



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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

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

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

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

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

Parliamentary language Ruling by Speaker

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (10.01): After question time yesterday, during matters arising, the Minister for Finance raised with the Deputy Speaker a question without notice that was asked by Ms Morris. The minister said:

... 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.

Ms Morris asked the following question:

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?

I note that, earlier in question time, the Leader of the Opposition asked the following question of the Chief Minister:

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

to which the Chief Minister replied:

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

Given that the Chief Minister indicated that trade unions do have an influence over government decisions, I consider that Ms Morris's question was reasonable. I do not believe there was an imputation against a member, in accordance with the standing

orders, and, therefore, I do not uphold the point of order.

Tourism and Aviation Strategy

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.02): This morning I rise to provide an update on the territory's tourism and aviation sectors and to reaffirm the government's commitment to the next phase of growth under the T2030 ACT Tourism Strategy. I am pleased to say that our tourism industry continues to showcase and reflect the best of Canberra and provides a level of diversity that we should be proud of. It is a connected, creative and resilient industry and plays a vital role in making our city one of the most liveable in the world. From world-class culture to nature, food and beverage experiences, and a busy annual calendar of events, our visitor economy showcases Canberra's culture and unique experiences and makes our city a destination of choice.

The latest data confirms the significance of the industry to the territory economy. It is an industry that contributes almost \$8½ million every single day to the territory economy. For the year ending September 2025, we welcomed approximately 4½ million visitors, and they generated \$3.1 billion in expenditure in our economy, across accommodation, hospitality, retail, attractions and transport industries. This, of course, supports thousands of jobs across our territory.

The economic contribution from tourism also supports growth in jobs in new businesses and in business prosperity. This is evidenced by one in every 13 workers in the territory being employed in tourism, representing 22,200 direct and indirect tourism filled jobs. Tourism related businesses also account for one of every eight businesses in the territory, totalling 4,804 on the latest data, contributing to ranking us second nationally for tourism business growth over the last five years.

To build on both this and our long-term success, in December last year I launched phase 2 of the territory's 2030 Tourism Strategy, with an updated and ambitious objective to grow visitor expenditure in our economy by an additional \$1 billion over the next five years. The strategy focuses on four priorities: increasing domestic visitors and spend, growing visitor numbers generated by events, making it cheaper and easier to visit Canberra, and realising our city's potential in growing international markets. This morning I will outline how we are translating these priorities into action.

Domestic tourism is the foundation of our tourism industry, and growth in this market segment is central to our success. Recent visitor survey data shows domestic overnight expenditure in the territory reaching \$2.1 billion, of which two-thirds is from leisure visitors, either on holiday or visiting family and friends. Our approach here is to encourage longer stays, to increase average spend and to broaden the range of experiences available to visitors. The government is working closely with industry to promote Canberra's strengths, its national cultural institutions, its food and beverage scene, its natural landscapes and its family-friendly experiences, while ensuring that regional dispersal and year-round visitation remain priorities.

Our marketing campaigns are increasingly targeted towards emerging growth markets beyond our traditional catchments, including visitors from interstate capitals who are

seeking authentic cultural and leisure experiences. This work has included acknowledgement of the relevance of whole-of-Canberra region experiences as a reason to travel to our city. For example, we are working very closely with key stakeholders in the region, particularly Destination Southern NSW, with whom we have successfully collaborated on the Great Southern Trails mountain biking initiative, for example.

I have tasked those involved to think big and be innovative about what we can do next in this regional collaboration space. As we know, both major cultural and seasonal events, including festivals, exhibitions and sporting events, provide compelling reasons for people to visit Canberra and to stay longer. Through 2025, we saw significant government investment in experiences to drive visitors to our city, including through the territory's Major Event Fund, which, since 2011, has supported 65 events, attracted 6.9 million attendees and generated \$1.29 billion in economic return—\$112 million of that in the last 12 months.

As I am sure members are aware, Floriade experienced its highest attendance to date in 2025, attracting a record 519,413 visitors, generating an unprecedented \$71.5 million in total expenditure stimulus and 234,374 visitor nights, reinforcing its status as a major driver of visitation to the territory during the spring period.

Throughout 2025, we also saw big crowds for a range of live music and cultural festivals and elite sporting content. As far as this year is concerned, we have already seen big numbers at Summernats, the NCA's drone event, the Canberra Festival of Speed, and the National Multicultural Festival. Just last week, there was plenty of fun across the city with events as diverse as the international cricket at Manuka Oval, the Belco Bowl Jam, the Lunar New Year Festival, and, of course, the Royal Canberra Show.

This weekend, Enlighten kicks off, with 11 nights of projections and late night experiences, live entertainment and great food to be enjoyed throughout this year's festival. Attendees will have yet another chance to "throw their arms around" Symphony in the Park this year, with Mark Seymour of Hunters and Collectors fame joining the Canberra Symphony Orchestra on Sunday, 8 March for a special performance that blends orchestral arrangements with his beloved Australian rock classics.

We will also welcome back the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, this year starring Finley the Turtle, between 14 and 22 March. And Canberrans and visitors are getting behind the growing "rig" economy at both the Canberra Day Appeal Fun Run and the Canberra Times Marathon Festival, which take place on 9 March and between 10 and 12 April.

Whilst this list is, of course, not exhaustive and covers just the first third of the year, it certainly highlights the government's commitment to back an events program that delivers a strong return on investment, creates new opportunities to reach our key domestic and international target markets, grows our visitor economy, and supports local business, strengthening the territory's social and cultural fabric in the process.

The government understands a thriving tourism and events industry relies on access to our city, so we remain sharply focused on making it cheaper and easier for people to travel to and from Canberra. Easier access to our city means more visitors, more

students, more business delegations and more trade in Canberra, increasing investment and supporting small businesses, the events sector, the hospitality sector and the tourism sector. It also means easy and more affordable access for the Canberra community to a growing number of domestic and international destinations.

Land transport delivers a significant volume of activity for Canberra, but, for most of Australia and all of the world, flying is how people get here. So our aviation sector plays a major role in our growth strategy, and the government's investments in related marketing campaigns underpin much of what we aim to achieve across the economic development portfolio: growth, job creation, trade engagement, tourism expansion and international education links. This is a modest investment the government makes, but it has a significant return. In fact, over the last four years—and year to date for 2025-26—Visit Canberra ran 25 marketing campaigns, with an average return on investment of 117 to one, contributing \$236.8 million to our visitor economy. This work is critical to our economic success and is of course conducted in partnership with our world-class Canberra Airport.

The government aims to build on the momentum of a strong 2025, which saw the return of Qatar Airways, connecting Canberrans to Doha and onwards to the world via Melbourne as part of their global network of more than 170 destinations; the sustained success of Fiji Airways, connecting to North America and onwards via Nadi; and seasonal domestic connections to regions like Darwin, Coffs Harbour and Geelong. Already this year, we have seen Virgin Australia announce its first direct international services from Canberra, headed to Bali, and Link Airways just yesterday announced a direct connection for Canberrans to the northern Tasmanian city of Launceston. The government intends to continue to engage with Canberra Airport, the Qantas Group of airlines, Virgin Australia and our smaller regional airlines to further direct connections to our capital cities and to major regional population centres. This includes Adelaide, the Sunshine Coast and Cairns, and other major regional population centres that are not currently serviced by a direct flight from Canberra.

Internationally, the government's clear focus is on re-establishing aviation connections with New Zealand and the ASEAN group of nations. A connection with Singapore Airlines, for example, is critical to our longer term goal of rebuilding international aviation links to the Asian region and to India and strengthening connections to Europe.

I want to particularly focus on opening access to India. India is now the largest country in the world. Our largest diaspora community is from India. It is a key target market to support the growth of our visitor economy under the 2030 Tourism Strategy. That is why we had a trade mission there earlier this month. Singapore Airlines has direct flights to Singapore from major Indian cities, such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Amritsar, which could feed Indian tourists through Singapore to a direct flight to Canberra.

Doubling the number of Indian visitors to Canberra each year from the current 15,000 to 30,000 a year would mean around 600 extra visitors a week, filling the equivalent of two international flights. The government understands this Indian tourism growth goal, combined with increased visitor numbers out of the United Kingdom, Europe, China, ASEAN nations and the United States, is what is required to see the resumption of Singapore Airlines services to Canberra. This is why an international tourism focus is

key to our aviation strategy and a clear growth opportunity for the territory.

International visitors currently represent only a small proportion of our total visitors, but they spend significantly more per trip, with recent data showing international visitors contribute around 19 per cent of total expenditure, despite making up only around five per cent of visitors, so spending is roughly three times more than domestic overnight visitors. We know that international visitors stay longer and do more in our city and our economy whilst they are here. To realise the value presented, the government is taking advantage of opportunities presented through our partnership with Tourism Australia, whilst also expanding our own in-market representation in those key markets.

Our focus remains on positioning Canberra as a distinctive international destination—a capital city that offers national attractions within a compact and accessible environment complemented by unique local experiences. The government is working with industry partners to attract higher-yield travellers, the families of international students who are studying here, and visitors linked to business and government travel. We will continue to, as I touched on earlier this week, leverage our city’s reputation as Australia’s knowledge capital, with international education remaining the ACT’s largest source of export income.

International education and tourism go hand in hand and we were very pleased to build on this in 2025 by hosting the Australian International Education Conference—the biggest international education trade show in the Southern Hemisphere, enhancing our credentials and welcoming over 1,500 delegates to Canberra. To continue this momentum through 2026, the government will lead focused engagements with our key tourism and education partners. The goal is to attract more international visitors, students and families to Canberra.

In closing this morning, whilst the government’s objective of an additional billion dollars in visitor expenditure in our economy is ambitious, we believe the priorities and actions that I have outlined today show how it can be achieved. Success will, of course, require close collaboration with industry and our tourism community. The government intends to work alongside tourism operators, airlines, local businesses and cultural institutions to ensure a coordinated approach that delivers sustainable growth. Our vision is clear: a strong domestic market that grows through quality experiences and longer stays; a higher value international market supported by improved aviation links and a diverse events calendar that reinforces Canberra’s reputation as a year-round destination.

Tourism is ultimately about confidence—confidence that visitors will choose our city, that businesses will invest and that our community will benefit from the opportunities that growth brings. The data shows that we have gained this confidence as a destination, and phase 2 of our 2030 Tourism Strategy provides the roadmap for us to maintain it. Through targeted investment, strategic partnerships and a relentless focus on visitor experience, the government seeks to position the territory for the next half-decade of tourism growth, ensuring we continue to showcase the very best of our city to Australia and the world.

I present the following paper:

Tourism and aviation priorities—Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Education—Valuing Educators, Values Children Workforce Strategy

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) (10.20): Today I rise to inform the Legislative Assembly about the findings of the report titled *Sector snapshot: ACT ECEC and OSHC workforce*. In 2022, under phase 2 of Set up for Success, I launched the Valuing Educators, Values Children Workforce Strategy, which aimed to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the ACT ECEC workforce.

An action under the strategy was to identify workforce capacity and needs by undertaking a comprehensive survey and review of the ACT's education and care workforce. This work aimed to enhance understanding of workforce needs, pressures and areas for future focus.

Data was gathered from approximately 363 participants from across the sector, through the delivery of focus groups and an online survey, supported by existing public datasets, policy and literature. Many of the findings confirmed what we already know about the ACT's sector. It is undergoing structural change, with slowing workforce growth, shifting enrolment patterns and increasing operational pressures. Oversupply of services is intensifying competition and placing pressure on viability, particularly for not-for-profit providers.

The ECEC workforce is predominantly female and aged 25 to 44, with slightly more men than the national average—comprising eight per cent of the workforce in the ACT compared to five per cent nationally. The OSHC workforce has a greater gender mix—86 per cent are women and 32 per cent are men—and they are considerably younger, primarily aged between 15 and 24. Those workers have limited formal early childhood training and are a more transient workforce.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is relatively high across both sectors and exceeds the general population proportion, and approximately two per cent of the workforce is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

What we heard directly from those working in the sector was both powerful and meaningful. They told us what is working well, what is challenging and what support is needed to ensure that they can continue to do a great job, ensuring every child has access to high-quality education and care.

Educators in the ACT are deeply values driven and motivated by a commitment to children's wellbeing and development. We heard that educators enter the profession because they care strongly about working with children, see early childhood education as a meaningful career, and believe in the power and impact of early learning.

Educators indicated a very high level of confidence to support children's safety and overwhelmingly agreed that child safety is embedded into service culture and daily practice. Approximately 70 per cent of survey participants identified that they had completed child-safety training in the past year, and over 95 per cent of educators reported knowing how to identify and respond to child safety concerns. These results are reflective of a sector that cares deeply about children's safety.

While these results are reassuring, educators also highlighted a number of challenges and areas requiring further focus and support. Leaders noted persistent challenges in attracting and retaining staff, the strain caused by workforce shortages, and the need for more sustainable workloads. These pressures are affecting day-to-day wellbeing and long-term career sustainability.

Most survey respondents identified that they intend to stay in the sector; however, increased workloads, low pay and limited flexibility are placing increased pressure on them. Whilst educators told us that they feel confident to deliver the core tasks of their roles and there is strong engagement in professional learning, they highlighted barriers to engaging in further learning, such as cost, time or limited support from their leaders.

These insights highlight the importance of continuing to focus on professional recognition, professional pay and conditions, and clear, supported pathways for people who choose this vital profession.

The results also show us that educator wellbeing matters. When educators feel supported through coaching and mentoring, professional learning, and emotionally safe workplaces, children benefit. When educators feel valued, they stay in the profession. The findings of this work are more than statistics. They provide a foundation to guide future investment and support for our education and care sector.

If we want the best outcomes for children, we must create the best possible environment for the educators who work with and alongside them. Valuing educators truly does value children.

Finally, I want to thank every individual who contributed to this work by engaging in the survey and focus groups. Thank you for your honesty, your dedication and your commitment to providing high-quality early learning for children. I look forward to continuing to work with the sector to implement the findings of this work.

I present the following paper:

ACT Valuing Educators, Values Children Workforce Strategy—Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.25): I thank the minister for her statement and for the work undertaken by everyone who prepared the sector snapshot. Most importantly, I would like to thank all the educators who took time out of their very busy day to contribute.

Listening to educators and learning about the everyday experience of working in the early childhood education and care sector are vitally important, and the findings of this report capture much of what people in the sector have been saying for a while; that is, in order for early childhood education and care to work properly, educators have to be valued properly.

Further to that, if we truly value the people who look after our kids and help our young minds to grow, we must pay them properly and treat the workforce in a manner that reflects their essential and irreplaceable role. This is not just integral for the sustainability of the sector but for the safety of our kids.

In recent discussions with early childhood stakeholders and educators, it was pointed out to me that how we talk about reforming the sector has an important role to play here. It speaks to the points I raised in the chamber on Tuesday—that we need to make sure our reforms in the early childhood education and care sector are evidence based, and that they are informed by experts, families and educators.

We need to make them in a considered manner so that, once implemented, we are not looking soon to implement another reactive move. This is what we would expect of big reforms made in any other critical sector—schools, hospitals and universities—so why shouldn't we do the same for early childhood education and care?

We all know systemic reform is needed and that this system has been under strain for far too long. Educators, local providers, families and advocates have been clear that the pressure they face in doing their jobs well, more often than not, is not the result of individual failings but of structural settings that are seeing a workforce stretched extremely thinly and somehow becoming business as usual. What is most startling, perhaps, is that we have allowed this to be the case for the people who educate and care for our children.

Yes, we absolutely need reform. We need to make sure we get it right—reform that is carefully designed, evidence based and created with educators, not imposed on them. We need to build a system where working in the sector is sustainable, where educators do not just feel valued because we tell them that they are, but because they can point to the material things that reflect as much—proper pay, leave entitlements, ratios and workload settings that actually allow them to do their job safely and with pride.

That is why I moved a motion on supporting early childhood educators last term—to recognise, as we far too often forget to do, the professionalism of educators, to raise the quantum and number of grants available to both new and continuing educators to build their skills, to recognise the highly accomplished and elite teachers and, heck, to ask the commonwealth to expand their student stipend to students doing placement in early childhood education and care so that people are not entering the profession and starving.

At the end of the day, educators have been carrying the system on their backs. They have been holding together a workforce stretched beyond what is reasonable, absorbing pressure that should never have been placed on them, and doing so out of a deep commitment to children.

