasy land thinking has come from, or the reality of what some members think occurred. I will try to make it as clear as possible. I know that people in this place, once anyone else is speaking other than themselves, tune out; that is fine. If you prefer to read, read the *Hansard* later, because I hope I do not have to say this multiple times.

First of all, I think there has been, across many members here, especially, and, in fact, entirely, across the non-government members, fearmongering and creating of false narratives about exactly what is going on here—what it looks like and how it came to be. They are saying that the government was asleep at the wheel or did not consider this or that. I have proof, Mr Speaker, about what happened when and who considered what. I think there has been really dramatic language that has been used ever since Minister Steel gave the update in the Assembly, and especially since December when Ms Clay created the petition.

The use of these words—“the R2 and the R3 are cut and they are not being replaced with anything”—has been extraordinarily frustrating. I have had to do a lot of mopping up, I have to say, after the other non-government members in Ginninderra, because guess what? People who write to you, write to me. People who write to Ms Clay, write to me. In fact, I have noted down all of those names, and I am pretty sure every single one of those people has written to me as well.

There was one that Ms Clay read out: she mentioned that this is an elderly person; she has a husband, and they often use the buses and enjoy the convenience for getting to the airport and to the Kingston railway station from their home. Just like they wrote to Ms Clay, they wrote to me. They were concerned. They were concerned that, first of all, the R2 and R3 were going to be totally gone, and there would be no way for them

to get to the airport or to the Kingston railway station.

You would know, Mr Speaker, if you live out that way, that the R2 and the R3, do not both go to the airport and do not both go to Kingston railway station; one goes to the airport, the R3, and the R2 goes to the Kingston railway station. These people are not living on both routes, so that means they are already having to change for at least one of those trips they are taking. I said:

To go to the heart of your concerns, I want to assure you that the routes currently serviced by the R2 and R3 will continue. The change is that they will be, from early February, the R2 and 12, and the R3 and 13. You will be able to access the train station and the airport through public transport. You will still be able to be picked up at the stop closest to your home and on the 13 service. The only change is that the 13 will terminate in Belconnen, and then you will join the R2 to the city and/or the railway station, or the R3 to the city and/or to the airport. It seems from your email that changing buses at Belconnen interchange is something you already do when travelling to the railway station. The changes you experience will be just like that.

The response to me was:

As usual, your explanation is very clear and helps me to understand the situation better. We will give the new system a go when it comes into effect in the new year.

This is just one example, but I have got countless others.

I get why Ms Clay would have just accepted the constituents' request to join the petition. I get that this is political. I get that as soon as Minister Steel rightly gave the update to this Assembly there was going to be a pile-on while we tried to navigate through this. But this is a good example of where there was an opportunity to provide clarity and reassurance to this person about what their experience would actually be like. I find it disingenuous to hear from Ms Clay her big concern about people getting in their cars, and that this is a travesty, when, by the same token, she does not take the time to properly read someone's correspondence and assist them. A car trip does not have to happen—in exactly this circumstance.

You may have noticed, Mr Speaker, that the R2 and R3 do still exist; they have not been cut. And the routes of the 12 and 13 service are exactly the same routes and the same stops that the R2 and R3 did. I understand that the start times and the end times, are different. I understand that the frequency is different. It did have to be chopped up at the Belconnen town centre stops—all three of them—because of how long the routes are for the R2 and R3. They are some of the rapids that have the most stops in our network. You can imagine that, when you have a route that has 59 stops, like one of these does, if there is going to be a delay because of the bridge works, that is going to have a huge domino effect, and it will get to a point where it cannot be recovered. I do understand, and I do have a lot of sympathy and a lot of time for, the fact that people are missing buses. I know that some have been full—I have experienced this as well—and that early arrival of buses is very, very frustrating, but it could have been so much worse, and the fact that this has not been properly understood has been enormously frustrating.

The claims that the government has known for a long time, and the implication that we should have started planning for this disruption last decade, are just wrong. Here is some logic that might crystallise this: if we knew because this had been publicly announced in 2017, as some people are saying—and I admit it was—then this would mean that people who were in this place knew too. So if it was such public knowledge in the Ninth Assembly, Mr Speaker, then why weren't the non-government members doing their due diligence? Why did we not get any questions about it? Why didn't they ask what we were doing to plan for it? Mr Rattenbury was here. Mr Parton was here. Ms Lee was here. They did not ask any questions. But do you know what? There were not any questions asked in the Tenth Assembly either! Mr Braddock, Ms Clay—they were here!

Opposition members interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: Mr Cain was here—never listening. Mr Parton too—the shadow transport minister. Why weren't they asking questions about it? Why didn't their election commitments account for this? And who can forget the key announcement from the then shadow transport minister about the busway between city and Woden? Taking what route? Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. Now, I am not saying the bridge works were not known to us. We did know. Mr Parton knew the bridge works were going to occur, and his transport policy, which underpinned his election commitment, assumed the work would create a magical extra lane on the bridge! It did not. But did he have a plan for the disruption? No. Don't you think that if he knew that it was going to be disrupted for two years, it might have informed his plan?

Ms Lee: This is just embarrassing!

MS CHEYNE: You are embarrassing! Did anyone have a plan? No. Do you know why, Mr Speaker? If you go back and look at all of the documentation up until October last year—the design, the scope and the need is what it is about. There is no indication anywhere publicly that it was ever disclosed to anyone what the extent of the works would be.

I have the update from 29 July last year that Roads ACT had met with the NCA. I remember reading it with alarm. I went on leave several days later and the number one thing I said to my chief of staff was, "I am very nervous. We are walking into traffic disruption across the city occurring all at once, unlike that of anything we have ever experienced."

Mr Cain: Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, on a point of order?

Mr Cain: I would like to recommend that the minister be given extra time because this is just too good! This is just too good!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, there is no point of order. Minister?

MS CHEYNE: Ms Clay said no-one thought about the other roads that would be or are being disrupted. Well, I definitely listed them at the time. I know that you think that

was embarrassing, but what is embarrassing is that you have not done your homework and this is an absolute furphy!

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.23): I just want to take a moment to respond to some of the assertions that have just been made. Of course, last term—

Mr Barr: You were not intending to speak, were you?

MR COCKS: Indeed; I was not intending to speak. Be that as it may, I hope the Chief Minister recalls that there was actually some extensive debate here last term. We raised some serious concerns about the fact that all of the planning we were seeing around the potential disruption—the decade of disruption that the transport minister announced was to “rethink your route”—was the communication that everyone in Canberra saw. That is what we brought to this place and we raised serious concerns that that was not enough. You need to do more than tell Canberrans that they are the ones responsible and are the ones that need to rethink their route.

Ms Cheyne: The timeline is all wrong.

MR COCKS: I think it is really important that the Attorney-General do her homework and look at what the debates were last term—because it was indeed raised. It was raised.

Ms Cheyne: What date was that?

MR COCKS: It has been a community concern; it has been a concern on this side of the chamber; and, I have no doubt, it has been a concern for the crossbench—the fact that nothing this government did at that stage seemed to indicate they understood the scale of the problem. Nothing that they were communicating to ACT residents indicated that they had any plan except to blame Canberrans for not being good enough at replanning and rethinking their route. Again, I will say the same thing that we said at this time in that debate: I think it is the government’s job to do a bit better than that.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.25): The Greens will be happy to support the amendment. I would also like to move the amendment circulated in my name, which adds to the amendment.

I move:

In paragraph (3)(b), after “take all steps possible”, insert: “, including network scheduling, bus fleet planning, bus leasing and bus acquisitions.”.