Commitment alone cannot hold up our system forever. We need reforms that recognise this reality and put children, families and educators at the centre, not profit. We need reforms that are grounded in evidence shaped by the people doing the work and designed to last, so that we are not back here in another 12 months with yet another report confirming what the sector already knows.

Early childhood education and care is vital. We all know this. It deserves the same level of planning, investment and policy seriousness that we apply to schools, hospitals and universities. Anything less risks failing children and families, and the educators that show up for them every day.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sport and recreation—Erindale Active Leisure Centre—update 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) (10.29): In response to a motion that was passed in the Assembly on 3 January, I would like to provide an update on works undertaken at the Erindale Active Leisure Centre facility.

The Erindale leisure centre is almost 50 years old—46—and provides a range of amenities for the community. The leisure facilities include two group fitness studios, and a large health club with gym facilities that include cardio, strength and weights. There is a 25-metre heated indoor pool and steam room, squash courts and a versatile, multipurpose sports hall catering to basketball, volleyball, badminton and indoor soccer. The complex also features a professional 443-seat theatre, making it a vital community hub for sport, health and performing arts.

In August last year, the custodianship was transferred from the Education Directorate to Infrastructure Canberra, with Belgravia Leisure as the operator of the facility, to run the day-to day leisure operations onsite.

The government acknowledges that this well-established community facility is ageing and needs significant upgrades. It is the government's priority to ensure that the facility provides a safe and inclusive environment for both the local and wider community. The centre has seen \$350,000 worth of improvements in recent months. In the gym areas, new gym equipment has been installed, and TVs replaced in the foyer and gym areas. The heaters in the change rooms have been replaced, and there have been some plumbing upgrades as well.

In the pool area, there have been significant repairs to the steam room, and upgrades in

the theatre, with audio equipment. Some of these upgrades will not be visible to the community. For example, we have replaced old air-conditioning units and made significant upgrades to the pool equipment, including pump replacements, filter and valve repairs, and better power supplies.

We are not stopping there. Currently, almost \$250,000 worth of upgrades are underway. We are re-grouting tiles in the change rooms, and we are replacing the pool grates and roller shutters. Again, there are some invisible upgrades. We are replacing the lighting panel for the squash courts and investing \$130,000 in new UV pool filters.

Based on feedback from locals via Labor member Taimus Werner-Gibblings, I have asked Infrastructure Canberra to prioritise repainting the ceiling in the main pool area. They will work to schedule the painting to minimise disruption to pool operations. The government is committed to working with Belgravia to improve issues like cleanliness and what services can be offered.

Since the operational management of Erindale leisure centre transitioned to Belgravia, the centre has passed the Royal Life Saving Society's rigorous 40-point aquatic safety check annual audit. The centre now holds the highest rating of a five-star water safety partner, demonstrating the strongest commitment by the government to aquatic safety standards. We have seen the venue attract new members, with membership increasing by 280 people—14 per cent—since August 2025, bringing the total to 2,240 members. Recent attendance figures are on the rise, too, with January recording 15,549 visitors, an increase of 8.5 per cent on last year.

Infrastructure Canberra will continue to work closely with Belgravia Leisure to ensure the delivery of services to the community at Erindale leisure centre. As part of the government's election commitment, and on top of the works undertaken this year, the government will consider, as part of the 2026-27 budget process a list of options for upgrades and investment into the centre.

To inform these considerations, Infrastructure Canberra will hold public engagement sessions across our aquatic facilities, as well as undertaking a survey, with an initial focus on Erindale and Lakeside leisure centres, with members, user groups and the local community. This feedback opportunity, as well as news about ongoing upgrades, will be promoted through Belgravia's direct communication with members via its newsletter.

I am looking forward to hearing from Erindale leisure users about what upgrades matter to them, and I certainly cannot wait to deliver the upgrades that Labor promised.

I present the following paper:

Erindale Active Leisure Centre upgrade—Assembly resolution of 3 February 2026— Government response—Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.34): One of the things that has struck me in my time

in this place is that Ms Berry and I often see the world differently. I think we would be a great pair to do a movie review show a la Margaret Pomeranz and the late David Stratton, because I think we would have these conflicting views, and that would be entertaining for the viewers. I could come out of the cinema absolutely appalled, after being forced to sit through two hours of rubbish, and I could give the movie half a star, and Ms Berry would likely describe it as a cinematic masterpiece, give it five stars and recommend that it be nominated for a swag of Oscars.

The government's response to community concerns of neglect and failure to follow up on their promises at Erindale Active Leisure Centre is not an Oscar winner. The minister in her statement says that "the government acknowledges that this well-established community facility is ageing and needs significant upgrades". They acknowledged this, of course, in the lead-up to the election in 2024 because they clearly communicated to the Active Leisure Centre community that this was what they were pursuing, and they have not fulfilled those expectations. They are pushing a little bit closer, and we are pleased to hear that that is the case.

Ms Berry has paid credence to Mr Werner-Gibbings because she indicates that so much of this work that has been detailed in this report has been done via feedback to him. I do feel for Mr Werner-Gibbings because he is forced to be the on-the-ground frontman for a party that has so badly failed to fulfil its promises in this space.

Ms Berry talks about the transition to Belgravia. I had a meeting with Erindale Active Leisure Centre users a week and a half ago. Their assessment, again, was along the lines of my half a star rather than Ms Berry's five. They talked about this bizarre booking system for the oversubscribed aqua sessions, whereby they had to make a booking; they opened the bookings exactly 72 hours before the next session. With respect to what it led to, because that time coincides with a class that is on, people would get out of the water and dash to their phones so that they could then book for the next session.

They have now changed it so that it is not 72 hours; it is 74 hours. If you want to book for a Wednesday aqua session at 7.30 in the morning, you have to set your alarm for 5.30 Sunday morning, and that is what they do. They set their alarm for 5.30 Sunday morning. Again, partly because of the model that has been established now with reciprocal rights, and partly because of the inability to have some of the other pieces of infrastructure that are being run either by government, or by government through some for-profit operators, there are a bunch of people, as has been evidenced in this statement. There are new members, but they are not really new members. They have just come from other places.

I could not resist coming down and having a bit of a crack, because that is what we do.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.37): I want to acknowledge with gratitude Minister Berry's statement on the government's current and future work on the Erindale leisure centre. In 2024, the minister listened to users of the Erindale leisure centre, including me, and committed to funding upgrades to the facility in consultation with its user community, should ACT Labor have the fortune of forming government. As I said in the last sitting week, ACT Labor was, and remains, despite my entreaties to the Leader of the Opposition, the only party that has made a commitment to upgrading Erindale leisure centre. I am grateful for that commitment, and I am pleased

that the listening, and the acting on what the government has been hearing, has continued.

Since being elected, I have regularly passed on constructive feedback from users of the centre to Belgravia and Minister Berry. In fact, I emailed Belgravia this morning about my daughter's swimming lessons. Libby is taking Octavia to the centre tonight. Mr Parton might talk about reviewing a movie at the cinema. It would add a bit of weight to his review if he watched it—in this case, if he used the centre.

Be that as it may, hearing this morning that more than \$350,000 worth of improvements have already been delivered is very welcome, and the work is obvious in the facility. Outside the pool, we users have seen new gym equipment, new TVs, new heaters in the change rooms—getting ready for winter—repairs to the steam room and improvements to the plumbing. The theatre's audio equipment has also been upgraded. In the pool area, pumps have been replaced and filters and valves repaired.

Belgravia notified members of the centre, like the Werner-Gibbingses, earlier this week that phase 1 of the change room upgrades is complete and now work will move to phase 2. I will not repeat the detail that the minister outlined, but nearly \$250,000 in ongoing improvements, along with \$130,000 for new pool filters, deserves a mention, as will the new pool grates, which will make a really obvious improvement to how the pool deck looks.

Pool users have also raised concerns with me about the cracking and flaking paint on the ceiling struts above the pool. A shout-out to my wife Libby, who made a comment about this on the Facebook post I did a fortnight ago about phase 1 of the improvement work, while she was on the couch, and I was in the kitchen, cleaning up. Social media is a great way to gather the thoughts and queries of one's constituents! Users will be pleased to hear—as I told Libby this morning—that Infrastructure Canberra is going to prioritise repainting those struts.

It is also encouraging to hear that there is more work in the works. Everything we have heard today is separate from ACT Labor's 2024 commitment to upgrade the centre. As I said earlier this month, during the debate on the motion, I continue to hope and advocate that the coming budget will fund upgrades to the Erindale leisure centre.

I welcome today's debate on the improvements already underway and the work towards the upcoming budget. I will continue to hold myself and the government to our commitments and listen to my neighbours who use the Erindale Active Leisure Centre every week.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.41): I thank the minister for the update on the Erindale leisure centre. I acknowledge that Erindale is an important community facility for many Canberrans, particularly older residents, people recovering from injury and those who rely on low-impact exercise. The pool and aqua programs are not a luxury. They are part of staying healthy, connected and independent.

I note the minister's advice about recent works and the centre passing the annual aquatics safety audit, but what matters now is delivery of the bigger commitment, clear milestones and timely follow-through. Communities across Canberra are watching to

see whether the government delivers on the community facilities that it promises.

We are hearing from people across Canberra about access and affordability at the community facilities that they rely on, whether it is pools, classes or programs for older people, rehabilitation or disability related. That should not matter to this Assembly, because a public facility must work for the community that it serves in day-to-day reality. Transparency matters.

As the government progresses this through the budget process, I expect to see a clear public timeline for delivery, so that users can see what is planned, when it will happen and how decisions are being made.

How the government handles Erindale will set an important benchmark for trust, because it goes to whether Canberrans can have confidence that promised upgrades and other promised community facilities across the territory will be delivered in a timely and transparent way. People want to see follow-through, not just another promise, and not, “We will do it at some point in the term.”

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.42): I want to thank Minister Berry for her statement this morning. I will speak for a short time, just to put my voice on the record as well. I recently met with Marilyn, who is probably the most dedicated aqua aerobics participant at Erindale. She goes there as much as she can, and she is an absolutely committed representative of the Erindale pool and aqua aerobics users at Erindale Active Leisure Centre.

We had a great chat the other week about the benefits of aqua, how important it is for people to stay active and how the pool is such a great way to do it. I told her how, at school, my school sport was aqua aerobics, because it is a fun sport to do, and it is a fun thing to do without feeling like it is a sport; you keep active and moving. But there are some challenges being faced by the aqua aerobics participants at Erindale and by the general pool users, so I am hoping that these upcoming works, like the re-grouting of the change rooms and replacing the pool grates, will be welcomed by the pool users. It is something that many people have raised as an issue. Given the age of the facility, it is timely that it is done.

I am hoping that this is part of bigger works. My colleague mentioned the flaking pool roof. I am also someone whose family likes to use other forms of conveying their constituent concerns to their local member, even if they could just tell me instead, so I appreciate that. I know that the aqua aerobics users are having difficulties with Belgravia. Marilyn and I spoke about it at great length. I have met with quite a few of the pool users about it—particularly, as Mr Parton mentioned, about the bookings. I have raised this recently with the minister’s office, around ways that we could make it easier—ways that Belgravia might be able to change it, particularly the online booking. For some older people, it is not always easy. I have spoken to the minister’s office and I have spoken to Marilyn. Maybe there is a way forward here.

I think this is a really great update as to what is happening with Erindale. It shows that we took to the election that we would do the upgrade. We have done some pretty good work so far, and there is more to do. I thank the minister for the statement.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.45): I want to start by acknowledging that the Erindale pool, for many of us in Woden, is also our local pool. It is not just Tuggeranong that it needs to serve. For areas like Isaacs, where I live, the surrounding suburbs, and places like Torrens and Pearce, it is our local pool as well. It is the nearest pool.

You can tell that the government are starting to clutch at straws here because they are starting to talk about replacing pool filters or repainting the roof—basic maintenance—as pool upgrades. These are not upgrades; they are the sort of thing you have to do when you have an asset. You actually have to maintain the thing and keep it in working order. This is not some big commitment or some amazing upgrade that people can expect.

What we are seeing is a symptom that we see from this government quite regularly. We see big announcements of money, talking about millions of dollars or hundreds of thousands of dollars, then it turns out to be just what the government should be doing, anyway—just doing its job.

The other point I want to make here is that “expensive” does not necessarily mean “good”. Too many projects that we see from the government end up with big price tags for subpar outcomes. One of my big concerns is that we may see this again at the Erindale pool. It is not the first time that we would have seen it under this government. My kids learnt to swim at the Erindale pool. My family has spent a lot of time at the Erindale pool. I have done large segments of my work sitting on the side of the pool while I am splashed by the kids playing there.

I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that, over an extremely long time, users of the pool have been extremely frustrated by the lack of delivery. There have been a lot of promises, but no real improvements over the decades that this government has been in power. I think it is about time that something changed.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Primary health care and general practice Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.47): I rise today to update the Assembly on the substantial work being undertaken by the ACT and Australian governments to improve access to primary care in the ACT and to support the general practice workforce that underpins our broader health system. As Minister for Health, I want to acknowledge the extraordinary dedication of our general practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals in primary care, who navigate an incredibly diverse and complex range of health issues every day to keep our community well.

Primary care is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of our community. While primary care is principally an Australian government responsibility, the ACT government has a complementary role in helping ensure Canberrans can receive the right care in the right place and at the right time. Access to strong primary care systems results in improved community health and wellbeing, enabling people to address health concerns early, as well as reducing hospital admissions.

Medicare data for the October to December 2025 period released this month shows that challenges persist in the primary care system in the ACT. We know out-of-pocket costs remain higher than in other jurisdictions. We also know that 11 per cent of Canberrans reported delaying or avoiding seeking care due to costs in 2024-25, according to data in the Report on Government Services released earlier this month. We will continue partnering with the Australian government and Capital Health Network to expand timely and affordable access to urgent and primary care across the territory, and I will keep advocating strongly to the commonwealth health minister, the Hon Mark Butler MP, to secure improvements in the ACT.

Since last November, we have seen the continued rollout of the Australian government's Strengthening Medicare measures, including the expansion of the tripled bulk-billing incentives and the Bulk Billing Practice Incentive Program. These initiatives provide additional financial support for practices that bulk-bill all eligible services. There are now 12 general practices exclusively bulk-billing in the ACT, with more in the surrounding region. Further strengthening access, the Capital Health Network is commissioning three new bulk-billing general practices in the ACT, with proposals currently under assessment.

The Australian government has also provided funding to secure the future of the former Interchange Health service in Tuggeranong, supporting its ongoing management and maintaining bulk-billing services for people with complex needs. The ACT government is complementing these national investments with targeted measures to address local access gaps and relieve pressure on our hospital system. This includes a \$1½ million investment to improve access to bulk-billed GP care for children under the age of 16 through the Supporting Access to GPs for Children grant program. The program has been designed to encourage innovative, community-led proposals from general practices, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and community providers to help reduce cost barriers and improve outcomes for children and young people, while reducing financial pressure on their parents and carers.

The ACT government has a strong history of investing in primary care for priority population groups, including young people, those experiencing disadvantage and people with complex needs. The long-term investments in community based organisations that support this work are vital to ensuring all Canberrans can access primary care, regardless of their circumstances. These investments include the Delivering Better Care and the Primary Health Services for Young People programs, which provide services to people like those experiencing homelessness, asylum seekers, refugees and people with substance use challenges.

We have also been working to improve access to ADHD care by expanding the scope of practice for GPs and other medical practitioners. From 11 February 2026, a new standing Chief Health Officer approval will allow general practitioners who have completed the required training to prescribe ADHD medication for eligible patients aged six years and older who have already had an established diagnosis and are stable on their medication, without requiring repeated specialist review or further CHO approval. In addition, paediatricians, psychiatrists and neurologists will no longer require individual CHO approval to prescribe ADHD medications for patients aged four years and older within specified dosage ranges. A future stage of this reform will enable GPs with appropriate training to diagnose ADHD and initiate medication for non-

complex patients over six years of age with CHO approval. Together, in a staged way, these changes will help to streamline collaborative care arrangements, reduce delays and administrative burden and improve access to treatment.

We know a strong, sustainable general practice workforce is critical to primary care access. That is why the ACT government is investing \$4 million in the Professional Development and Wellbeing Fund. This fund is designed to attract and retain GP registrars and to support existing GPs in the ACT through professional development and wellbeing initiatives. Consultation and early program design work are well underway with the general practice sector to ensure the fund meets the needs of our local medical community.

Supporting the wellbeing of our medical workforce is essential, and the first stage of investment through the fund has been to invest in the Drs4Drs ACT helpline. This confidential, independent, 24/7 service assists doctors and medical students with personal health and wellbeing concerns, including stress and mental health challenges, and can refer callers to specialist and online services. By investing in clinician wellbeing, we are helping to ensure that our medical workforce can continue to provide safe, high-quality care to the Canberra community.

Growing our future general practice workforce is also important. From the first rotation in 2026, the ACT government is delivering primary care placements for pre-vocational doctors from Canberra Health Services in metropolitan general practices, and we have increased our intern intake to support this. This will help maintain strong connections with primary care early in doctors' postgraduate training, supporting a future pipeline of GPs in the ACT.

I was also very pleased recently to be advised that, from 2027, the ACT will transition from the Western NSW GP training region into the newly created ACT and Surrounds subregion within Lower Eastern NSW. I have previously advocated for this realignment which reflects actual patient referral patterns, aligns with the ANU medical school footprint and will enable more coherent planning, targeted support and strengthened training pathways. It will also encourage increased interest in general practice among prevocational doctors.

In closing, I will take the opportunity to touch on the role of walk-in centres, which continue to be one of the ACT's most trusted and accessible urgent care services, complementing our hospital and primary care systems. These nurse-led services are now part of the national Medicare Urgent Care Clinic network and provide free care for non-life-threatening injuries and illness for people aged one year and older. The centres operate from 7.30 am to 10 pm every day of the week, 365 days a year, with no appointment needed and highly skilled advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners delivering excellent care.

Most recently, the Australian government has funded the Woden Medicare Urgent Care Clinic, which was commissioned by the Capital Health Network and opened in December 2025. This service further expands access to timely care for non-life-threatening illness and injury, with bulk-billed treatment provided by a GP for Medicare-eligible patients. The clinic operates from 10 am to 8 pm, seven days a week, and accepts walk-in patients without the need for an appointment.

In presenting this update on progress in primary care in the ACT, I recognise there will always be more to do. I will continue to work with my colleague Minister Butler to advocate for equitable access and funding for primary care in the ACT. I thank our GPs, nurses, allied health professionals, practices—including practice managers—community organisations, the Capital Health Network, and the Albanese Labor government for their work and partnership. Together, we are making progress to ensure all Canberrans can access high-quality primary care when and where they need it.

I present the following paper:

[Editor: take in text from *Minutes of Proceedings*.]

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Voluntary assisted dying—implementation—update Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.56): I am also pleased today to update the Assembly on the three-month milestone of voluntary assisted dying services being a legal, end-of-life choice for eligible Canberrans. As members are aware, the ACT's voluntary assisted dying model is the most progressive in the country. It puts compassion, dignity and safety at the centre of care, while ensuring people have genuine choice and control over their final days.

The first three months of operation have shown the ACT legislation and clinical safeguards are working as intended, offering people with an advanced progressive and terminal condition compassion and a genuine choice at the end of their life that aligns with their values and wishes. This very early data highlights the positive impact this significant reform is having in providing holistic end-of-life options centred on the needs of individuals, families and carers. These early insights also highlight the care, dedication and professionalism of the workforce supporting Canberrans through this process.

Central to this support is the Care Navigator Service, operated by Canberra Health Services. Since 3 November 2025, the service made or received almost 1,500 contacts by phone and recorded almost 90 inquiries for information and support to access voluntary assisted dying in the ACT. The care navigators connect people with authorised practitioners and facilitate referrals to relevant services and specialists, including psychosocial supports before and after the person's death. While assisting people through the assessment process, the care navigators have also been instrumental in providing holistic, person-centred care, connecting people with other supports such as My Aged Care and CHS outpatient and community services, as well as outpatient and home-based palliative care for symptom management.

These numbers tell us that Canberrans are receiving access to the community supports, information and guidance they need and that the people who wish to access voluntary assisted dying are able to do so without unnecessary barriers. Of the 87 people who registered for voluntary assisted dying in the ACT in the first three months of operation, 55 per cent were male and 45 per cent were female, with a median age of 74½ years. The youngest person was 43 and the oldest person was 103. More than 40 per cent of those seeking voluntary assisted dying were aged 80 or older. The most common underlying condition was cancer, appearing at almost twice the rate of any other medical condition, consistent with trends seen in other Australian jurisdictions.

There is a multistep process to access voluntary assisted dying in the ACT. The process is initiated by a person making a first request. Within the first three-month period, 61 people had a first request accepted by an authorised practitioner. After making a first request, a person must be assessed independently by two authorised practitioners to be found eligible for voluntary assisted dying. A total of 43 people have been found eligible to access voluntary assisted dying in both assessments during the three-month period.

Fourteen people have exercised their ultimate end-of-life choice and have died after taking an approved voluntary assisted dying substance. There has been a strong preference for practitioner administration, with 12 people choosing an authorised clinician to administer the substance and two people choosing the self-administration option.

On average, the length of time from a person's first request to the administration of a voluntary assisted dying substance was 18 days, with the shortest period being five days. This reflects a system that is both responsive and accessible, while still maintaining the careful safeguards designed to protect every individual throughout the process. A small number of people who made a first request died from their underlying condition before they were able to complete the assessment process. It is comforting to know that these people were supported by dedicated clinicians and were exercising their right to choice and dignity during their final days.

The ACT has established an extremely capable and committed workforce to deliver voluntary assisted dying in a safe and compassionate way. To date, 36 practitioners have completed the mandatory training and are authorised to perform voluntary assisted dying functions. Of these, 20 practitioners are authorised to perform all roles, enabling them to conduct assessments and administer an approved voluntary assisted dying substance. Fifteen are medical practitioners and five are nurse practitioners.

This early data is validating the ACT's progressive legislation enabling eligible nurse practitioners to work to their full scope of practice. Nurse practitioners have undertaken more than half of all coordinating practitioner responsibilities and 35 per cent of consulting practitioner assessments, indicating their critically important contribution to the ACT voluntary assisted dying workforce and enabling timely access. The voluntary assisted dying workforce also includes 16 registered nurses authorised solely for the role of administering practitioner.

Seventeen authorised practitioners have already actively participated in assessments or administration. We are incredibly grateful to the clinicians who have stepped forward

to undertake this training and serve the community. Their insights, professionalism and compassion have been vital in ensuring the ACT's model and implementation is robust, accessible and centred on the needs of individuals, families and carers.

Canberrans and members of this place can be proud of the compassionate, safe and carefully governed service that has been established in these early months. These results reflect the extraordinary commitment of our clinicians, our support services and the community advocates and experts who have helped guide this important work.

On behalf of the government and community, I express my deep gratitude to our amazing workforce and care navigators who have been instrumental in supporting the people and their families throughout the voluntary assisted dying pathway. I also extend my heartfelt condolences to everyone grieving the loss of a family member or loved one, and I hope it gives them some comfort to know that those who have accessed voluntary assisted dying were able to make a decision that aligned with their values and wishes at the end of their life.

I encourage all health professionals to complete the general awareness training and invite them to consider registering for the mandatory training to join the growing network of authorised practitioners supporting people to access voluntary assisted dying.

All the feedback I have received indicates that the first three months of voluntary assisted dying operating in the ACT have been positive for the Canberra community. Alongside the introduction of voluntary assisted dying, the ongoing provision of accessible, comprehensive and high-quality palliative care gives people the options and supports they need to live comfortably and die with dignity. Together, we will continue to build a compassionate and dignified service option for those facing intolerable suffering at the end of their lives.

I present the following paper:

Update on Voluntary Assisted Dying—Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

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) (11.04): When this Assembly debated and passed the ACT's Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill, we undertook one of the most serious human and technically demanding tasks that a legislature can face. Bringing voluntary assisted dying from aspiration to operation required years of open consultation, careful drafting, a thorough committee process and an incredibly mature debate in this chamber. And that is before we get on to the 25 years of the federal parliament banning us.

We set out to build the best, most compassionate and clinically sound scheme in the country—evidence based, rights affirming and practically workable for clinicians and families, a scheme that would enjoy the confidence of the health profession and of our

practitioners. Key architecture that was part of our bill and maintained through to its passage is now being recognised—in fact, I think it was broadly recognised then—as sensible and workable. Most pleasingly, it is being adopted by other states.

I particularly acknowledge the many years of campaigning which have resulted in some absolutely wonderful updates and revisions to the scheme in Victoria late last year which have addressed some of the most prohibitive elements of its scheme—elements which have been delivering adverse and, in many cases, egregious outcomes.

I put on the record just how hard clinicians in that state and how hard Dying With Dignity Victoria, Go Gentle Australia and so many ordinary people have worked to get those changes through. I think so many of us are just so pleased to see that happen, finally.

Minister Stephen-Smith's statement this morning demonstrates that our scheme is working as intended. I was particularly interested in the average time from first request to administration, and the shortest timeframe as well. Both of these numbers underline to me what we argued in our bill, that an arbitrary cooling-off period was unnecessary, that the multistep assessment and careful clinical processes were effectively a de facto cooling-off period, allowing time for consideration and reflection, without adding unnecessary delay.

Thirty-six practitioners having completed mandatory training and 20 being able to perform all roles is wonderful, and I cannot wait to see that number grow. Critically, nurse practitioners are working to their full scope, undertaking more than half of the coordinating roles and 35 per cent of the consulting assessments.

This throws even further into light how bizarre the position was that the opposition took yesterday, on nurse practitioners being able to issue cause-of-death certificates. Surely, it is reasonable for them to be able to do that, when they are so trained and so trusted in all other aspects of health care. Thanks to our nation-leading legislation yesterday, and to the Greens, they can.

To each practitioner who has trained, and especially those who have supported patients in any element of the process, I offer my sincere gratitude. I have had the privilege of meeting a handful of you, and my confidence and pride in our scheme and in our profession only grew on meeting you.

To the families and loved ones of those who have already used this pathway, we honour your loss. As Minister Stephen-Smith said, I hope that it offers some comfort that those who have chosen voluntary assisted dying have done so, consistent with their values and wishes, and that they have been supported by the most beautiful, incredible workforce, and a system that has been so deliberately designed to preserve dignity to the end.

In saying that, I recognise that even a good death is still a death. Grief remains very real, and it is a load, and those who are grieving continue to carry that feeling and that loss. Voluntary assisted dying does not change that.

There remain two issues that I consider to be the missing pieces to what will ultimately

be the most compassionate scheme we can possibly offer. One of those is one for which we have responsibility and that we can, in future, address in this legislature, and one where we cannot.

Canberrans told us clearly that we must keep working on what happens when a person loses decision-making capacity—before the process, but especially late in the process, including how advanced care planning and enduring powers of attorney should interact with voluntary assisted dying. It is why we embedded this very question in our statutory review and why we undertook additional consultation last year off the back of Minister Paterson’s motion.

The ACT government and the Minister for Health have committed to progressing this policy work this term, and I reiterate that commitment today. I know we all want to see progress on this, but I also absolutely support the fact that we needed to get the implementation of our scheme and its ultimate operation, and to have every resource dedicated to that for these last 18 months. Now, with the scheme working as intended, I hope that some more policy work can continue apace.

The second missing piece is not in ACT hands. Under the commonwealth Criminal Code, it remains an offence to use a carriage service—phone, email, telehealth—for suicide-related material. That interpretation of it applying to voluntary assisted dying was put without doubt through a Federal Court decision that the commonwealth Criminal Code and its offence does capture voluntary assisted dying communications.

What this means practically is that clinicians risk prosecution for doing, by video or phone, what is entirely lawful face to face and what is commonplace in all other aspects of health care. This is out of step with modern care and out of step with the rest of our health system. It is not just a big-state issue or a remote community issue; it is an issue that is very live in the ACT, too.

The continued prohibition of telehealth in voluntary assisted dying creates delays, multiple trips and unnecessary suffering, including in settings like the ACT, where people can be simply too unwell to leave their home. In Queensland, where we do look at a much bigger state, there is a widely reported case where a doctor drove 3,000 kilometres for an assessment and a second doctor drove 2,500 kilometres, and the first returned again for a final request. How can that be seen as compassionate, patient-centred care? It cannot be.

The health profession has made its views abundantly clear to us, and I would note that health ministers in particular have had a long history of arguing for this restriction to be removed from the commonwealth Criminal Code. All states and territories, no matter their size, have an interest in resolving this. It is how we reduce inequity and fatigue for dying people and their families, it is how we let specialist teams support local clinicians, and it is how we bring the same dignity to logistics that we bring to law. But it is a commonwealth responsibility.

I can confirm that, at the last meeting of attorneys-general in November, jurisdictions, including the ACT, asked the commonwealth Attorney-General to provide an update on the status of these reforms—simple reforms, I might add—at the next meeting. That next meeting is tomorrow.

I want to place on the record that this is something in which the ACT maintains an active interest, together with many of our state and territory colleagues. We are expecting an update tomorrow that work has begun on what, ultimately, I view as a very simple amendment, but one that will do so much to enhance the scheme.

I look forward to being able to report back to the chamber on those discussions tomorrow, if not an announcement out of that meeting. We certainly have not dropped the ball on this issue. In fact, it is more important than ever that this missing piece be addressed, to take our scheme, and schemes across the country, to that next level of true, person-centred care.

I thank Minister Stephen-Smith for the detailed statement and the transparency provided, and I look forward to further updates. Again, I extend my gratitude to every single person involved.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.14): I rise to make a few brief remarks. Members will know that, for the Canberra Liberals, voluntary assisted dying is a conscience issue, so this is me, Leanne Castley, reflecting on some things that the minister has said today.

End-of-life decisions are among the most serious and deeply personal choices that a person can face. Regardless of where members stand on this issue, we can agree that the law must operate with transparency, integrity and unwavering commitment to protecting vulnerable Canberrans. A democratic system is defined not only by the freedoms that it grants but by the safeguards it upholds. If this framework is to retain public confidence, it must continue to demonstrate that every decision is informed, voluntary, free from pressure and supported by rigorous independent oversight.

I appreciate the minister providing an update so soon after the commencement of voluntary assisted dying. The thing that stuck out for me today was the Care Navigator Service. I was glad to hear more about the critical role that that plays—having a dedicated navigator that provides that clear information, coordinates referrals and connects people with that psychosocial and community support. It is not just an administrative function; it is a safeguard, and it helps to ensure that decisions are informed, as I said earlier, voluntary, and made with a full understanding of all available options.

We must ensure that voluntary assisted dying never becomes a substitute for proper investment in palliative care, mental health services, disability support and aged care. Real choice only exists when high-quality alternatives are genuinely accessible. No Canberrans should feel that their circumstances, whether financial, social or medical, narrow their options. I appreciate the minister covering that in her speech and giving some assurance in that vein.

As legislators, our responsibility does not end with the passage of law. It continues through careful scrutiny, ongoing reporting and a willingness to make changes if evidence shows they are needed. To reflect on something Minister Cheyne said about a commonwealth law impacting something that can happen here in the ACT, telehealth is crucial in health. I learned that while I was, for a long time, the shadow health minister, so I will be looking forward to hearing how the commonwealth are handling this. I am

quite surprised that it is taking this long, but I look forward to the update after tomorrow's meeting.

Finally, to the families who have lost loved ones in these first three months, we extend our condolences and compassion. To the clinicians who have stepped forward, we acknowledge the seriousness and care with which they undertake the responsibility.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.16): I would like to thank both ministers for the updates they have provided today. Whilst it is only in the first three months of operation, I acknowledge that the initial signs we see in these updates are positive. For those who made the ultimate end-of-life choice, I hope that this scheme allowed them to have a peaceful end to their intolerable suffering. For those who are approved for VAD but have not yet decided to take that final step, I hope that having an option and a control over how and when you exercise that choice enriches your days.

I will have, in future, questions about how people are progressing through the assessments—whether the system is working and whether there are barriers—but I think we need a larger dataset before interrogating those questions. I will be interested in seeing statistics around the particular criteria of the act and how they have been accessed. Western Australian reporting is apparently best practice in terms of Australian jurisdictions, and I would encourage the government to examine that.