I will speak to both briefly. We are happy to support the transport minister’s amendment. We have added a little detail there to make it clear that network scheduling may be enough to get us to where we need to go but that, if network scheduling is not enough, we expect some bus fleet planning, bus leasing, bus acquisitions and something like that. These are all steps that government has taken in the past. They are all definitely steps that are possible. I note that the government managed to do a network replan in two months last year—so network planning can clearly be done well and truly before term 3—and the government has in the past bought more buses, leased more buses and planned acquisitions. So I think, between this suite of measures, we should be able to

get to where we need to go.

I want to touch on the community petition, because it has come up a little bit. I want to read out what the community petition said. It was set up when these announcements were first made. It said:

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that the ACT government intends to cut R2 and R3 routes from West Belconnen, replacing these with local buses from February 2026. The proposed changes to the R2 and R3 will mean that these services terminate at the Belconnen interchange and disconnect the residents of West Belconnen from reliable and frequent public transport options.

I think that is still a fairly accurate statement of what was announced at the time and what has actually happened. It is a community petition. It states that the R2 and R3 would terminate at the Belconnen exchange, which is what is, in actual fact, the case, as I understand it.

The Greens took quite a lot of transport policies to the last election, including that we have busways in Molonglo, the city and Belconnen, and including that we have more buses and more drivers. So I think these commitments would have actually gone to the problem that we are trying to solve today. That is probably enough from me for now. We have had an awful lot on this topic. I note that the Greens support the transport minister's amendments and obviously we would like to add ours into those.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Clay's amendment to Mr Steel's amendments to Ms Clay and Mr Braddock's motion be agreed to.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.28): The government will take all steps possible to restore the full R2 and R3 rapid bus services to their previous routes and increase other services that also may be in need, like the northbound R4 and R5 routes, by the commencement of term 3, 2026 without reducing overall service levels across the network.

I note Ms Clay's amendment to my amendments to her motion and Mr Braddock's motion. We will take those matters seriously that have been proposed. When it comes to the operation of the bus network—and we are, I think, one of the only public bus operators in the country—those operations need to be grounded in reality. That includes the size of the bus fleet and the number of drivers we have. Those things cannot be changed in a very short period of time significantly. We obviously made a commitment in the budget last year to purchase an additional 30 electric buses as part of our overall plan that we took to the election of purchasing 110 electric buses and, of course, recruiting more bus drivers as well.

We will look at what options might be available to us beyond the spare capacity that might be available in the bus network once we understand the extent of actual delays on the traffic network. We will look at those other options to see what is potentially viable. I do not think some of those are going to be achievable, particularly around bus leasing and bus acquisitions with actual deliveries prior to term 3. But we will look seriously at it and see what is possible.

I hope that we can deliver what is asked for in the motion simply through “network scheduling”, as it is referred to in Ms Clay’s amendment. I hope that there is enough capacity there, but I do not know. I will not know until the traffic network beds down and we understand what the new bus timings are on the network, once the period of behaviour change has settled down. We are looking at that very closely at the moment, and we will certainly be having a priority of looking at West Belconnen and making sure that we are also adding extra services and capacity into the R4 routes and potentially others so that we can deliver on the intent of this motion as far as possible. I look forward to providing updates to the Assembly as we progress.

Ms Clay’s amendment to Mr Steel’s amendments agreed to.

Mr Steel’s amendments, as amended, agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.31): In closing, we have heard a lot of keen interest in this issue from the members for Ginninderra, and rightly so. I would also like to thank Ms Carrick, who is no longer with us, for her contribution in terms of the impacts that this has had on the—

Ms Cheyne: She is still alive.

Mr Barr: Yes; she is no longer with us in the chamber.

MR BRADDOCK: I will stand corrected on that particular element, and I agree in terms of not in the chamber. I would also like to thank Mr Parton for his similar contributions in terms of the people of Tuggeranong.

I will not apologise for not doing the government’s job for them of asking the questions back from 2017. If the minister wishes to delegate her duties to me, I am happy to have that conversation. But, otherwise, I do not believe that is an appropriate allegation to put on me. I have also heard a good few excuses from the minister. The amendments are very much not what I would want, but I can live with them. The minister is clear with the parliament about what they can achieve and deliver to the best of their abilities. I can respect that. Where we talk about any future amendments to the network, I understand—and can be reasonable—that there may be some tweaks in the network that may see the frequency go up or down in certain parts. The concern that brought forward this motion were the significant impacts it was having on a region of Canberra. It had to be brought forward to this Assembly, and I think that was a worthwhile debate to have.

I would also like to draw the minister’s attention to how he has previously informed members that the government has provision in the budget for the acquisition of an additional 30 electric buses during the next financial year. He also has an election promise to procure 110 additional electric buses over the course of the term; meaning there is an additional 80 that are not yet in the budget. If meeting his commitments to the people of Canberra means that he needs to bring some of those acquisitions forward, then maybe that is what he needs to do. Consider that one extra idea on how he may act. Another is leasing additional buses to satisfy demand until procurement can be made.

In saying, as per the minister’s amendment, “take all steps possible”, I will be taking a rather broad interpretation of those words, because the Greens are here to push for positive change with a vision of a better-connected city. We consider it our job to always pressure the government to do better. We will call on members of cabinet to keep their promises and to do their jobs, for the people of West Belconnen, for the people of Tuggeranong and for the people all across Canberra.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—Speaker’s rulings

MR SPEAKER: Before we move to the next item, I have been asked to rule on a couple of matters, and I have sought advice from the Clerk. Firstly, there was a point of order raised by Ms Stephen-Smith about a question asked by Ms Morris yesterday in question time and comments made by the Leader of the Opposition today. I will go firstly to the question from Ms Morris.

After question time, Ms Stephen-Smith raised concerns with a question raised or asked by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The minister said:

I was going to ask also, whilst I am on my feet, for the Speaker to review the *Hansard* in relation to Ms Morris’s question that made allegations of alleged corruption. It would just be helpful, I think, to review the language in that question, as it seemed to sail pretty close to the wind in terms of imputation. And Mr Cocks is going to take offence at allegations that he is anti-trade union. I think it is reasonable to ask us for a review of allegations of corruption.

Ms Morris asked the following question:

Is it accepted practice for the territory to enter into a contract for the supply of goods or services that have not been provisioned for in an appropriation bill?

Ms Morris then asked a supplementary question:

Minister, is it common practice for the government to pay invoices on behalf of the territory that have been submitted in relation to supply of goods and services that have not yet been appropriated for?

In responding to the query raised by the minister, can I draw her attention and the attention of other members to page 193 of the *House of Representatives Practice*—I have been studying—which is linked through standing order 275, which states:

It is not acceptable to raise points of order concerning proceedings earlier in the day or concerning proceedings of a previous day.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Apologies, Mr Speaker—and I take your point around proceedings earlier in the day. I take full responsibility for this; I did not clearly differentiate between the response to yesterday’s question that I was giving and my point of order. My point of order was actually related to a question that Ms Morris asked today where she used the word “corruption” multiple times. So it was in relation to today’s question time.

MR SPEAKER: If it is in relation to today's, I will go back and have a look at that. I was not in the chair. The advice I received was that it was in relation to yesterday's question. That is the advice I have been given, and that is the one I have had a look at. If that is the case, I will have a look at that and get back to it. If it has used the word "corruption" that could be problematic. I accept that, but I will have a closer look.

The point I am making on the one from yesterday, while I am making the ruling, *House of Reps Practice* does say that you cannot make a point of order about something that has happened. As it says, it has to be done immediately—which, on another issue, is why I have been getting 118AA to be done at the time not at the end of question time. While we are here, as a bit of a segue, points of order need to be done at the time, immediately at the time. I will go back and we will have a look at today's for you.

But back to the other one then—Mr Parton; he will not be so lucky. During debate on the motion moved by Mr Cocks concerning the ACT budget, the Leader of the Opposition said:

Canberrans are sick of being lied to. If there is a problem, we want to know the extent of the problem. Do not just pretend that there is not one there.

He concluded the speech by saying:

The people of Canberra are sick of being lied to. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

Standing orders 54 and 55 state in relation to offensive words:

A member may not use offensive words against the Assembly or any member thereof or against any member of the judiciary.

And, on personal reflections, standing order 55:

All imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members shall be considered highly disorderly.

Members will be well aware that accusing a member of lying has been long ruled as unparliamentary. It is clear to me that when the leader says that Canberrans are being lied to during debate on the budget position, it is the government that is being accused of lying. Accordingly, I call on the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw his comments.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.39): I withdraw.

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.

Hospitals—Territory Priority Project declaration

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.39): I rise in relation to the tabling of the Territory Priority Project declaration for the Northside Hospital and the Inner South Health Centre and I want to make a few brief comments in relation to the consultation that was undertaken on this matter.

I thank those who participated in the consultation. There were very few comments—I think the planning minister said five comments—received in relation to the Northside Hospital, but there were a number of comments received in relation to the Territory Priority Project declaration for the Inner South Health Centre and also in relation to the major plan amendment. More comments were received in relation to that on the Inner South Health Centre, and I understand the major plan amendment has now been referred to the relevant committee for consideration as to whether to undertake an inquiry.

Both of these infrastructure investments are significant investments in the future health and wellbeing of our community. Both are quite different levels of investment, the new Northside Hospital being the largest investment in health infrastructure that will have been made since self-government, renewing the hospital infrastructure for Canberra's north side and delivering a modern state-of-the-art facility to replace the aging North Canberra Hospital. Stage one of that development is very well underway in terms of design. Members will be aware that there has been some consultation and further public exhibition through the commonwealth Department of the Environment in relation to environment planning. Declaring this project a Territory Priority Project should it be allowed by the Assembly and will provide certainty to ensure that the project can continue on very clear timelines in relation to further consultation, development, application et cetera. I want to assure the community that, for both of these projects, the development application processes will involve further community consultation and also that we are committed to ongoing consultation with the community in relation to both the development of health infrastructure and the delivery of health services.

The next stage of the Northside Hospital project includes early enabling works to prepare the site, including the realignment of services, relocation of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Cottage Program, the relocation of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Service at Arcadia House and, of course, the relocation of the childcare centre as well as then the associated demolition. We have been working with Capital Region Community Services to ensure that the childcare centre is relocated before that building will need to be demolished. We are also working with staff at North Canberra Hospital and with consumers, and we will work with the wider community, in relation to that further development of the project.

The Inner South Health Centre will provide much-needed essential services in the community settings, such as dental services; pathology collection; breast screening; chronic disease management, including nursing and Allied Health clinics; maternal and child health; rapid access clinics; multidisciplinary group programs; and, really importantly, virtual care facilities to enable that connection with specialist care in the hospital for people closer to home so they do not have to travel onto the busy hospital sites. The proposed site for the health centre, as people would be aware, is behind the

shops at Griffith, and this is why we needed to undertake a major plan amendment to expand the community facilities owned land there.

I look forward to being able to progress with the development application and have those more detailed conversations with the community on the issues that they raised during this project process, particularly around parking, traffic, the size and shape of the building, the protection of the green space that they enjoy and also the services that will be delivered through this important facility.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MyWay+—order to table documents—documents tabled

The Clerk, pursuant to standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly of 4 February 2026, as amended 24 February 2026 presented correspondence and documents from the Head of Service dated 25 February 2026 relating to documents and briefs relating to MyWay+ patronage data:

MyWay+ data patronage data—Order to table—Copy of—
MyWay+ tap data and Light Rail door count.
Description of data provided.

Child care—early childhood education and care incident reports—order to table documents—additional documents tabled

The Clerk, pursuant to standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly 24 June 2025, as amended 18 September 2025 relating to the order for the production of documents regarding Early Childhood Education and Care incident reports, presented additional documents for which the claim of privilege has been withdrawn:

Early Childhood Education and Care Incident Records—Order to table—Copy of—
Privilege claims on certain returned documents withdrawn—
Document 00954.
Document 00967.
Letter to the Clerk from the Chief Minister, dated 20 February 2026.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Reference

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.46): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) the Integrity Commission inquiry into procurement issues around the

- Campbell Primary Modernisation Project called for submissions exactly four years ago on 22 February 2022;
- (b) the *Canberra Times* reported on 20 February 2026 that the Commission was hopeful about providing a report by the end of this financial year, but that this was dependant on “whether relevant parties sought additional time to respond and/or the extent and complexity of submissions received”;
 - (c) significant community concerns over the length of time taken to table the report; and
 - (d) the Deputy Chief Minister, as the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, is a key witness in the ongoing inquiry; and
- (2) calls on the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to inquire into the following matters:
- (a) whether the Integrity Commission is adequately resourced;
 - (b) the status of the Government’s implementation of the recommendations of the Govey Review;
 - (c) the potential use of taxpayer-funded legal processes to impact the inquiry; and
 - (d) any other related matters.

A little over four years ago, the Integrity Commissioner called for submissions into the inquiry that would become Operation Kingfisher. It was 22 February 2022. Much work has been done in that space since then. This motion today focuses on the public expectation of an important and complex process about which, for many Canberrans, the public expectation has not been met.

I was a part of the parliamentary cohort that sat in this chamber until late in the night, helping to form the legislation that established the Integrity Commission. When we did this, I think we envisaged some different processes and some different outcomes. Please do not misunderstand me, Mr Speaker, or, indeed, anyone else; I am by no means being critical of the Integrity Commissioner or the commission. I am just keen to arrive at an understanding of the delays in the process.

There are extremely serious questions of potential undue influence that are being investigated as part of this inquiry. This is an incredibly serious corruption investigation, or potential corruption investigation, and there are allegations that go directly to the Deputy Chief Minister’s office. This motion does not set out to throw anyone under a bus. The motion came about because it has been long enough. The community deserves transparency, certainty and timely accountability from the institutions charged with safeguarding integrity in the ACT.

This motion and the inquiry that we hope to establish simply seek to find out if the Integrity Commission is adequately resourced for its role and to flesh out some of the other factors that have led to this inquiry dragging on for so long. The *Canberra Times* reported just this morning that the final roadblock into the probe had been cleared, but we are not done yet. According to the *Canberra Times*, the findings will be revealed to the affected parties this Friday. This follows the ending of legal action from one individual who sought to prevent the commission from examining the large number of

documents downloaded from a mobile phone.

We now brace for a potential, drawn-out to-and-fro between the commission and affected parties. It is quite possible that that will not be the case, but it is within the realms of possibility. In earlier media reports, cautious hope was qualified. It would depend on whether relevant parties sought additional time and on the complexity of submissions. That uncertainty has only deepened community frustration, so we still do not know for sure whether we will have a final report by the end of the financial year.

It goes without saying that the Canberra Liberals absolutely support natural justice. We are keen to discover more about the government-funded legal processes that have ultimately delayed this inquiry. Just last week, on 20 February 2026, the *Canberra Times* reported that the commission, again, was hopeful of providing this report by the end of the financial year.

The community is concerned. They are concerned about the time this process has taken. They are concerned that key witnesses, including the Deputy Chief Minister, remain at the centre of an unresolved inquiry. I am sure she is concerned as well about how long it has gone on for. They are concerned about whether the commission has the resources, the support and the independence it needs to complete its work without obstruction.