I thank Minister Cheyne for her update in terms of addressing those who have lost capacity or are likely to lose capacity under their prognosis. Ministers and I have spoken about this at length in this place. Whilst this needs careful consultation, discussion and consideration, until this work is completed, there are Canberrans who are currently intolerably suffering and are unable to access VAD. We need to keep these and future patients in mind as we endeavour to complete this piece of work.

I also wish to raise, on behalf of the community, that those with conditions such as Parkinson's are facing uncertainty as to whether they are or are not eligible to access VAD. This uncertainty is inhibiting their access to the scheme. I think it would be beneficial if we can find a way that we can provide certainty to that community.

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) (11.18): I would also like to thank Minister Stephen-Smith and Minister Cheyne for all their continuing work in this space in the ACT. I would like to express my condolences to the families of the loved ones who have accessed voluntary assisted dying since the scheme began, and I thank the clinicians and the medical professionals for the incredibly important work that they do in this space every day.

I would like to continue to advocate to see the gap addressed regarding an individual who has gone through all the requests and approval stages to access VAD, and then they lose capacity. I would like to see us continue the work to understand how that individual may become eligible.

There are two adverse outcomes or gaps that are identified in other jurisdictions and in the research. Individuals will often choose to end their life earlier than they would like

because they are concerned about losing capacity. Also, when an individual does lose capacity and is no longer eligible, this often leaves families very distressed, as they can no longer support their loved ones to access VAD.

I am really keen to work with Minister Stephen-Smith, Minister Cheyne and others in the Assembly to see that we continue the policy work to address this critical gap.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 3 on MyWay+—Government response

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.20): I rise to speak to the government response to the report of the inquiry into the procurement and delivery of MyWay+ from the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning.

The government welcomes the report on the inquiry into the procurement and delivery of MyWay+ and thanks the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning for its comprehensive consideration of the procurement and delivery of this complex digital transformation program. The government has agreed to all seven recommendations made by the committee.

The ACT government acknowledges the contributions of community members, industry representatives and stakeholders who made submissions and attended inquiry hearings to provide evidence, as well as frontline staff in Transport Canberra who supported Canberrans with the transition.

I would like to thank the community for their patience during the rollout of the ticketing system. Our bus drivers and Transport Canberra customer experience team, who continue to play an essential role in supporting members of the community in navigating any changes to our public transport system, deserve our thanks, as well as members of the community, who either volunteered to participate in the community-based testing program ahead of the system being launched or have provided feedback which has helped to inform improvements to MyWay+.

The delivery of MyWay+ is the most significant upgrade to Canberra's public transport ticketing technology in over a decade, and it represented a major digital transformation project undertaken by the ACT government. However, the government acknowledges that the system did not work as intended when MyWay+ went live on 27 November 2024. The project delivered important advancements—namely, the ability to tap on and off public transport services using a credit or debit card for the first time. Canberrans and visitors are embracing the use of credit and debit card payments for public transport, in addition to using regular travel cards, with 39 per cent of passengers using this payment method daily.

However, the government acknowledges that the transition to MyWay+ was not smooth. A range of system issues negatively impacted our passengers, and it did not deliver a fully accessible system at go-live. Whilst many of these issues were addressed

immediately at launch, and the ACT government worked with NEC to prioritise and roll out patches and updates to the system, these took too long.

I am sorry for the impact that the issues with the MyWay+ system have had on Canberra's public transport users. The ACT government agrees with the findings of the committee that defining a minimum viable product sooner rather than delivering every single thing that people expected of the new ticketing system all at once would have been a better approach, and that the project would have benefited from a longer implementation timeframe to conduct better user testing, iron out bugs, and communicate a phased approach, starting with a minimum viable product.

We also agree with the committee that concerns raised by other parties should have been examined further and given additional weight when considered against the advice from NEC Australia that MyWay+ was ready to launch on 27 November 2024. The government acknowledges that the community-based testing program did not meet expectations, particularly where concerns raised did not result in changes to the system prior to launch. We also recognise the extent of testing and validation undertaken did not provide the level of assurance ordinarily expected to inform decisions regarding the system.

The government has acted on the range of systemic issues that arose from the implementation of MyWay+ relating to ICT and project management capability in the ACT public service, user testing, cyber-resilience and customer service. In responding to and learning from these issues, the ACT government has undertaken concrete remedial actions to address not only specific issues in the performance of the MyWay+ system with NEC, but also to change the way that we deliver complex ICT projects in the future.

Responsibility in the public service for delivering ICT systems has changed across the ACT government. The establishment of the new ICT delivery agency Digital Canberra recognises the need to build capability and expertise within the ACT government in managing complex ICT projects. The agency was established following the MyWay+ launch and will work across agencies, including Transport Canberra, to take lessons learned from the MyWay+ implementation to reform how our government delivers these projects.

The model will be similar to the successful establishment of Infrastructure Canberra to provide central expertise and coordination in the delivery of complex infrastructure projects across the ACT government. This expert agency will take the lead on implementing actions that respond to the recommendations by the committee that relate to the delivery of ICT projects.

The ACT government is seeking to improve project management practices, leveraging lessons learned from recent digital projects through the introduction of a project management framework. The framework has been developed in partnership with the Australian Institute of Project Management and will deliver a best-practice framework to support transparency, accountability and strategic alignment across a diverse portfolio of ACT government projects. The framework will also include a suite of tools and templates to guide ACT public service staff when managing projects, covering planning, governance, risk management, reporting, review and evaluation.

The ACT government has engaged with the inquiry in good faith and has provided detailed and extensive information to the committee through submissions, evidence given during hearings and in response to questions taken on notice, including on sensitive matters such as contract management and, where appropriate, to assist in informing the findings and recommendations. We will also conduct a post-implementation review of MyWay+ procurement and delivery, including all aspects of the solution design, program management and delivery, including risk management, testing and post-implementation operations, which will be considered through these reforms regarding how we manage ICT projects in the future.

Within the project management framework sits the ACT government's Best Practice Design and Delivery Guide. In recognition of the lessons learned from the MyWay+ rollout, Digital Canberra will publish a detailed update to the Best Practice Design and Delivery Guide that will more clearly emphasise the importance of community and user-based testing to ensure accessibility is positioned as a core measure of readiness, particularly for digital transformation projects, and that accessibility requirements are fully met prior to public launch.

The ACT government is committed to fostering a more inclusive city for people with a disability, and it is continuing to strengthen our approach to removing barriers and enhancing accessibility. This includes delivering projects through best-practice principles and government oversight. This will include strengthening guidance on the role of community and user-based testing, alongside various types of technology testing, and clear articulation of responsibilities of project sponsors and project boards in assuring readiness of all project elements prior to launch.

I want to apologise to people who experienced barriers to using public transport because MyWay+ was not fully accessible at launch. The government should not have relied on the contracted accessibility requirements alone, and assurance that these requirements were met should have been sought prior to launch. A structured program of regular updates since launch has seen a number of corrective actions to achieve level AA conformance with web accessibility requirements for outstanding elements implemented, in parallel with improvements to uplift real-world usability which go beyond requirements for the MyWay+ customer portal, which is the website. These will be reassessed by the independent assurer, Get Skilled Access.

The update will also expand existing guidance to more clearly distinguish the complementary roles of technology testing, user acceptance testing, community-based testing, and how each of these contributes to determining whether a service is fit for operational use prior to public launch. This update will be supported by refreshed examples and practical advice to assist project teams to plan end-to-end design and testing activities appropriate to the scale and risk of each initiative. This expanded guidance material will be supported by a new coordination capability in Digital Canberra that will assist with community engagement.

Since the launch of MyWay+ and the reporting by the committee, there has been a significant lift in performance of MyWay+. The core functionality of the MyWay+ system, which is the ability to pay for public transport, is now working 99.18 per cent of the time, as measured by successful end-to-end payments using MyWay+ validators.

This is an example of addressing complex issues arising through major transformation projects, with Transport Canberra working with NEC over the past year to improve the end-to-end performance in having the system powered on, being ready and able to accept payments, and to have these charged at the correct rates through a series of hardware and software upgrades.

Transport Canberra also continues to work with NEC to deliver outstanding functionality, including group accounts, delegated users and institutional accounts. This is an example of where lessons learned through the program from launch have led to a deeper review into the design and testing of these functionalities to ensure they provide a good customer experience—with the functionalities undergoing a redesign and having now been progressed back to the testing stage following acceptance of the redesigned proof of concept—prior to becoming available later this year.

Alongside this program of ongoing improvements, Transport Canberra is planning and investigating future enhancements that will further improve customer experience and respond to the changing needs of our community over time. A key feature of the contract for the Next Generation Ticketing System for Transport Canberra is the support for continuous improvement throughout the life of the 10-year contract with NEC. These future enhancements being investigated include alternative payment options to the QR code, including the Apple Wallet “Express Mode” and a Digital MyWay+ card, which represent an evolution towards global best practice, as new technology becomes available and across other jurisdictions and internationally.

We are also exploring options and completing an assessment of requirements to inform a funding proposal for communicating real-time information to passengers at key locations, including public transport interchanges.

Cybersecurity has been another key focus as the MyWay+ system matures. As outlined in the government response, a program of cybersecurity assurance testing, including penetration testing, of MyWay+ is conducted on a quarterly basis by an independent and external cybersecurity assurer engaged by NEC.

This has been augmented by the City and Environment Directorate having engaged a separate, independent cybersecurity assurance firm, which have been engaged to conduct assurance, including penetration testing, as part of the directorate’s compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard.

The government is committed to continuous improvement and to ensuring that MyWay+ ultimately delivers the reliable and user-centred transport experience that Canberrans expect. The government welcomes the report by the committee as an important contribution to accountability and continuous improvement, particularly in the procurement and delivery of large, complex digital initiatives. The lessons from MyWay+ will shape how the ACT government designs, governs and delivers large, complex digital programs in the future, with a clear focus on community outcomes, trust and service quality. For that, we thank the committee again for their work and the community for their feedback.

I present the following papers:

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 3—Inquiry into the procurement and delivery of MyWay+—

Government response, dated February 2026.

Government response—Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.33): I am pleased to see that the government has accepted all seven of the committee's recommendations. I speak not as a member of the committee but as an Independent member for Murrumbidgee.

I acknowledge the meaningful actions already underway to address the serious shortcomings in project and contract management revealed through the MyWay+ inquiry. These reforms, particularly the establishment of Digital Canberra and the shift to whole-of-government project management, represent important structural steps towards more consistent, transparent and accountable procurement and contract oversight.

However, I remain concerned about the absence of clear implementation timeframes for several agreed recommendations. Basic functionality must be restored without further delay. The provision of fare charged and account balance information at tap-off were standard in the old MyWay system, and it is commonplace across comparable networks.

Likewise, the reinstatement of passenger information screens at interchanges should be treated as urgent. Real-time information is fundamental to an accessible, reliable network, especially now, when reduced services and overcrowding mean communities need clear information to decide whether to board a full bus or wait for the next rapid service.

I welcome Transport Canberra's acknowledgement that they need to better understand the community's expectations of our public transport service and to outline clearly how they will deliver services in accordance with these expectations. This shift is essential if we are to rebuild trust.

It is also imperative that data accuracy issues in the MyWay+ system are resolved so that future network planning reflects actual demand. The current mismatch between reduced service levels and growing patronage highlights the consequence of planning without reliable recent data. To design a network that encourages genuine mode shift, I would like to see a stated preference survey undertaken to understand passenger priorities and the service characteristics most likely to attract new users.

Finally, as discussed yesterday, transfers and travel time are important to people's travel decisions. As required by my motion of 16 September last year, I look forward to the government publishing conceptual options for the bus network from Canberra's south integrating into light rail by June 2026. This will show us how many transfers will be required to get to the city and an idea of travel times.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.36): I would like to thank the minister for the statement and the government response to what we should remember was a scathing inquiry report from the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning. I will now highlight some of the significant findings in the committee’s report.

The project scope was too large and complex. The change to a single-phase delivery was a poor decision. The community testing of MyWay+ was undertaken so poorly that it was almost meaningless, and it does not appear to have had any impact that improved the rollout of the system. The ACT government lost the trust of public transport users by promising basic features like real-time tracking that were not delivered at launch. MyWay+ was clearly not ready for launch on 27 November 2024. Multiple stakeholders had pointed this out to the ACT government and officials, and the decision to launch, anyway, on that date was clearly flawed.

Poor project management led to an undersupply of MyWay+ cards and retailers, despite the ACT government being told by stakeholders that access to cards was important. MyWay+ accounts, the app and website were poorly designed and did not work properly. The decision to launch MyWay+ without providing proper coverage and access to ticket machines was flawed. Offering a QR code payment option on a busy public transport system was a questionable choice, showing poor judgement.

Despite clear feedback from stakeholders and members of the public, the ACT government failed to provide services and information that met the needs of senior Canberrans. The MyWay+ project demonstrates a significant lack of appropriate risk management practices within Transport Canberra. The MyWay+ project constitutes a significant failure to effectively manage a complex digital project, and it comes in the context of a series of digital projects that have been poorly managed and delivered by the ACT government. The non-compliance of MyWay+ with accessibility requirements has failed the ACT community—in particular, those people living with disabilities.

The MyWay+ project testing process was flawed and unable to contribute useful information that would have effectively informed the project team. There was a failure of management over the MyWay+ project, and its delivery structure was not sufficient to provide internal oversight and identify key concerns in relation to the delivery schedule.

Transport Canberra officials failed to take the security vulnerabilities and data breaches reported by members of the public seriously, and they repeatedly told the committee that there was no basis for these concerns, despite clear evidence to the contrary.

That was the committee’s report. It is gratifying to see the response today to that report, which contains the word “apologise” three times and, in 14 instances, acknowledges the impact that this project had on Canberrans. For example, I quote the minister today:

... the government acknowledges that the transition to MyWay+ was not smooth. A range of system issues negatively impacted our passengers, and it did not deliver a fully accessible system at go-live.

I am also grateful to see that the government has seen fit to agree to all seven recommendations contained within the committee’s report. I am particularly glad, given

one of the findings of the committee's report was "that the ACT government should have taken a more proactive and genuine approach in acknowledging the many flaws and faults in this project". I only wish this had been the government's approach at the time, instead of brushing off significant community concerns as teething issues.

I believe the government response today is a vindication of the many Canberrans who raised their concerns about the MyWay+ project. There are still some outstanding issues from the government response that I wish to address in my speech today.

Firstly, there was the committee report finding that "there was insufficient transparency regarding the costs of the MyWay+ project which hindered the ability to determine whether the project was delivered within budget, and the financial implications of lost revenue". This ties in with the poor patronage data that the government currently possesses for MyWay+. This lack of data is hurting the government's ability to effectively plan its network. It is undermining community trust in our public transport system, and it was the subject of my order for the production of documents around this data.

We will only be able to broadly estimate the lost fare revenue because, quite frankly, we do not know how many patrons we have had over this period. I am grateful to see that the validator availability is improving, but I am not yet convinced about the statistics on 99 per cent availability when I continue to receive reports of bus validators wrapped in "out of order" labels. I will therefore be looking into that a little further. We also now have the challenge of challenging the passenger mindset, where Canberrans have got used to not tapping on, when using MyWay+.

I would also note that we have had issues with the testing of system and network upgrades, as exhibited by the change to the network earlier this month. Due to insufficient testing, there was a case of Canberrans being unable to access information about the live feed of bus locations and scheduling until later in the day. This continues to undermine the confidence in our public transport system and that of Transport Canberra to effectively manage it.

The lack of group accounts more than 16 months later is still a significant missing functionality impacting families, carers and community groups. Whilst I appreciate the government wishes to ensure that it gets this right, this is an outstanding functional gap that continues to be essential for families, who want to ensure that their children can catch public transport effectively.

Finally, the Council on the Ageing is still experiencing significant call volumes from Canberra's seniors about MyWay+. This is not a finished issue. They are continuing to be impacted by the government's management of this project. It is a community group whose initial feedback was ignored, and who bore the brunt of having to respond, in the middle of the government's mess, and they are still being impacted by this project.