This Assembly cannot simply sit by and watch an integrity process stretch endlessly into the distance. I think the public expects us to act. That is why this motion calls on the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to enquire into several key issues—whether the commission is adequately resourced, the status of the government’s implementation of the Govey review recommendations, whether ACT taxpayer-funded legal processes may have been used to influence, delay or otherwise impact the inquiry, and any other matters relevant to ensuring the commission can do its job independently and efficiently.

This is not about pre-empting the outcome of the Campbell primary investigation. It is not about political point scoring. It is about ensuring that the ACT’s integrity framework is functioning as the public expects and deserves. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.50): I thank the opposition leader for bringing forward this Assembly business item. I note that, from its establishment, the Integrity Commission has formed a key part of the territory’s integrity and anti-corruption framework. I also recall the discussions and the many hours spent in this place arriving at the original legislative structure.

Since its commencement, it has become evident that some components and restrictions that I think we could probably conclude were inserted with the best of intentions to achieve unanimous support in this place have nonetheless affected the commission’s capacity to operate efficiently. The number one issue, which has now been resolved, was a restriction that the then opposition leader required that employment of former ACT public servants in the commission would be highly restricted. This, of course, resulted in it being very difficult, until we changed the law, for the commission to recruit experts into essential roles, which undoubtedly was a factor in slowing down

investigations and inquiries.

This restriction and other provisions affecting the timeliness of commission operations have been rectified by government legislation that I am pleased to say was supported unanimously across the chamber.

Appropriate funding for the Integrity Commission is, of course, essential for it to meet its functions thoroughly and quickly. Since its establishment, the government has always endeavoured to meet its funding requirements as its workload has grown, and we have always given serious consideration to budget funding requests, particularly for particular projects or the base workload of the commission.

As members are aware, requests by the Integrity Commission for specific funding are brought forward not by the government but by the Speaker of the Assembly, which, of course, the current Leader of the Opposition would know, as he was, until recently, the Speaker of the Assembly, and he brought forward submissions on behalf of the Integrity Commission.

In the 2023-24 budget, the government provided \$940,000 of additional funding to further increase the capacity of the commission. This was to increase investigative and legal resources to meet immediate needs. The funding was provided over two years—\$369,000 in fiscal 2023-24, rising to \$571,000 in fiscal 2024-25. I note the Integrity Commission, through the Speaker, did not submit any business case proposals in the 2024-25 budget process.

As per the Assembly motion of December 2024, the government is required to provide a public statement, as part of the budget tabling process, if the Integrity Commission's budget funding request differs from the funding that is granted through the budget process in that financial year. I note that, again, in 2025-26, the government had no need to provide such a statement because all the funding that was requested by the Integrity Commission was provided in the budget, which the Leader of the Opposition and then-Speaker knows, because he brought forward the budget bid.

I will turn briefly to the status of items from the Govey review. The government continues to progress work to implement the recommendations from the statutory reviews of both the Integrity Commission Act 2018—the IC Act—and the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012. The Govey review covered both. The 2025-26 territory budget included funding for two full-time equivalent positions to consider and implement the outstanding recommendations. The funding has been used to establish a legislative reform and integrity policy business unit within the culture, capability and governance group in the Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate.

The government will be bringing forward a further bill to implement approximately 12 of Mr Govey's recommendations that particularly focus on enhancing witness protections and supporting an efficient Integrity Commission. Officials are working towards the introduction of a bill in the Assembly before the end of this calendar year and have been actively engaged in policy work and collaboration with stakeholders to advance the development of the proposed reforms. The capacity to introduce legislation in 2026 as desired is, in part, dependent on the complexity of drafting. The drafting of

the legislation is, of course, subject to consideration and agreement by cabinet and, ultimately, this place.

Work will continue in parallel with this program of reform to consider a range of non-legislative tools that may be used or put in place that also meet the spirit and intent of the Govey recommendations. This includes reviewing the guidance, training and support available to support good governance and decision-making in the public sector.

That is where we are at with the elements contained within the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. It is open to the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to inquire further, but I thought that, at the beginning of this process, the latest information would help the committee in that regard.

The government has expressed concern over the use of one pejorative word in this motion, but it seems there is not an interest in removing that, so we will not seek to move amendments and take up the Assembly's time any further on that matter. Members know the word that I am referring to. We have raised it privately with offices, with a view to trying to get unanimous agreement here. I regret that that was not possible, but we will not stand in the way of the committee referral. With that, we are happy to support the motion.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.57): Whilst I happen to be a member of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders, I am speaking today as an individual member of this place and not on behalf of that committee. I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this motion. The Greens agreed at the start of this term that a greater level of Assembly committee oversight of the Integrity Commission would improve confidence in our integrity framework and as a reflection of the important work of the Integrity Commission.

The Govey review, as Mr Barr mentioned, was the first independent statutory review, conducted five years after the passage of the Integrity Commission Act. This review was published in November 2023 and provided 66 recommendations to improve the powers and operations of the Integrity Commission.

The government decided to deliver the recommendations in tranches. The first tranche of amendments was passed by this Assembly in 2024. We are now waiting for the government to present the second tranche of amendments that are expected to address the more substantive or time-intensive matters.

It will be timely during the course of this term for the committee to undertake an inquiry to examine the Integrity Commission's performance since the Govey review was undertaken, the impact of the first tranche of amendments passed in 2024, the outstanding recommendations from the Govey review, and the proposed second tranche of government amendments when they become available.

Such an inquiry would also provide an opportunity to advance a community conversation on a couple of areas highlighted by Mr Parton's motion. Firstly, on the level of resourcing, I note the previous motion in this Assembly, which was supported by the Greens, for the funding for the lobbying inquiry, which the government has included in the uplift of commission resources and which the commission is now

commencing.

I am particularly interested in the outcomes of this lobbying inquiry. Ms Clay laid out yesterday the level of connection and apparent influence that the horseracing industry has on this government, and I expect the Integrity Commission to look at that as part of their inquiry.

There is no doubt that we need an effective, adequately resourced Integrity Commission that enjoys the community's trust and confidence. There is also no doubt that every dollar invested into the Integrity Commission is one less dollar available to teachers, nurses, schools and hospitals. Therefore, I think it is valuable that those who wish to make their case about the commission's resources can do so in a transparent way and without prejudice to the open inquiry.

The second part relates to the taxpayer-funded legal processes. As the commission itself notes about Operation Kingfisher, three separate legal actions have been brought on the commission by Kingfisher witnesses, with all matters resolved in favour of the commission and/or withdrawn by the plaintiffs since the commencement of this investigation. Whilst I support the rights of individuals to have their days in court to hear their case, I cast a dim eye if it was a deliberate strategy to interfere with or delay the commission's work. It should be noted that three witnesses were current or former ACTPS or LAM staff who, I understand in at least two of those cases, had legal assistance funded, whether fully or in part, by ACT taxpayers.

I do not wish to pre-empt the work of the committee on this question. I am genuinely open to hearing submissions and evidence. I note previous statements from the government about how these sorts of decisions are made by the Solicitor-General in accordance with the Law Officers Legal Services Directions 2023.

I will also be very interested in how these directions were applied in this case, particularly if anyone who obtained taxpayer-funded legal support is subsequently found to have engaged in corrupt conduct. Taxpayer-funded legal assistance may also have an impact on the resourcing of the commission, as these cases have also slowed down the inquiry process and consumed Integrity Commission resources to defend these cases in court.

I note the Chief Minister's comments in terms of one word which the government had an issue with. I would like to say for the public record that we did not form that view; hence we were not supportive of it being put forward as an amendment. The Chief Minister has not mentioned the specific word, but I would like to put on the record that we do not necessarily agree with the Chief Minister's description of that word.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning relating

to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025, the committee considered a total of four appointments and reappointments to the following bodies: the ACT Heritage Council; the ACT Scientific Committee; and the Suburban Land Agency Board. I present the following paper:

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2025.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (6.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025, the committee considered five appointments or reappointments to the following bodies: Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority Governing Board; Tree Advisory Panel; and ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board. I present the following paper:

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2025.

Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 4 December 2025, on motion by **Ms Barry**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (6.03): I rise to speak on the Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill. In the interests of time, I want to apologise to my staff: I have just torn up most of the speech and got rid of it. It was good, too.

At the heart of any sound public policy process lies a simple but essential question: what is the problem that we are trying to solve? I am not sure that it has been clearly articulated in this space. The minister suggested that the bill would create a more fulfilling and rewarding career pathway for nurse practitioners, and I am sure that is the case, but I do not know that that is a public policy rationale. It seems to be more of an HR talking point. I am sure it is important, and I note the presence of nurse practitioners in the gallery.

Stakeholders across our health, justice and law enforcement sectors have raised serious concerns with this proposal. The most obvious of these is that no other jurisdiction in Australia allows nurse practitioners to sign death certificates—not one. We would be the outlier.

Why? Because the coronial system relies on strong, clear, medically rigorous

gatekeeping to ensure that unexpected, unexplained, suspicious or potentially preventable deaths are properly referred to the Coroner. Lowering the threshold for who makes that determination risks weakening those safeguards, and I say that, again, with the greatest respect to our nurse practitioners.

The ACT Coroner himself has raised concerns with me—concerns, I suspect, that he has also raised with other members of this place. He warns that this bill risks creating gaps, increasing uncertainty and placing additional burdens on an already stretched coronial system that should give every member pause.

The Australian Federal Police oppose the measure. The Australian Medical Association oppose the measure. Many of the groups who have spoken to me have described this change as a step too far. Peter Somerville, the CEO of the AMA ACT, put it plainly. He said, “We think that the proposed change risks doing a great disservice to both the patient and the community at large.” He went on to say, “We believe that there is considerable risk of inappropriately determining causation if the change in its current form was to proceed.”

I have had numerous conversations with others in the medical profession who were beside themselves regarding this change. One of them nearly drove off the road when I shared this amendment with him.

These concerns are not abstract. They go to the integrity of our mortality data, the safety of our coronial processes and the trust of families who deserve absolute certainty about what happened to their loved ones. Again, let me be clear: I respect nurse practitioners. I recognise their advanced training, their postgraduate qualifications and the invaluable role they play in our health system. They request and interpret diagnostic examinations, diagnose medical conditions, prescribe medicines, and refer to medical and allied health specialists. They are highly skilled clinicians.

The Canberra Liberals will be voting against this bill, and we will be moving an amendment calling for an independent review by the ACT Chief Coroner after 12 months of operation. If the government insists on pursuing this bill, at the very least, this Assembly must insist upon proper oversight and evaluation. The stakes are simply too high to rely on optimism.

This bill shifts a significant legal responsibility to a group of practitioners without providing evidence that the change will strengthen the coronial process or enhance public confidence. Until the government can demonstrate that this proposal is not only safe but necessary, we cannot support it. I urge members of this Assembly to consider the concerns raised by clinicians, police, the AMA and the Coroner. The integrity of our coronial system and the trust of families across the ACT should never be compromised.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.07): Today I rise to speak in support of the Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill. At its heart, this bill is about modernising our health system, using our workforce more effectively and improving access for patients and families, while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

The amendment allows endorsed nurse practitioners to undertake specific functions,

including witnessing non-written health directions and completing death certificates, where they have been involved in the patient's care. This is not a radical step. It is a careful, measured reform grounded in how contemporary health care already operates.

Nurse practitioners are not some sort of junior clinician; they are highly experienced registered nurses with advanced clinical training, masters-level qualifications, and endorsement by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. Many have decades of practise in complex settings—aged care, palliative care, chronic disease management, mental health and primary care.

With regard to the issuing of death certificates, which is what Mr Parton particularly focused on, this bill includes safeguards. A nurse practitioner must have been part of the treating team within the relevant period, ensuring familiarity with the patient's history and circumstances. If they do not have sufficient knowledge of the person's medical history, they must refer to a doctor. This directly addresses concerns raised by the AMA and the RACGP that a nurse practitioner may not have access to the full medical picture.

We have heard claims that complex cases such as multimorbidity may not be appropriately managed, but collaboration and consultation are standard practice for nurse practitioners. The majority work in multidisciplinary teams. They are trained to recognise the limits of their scope and to escalate when required, just as doctors do.

It is also worth putting risk into perspective. Currently, very junior medical practitioners, sometimes only one or two years out of medical school, are legally able to complete death certificates, yet a nurse practitioner with many years of clinical experience and advanced postgraduate qualifications cannot. This change recognises that the skills and experience of nurse practitioners should be taken into account in considering the scope of activities they can undertake.

The AMA and the RACGP also raised concerns about accuracy in identifying primary and secondary causes of death, including conditions that may have implications for family members. Nurse practitioners receive the same training as doctors in death certification, and that training is regularly reviewed. Evidence from the United States published in peer-reviewed journals indicates no meaningful difference in accuracy between physicians and non-physicians when completing death certification. Poor practice would also be identified in coronial systems and professional regulation processes. There is no credible body of evidence demonstrating systemic inaccuracy.

We also note that, in New Zealand, nurse practitioners have been able to certify deaths since 2018. There has been no reported surge in inappropriate referrals to coroners and the coronial system there provides robust professional guidance.

One issue raised with us in the consideration of this bill is the question of liability. Nurse practitioners are required to hold professional indemnity insurance. Under law, they are the delegated practitioner for the task, so it is they, not the doctor, who would be held liable for any mistakes that may occur. The regulatory framework is clear and comparable to other advanced practice functions that they already perform.

Ultimately, this reform is about sensible use of skills. In aged-care facilities, in

palliative settings and in community practice, families should not have to wait unnecessarily for a doctor to attend when a qualified nurse practitioner who knows the patient is present and capable. Delays add distress at an already painful time.

The ACT Greens believe in evidence-based reform. We believe in multidisciplinary care, and we believe that enabling health professionals to work to their full scope of practice, where it is safe, regulated and supported, strengthens our health system. Doctors are valued members of that system, but modern health care is a team endeavour. Recognising the expertise of nurse practitioners does not diminish doctors. It ensures patients and families receive timely and appropriate care.

For these reasons—the safeguards in the bill, the training and experience of nurse practitioners, the absence of evidence of harm in comparable jurisdictions and the practical benefits for families—we will be supporting this legislation today.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (6.12), in reply: It is disappointing that the opposition will not be supporting this bill today, and it is particularly disappointing to hear the Leader of the Opposition describing the introduction of this capacity for nurse practitioners as “lowering the threshold”. Mr Rattenbury has very clearly articulated how highly qualified nurse practitioners are, and also made a point about the power to sign what I need to clarify are cause of death certificates. Death certificates are issued by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Currently, under the legislation, cause of death certificates can be signed and provided to the registrar by very junior doctors indeed, whereas nurse practitioners, as Mr Rattenbury has outlined, are required to have the equivalence of three years’ full-time experience, which is 5,000 hours, at the clinical advanced nursing practice level within the last six years—that is not three years out of university; that is three years at clinical advanced nursing practice level—and must have successfully completed an approved master’s degree program of study. As Mr Rattenbury also indicated, they need to be endorsed as a nurse practitioner by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

This chamber has previously recognised the high level of qualification and skill of nurse practitioners in a range of areas. This bill does not intend nurse practitioners to replace the role of medical practitioners; it seeks to augment timely access to health care through enabling a complementary and interdisciplinary approach to provide the right care at the right time for the ACT community. As Mr Rattenbury has said, this reflects the importance of shared interdisciplinary care and the impacts on the wellbeing of the ACT community.