Ultimately, whilst I welcome the government's response today, I wish this approach had come earlier, and that Canberrans had received the world-class ticketing system they were promised.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.43): While I chaired the inquiry, I am making a few

remarks now in my capacity as a member for Ginninderra. I want to thank the transport minister and the government for today's statement. It is a really good statement. I think it will go a long way to making a lot of people feel much more heard. It is really good to hear the words, "Sorry for the impact that the issues with the MyWay+ system had on Canberra's public transport users." That was a really good acknowledgment.

I am also pleased to see that the government has genuinely read and understood the seven recommendations. I have never before seen a government report agree with all the recommendations from a committee inquiry. The content in this statement shows that each recommendation has been genuinely engaged with and understood, and that there are steps, reviews and mechanisms in place with government to make sure that the next project does not suffer from the same problems as this one.

It is a really good response, and we hope we can see more of this kind of genuine engagement when something does go wrong and when something is not managed well.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.44): Ms Clay basically said exactly what I was going to say, so I will not speak for long. I want to echo her comments and very much welcome the government's acceptance in full of all the recommendations made through this inquiry report.

Of course, the rollout of MyWay+ could barely have been more bungled, so I appreciate the work of all the members in preparing this report and communicating the concerns raised by many people across our community about their experience with the system. I warmly welcome the government's acknowledgement of all the findings made through the inquiry and the clear acceptance of all the recommendations with no caveats. I am looking forward to a time when the system is functioning optimally, fully and as anticipated. I appreciate the work that will be required to get us there, and I am glad that work is underway.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Victims of Crime Commissioner Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.45): After an extensive and robust executive recruitment process, I am pleased to welcome Ms Juliette Ford, who commenced as the territory's new Victims of Crime Commissioner on Monday this week. I would like to take this opportunity to briefly outline the experience and skill that Ms Ford brings to the commissioner role and acknowledge the significant contributions made by former Commissioner Heidi Yates and Acting Commissioner Margie Rowe.

Before I do that, let's take a moment to reflect on why this role matters so deeply to our justice system and the community we serve. I certainly do not talk about every appointment we make, but this does deserve special mention for a variety of reasons. The Victims of Crime Commissioner exists because victims and their families deserve more than sympathy. They deserve advocacy, accountability and a system that responds to their lived experience. Navigating the justice system can be overwhelming, re-

traumatising and complex. The Victims of Crime Commissioner helps ensure victims and their families are informed, supported and heard throughout their journey. Beyond that, the commissioner ensures that victims are not an afterthought in justice policy but a central consideration in how our system is designed and delivered.

Turning to the new Victims of Crime Commissioner, Ms Ford brings proven expertise and leadership in advancing access to justice. Over her extensive career, Ms Ford has worked at the intersection of individual advocacy and systemic reform, promoting the rights of victim-survivors, particularly those impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence, through frontline legal practise, organisational leadership, governance roles and reform initiatives. Ms Ford brings more than two decades of experience in family law and advocacy. She joined the law firm Farrar Gesini Dunn in 2001 and became a partner in 2003, specialising in all areas of family law, dispute resolution and collaborative practice. She has also worked with community legal centres, including Canberra Community Law and the Aboriginal Legal Service in Western Australia, and she previously served as a Registrar of the Family Court of Australia.

Between 2021 and 2024, Ms Ford took time away from her private sector role to work for the ACT government, leading the Sexual Assault Prevention, Response and Law Reform program that delivered the groundbreaking *Listen, take action to prevent, believe and heal* report. The report paved the way for significant reforms in responses to sexual violence in the ACT, including the subsequent sexual assault police review. Ms Ford recognises the importance of prioritising the wellbeing and safety of staff working in contexts involving trauma, in implementing supportive practices and fostering a culture where staff feel valued, heard and equipped to manage challenging work. Ms Ford has led award-winning teams, which is a reflection on her ability to motivate, manage and develop staff to achieve outcomes with integrity, collaboration and a strong focus on the needs of victims.

Under Ms Ford's leadership, I trust that we will see a high-performing, resilient Victim Support ACT that continues to deliver critical services and supports to victims, while also maintaining a safe and supportive work environment for staff supporting victims of crime. I am confident that Ms Ford's approach to the commissioner role will encourage rigorous discussion, innovative thinking, collaboration with government and stakeholders and solutions-focused approaches to upholding the interests and rights of victims of crime. The leadership that she has demonstrated throughout her career will be critical in helping victims of crime in the ACT receive timely, compassionate and effective support and, indeed, to assist me and to assist this government in the development of further policy reform.

In welcoming Ms Ford, it is equally important to recognise the contributions of our outgoing commissioners. Heidi Yates, who was commissioner from 2018 to 2025, had a transformative tenure, overseeing the introduction of a number of important initiatives and a huge uplift in services, including, to mention just a few, the establishment of the intermediary program in 2020 as a response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse—a program which supported vulnerable witnesses, particularly children, to provide their best evidence at police interviews and trial; the Family Violence Safety Action Program, an expansion of the ACT Family Violence Intervention program's case-tracking process that has enabled information to be shared across relevant agencies to better ensure the safety of victims; and, of course,

in January 2021, there was the implementation of the Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime. The introduction of the charter moved away from “governing principles” to the provision of express rights for victims in the criminal justice system. At its introduction, the charter was recognised as the most comprehensive set of legislated rights for victims of crime in Australia. Last year we commenced a review of its operation to ensure it is meeting community expectations and to hear directly from those it is intended to support. I very much look forward to working with Ms Ford to finalise this review.

Ms Yates provided outstanding leadership to Victim Support ACT staff to achieve these and many other outcomes, especially on an individual basis with victims. She leaves behind an impressive legacy, having advocated tirelessly for victims of crime over six years as commissioner and certainly well beforehand in her numerous roles and with her work continuing to have a direct impact on our community today—an amazing legacy for such an impressive person.

Since stepping into the role as Acting Victims of Crime Commissioner in July 2024, Margie Rowe has provided expert and compassionate leadership, ensuring that vital services for victims of crime continued without disruption. During her time as acting commissioner, Ms Rowe has championed the development of the Significant Dates Pilot to ensure the justice system recognises and respects significant dates for matters in the criminal justice system where a death has occurred. She has tirelessly advocated for the Intermediary Program, which has been highly successful in supporting vulnerable witnesses with communication needs. I am very pleased through the budget review to honour her advocacy and to do exactly what was right, which was to ensure the continued support for that program. She has continued that strong partnership with the Women’s Legal Centre to deliver the ACT Sexual Violence Legal Service. This service has already supported over 100 people, providing trauma-informed legal assistance to help people navigate the justice system safely and with dignity.

I am incredibly grateful to Ms Rowe for stepping in when she was needed most. It meant a lot to have such a trusted and experienced practitioner, official and policy person, but ultimately human. Ultimately, this is about supporting humans, supporting victims. I think Margie is just this epitome of what humanity, integrity, empathy and strength look like, and she leaves an incredible legacy too. I think that Minister Paterson and I have been incredibly supported by her in this last year in particular and I think we will really miss her. It will be very different without Margie around, but I understand there are mimosas and Cheezels on the horizon, and I look forward to being able to partake in that at some point.

I commend this statement to the chamber, in that it warmly welcomes Ms Ford as the territory’s new Victims of Crime Commissioner and in offering our sincere thanks and gratitude to both Ms Rowe and Ms Yates for their outstanding contributions.

I present the following paper:

Welcoming the Territory’s new Victims of Crime Commissioner—Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

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) (11.54): I would really like to warmly welcome the new ACT Victims of Crime Commissioner, Juliette Ford, to this vital role. I really look forward to working with her to strengthen the rights of victims, amplify their voices and better support them to be able to access justice and heal and recover. In my time as a member advocating for victims, I have had many interactions with the ACT Victims of Crime Commission, and I have huge admiration for the critical work they do and the time they have given me to work together to support victims.

I also want to sincerely thank Acting Commissioner Margie Rowe. I think you are amazing. Your patience, compassion, expertise and professionalism that you use to support victims is inspirational. I give you my commitment as the Minister for Corrections that we will continue to work to improve the system to protect the rights and safety of victims as offenders progress through the correctional system.

I would also like to very much thank previous Commissioner Heidi Yates. Heidi, you are an absolute inspiration as well. Your contribution and service to the ACT in your time as commissioner was significant. You are greatly missed here, but I wish you all the very best on your future steps.

I feel very passionate about seeing victims treated with dignity, respect and humanity. Victims' voices are not an optional addition to our justice system; they are central to its integrity. When people who have experienced harm and their voices are heard, believed and respected, systems become more responsive, more accountable and more humane—listening and learning from their experiences with compassion and humility, centering victims' voices in how we move from a process-driven justice system to a people-centred justice system, justice and recovery that is grounded in care, dignity and respect. I look forward to continuing to work with Minister Cheyne in terms of how we can centre and strengthen the human rights of victims in the ACT.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.56): I would like to thank the Attorney-General for her statement and take the opportunity to reflect on the contribution of the outgoing commissioners. During her period as commissioner, from 2018 to 2025, Heidi Yates lifted the profile and the impact of the Office of the Victims of Crime Commissioner. The Attorney has outlined some of the specific measures, including with regards to the Intermediary Program and the Charter of Victims' Rights. As the minister responsible for developing and legislating the charter, I was particularly pleased to see the development of this important project under Heidi's leadership. The Intermediary Program was the classic case of a powerful, quiet achiever—a project that might not have captured the headlines in the justice space but was deeply impactful in delivering better justice outcomes.

More than the list of specific outcomes, though, it was how Heidi conducted herself and how she built the capacity of the Office of the Victims of Crime Commissioner that is the true reflection of her contribution. It is evident that Heidi is widely regarded across the ACT community by victims, members of this place, public servants, statutory office

holders, police and the range of other stakeholders she has interacted with in her role. Her calm and compassionate demeanour is a hallmark of Heidi's delivery of the role. I also deeply valued her insights, the questions and perspectives she would put forward and her ability to drive change in a way that brought people with her. I am deeply grateful that Heidi has been our Victims of Crime Commissioner and equally grateful for her list of achievements in the role.

I would also like to thank Acting Commissioner Margie Rowe, who stepped into the role when called upon and took up what is undoubtedly a heavy mantle with intelligence, energy and a steadfast commitment to the victims of crime she served. Margie was always very gracious in picking up the phone and taking a call from me or my team, and generous in her advice, which was consistently thoughtful, measured and of tremendous practical assistance. With Margie's guidance, I can think of several victims of crime who I was better able to support to more positive outcomes. Margie was also instrumental in maintaining the relationship with the Women's Legal Centre to deliver the ACT Sexual Violence Legal Service. I hope she feels very proud of her legacy in this space. More than 100 women have benefited from the support of this service under the combined formidable leadership of ELA and the Victims of Crime Commissioner.

My team and I are grateful for having a line to Margie's big brain and big heart, and we wish you all the best in the next stage of your journey, and the same goes to Heidi. May you both have every joy and success, enjoy more time with your families and feel very proud of the work you have done for Canberra's victims of crime and the legacy you have left on the shape of justice in this city. I also welcome Ms Ford and look forward to seeing her impact.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.59): The ACT government has signed a Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement with the commonwealth. This marks a further important step in health and disability reform following national cabinet finalising the new National Health Reform Agreement last month. I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on Foundational Supports and the work underway with all governments to deliver supports for children aged zero to eight with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs and their family, carers and kin, an initiative known as Thriving Kids.

As I have previously outlined, the NDIS review called on all governments to design and implement additional Foundational Supports outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS, to address the current gaps and ensure people with disability receive the right supports at the right time. The NDIS review found that the current system does not adequately meet the needs of children or their families. It confirmed that the NDIS has become the default pathway for developmental concerns, something it was never meant to be. The review identified that support for children zero to eight is not delivered early enough and that many children's developmental concerns are not

identified until after the optimal window for early intervention.

It also found that many children are entering the NDIS on the basis of a diagnosis rather than functional needs, despite evidence that many of the concerns presented can be responsive to early intervention. The review reported that families have frequently turned to the NDIS because mainstream and private services are inconsistent, difficult to access, slow, limited or unaffordable. It also highlighted that children who do not have a diagnosis are unable to enter the NDIS and that there are limited services in the community to support them.

Foundational Supports are designed to address these challenges and gaps in service provision by creating more accessible and timely services for children and families. Thriving Kids responds to the specific cohort of children aged zero to eight years with low to moderate support needs and represents an important first step in meeting this shared commitment to Foundational Supports.

I previously advised the Assembly I would be providing my first biannual update on Foundational Supports and the implementation of Thriving Kids in May 2026, as I committed to following Ms Barry's motion late last year. I also noted at the time, as well as prior to Ms Barry's motion, that I would provide updates when timely. The information in this statement may go to some points of Ms Barry's motion; however, it is not intended to be a formal response to that motion. I will provide that in May 2026 as previously committed.

The update I provide today is in acknowledgement of reaching a bilateral agreement on Thriving Kids and the Prime Minister's recent national cabinet announcement on health and disability reform of 30 January 2026. In his announcement, the Prime Minister confirmed a landmark national agreement to secure the future of the NDIS while strengthening the system of Foundational Supports that sits alongside it. The commonwealth, states and territories will co-fund Thriving Kids with a \$4 billion new investment over five years. Importantly, the commonwealth will allocate \$1.4 billion of its contribution directly to states and territories to fund the delivery of Thriving Kids services in their jurisdictions. This will provide the ACT with additional funding to enable us to design and deliver the services that meet the specific needs of our community.

Establishing Thriving Kids is a generational investment in improving outcomes for Australia's children with developmental vulnerability and autism. Timely and high-quality early intervention can dramatically change a child's developmental trajectory and reduce the need for intensive support later in life. It is therefore critical that we get this right, so that we can build an inclusive, accessible and well-connected support system. Because of the critical nature of this initiative, the ACT, together with other states and territories, have advocated for sufficient time to develop and commence services. All governments have agreed to a staged rollout with services to commence no later than 1 October 2026, with full implementation by 1 January 2028. The commencement date reflects the time needed for community consultation; to allow for adequate planning and time to scale up and establish quality services; and to address workforce pressures that must be carefully managed to ensure Thriving Kids is delivered well.

Just as importantly, the Australian government has confirmed that children with permanent and significant disability with high support needs will continue to be eligible for the NDIS. This reflects the strong advocacy of state and territory governments, the disability sector and the broader community, emphasising that Foundational Supports must complement and not replace the NDIS. For children aged zero to eight who are already NDIS participants before 1 January 2028 with developmental delay and/or autism and low to moderate support needs, the Australian government has indicated that existing NDIS access and assessment arrangements will remain in place until the new access settings commence on 1 January 2028. This arrangement responds to the NDIS legislative amendments and the implementation of Thriving Kids.

I assure families, carers and kin that all states and territories will closely monitor these access and eligibility changes to safeguard the continuity of support for children throughout this period. I recognise the uncertainty that comes with major national reforms, and I want to assure ACT families, carers and kin that the ACT government remains committed to providing timely information where possible as we work through the design and implementation of these Foundational Supports here in the ACT.

Important work is already underway within the ACT which will support our community and the implementation of Thriving Kids. Cross-directorate collaboration and consultation to understand the ACT service landscape and workforce requirements have been completed, together with cohort and demand estimates and extensive research and analysis of the evidence base of best practice early intervention for children and supports for their families, carers and kin. Additionally, the ACT's 2025-26 budget committed \$300,000 in new grant funding to support disability reform consultation with community members. This work is underway and will provide important contributions to our evidence base for designing supports for children, ensuring these services meet community expectations and needs.

Through our consultations, we know that families want support that helps them feel confident in supporting their children. We have consistently heard that the disability and health system are hard to navigate and that parents want in-person support and trusted relationships, including trusted navigation channels in familiar and safe places. We also know that families need consistency across services and an integrated service model that avoids siloed approaches and prevents them from having to repeat their stories multiple times at multiple service points.

Our vision for Thriving Kids is an inclusive and integrated service system that is accessible to all. It will provide children aged zero to eight and their families, carers or kin with the timely services, supports and information they need. Best practice and evidence tell us that children are best supported in the context of their families and communities. Therefore, core to this vision is ensuring these services are delivered in familiar settings where families live, play and learn. Thriving Kids will improve ACT children and their families, carers or kin's access to local services that meet their level of support needs. These supports will be delivered in different models—in person, group or virtual—to enable greater access. Further, this support will be accessible through multiple access points, including hubs for information and navigation and support services such as playgroups, peer support and/or therapeutic supports. Access to Thriving Kids supports will not require a diagnosis, which means families with concerns about their children's developmental milestones can access information and,

if necessary, services under Thriving Kids. Our next step is to take these initial learnings and understandings as well as our early service design to stakeholders as soon as possible, to gather their feedback and understand their views on the work completed so far. Shortly, I will convene round tables with service providers, carers and advocates to further inform implementation.