We talk regularly about the shortage in the healthcare workforce. Anything that frees up doctors’ time from having to do a task that could be done by a nurse practitioner who is in the environment already and knows the person and knows their family is surely good for our broader health system. This is what enabling all practitioners to work with their scope and practice is about. The amendments will have the greatest impact in hospice and palliative care settings at home and hospitals, where nurse practitioners are often the primary health professionals managing end-of-life care. It will also positively impact residential aged-care facilities, where nurse practitioners

routinely care for elderly patients, particularly those with chronic conditions.

Mr Parton has questioned whether there is any benefit beyond the benefit to nurse practitioners and their capacity to see a person's care right through to the very end of their care journey. Yes, there is. I take the example of someone who dies by voluntary assisted dying. This chamber has agreed that nurse practitioners should be able to perform the role of coordinating practitioner and consulting practitioner to determine whether somebody is eligible to access voluntary assisted dying. Nurse practitioners can walk alongside an individual right through the process of voluntary assisted dying to administration of the substance. To then say that they are not in a position to sign a cause of death certificate and that another person has to come in and do that job is not only disrespectful to the nurse practitioner; it is also disrespectful to the person and it is disrespectful to their family, who have chosen a pathway of dignity at the end of the person's life, whether that is through voluntary assisted dying or death from natural causes in an aged-care facility or a palliative care hospice.

Very briefly, there has not been any real discussion about the second amendment at part 5 of the bill which will allow a non-written health direction to be witnessed by a nurse practitioner and one other professional, without requiring a doctor to be one of the witnesses. Again, it is disappointing that the Canberra Liberals are unable to support this. This bill will still require two appropriately trained and qualified health professionals to witness non-written health directions and does not change the substantive safeguards under the Medical Treatment (Health Directions) Act. Health directions are an integral part of health care, ensuring individuals' preferences are respected and understood by their health providers at times when they are unable to communicate their wishes directly. By allowing greater flexibility in the combination of health professionals who can witness a health direction and including the person who often is the primary carer of these individuals, this bill ensures better care and consistently aligns with an individual's wishes.

I commend the bill to the Assembly. I thank everyone who has been involved in scrutinising it, and I thank the Greens for their support.

Question put:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

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

Noes 7

| |
|----------------|
| Chiaka Barry |
| Peter Cain |
| Leanne Castley |
| Ed Cocks |
| Jeremy Hanson |
| James Milligan |
| Mark Parton |

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (6.22): I seek leave to move an amendment to this bill that has not been considered by the scrutiny committee and not circulated in accordance with standing order 178A.

Leave granted.

MR PARTON: I move:

Amendment No 1 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 613*], which inserts a new clause 11A.

Many concerns have been raised with me about this bill, but the concerns that carried the most weight with me were from the Chief Coroner. The Coroner is the crunch point when it comes to this process. I have absolute trust in the judgement of the Coroner. I would assume that everyone else in this chamber would share that trust. There is not a great deal of spin that comes from the Coroner; indeed, none at all. Given that whoever holds that role is absolutely at the coalface on the outcome of this issue, I would expect the Chief Coroner would be in a perfect position to judge the consequences of this policy change. I commend the amendment to the bill.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (6.24): The government will not be supporting Mr Parton's amendment. We agree in principle that a review of new legislation is appropriate, but we have two issues with Mr Parton's proposed amendment. Firstly, he proposes that the Chief Coroner undertake the review of the operation of section 35A—that nurse practitioners may give a cause of death certificate to the Registrar-General. We do not believe that the Coroner is the appropriate entity to undertake such a review. It would be, I believe, unprecedented to have the Coroner review a legislative provision, and, of course, the Coroner is directly affected by this change in legislation. In addition, we regularly have conversations about resourcing for the Coroner, so it would be a challenge. This is not the core type of work that the Coroner undertakes.

Secondly, Mr Parton's amendment would cause the review to take place as soon as practicable after one year from when the section commences. We believe this is too short a timeframe to have understood the broader impact. As Mr Rattenbury indicated earlier, nurse practitioners very much understand the scope of their work. There will be time for nurse practitioners to be trained to start undertaking this work. And, again, one year is not the normal timeframe for a review,

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.26): We will not be supporting Mr Parton's amendment, but we will be supporting the minister's amendment when it comes forward. Firstly, we often see written into new legislation a review after some period of

time. It is quite appropriate, depending on what the reform is. In this case, looking at it after three years seems to be a suitable timeframe. It allows enough time for healthcare providers to become used to the system, as well as enough time to generate enough data to make worthwhile analysis.

Secondly, we consider it more appropriate that it is the minister's responsibility to undertake this review. Obviously, the minister will not personally do it; they will perhaps engage a suitable healthcare consultant or an expert in the field. In this case, having worked with the Coroner a great deal in the past in my former role as Attorney-General, the Coroner is a stakeholder or an interested party in this discussion, so I do not think they are the appropriate person to conduct the review. The Coroner has opportunities along the way if issues come up. They will be issuing reports. They have an annual report. There is a range of ways for the Coroner to express their views, but an actual review of a system should not be conducted by one of the parties in that process. I will be supporting the minister's amendment when it comes forward next.

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) (6.27): As the First Law Officer, I need to clarify that the amendment actually refers to the Chief Coroner. The Chief Coroner is the Chief Magistrate. Many people have been referring to Magistrate Archer. Magistrate Archer now undertakes the vast majority of the coronial work and is greatly respected by every one of us. I certainly do not want it on the record from Mr Parton that there is any disrespect through this approach. To further underline the points that the health minister was making, the Chief Coroner is the Chief Magistrate, so, as there is already pressure everywhere, including on our courts, I am not sure that even Mr Parton knew exactly what this amendment would do.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (6.28): I want to reflect the comments from the previous speakers. I understand there have been some concerns from the Coroner's office regarding the risk of increased workload. I empathise with any office that is already overburdened and under-resourced, as we have heard. I strongly support adequate resourcing for the Coroner, which is a matter I have raised in this place before. I am not convinced that tasking the Chief Coroner, as Ms Cheyne has indicated—as it is a different role—with a review would help with resourcing. I appreciate the opposition's engagement with me on this matter. I will not be supporting this amendment, but I am supportive of a review.

Very briefly, as we have heard, the bill expands the scope of practice available to nurse practitioners in the ACT, as we have discussed. Hopefully this offers a small measure of relief to the pressures felt in the health system, while acknowledging the expertise of the relatively limited number of nurse practitioners working in our system.

I understand there has been extensive consultation in the preparation of this bill. It appears unlikely, given the safeguards it contains, that it will create more burden for the Coroner. There are still more restrictions on a nurse practitioner's ability to issue a medical certificate regarding cause of death than there are on a junior doctor, and nurse practitioners are, of course, highly skilled, experienced medical professionals at the top of their game. Often, as the minister explained, nurse practitioners will be the key people responsible for care until the moment someone passes away, as in, for instance,

palliative care and voluntary assisted dying contexts, so it makes sense to me for them to be able to issue death certificates under such circumstances.

With all of that said, a review also seems sensible, best undertaken in a more standard way and with a more standard timeframe, so I will be supporting the government's amendments on that.

Mr Parton's amendment negated.

At 6.30 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negated, the debate was resumed.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (6.30): I seek leave to move an amendment to this bill that has not been considered by the scrutiny committee.

Leave granted.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name [*see schedule 2 at page 615*] and table a supplementary explanatory statement to the government amendment.

We have been through this enough, and we are past the time for normal adjournment, so I will not speak to this. I just thank the Assembly, and I will take the opportunity to thank the Office of the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, which undertook significant consultation and policy work in developing this legislation. I really appreciate them being in the Assembly today to celebrate this next milestone in ACT leadership on the scope of practice of nurse practitioners.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (6.32): The Greens—my crossbench colleagues; my good friends—indicated that they were not going to support my review amendment because the Coroner is a stakeholder and very much an interested party. I would suggest the health minister is also a stakeholder and very much an interested party in this legislation, and we are not supportive of the health minister marking her own homework.

Ms Stephen-Smith's amendment agreed to.

Bill, as a whole, as amended, agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Statements by members

UC Cricket Challenge

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (6.33): On 12 February, I had the great pleasure of being part of the launch the UC Cricket Challenge with Cricket ACT, which highlights the expanding and enduring education partnership that Canberra is building across India.

The UC Cricket Challenge shows what is possible when we bring sport and education together with purpose. In just a few years, it has evolved from a pilot into a first-of-its-kind international schools tournament, supported by year-round coaching, talent development and study pathways into Canberra.

Cricket has always been a natural bridge between our countries, and this initiative strengthens the connection by opening real opportunities for young athletes. For the ACT, the challenge builds on strong international education pipelines and positions Canberra as a leader in sport education innovation. It is helping to create long-term talent links that support our future skills needs and our growing economy, and it deepens the people-to-people ties that sit at the heart of Canberra's relationship with India.

The partnership is already delivering real outcomes, and this initiative is laying the foundations for long-term success between Canberra and India. I look forward to seeing the academy grow and to welcoming many of the talented young athletes to the ACT in the years ahead. I congratulate Cricket ACT and the University of Canberra for their initiative in this area.

Tributes: Hannah and Kashish

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) (6.34): I am going to speak very briefly. Two staff members are leaving my office: Hannah this week and Kashish in a few weeks. I want to say how grateful and thankful I am to have spent the time that I had with them. As everyone in this place knows, this job is very intense and you ride the ups and downs with your staff every single day. I want them to know of their impact for the Canberra community in the work that they have done every single day—responding to emails, phone calls, social media requests and progressing our agenda here as well. I am incredibly grateful and I wish them all the best for the future.

Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.35): As members would be aware, yesterday was the opening hearing for the royal commission on antisemitism and social cohesion—a very significant royal commission. Letters patent were issued by the monarch on 9 January this year and a report is due on 14 December this year. I want to highlight some of the important points about this royal commission, in particular the terms of reference, which begins as follows. This is from the monarch to the Hon Virginia Bell AC:

GREETING

ACKNOWLEDGING the antisemitic terrorist attack on Jewish Australians that took place at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025, and which resulted in the loss of 15 lives and the wounding of a further 40 individuals.

Thus begin the letters patent. As members would be aware, the big headline items in the terms of reference for this royal commission are: tackling antisemitism, making recommendations regarding law enforcement and border control, examining the circumstances of this antisemitic Bondi attack, and making any recommendations that

will enhance our social cohesion. It is a significant royal commission.

Tuggeranong—Lunar New Year celebrations

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.36): I rise to inform the Assembly that this Saturday, 28 February, from 10 to 12, you can come along to South Point Tuggeranong and celebrate Lunar New Year. I am very much looking forward to being there. South Point was recently voted the best shopping centre in the ACT, so, if you have not been there, go and check it out. It is a wonderful place where people meet. This Saturday promises to be a spectacular of colour, music and celebration activities for kids as we welcome the Lunar New Year together.

Lunar New Year is a significant cultural event observed across many communities, including Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and many other Asian cultures. It is a time of renewal, family and hope for the year ahead. This year marks the Year of the Horse—a symbol of energy, resilience and forward momentum. It is a fitting reminder of optimism and determination as we look ahead to the year to come.

From 10.30 on Saturday, there will be the lion dance and traditional performances, bringing vibrancy to Centre Court and creating a wonderful atmosphere for families and shoppers alike. In keeping with the Year of the Horse, because South Point is the only shopping centre that allows live animals in the ACT, there will even be a horse and a pony, named Travis and Finnegan, joining in the festivities. You will be able to get photos and enjoy time with them. So, please, come along and join me and the Chief Minister to celebrate Lunar New Year at South Point this Saturday.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

National Apology to the Stolen Generations—18th anniversary National Service Training Scheme—75th anniversary

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.38): I want to speak about two very significant anniversaries that were marked by events at Parliament House in the last two weeks. On Friday morning, 13 February, I attended a breakfast at Parliament House to commemorate the 18th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. This was a particularly moving event. It was great to chat with community leaders and Aboriginal Elders from all over the country who knew what it meant to see such an apology delivered with hope for real change for our First Nations community in our nation.

It is estimated that over 100,000 children were displaced in the stolen generation. We have made progress since that apology and there is still much more work to do. One example that gets brought up in this chamber is that the incarceration rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has not improved over that time. That is something

that requires a whole community effort and obviously a whole-of-government effort to find the source of those problems and to find ways to redirect young lives into fruitfulness, personal satisfaction and contributing to our community.

That apology 18 years ago was certainly a milestone. I do not believe there would be any member in this place who is not committed to ensuring that our First Nations community have all the benefits at the level all Australians enjoy, all of the benefits and none of the disadvantages of our broader Australian community.

The second event I attended was the next day, Saturday morning, at Parliament House—again with a national attendance. I attended the 75th Anniversary of the National Service Training Scheme. It was particularly fitting for me, as shadow minister for veterans, to attend that commemorative service hosted by the Department of Veterans Affairs. In 1951, 75 years ago, Australia introduced the National Service Training Scheme, at a time of deep global uncertainty during the Korean War. The commemorative service on 14 February brought together veterans, families and the wider community to reflect on the history of national service—obviously, a very controversial move in some ways. It was a reminder that behind every service number was an individual, an Australian—some who saw that service at great cost; a son, a brother, a husband, a mate whose life was changed by that call.

As we marked the 75th anniversary, we acknowledged not only the national servicemen but also their families who were left behind. It was very touching to hear testimonials from those who had been called up for national service and their families. Over 800,000 young people registered for the National Service Training Scheme and over 63,000 men were conscripted by the national ballot at the time, 19,000 of whom were sent to conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Unfortunately, over 200 were killed because of the conflict in Vietnam and nearly 1,300 were wounded.

As I have mentioned, as shadow minister for veterans, I was inspired by the stories of individual heroism. We heard personal testimonies of this from national servicemen who had served. I was honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of the ACT opposition, in company with Minister Orr, on that occasion. To all those who served under national service, we say: Thank you; your duty, sacrifice and service to Australia will always be remembered.

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

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) (6.42): Members will remember that on 24 December last year the government provided 2,454 early childhood education and care regulatory documents to the Clerk in response to the 213A motion of 24 June. These documents were subsequently released by the Assembly to members and the public. Since then, the Education Directorate has identified approximately 250 documents that were missed. All of these documents are held in the National Quality Agenda IT system, a national database administered by ACEQA.

When the documents were first extracted from the database, it was done on the basis of

the date range specified in the Assembly in the motion. Unfortunately, documents that had an incomplete date field were inadvertently excluded. Now that this administrative error has been identified, Education Directorate staff have been manually extracting the relevant documents from the database. The team are now working through the documents to ensure that redactions are correctly applied to protect privacy as much as possible. I expect the additional documents will be provided to the Clerk during the March double sitting of the Assembly.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the team who have worked tirelessly for months to process the documents required by the motion. At its peak, that team included 18 people. They have worked through the documents with professionalism and care and have really made every effort to get this right. I wanted to update the Assembly on the work that is being done in that space.