I want to assure the Canberra community that the ACT government will continue to prioritise an approach to Thriving Kids that places children, their families, carers and kin at the centre of all supports. This approach will strengthen the broader ecosystem and build a system of supports that meet the ACT's needs. As we move forward, the ACT government remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that Thriving Kids strengthens and not fragments the support system that children and families rely on. This is a significant reform, and we will continue to work closely with the commonwealth, our state and territory colleagues and the ACT community to build a system which is integrated, inclusive and genuinely responsive to the needs of our community.

I present the following paper:

Update on Implementation of Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids—
Ministerial statement, 26 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (12.09): I thank the minister for her update on Thriving Kids and Foundational Supports. Since coming back to work this year, I have met with constituents and community groups for whom the current shifts in disability support and services will have—and, in fact, are already having—a huge impact. Mr Assistant Speaker, in this speech, you might wonder why I only get to Thriving Kids near the end. To be honest, I think it is because, if you listened to this statement without knowing the context, it would give any reasonable listener the impression that things are unfolding on time and by design, and that the community is largely on board because they are being consulted.

I do not want anyone listening to the broadcast or reading our words in *Hansard* to assume that things are fine when successive, vague announcements about Thriving Kids, particularly from the federal Labor government, have made people with a disability, advocates, parents and carers extremely worried. What I am hearing consistently from my constituents is that there has been a real void left by the federal Labor government cutting NDIS supports. For many members of our community, that gap is being felt right now and it is being felt hard.

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids initiatives theoretically are designed to help fill that gap and, as the minister said, do things that the NDIS was not supposed to do, but they will only do so in practice if we get them right. In the meantime, the gap already exists. Our constituents are already having the rug pulled out from underneath them. People do not want to answer the phone in case it is the NDIS reviewing their plan and deciding that their core needs, which they have jumped through months and months of

hoops to prove, are still not core enough needs to care about them.

The federal Labor government seems to have decided that AI is a great assessor of people's needs. I will be a bit frank here. That is quite nuts to me. It is quite nuts to my constituents with NDIS plans. I do not say this with flippancy; I say it to embody the frustration of people with a disability and highlight the absurdity of what we are hearing from policymakers who are supposed to have people's best interests at heart. What is to stop this becoming Robodebt 2.0?

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids appear to be the government's answer, but the community still does not have clarity on what they will look like. There must be time for consultation. While we welcome the ACT government's investment in consultation in the larger budget—that is genuinely the right thing to do—community consultation is not optional; it is essential. Reforms of this scale have the best chance of succeeding when we genuinely listen to our local advocates and providers, and when people with a disability are the ones leading the discussion. Their voices must shape this reform, and they must be compensated for their time, their energy, their expertise and their lived experience.

These changes are not happening in a vacuum. They will redefine what Foundational Supports look like in the ACT, how people access critical information when newly diagnosed with a disability, how support services are delivered, and how children with developmental concerns are supported from the start.

I have spoken with stakeholders who provide our communities with vital support services, and they have been clear about the pressures that they are under, as well as concerns for the future, if they do not get proper funding soon. Information services led by people with a disability with lived experience often struggle to attract core funding for things like rent and staff because they cannot charge their clients, and they should not have to. But if we do not fund them to cover things like rent and staff, we may lose these orgs before the new Foundational Supports, like Thriving Kids, come into place. That would be an absolute travesty. They are doing so much work in the community and their insights must guide us.

With respect to Thriving Kids in particular, I will say it is telling that, at a time of such urgency, in this void where people with a disability are not having some of their core needs met, advocates are still relieved when the implementation of Thriving Kids is delayed so that they will actually be consulted. I think we have put them in a really cruel position there. Frankly, if the federal Labor government knew that these reforms would take time to get right, as we told them at the time, they should not have cut the NDIS in the meantime.

While we work through this reform, and while consultation and design take place, we must ensure that families are not left without help. Interim funding and support are critical to bridging the gap created by cuts to the NDIS so that no child or family is left waiting for the system to catch up. Our community deserves a system that is accessible, and that is coordinated and built with them, not for them. I look forward to ongoing updates and to seeing Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids in the ACT developed in partnership with the people who rely on them most. We have to get them right.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.14): I rise today to speak about the importance of a coordinated, integrated approach to supporting children aged zero to eight through Thriving Kids, Strong Foundations and our Maternal, Child and Family Health services. It is critical that we get this right so that we can build an inclusive, accessible and well-connected support system.

Thriving Kids will create accessible supports that do not require a diagnosis, providing multiple access points, including hubs, playgroups, group programs and therapeutic supports. This aligns strongly with the work already underway through Strong Foundations, which focuses on identifying developmental concerns earlier, and expanding access to small group and targeted learning supports. Thriving Kids complements this by ensuring that, once children are identified, there is a clear pathway into practical early intervention supports, and not another maze.

Our Maternal, Child and Family Health services remain the backbone of early engagement with families. These services are often the first to identify emerging concerns, the first trusted relationship, and the most natural entry point into Thriving Kids support. Together, these programs form a continuum of early identification and early intervention.

This is our opportunity to deliver a coordinated, child-centred system that meets families' needs. Strong Foundations, child and family health services and Thriving Kids must work together with a shared mission, ensuring every ACT child has the supports they need to thrive.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

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

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

Sitting suspended from 12.16 to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice Government procurement

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

Chief Minister, in question time on Tuesday you said:

... if you say you are going to spend \$500 million on the project, then you will basically get all the tenders around that mark.

You said that when you were asked about the use of NFP, or not for publication, on the territory's budget papers. This is an approach that you used for the upgrade of the Fitzroy Pavilion at EPIC. Was this figure held from the industry during the procurement

process?

MR BARR: I will have to check on that. It is one of a thousand projects from several years ago.

MR PARTON: Why did Major Projects, in issuing a works order for a project manager, disclose the full amount of that project?

MR BARR: Again, I will need to seek some information from the relevant agency. I do note that that was not a \$500 million project though.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why are the administration processes in directorates that you are responsible for so sloppy?

MR BARR: I will reject the premise of Mr Cocks's question.

Firstly, government procurement occurs across all agencies, but we do have Infrastructure Canberra as a central focus for the larger projects. So I do not think it is a fair characterisation. I am not sure whether this is going to prompt Mr Cocks to get up and claim a standing order non-answer, but to be clear I do not think the question is fair. The way procurement works, the government has a central agency but individual directorates also have responsibility for the delivery of smaller projects.

Government procurement

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. According to the Declarations of Members' Interests, one of your cabinet ministers remains a member of the CFMEU. Before entering parliament, this cabinet minister worked for the CFMEU and, in his inaugural speech, thanked the CFMEU for helping him get elected. Chief Minister, is it appropriate that a member of your cabinet maintains CFMEU membership, given widely reported corruption concerns around Australia and recently highlighted in Victoria, Queensland and the ACT?

MR BARR: People are free to join organisations. Under the Human Rights Act, that would indeed be a right that we all have. I would be surprised that a member of the Liberal Party who believes in freedom of the individual and freedom of association would suggest that someone could not be a member of a trade union.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, can you assure the Assembly that this cabinet member is excluded from cabinet deliberations involving government procurement?

MR BARR: The member is not a member of the Expenditure Review Committee. But, equally, if there is any conflict of interest—and I do not believe there is in relation to the minister's involvement in government decision-making—those conflicts of interest are declared. The minister is quite clear, as is required in the Declarations of Members' Interests, on declaring membership of organisations, as, indeed, all ministers and all members do.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, will you direct this cabinet minister to at least suspend his CFMEU membership while investigations into the CFMEU are underway?

MR BARR: I am not sure what you mean by “investigations”, Mr Pardon. The union is under administration, but there are no investigations into the ACT branch of the union. It is under national administration. Being a member of an organisation, as distinct from being on the executive and running an organisation, represents a pretty clear distinction. It would be a bit like asking you to not be a member of the West Coast Eagles if the West Coast Eagles’ executive were under some form of investigation. It is a very tenuous link.

Paediatric electroencephalograms

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Electroencephalograms—or EEGs, as they are more commonly known—are vital for diagnosing seizures and understanding the nature of seizures. Seizures are said to be common in paediatric patients, yet we have been told that Canberra Health Services does not have an EEG available on the paediatric ward. Instead, CHS requires patients to leave the hospital, potentially involving interruption of inpatient care, and pay around \$200 to have an EEG done privately, unless they are a concession card holder. Minister, can you confirm whether CHS has an EEG on the paediatric ward and, if not, why not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I am aware of the issue. I am not sure if I have some advice in some briefing that I have not had an opportunity to review yet. So I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, can you confirm whether the ACT government has any plans to purchase the piece of equipment for the paediatric ward?

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

MS CLAY: Has CHS received requests from staff or stakeholders to purchase an EEG?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Certainly this issue has been raised by stakeholders. But, until I have the further information about the existing availability, I obviously cannot answer that question. So I will take that question on notice as well.

Public housing—maintenance

MR EMERSON: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The Productivity Commission’s latest *Report on government services* shows the proportion of public housing in the ACT whose condition is of an acceptable standard has decreased from 76 per cent in 2023 to 71 per cent in 2025. That means almost a third of our public housing dwellings do not have at least four working facilities and no more than two major structural defects, the second-lowest rate in the country. Minister, why is the condition of our public housing stock so poor and why is it worsening?

MS BERRY: Well, the ACT has some of the oldest housing stock in the country, which is probably one statistic Mr Emerson did not pay attention to. That is the reason the

government has been conducting a growth and renewal program where we have been renewing older, unsustainable homes, so that 20 per cent of our public housing properties are now newer, more sustainable, environmentally friendly, affordable to heat and cool and accessible for people with different ability needs.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the ACT government commit to reversing this concerning decline in the condition of our public housing stock by the time the next set of RoGS data comes out, which will be based on the 2027 year?

MS BERRY: Well, I have just described what the ACT government is doing to address the issues in our public housing and will continue to do that.

MS CARRICK: Minister, has the government set a goal of at least meeting the national average for the condition of our public housing stock or of having the highest quality public housing in the country?

MS BERRY: We have certainly been running a growth and renewal program, unlike any other any other state or territory. The ACT government is keen to ensure that our public housing stock meets the needs of all our tenants, regardless of their needs or their backgrounds, including the increase to public housing of another thousand homes. It will make a difference to the sustainability and liveability of our homes. We are also, as members know, looking at insourcing our housing maintenance program as well as making sure our homes are electrically efficient, have electrical upgrades and have ceiling upgrades to ensure there is appropriate insulation. So there is a range of different work happening in the ACT, and I am sure that there will be better outcomes as we continue with that work.

Mr Emerson: Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on the responsiveness of the minister's answer. I appreciate the remarks regarding the work that is underway but I believe Ms Carrick's question was specifically whether a target had been set in relation to the data that I quoted in my first question.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Minister Berry, do you have anything to add or not?

MS BERRY: No.

MR SPEAKER: I will have to review that one, Mr Emerson, on the specifics. I will take that away, have a look and get back to you as to whether there is anything under 118AA, which I presume is where you are at. I will get back to the Assembly on that.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health, and it is about Burrangiri.

Minister, on 24 February, a couple of days ago, you said:

The ACT government is funding Burrangiri until 2027 at the cost of almost \$2 million a year in ACT taxpayer dollars for a service that is a commonwealth responsibility and which is not structured in a way to be cost-effective or

commercially viable in any part of the aged care system, and we are doing that in a building that is rapidly running out of time, that was considered to be end of life last year in terms of needing refurbishment.

You also said:

It does not meet modern standards of delivering this kind of care.

Minister, will the ACT government release the full building condition and safety documentation for Burrangiri so the community can understand what the actual concerns for the building are and how those concerns affect future service delivery?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: All of those documents have already been released. I understand that Ms Carrick has a different interpretation of some of those documents to me, to officials and, indeed, to some of the feedback from the service provider over a period of time about the constraints associated with the infrastructure at Burrangiri. But all of that documentation is available. I think probably Ms Carrick and I will continue to take different interpretations of that. Ms Carrick also has available to her all of the briefs that I received, which very clearly include advice from the directorate about the quality of the infrastructure.

I will just repeat what I have said multiple times in relation to this matter. The thing that sat alongside the condition of the infrastructure was that the Salvation Army's contract was coming to an end and, under our procurement rules, there was going to be a requirement to test the market for this service. If we were going to go to market for a new contract for this service, we would have to ensure that the facility was such that our officials could stand by asking someone to deliver this service in a facility that was fit-for-purpose for the activity that they were contracting for, for an extended number of years. On that basis, officials could not in all conscience go to market asking someone to deliver this service in that facility without significant refurbishment, which—yet again—would have required the facility to close to be refurbished. I do not think Ms Carrick and I are ever going to agree on this matter, but all of the documentation is already publicly available.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what financing and sustainability analysis has the ACT government completed? Which providers have you spoken to about what they believe can realistically be delivered with the commonwealth's \$10 million?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not going to go to individual providers that have been consulted, although I will say that I have had some good conversations when—as I think I mentioned on Tuesday—I visited the Mullangarrie Baptist Care facility that provides the residential portion of the therapy and transition care program, 14-bed facility that is funded through that commonwealth program where the ACT contributes allied health services as our in kind contribution to TTCP. I also had a bit of a chat—as I know Ms Carrick did—with the CEO of Goodwin at the Dementia Australia Memory Walk & Jog on Sunday morning. So I think both of those are kind of on the record, as it were.

I know that the ACT Health and Community Services Directorate, the commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and I have all had conversations with

providers. In fact, we have seen a business case, which would be commercial-in-confidence, from a provider talking to another jurisdiction about a similar kind of service, which indicated that the minimum number of beds that would make a service like this viable was 30 beds, and that a 15-bed service simply was not a cost-effective service nor a service that was viable to operate under current aged care funding arrangements.

Ms Carrick: Point of order The first part of the question was what financing and sustainability analysis has the ACT government completed?

MR SPEAKER: On relevance, Minister, the supplementary did ask if there had been any analysis done. Do you have a response?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The Health and Community Services Directorate is continuing to undertake that analysis and is providing advice to the government, in the context of negotiations with the commonwealth and ACT government budget processes. Obviously, I will not be revealing the content of that advice at this time. *(Time expired.)*

MR EMERSON: Minister, what is the process you are following to ensure that when the Salvation Army's contract ends there is no reduction in respite bed capacity and the level of care that is currently provided?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. As I indicated on Tuesday, the ACT government is working very closely with the commonwealth. The Health and Community Services Directorate has been engaging with aged care providers and with the commonwealth department to work through what the options are for the use of that \$10 million as well as what opportunities exist in the ACT for respite care. Our intention and the commonwealth's stated intention—recognising, again, that this is a Commonwealth responsibility—is that the number of respite beds available in the ACT will not be reduced from July 2027.

Land sales—Jamison and Kaleen

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. On 13 February, in response to my question, you wrote to tell me that direct sale applications have been received for unleased land at both the Kaleen and Jamison group centres in July 2025. There is community concern that Big Splash closing may have been related to a desire to redevelop the area, and those feelings will be exacerbated by any sale processes that are not public. Can you tell me the status of the two applications for direct sale at Kaleen and Jamison and what criteria will be applied to determine whether the land should be sold directly instead of through an open, public process?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Yes, the status is that they have been received, and I think they are under assessment in accordance with the Planning Act and regulation. There is a panel that initially assesses those, and then there may be a decision and recommendation to government about whether there should be a different process, rather than just engaging with the one direct sale applicant, or whether it should go to a competitive sale or another process, depending on the outcome, or, indeed, that it should not be considered at all.

I will seek an update from the City and Environment Directorate on the status and come back to the Assembly on notice.

Ms Clay: A point of order on relevance. The question was: what are the criteria? We heard about the panel, but what are the actual criteria that they apply?

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister did respond to what the process is in terms of moving forward, and he said he would get back to you with further detail. I think that he has been relevant.

MS CLAY: How is the community consulted, and transparency given, where land is sold via direct sale?

MR STEEL: The government would have to consider what steps need to be taken in terms of community consultation; that would be on a case-by-case basis. But in virtually all circumstances, any direct sale is usually contingent on there being a development application that is approved for a site, which has a requirement, of course, for consultation to be undertaken. There is an independent assessment by the Territory Planning Authority in those circumstances, but that is really dependent on whether the government is prepared to actually sell the site, which may not be the case, depending on the particular proposal. I will provide an update to Ms Clay. I do not think it has reached the stage of providing a recommendation to government yet. It is still under consideration by the City and Environment Directorate.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are any of the companies involved in the Big Splash site also involved in applications for direct sale?

MR STEEL: I do not believe so, but I will check and take that on notice to make sure I have that correct.

Tourism

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, can you provide an update on the government's plan to action phase 2 of the T2030 Tourism Strategy?

MR BARR: Yes, I can provide an update. We are particularly focused on a number of domestic and international markets with a view to increase the tourism expenditure in the city's economy by a billion dollars over the next five years. We have four key priorities and that includes domestic and international markets as well as continuing strong investment in infrastructure, major events and making it cheaper and easier for people to visit Canberra and that includes initiatives to support both land transport, principally through the Canberra-Sydney rail corridor, and aviation access, working in partnership with Canberra Airport.

We have seen this week a further announcement of a new direct service between Canberra and Launceston, building on the Canberra-Bali services that Virgin announced earlier this year and our priorities will focus on working with the

Queensland government on connections between Canberra and the Sunshine Coast and Canberra and Cairns, as well as working with the South Australian government to improve the frequency of services between Canberra and Adelaide and working with the Western Australian government to see if we can get Virgin to fly between Canberra and Perth.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what progress have we seen so far in 2026?

MR BARR: We have seen some significant progress in the areas that I have just spoken about and we have been particularly pleased with attendance at major events already this year, with a lot still to come. We are, I think, in peak festival season now for our city, Mr Speaker. We will continue our focus in relation to international aviation, welcoming the return of Qatar Airways service, but maintaining a focus on connections to New Zealand, either—most likely, I think—with Air New Zealand or with Qantas, and then working on that Singapore connection which really does require more traffic from India and from the UK and Europe. So these will be priority areas for Visit Canberra to focus on through this year.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what recognition are those in our tourism sector receiving nationally?

MR BARR: Some excellent recognition, and I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. We are very strongly represented at next month's Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. A number of significant Canberra region businesses are national finalists. I cannot name them all in two minutes, but I do want to acknowledge Questacon, which has been a regular winner of national tourism awards, but also on the smaller scale, Pop Canberra, Shaw Estate, Hotel Realm and some of our own ACT government venues and events. The National Arboretum is up for a national award and so too is Floriade.

These awards represent the highest level of recognition for tourism excellence in Australia and the territory's nominees reflect the diversity and quality of experiences that our city offers. So I would take this opportunity to wish all of the ACT finalists all the best in the national awards and thank them for the work they do in providing quality tourism offerings and for representing Canberra on the national stage.

Government procurement

MR COCKS: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, between March 2017 and the end of October 2024, the territory entered into three contracts with Relational Data Systems, with a combined value of \$1.221 million, including all published variations. That was for provision of online services for a land title project. Minister, why did the government make over \$2.4 million in payments under these agreements that totalled \$1.2 million?

MS CHEYNE: For clarity, this might be in my role as Minister for City and Government Services. The short answer is that I do not know. Even if this is from responsibilities I had last term—it obviously extends back to the Ninth Assembly—I will need to seek some advice. I will take it on notice.

MR COCKS: Minister, why is the government incapable of properly administering its

contractual arrangements?

MS CHEYNE: I reject the premise of that question. I do not think there is any suggestion, especially in relation to the specific project that Mr Cocks is asking about, that it has been incapably managed. I have no evidence to support that, and I am not sure that Mr Cocks does either. If he does, he is certainly welcome to raise that with me here or in any other forum that he wishes. But, to my knowledge, it has not been improperly managed. If that is not the case and I owe the Assembly an apology, I will provide that and correct the record. Otherwise, I will seek to explain what this contract was for and any other relevant information.

MS MORRIS: Minister, will there be any overspends without variations under the current \$1.3 million contract with the same service provider?

MS CHEYNE: I think that borders on hypothetical, but, in the interests of hoping to be useful, the short answer is again that I do not know, because I do not know the full extent of this arrangement. But I would note that variations in contracts are not unusual. In fact, many contracts have variations built into them, including relating to extensions of time or further services that might be available if the circumstances allow.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order regarding relevance: the question was about overspends without variations.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister is being helpful, to be honest, Mr Cocks. She said that she will take the original question on notice and will provide further information. And I think she is right to say it is verging on hypothetical. She cannot predict the future. I think she is being helpful. There is no point of order.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If there is anything in the projection that suggests that this might be the case, of course I will try to give as much information as possible. If there is further information, with the imputations that are coming across here, I will be happy to receive it, if that might assist us in providing the information that is actually being sought here.

Government procurement

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Minister, on Tuesday in question time, you were asked:

Minister, is it common practice for the government to continue to pay invoices on behalf of the territory in excess of the total contract value stipulated in the contract documents without a variation?

Your answer was: “I would say no, that is absolutely not common practice.” Minister, in August 2022, the ACT Insurance Agency, ACTIA, entered into an agreement with Marsh Pty Ltd, contract No GS2593938. Schedule 1 item 3 of the contract, labelled “Contract Price” states, “The maximum amount payable is \$2,340,000.00 (GST inclusive)”. Minister, what is the maximum amount payable under this contract without variation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think the answer to the question was in the question—it was two million and something. But I will take the question on notice, review the *Hansard* and talk to ACTIA about this contract and whether Mr Cocks has the right end of the stick, given how regularly he is actually unable to read budget papers and contract arrangements.

MR COCKS: Minister, why has the government paid over \$40 million in invoices to this service provider without a contract variation since the commencement of this agreement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, while I thank Mr Cocks for the question and drawing this matter to the attention of the Assembly, the frequency with which Mr Cocks misunderstands these issues—

Mr Cocks: Point of order: the minister is debating.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, I would ask you to turn to the question. If you do not have the detail, take it on notice. But a dissertation on Mr Cocks is not relevant.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Okay; let me put that in a different way. I do not accept the premise of the question on face value, and I will take the question on notice.

MR CAIN: Minister, why are you and this government so reckless with taxpayers' money?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not agree with the premise of the question. This government is not reckless with ACT taxpayers' dollars.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, on 10 April 2025, you signed an authorisation under section 16B of the Financial Management Act to move an additional \$12.599 million to the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate from the previous year. On what date did you, or the Treasury, become aware of the need to move the additional funding?

MR STEEL: Mr Cocks's question relates to the rollover of an undisbursed appropriation. I will seek some advice in relation to that and check records around that date and come back to the Assembly on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, when did you, or the Treasury, become aware of the need to move an additional \$7.9 million into Canberra Health Services for the 2024-25 financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I will take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Treasurer, when did you or the Treasury become aware of the need to move an additional \$7.15 million into CIT for the 2024-25 financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I will check and come back on notice to the Assembly.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR COCKS: Treasurer, are you aware of your rollover reporting obligations outlined under section 16B of the Financial Management Act, and if so, what are they?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question and refer the member to section 16B of the act that he has been referring to and if the Treasurer authorises an amount to be dispersed under this section, the Treasurer must attach a copy of the authorisation for the next financial statement presented to the Assembly. I will check whether those have all been attached and come back on notice, thank you.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, if you were aware of your reporting obligations, why were you negligent in fulfilling these obligations when tabling the consolidated financial statements for the quarter ending March 2025?

MR STEEL: I will check that and come back on notice. I cannot verify that in the Assembly right at the moment, but I will come back on notice when I can.

MR MILLIGAN: Treasurer, will you apologise to ratepayers for your gross negligence if it is proven that you did not report according to the Financial Management Act?

MR STEEL: That is a hypothetical, and I will be coming back on the other questions, so I will address it through that and then come back to the Assembly about any further actions that need to be taken.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, on 10 April 2025, you signed multiple authorisations under section 16B of the Financial Management Act. Your responsibilities as Treasurer under FMA require you to table these authorisations with the presentation of the next financial statement to the Assembly. Treasurer, why did you fail to comply with your responsibilities under the FMA and, in doing so, fail to disclose the need for an additional \$100 million in funding for the 2024-25 financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I will check that and come back on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, why didn't you choose to disclose the need for an additional \$100 million in funding as part of the second Appropriation Bill for 2024-25?

MR STEEL: I will come back in relation to the first question, and that may also answer the second question.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, did you hide the need for this additional funding because S&P were undertaking a review of the territory's credit rating at that time?

MR STEEL: No.

Treasurer—conduct

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, you have explicit reporting obligations as outlined by the Financial Management Act. If you were the Chief Financial Officer of a private company, breaching reporting obligations could result in up to 15 years of jail time or potential fines exceeding \$1 million. Since you failed in your reporting obligations, will you resign as Treasurer?

MR STEEL: No, because that has not been verified. I will certainly come back to the Assembly with some information about those particular reporting obligations and present that to the Assembly.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, why should you be held to a different standard to a private company director?

MR STEEL: I am not. I will come back to the Assembly with information transparently, as I always have and as our Treasury officials always intend to do in supporting me with the reporting obligations under the Financial Management Act.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, was this malice or simply gross incompetence?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question, Mr Speaker.

Ms Cheyne: On a point of order directly relevant to that question set: standing order 55 is quite clear that all imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members shall be considered highly disorderly. If it is not absolutely within that definition, I think it is bordering quite close.

MR SPEAKER: I tend to agree with you on that.

Mr Parton, I think accusations of malice are unparliamentary and I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr Parton: Happy to withdraw. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Vocational education and training—enrolments

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, this month marks the commencement of the VET academic year for 2026. What kinds of initiatives and activities does 2026 hold for our VET sector?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. I am pleased to say that 2026 is shaping up to be a great year for VET learning here in the ACT. The CIT has hit the ground running in 2026, following a particularly strong turnout at twilight enrolment sessions earlier in the month, I can happily advise that the CIT now has over 7,900 learners enrolled in semester 1 in 2026. This is around three per cent higher than last year. 2026 will see more fee-free TAFE places offered at the CIT,

driving enrolment in courses across critical skill areas, including early childhood education, mental health, cybersecurity and education, to list just a few.

On top of this, 2026 will see the first full academic year where our 90 per cent subsidy of fees for critical construction apprentices is in place. As an initiative introduced part way last year, this subsidy is helping lower the costs for an apprentice across trades. This initiative removes barriers to education and ensures that we are supporting people into a career they know will have a positive impact on our community.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the ACT government support VET learners with their studies in 2026?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary question. The ACT government recognises that, to meet the skills needs of our city, we need to support our VET learners. Earlier this week, I provided an update about the important work we are doing in partnership with the Albanese Labor government through the National Skills Agreement and how this agreement is central to our efforts to support VET learners.

2026 will mark the commencement of work on an ACT careers hub, which is an initiative of the National Skills Agreement. This hub will provide guidance to learners, both new and already studying, about pathways and qualifications open to them in VET. This hub has been established because we heard, through consultation, that current and prospective students would benefit from a simpler, clearer and central point of information on vocational pathways. Through the careers hub, we will be able to provide greater support and guidance to help learners find a career through their VET studies. It will complement the skills and knowledge of our employers and RTOs and will help our learners find the career path they want to be on.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how can we as a community support our VET students with their studies this year?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. If there is one thing that helps the students succeed in their vet studies, it is practice. CIT has talented students sharpening their skills across a wide range of disciplines. At CIT Woden, the return of students for 2026 marks the return of the CIT Restaurant and CIT Hair and Beauty Bar. These wonderful facilities are open to the community and, if you have not visited yet, you are frankly missing out. At the CIT Restaurant, the cafe is open Thursdays and Fridays, pouring wonderful coffee and selling bread, pre-made meals and delicious desserts. In the evening on Thursdays, the apprentices offer Canberra's cheapest five-course tasting menu, with wine pairing, for just \$85 a head. Mr Speaker, I know this one is close to your heart! If you are looking to make a day of it, the CIT Hair and Beauty Bar offers haircuts, colour, waxes, tinting of lashes, manicures, pedicures and massage, as well as a whole host of other treatments and pampering.

These services provide students with real experience for real success in the workplace, but they only work if people in our community show their support and encouragement by taking part. Further information on how you can get involved and make bookings is available on the CIT website.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for the information, Minister.

Playing fields—artificial grass

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, the Gungahlin Bulls Rugby League Club, the primary user of the Taylor playing fields, has written to the government about their concerns with the government's announcement of installing artificial grass. They write that installation of the surface would make the facility unsuitable for rugby league due to concerns about injury risk, increased abrasion and altered playing characteristics and, hence, have asked that the ACT government reconsider its proposal to install synthetic surfaces at Taylor. Will the government reconsider its position on this project?

MS BERRY: I am aware of the Bulls' concerns with regard synthetic grass and sports fields at Taylor. This was part of an election commitment that the ACT Labor Party made and was made aware to the community at the time that those fields would be synthetic. I will have to check on the timeframes around requests for tender and things like that to see if it is able to be reconsidered and whether it is appropriate to be reconsidered, because there is a need in the ACT for more synthetic field ovals for a range of different sports.

We find that, in inclement weather, in the ACT our grass fields get damaged quite a bit when there is a lot of rain and so a lot of sports look to use synthetic fields. We have only a few synthetic fields and we were hoping to add to our stock by including the Taylor fields. But I am happy to continue to work with the Bulls, as I always have been, on a positive outcome for them and all other sports in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, do you acknowledge that some community sports organisations do not welcome artificial grass due to increased injury risk and abrasion?

MS BERRY: Yes, of course, I do. I am aware of the challenges with some sports, particularly with rugby league with more time on the ground perhaps than other sports might. However, as I said, these sports facilities are often for a range of different sports. Making sure that we have some equality there around the kinds of facilities that we provide and having a variety of stock available for a range of different sports is important to the ACT Sport and Rec team. But I do understand the issues that the Bulls club have raised, and I will continue to work with them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you make decisions on sports ovals based on Labor election commitments or on community sentiment?

MS BERRY: Of course, when the government make a commitment they follow through on that commitment and deliver on their promises. Often that is as a result of conversations. As I explained in my first answers to these questions, there is a need and a call from a range of different sports for access to more synthetic fields. I know Mr Braddock has a feeling about synthetic fields—I get that—but there are a range of sports that do benefit from synthetic fields. The technology for synthetic fields has improved over the last decade or so, and there is a very big difference in the quality of the fields and the sustainability of those fields both environmentally but also for user groups. I always consider the needs of sports across the ACT. That is why the Taylor fields are

being considered to include synthetic fields.

Public housing—maintenance

MS BARRY: My question is to the minister for housing. Earlier in the month I asked you a question in this place about the insourcing of maintenance for public housing. You indicated that you would not consider doing an efficiency review of this pilot insourcing program by saying “I think we are kind of past that work,” but you went on to clearly indicate that there would be an increase in the cost of maintenance because of your fixation with insourcing. Minister, given the parlous state of the budget, why are you choosing to pursue a much more expensive maintenance method? Will this result in even fewer maintenance jobs being completed?

MS BERRY: Well, I get the feeling that the opposition wants to have a housing maintenance program that is the cheapest, at any cost. The cheapest does not always mean the best quality outcomes, particularly for people who are the most vulnerable in the ACT. My focus is on ensuring the best possible outcomes in repairs and maintenance for Housing ACT properties and tenants who do not have the same kinds of choices as the rest of us. So my work in insourcing the housing repairs and maintenance program is very much focused on the best outcomes for tenants.

MS BARRY: With that in mind, Minister, how much more will it cost to provide even the current level of maintenance once this pilot is rolled out across the territory?

MS BERRY: Well, thank you. That is a hypothetical question. Work is still occurring in that space. As I have said in this place a number of times, we have been piloting a part of the program to test the viability and the ability of the government’s insource teams to deliver that work and whether it is achieving the best possible outcomes for tenants. The feedback that I am getting is that tenants are benefiting from that pilot.