Playgrounds and play spaces—Erindale—shopping centre upgrades

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.44): Today I rise to speak about my survey on the Erindale public space upgrades and to share with the Assembly what 422 Tuggeranong locals told me about those upgrades, loudly, clearly and in some cases with quite a lot of emphasis. As members will know, the ACT government committed \$2.6 million in the 2025-26 budget to upgrade the public spaces around Erindale shops. Because everyone has a strong opinion about their local shops, opinions that are regularly expounded to me at my Tuggeranong office in Erindale, between December and February, over the last summer, I asked residents how we could get this right. I made this survey available everywhere—online, in person and delivered to every household in Wanniasa, Monash, Gowrie, Fadden and Oxley. If you live in those suburbs and you opened your letterbox over summer and wondered why you had a letter from your local and vocal member, hello and you are welcome.

In total, 422 residents told us what they thought. That is a big response for a survey about a local shopping centre. The strongest message: “Give us a play space, please, and make it a good one.” A massive 79 per cent of respondents to the survey want a playground, and that is a big endorsement for a playground. While Erindale is the only group centre in Tuggeranong with a heritage-listed skate park, in the Erindale Brick Banks Snakepit, residents made the point that Erindale is in fact the only group centre in Tuggeranong without a dedicated play space. In Canberra, that is like being the only suburb without an adjacent roundabout. It feels wrong. People see huge value in putting the play space in Grattan Court, where there is currently a large derelict garden bed and lots of concrete. In fact, one resident wrote, “As a mum of little children, I would really appreciate a playground being built in Erindale. It will make a rich difference to our family life in the local community.” Another told me, “We have been waiting for this for so long. I hope you can make it happen.” Mr Speaker, I can assure you and them that so do I.

Residents mentioned that they want a greener, cooler and more comfortable Erindale shops, with trees, shade structures, better seating, upgraded pathways, improved lighting and gardens that look loved rather than confused. People want spaces that are welcoming, safer, cleaner and more connected—somewhere you choose to linger and not just pass through on the way to Giggle and Wiggle at Erindale Library or back to class at Erindale College. One resident put it perfectly: “There is a disconnect, but it

has the potential to be a really good town centre hub.”

The topic that generated the most feedback was parking. Nearly 75 per cent of respondents said retaining current parking levels at Erindale is very important. Ninety per cent said that parking must remain free. Finally, there is a clear appetite that came through for Erindale to feel more alive. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents want the upgraded spaces to support community events like markets, small performances, workshops, pop-ups and perhaps more outdoor dining. In other words, people want Erindale to feel like a place you go to, not just a place you go through.

The Erindale Group Centre uplift is a huge opportunity to re-energise and renew a community. This report is a strong, clear and energising vision from the people of Brindabella. It is a vision I am proud to bring into this place today. I thank every resident who took the time to share their thoughts over summer. I look forward to working with Minister Cheyne, the project team and the community as we shape Erindale into the welcoming, vibrant centre it deserves to be.

I present the following paper:

Erindale Shops Upgrades—Community feedback summary—Letter to the Minister for City and Government Services from Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA, dated 25 February 2026, together with the summary report.

Multiculturalism Ramadan

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.48): A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to attend the Multicultural Festival, which is one of the highlights of my political calendar as well as my social and culinary calendar. On the face of it, multiculturalism is not a political event. It is about food, music, dance, celebration. Yet, this has become something of a mantra across the political spectrum. Politics is the downstream of culture. This makes the Multicultural Festival important, beyond just being delicious and fun.

All around the world, we are witnessing the deliberate fostering of hatred and resentment as a tool for political manipulation and, unfortunately, we are seeing too much evidence that the tactic is working. As a society or a community, the better we know each other and the more connections we have across the artificial boundaries of different cultures and traditions, the less vulnerable we will be to the kinds of messages of hate and suspicion. It alarms me to see Pauline Hanson’s mean-spirited worldview rising in the polls, and I hope Canberrans continue to see through it. The representatives and community members from many of the different cultures we have here in Canberra have spoken to me to express similar feelings.

There is one concrete suggestion I want to raise today: that we aim for deeper dialogue. A familiarity with different cultures needs to go beyond eating a plate of curry, a kebab stick or a rice paper roll at Commonwealth Park. Do not get me wrong: the food aspect is great. Humans have, since the dawn of time, greased the wheels of communication between each other through good food and drink. But can we find ways to have people from different communities actually sitting down and eating dinner together over a long,

lively and thought-provoking evening, sharing each other's cultures rather than simply sampling a few treats from a stall? The ACT has a well-established tradition of exploring with ambition and demonstrating to other jurisdictions what is possible in terms of positive change. I will continue to work on doing this with regard to creating strong, connected and conflict-free communities from all backgrounds across Canberra.

I also want to talk on a second matter today, this being the holy month of Ramadan. I would like to say, as-salamu alaykum, and really reflect that so many in our community are coming together in prayer, reflection, fasting, as well as coming together as a community, living their faith, their values, all while inviting others to break bread together, to break down the barriers between us. I want to say to those in the Muslim community here in Canberra: I appreciate what you are doing, how you are building those connections and increasing the understanding that we have in our community, and to you, I would like to say, Ramadan mubarak.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.51 pm

Schedules of amendments

Schedule 1

Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Amendment moved by Mr Parton

1

Proposed new clause 11A

Page 6, line 3—

insert

11A New section 69A

insert

69A Review of section 35A

- (1) The Chief Coroner must review the operation of section 35A (Nurse practitioner may give cause of death certificate to registrar-general) as soon as practicable after the end of 1 year after the day section 35A commences.
- (2) The Chief Coroner must give the Speaker a report of the review within 3 months after the day the review is started.
- (3) If the Legislative Assembly is sitting when the Chief Coroner gives the report to the Speaker, the Speaker must present the report to the Legislative Assembly on the next sitting day.
- (4) If the Legislative Assembly is not sitting when the Chief Coroner gives the report to the Speaker—
 - (a) the report is taken to have been presented to the Legislative Assembly on the day the Chief Coroner gives it to the Speaker (the *report day*); and
 - (b) the Speaker must arrange for a copy of the report to be given to each member of the Legislative Assembly on the report day; and
 - (c) the Speaker must present the report to the Legislative Assembly—
 - (i) on the next sitting day; or
 - (ii) if the next sitting day is the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly after a general election of members of the Assembly—on the second sitting day after the election.
- (5) In this section:

Chief Coroner—see the *Coroners Act 1997*, dictionary.

Speaker includes—

 - (a) if the Speaker is unavailable—the Deputy Speaker; and

- (b) if both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are unavailable—the clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

unavailable—the Speaker or Deputy Speaker is *unavailable* if—

- (a) they are absent from duty; or
 - (b) there is a vacancy in the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker.
- (6) This section expires 3 years after the day it commences.
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Schedule 2

Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Amendment moved by the Minister for Health

2

Proposed new clause 11A

Page 6, line 3—

insert

11A New section 69A

insert

69A Review of section 35A

- (1) The Health Minister must review the operation of section 35A (Nurse practitioner may give cause of death certificate to registrar-general) as soon as practicable after the end of 3 years after the day section 35A commences.
- (2) The Health Minister must present a report of the review to the Legislative Assembly within 6 months after the day the review is started.
- (3) In this section:

Health Minister means the Minister administering the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (ACT) Act 2010*.

- (4) This section expires 4 years after the day it commences.
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