MR PARTON: Which other services will you be cutting to pay for the union-demanded insourcing of the public housing maintenance, or will you simply accept that even less maintenance jobs will be completed?

MS BERRY: No, there will be no cuts to other services.

Mr Parton: So where is the money coming from? It is going to cost more. You told us it is going to cost more.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton. Minister, continue.

MS BERRY: I am very much trying hard to answer the question, but the constant interruptions by the Leader of the Opposition are making it difficult. My focus has always been on ensuring the best outcome for tenants and that is it. I have always been focused on making sure that low paid people in our community get some kind of security in their work, and in the case of public housing tenants—tenants who do not have the same kinds of choices as the rest of us—get the best kind of support through their repairs and maintenance program and some respect from people in this place who are leaders in this community, showing that respect, by insourcing a program which will deliver better outcomes for tenants. That is my goal.

Mr Cocks: Point of order under 118AA. The question that the Leader of the Opposition asked was which other services will be you be cutting to pay for the union-demanded insourcing of public housing maintenance or will you simply accept that even less maintenance jobs will be completed? The question was very clearly about how the government intends to pay for higher costs that the minister has already spoken to. The response that the minister provided instead went only to questions of her priorities in what she would like to see delivered, rather than how to offset the costs.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, do you want to—on the point of order?

MS BERRY: I answered it in the very first question. I said no other services would be cut.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I do not see a point of order, Mr Cocks.

Community sector organisations—funding

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, I have been really grateful for your engagement on community sector sustainability and funding. ACTCOSS's latest *State of the ACT community sector* reports a community sector that is on the brink. In 2024, 83 per cent of the organisations surveyed reported an increase in demand, driven by increased cost-of-living pressures, housing insecurity, a lack of mental health support and a growing complexity of need in our community.

In their response to ACTCOSS's *Counting the costs* report on sector sustainability, government agreed to a sector sustainability program. In the executive summary, they say that "commissioning of the SSP will include development of an evaluation framework for the program to enable evidence of impact to be gathered and a final evaluation report developed in 2027". That is at the bottom of page 3. Minister, when will that evaluation framework be made publicly available?

MS ORR: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I am trying to figure out the sequence here, because Miss Nuttall has asked about an evaluation framework and when it will be made public, and it is for something that is meant to happen in 2027. I will need maybe to seek some advice on timeframes, so that the sequencing is better. I will come back, if there is anything to update.

I would point Miss Nuttall to the Sector Sustainability Program, which is at the core of the question, and it is the program that the evaluation framework refers to. It has been ongoing since 2023. My understanding is that, towards the end of the last term, the progression of that program was not the easiest; it was a very big, complex project, and it continues to be worked through. The delivery was a little bit off, and the timeframes have been pushed out.

With respect to informing ACT Labor's election commitments, coming into government, we have acknowledged that there needs to be more work done on the Sector Sustainability Program, and we had an election commitment to finalise that work, amongst a range of other commitments that are sequential and go to a lot of things,

including reviewing commissioning, standing up a unit within the public service, refreshing the social compact, and considering matters of funding. We have been working through those.

I note that the Greens also had quite a lot of election commitments, and part of those go to investing further in the Sector Sustainability Program. That is reflected in our Supply and Confidence Agreement with the Greens. As I said, we have been progressively working through that, and we have been working quite closely as well with the sector and the peak organisations within the sector. I must admit that none of them have asked me about the evaluation framework that Miss Nuttall has raised. I would say that there has been— *(Time expired.)*

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, are we on track to evaluate the program in 2027, and what would be the barriers to that timeline?

MS ORR: In answering the question as to whether we are on track, I think it was generally regarded, before I took on the portfolio, that this project was not necessarily on track. Part of the work that we have committed to do, and that I have been very open about doing, has been working with the sector on progressing a wide range of reforms and getting that work completed. I think that the initial timeframes in 2023 were put forward with the best intentions by all partners to the project. The complexity of the matters to be considered means that perhaps it was ambitious, and not quite as realistic as one might like.

We will continue to work through that. We will continue to see how we can get those commitments and that project back on track. Again, it is part of a sequential reform agenda that is there; it is very clearly stepped out. I have spoken many times in this chamber around looking at how we progress these reforms. Certainly, the ACT for Community campaign brought forward a number of priorities around funding to which they wanted immediate attention to be given. That has been our focus in the first instance.

We will continue to look at things such as the social compact, the commissioning framework, establishing a unit within the public service to focus more on this work, and the sector sustainability. As I said, in all the conversations I have had with sector representatives, they have not raised with me that they would like any particular piece of work changed, with respect to that prioritisation.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what are you hearing from community sector organisations about the sufficiency of the boost of \$5 million a year split among around 150 community organisations while the Sector Sustainability Program progresses?

MS ORR: The feedback that I have had from community sector organisations is that the boost has been appreciated and that most organisations are putting it to good use. I have certainly had other feedback from people and organisations that, in taking a one-size-fits-all approach, they feel that there are some areas where there might have been a bit more need or a little bit less need, and they would like to see that balance.

They also appreciate that the boost was put in place to alleviate the immediate pressures that the sector was saying they were experiencing, in order to have the time to work

through this bigger reform program. It was in direct response to the feedback that we have heard from the sector. There was definitely an appreciation and understanding that, as a temporary measure, it was best to get that in place, so that we can get on with the bigger work of looking at that more detailed reform agenda.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Land sales—Jamison and Kaleen

MR STEEL: Earlier in question time I was asked about direct sales in a range of locations, including Macquarie. I can inform the Assembly that, as I mentioned, direct sales are assessed under the criteria set out under the Planning Act 2023 and regulation, and they are subject to a decision by government. In July 2025, the direct sale team in the City and Environment Directorate received direct sale applications for land in Kaleen, Wanniasa, Erindale and Macquarie—Jamison—group centres. The proposals have been brought forward by the owners of the main shopping centres in each group centre.

CED has met with the proponent to discuss the direct sale applications, to understand staging, timing and details of the proposals. To inform an assessment of the applications, CED sought feedback from relevant agencies and service providers via the Land Requests Advisory Committee in December 2025 and January 2026. The proponent is currently considering feedback from agencies and deciding whether they will update their direct sale application in response.

Paediatric electroencephalograms

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Rattenbury asked a question about paediatric EEG at Canberra Hospital or within Canberra Health Services. As I indicated, I have had representations about this issue, and I recognise the importance of and need for paediatric EEG. CHS has not had EEG services at all for several years, but this has been reinstated in the last year or so. There are now three neurophysiologists, the third of whom has just completed their training in adult EEG.

CHS is therefore now better staffed to start considering extending the service to include paediatric EEG. This will require training for the neurophysiologists in this area, as CHS currently does not have any neurologists who can report paediatric EEGs. The development of remote EEG reporting access is also in progress. While we do not have a timeframe for that at this point, that is expected to provide better options for paediatric reporting, once that is in place. There are discussions happening, I understand, with the paediatric neurologists about how CHS can develop this service in conjunction with them.

I again thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I thank CHS for the very quick answer. Based on all of this information, I can also confirm that both staff and stakeholders have requested the availability of—I am not sure about the purchase of an EEG explicitly for paediatric use, but certainly the instatement of paediatric EEG at Canberra Health Services, in answer to Ms Clay's question.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR STEEL: I rise in relation to the questions I was asked around reporting obligations under section 16B of the Financial Management Act. I can confirm that there has been no breach of reporting obligations, based on a check that has been done in relation to the matters raised. The decisions were taken in April for subsequent publication of the next quarterly report in June, for the period 1 April to 30 June 2025. I understand that they were tabled as usual and circulated to MLAs on 14 August 2025.

Papers

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

Education and Care Services National Law as applied by the law of the States and Territories—Education and Care Services National Further Amendment Regulations 2025 (2025 No 711), dated 23 December 2025, together with an explanatory statement.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate—FOI2025-371, dated 3 December 2025.

Health data and processes—Independent inquiry—Assembly resolution of 24 June 2025—Government response—Inquiry into ACT health system data, demand and processes—Inquiry Progress Report, dated 4 February 2026.

Housing Supply—Additional targets—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 5 February 2026—Government response, dated February 2026.

Public transport—pets

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.00): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that rates of pet ownership have increased markedly in recent years, with more than two in five Canberra households now owning at least one pet dog;
- (2) further notes that the government's current policies and regulatory settings make it unnecessarily difficult for Canberrans who need to travel with a dog, including for exercise and veterinary care, to rely on public transport; and
- (3) calls on the government to review its policies and regulatory settings with a view to enabling greater access to public transport and other public facilities for those with dogs, and to report back to the Assembly by 30 June 2026.

I rise today to move a motion that, if agreed, would be the first step in enabling Canberrans to travel with dogs on public transport. I think most of us in this place know dogs are not just pets; they are part of the furniture. They are part of our households, companions, and absolutely essential members of families.

I have a feeling that this motion might receive some frivolous or dismissive comments

about possibly wasting the Assembly's time. I am hoping that that will not happen here today, partly because people would know that public opinion is firmly on the side of this issue; also, partly because Labor would know that this would demonstrate that they are a little bit behind the eight ball on this issue. It is something that I believe we could be taking action on.

It is absurd that a Canberran can fly out of our airport to destinations all around Australia with their dogs sitting alongside them, with no special conditions, but they cannot do the same if they want to take a bus from one suburb to another. Why is it that Virgin can do in the skies what Transport Canberra cannot do on the ground? There are no real barriers here, and nothing that the government cannot overcome if it wanted to. The only obstacle is that Labor has not bothered to do it and has not really been listening to the community or taking action on what Canberrans want.

Mr Speaker, if you were to listen to the government—in particular, the Minister for Transport, who I believe has carriage of this issue—you might think that they have a well-considered plan for Canberra, and that is a plan to limit the growth of new suburbs, put everyone in towers without car parks, and push everyone onto public transport. You would think that they may have worked through all those issues and the sequencing to make this happen. But this issue, seemingly a minor, frivolous issue, shows that Labor have not really planned for it. They have not considered how this will work or if it will work.

If there was a plan, they would have thought about how people actually live. Most Canberrans have dogs, and those dogs need exercise and care. Most people with dogs do not live within walking distance of a dog park and they do not live within walking distance of a vet, so they need transportation. If the government are pushing them away from cars while denying them the ability to use public transport for their pets, it leaves Canberrans relying on friends who do own private cars or businesses like Uber, some of whom I understand charge a premium to allow you to take your dog.

Like so much of what I see from Labor in this place, it is an example which shows that the government has not really thought it through. It has spent decades densifying random parts of Canberra, without thinking about how it will work. The plan for Canberra is scattered, with piecemeal changes, decided on the fly. It would almost be funny if it were not for how much this scattergun approach to governance impacts the lives of Canberrans and finances.

Those of us on the opposition side of this chamber are doing what a good opposition should do. We are finding and pointing out the flaws with the government's approach. We are proposing constructive solutions, and we are getting on with the job of developing an alternative vision for Canberra and the policies that will take us there. Whether it is simple things like taking your dog on a bus or bigger things like getting the budget back on track and your taxes down to where they should be, we are here for Canberrans, because that is what they deserve.

I want to give a quick shout-out. I spoke to Jan Phillips and Dr Di Johnstone. Di, from Pets and Positive Ageing, was talking to me today about the importance of this motion for seniors in Canberra. A lot of our seniors do have dogs, companion dogs, and those that are not necessarily companion dogs, but they do need to get to the vet. They do

need to get themselves elsewhere, and we know how important social inclusion is, especially for our elderly communities. They are really excited about this motion today.

I do not have much else to say, other than I think this is something we could have done way before now, as I mentioned earlier. I am proud to have moved this motion. I think it is my first one, as the City Services portfolio holder now. I commend my motion to the Assembly and look forward to hearing members' contributions.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.05): I am pleased to speak on the motion calling on the government to review our policies and regulatory settings with a view to enabling greater access to public transport and other public facilities for people with dogs, and to report back to the Assembly by 30 June this year. I thank Ms Castley for bringing this matter forward. It reflects strong community interest in how we can support people who travel with pets while maintaining the safety, accessibility and reliability of our public transport network for everyone. We will be supporting today's motion.

The government recognises that companion animals play an important role in the lives of many Canberrans. Pets support wellbeing, social connection and day-to-day participation in the community. For individuals and families who rely on public transport, including those without access to a private vehicle, having clear and workable rules is essential.

I reject the assertions from Ms Castley about us forcing people to make choices about their housing. We support a range of different housing choices, which is why we have introduced the missing middle housing reforms and so forth, while continuing to provide housing choice in greenfield areas, including in some areas that the Liberals do not necessarily support us investigating.

We do know that, as people move around our city on public transport, it is often to access veterinary services, and they may be considering whether they can travel with their animal. It is important that there are clear arrangements available to them. Our current arrangements generally distinguish regarding assistance animals, who have a legal right of access, something that we established under the review of the Animal Welfare Act a few years ago, when I was the City Services minister, and that is, of course, consistent with Disability Discrimination Act requirements. At the moment we distinguish between domestic animals and those assistance animals whose carriage is subject to safety and operational considerations.

Under the framework, assistance animals, including guide dogs and hearing dogs, have unrestricted access under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. This right does not depend on identification or accreditation. Domestic animals, such as small dogs or cats, may travel on public transport at the discretion of frontline staff, provided they are safely contained, secured for the duration of the journey and do not pose a hygiene, behavioural or operational risk. This approach needs to balance inclusion and accessibility with safety, accessibility, hygiene and service reliability.

However, the government acknowledges that reliance on discretion can sometimes result in inconsistent experiences for passengers who need to travel with pets. We

recognise that pet transport outside the public transport system, particularly for people accessing veterinary care, is often volunteer driven and not linked systemically with community transport or other coordinated support services.

Other jurisdictions, including some in Australia and overseas, have moved towards more structured models that integrate transport, pet welfare and social outcomes. These provide valuable insights, although they must always be considered within the ACT's regulatory environment, cultural expectations and operational constraints.

To ensure that the government's review is comprehensive and grounded in operational realities, I will convene a minister-led roundtable, bringing together key stakeholders, including animal welfare organisations, disability advocates, transport workers and transport worker representatives, community services, and public transport users. Ahead of this, I have asked Transport Canberra officials to undertake preparatory internal work. This includes refining the scope of risk assessment, identifying relevant data and specialist expertise, and mapping practical considerations that must inform any future settings.

While international practice, particularly in parts of Europe, provides useful reference points where rules may be more relaxed, officials are assessing these examples within Australian regulatory settings, workplace safety environments, cultural expectations and the physical constraints of bus operations.

Preparatory work is considering, among other things, passenger and staff safety, such as animal behaviour, tripping hazards, aisle access, boarding and alighting flow, and interactions with priority spaces, animal behaviour and welfare, such as heat and stress in confined spaces, reactions to noise and crowding, and suitability of the vehicle environments, health and hygiene, such as allergens, waste management and cleaning requirements, and expectations of cleanliness across the network.

It is also considering accessibility and equity issues, such as interactions with mobility aids and prams, and ensuring that the rights of assistance animal users remain protected and clearly distinguished, operations and service reliability, being usable capacity and the practical responsibilities placed on drivers and light rail staff, security and public order, and potential conflict between passengers, animal control concerns and potential misuse of animals, assets and environmental considerations, being impacts on vehicle interiors, and any additional cleaning resources required.

As we consider potential options, the government will be guided by a range of clear principles—safety first, for passengers, staff and animals, the protection of accessibility, including clarity of the rights of assistance animal users, operational practicality, including clear rules that frontline staff can apply consistently, customer experience, balancing the needs of passengers travelling with pets and those that may have allergies, fears or sensitivities, and animal welfare considerations, including ensuring that conditions are humane and appropriate.

Driver discretion will remain an essential component of safe operations. Any future approach must support staff judgement during crowded or complex service conditions on both buses and light rail, as well as at stops and platforms. The government is open to exploring these options and undertaking consultation. This is a conversation that I

have been having for a very long time, and I do believe that now is the right time to be starting some of these discussions.

What was the wrong time to have this discussion was after serious occupational violence concerns were raised by transport workers in 2024, and immediately thereafter. That had to be the priority, to address those concerns through the occupational violence action plan, with the measures that we have undertaken and that we committed to at the election.

There have been concerns raised in the past with both Transport Canberra and me in relation to pets on public transport, going beyond the current policy that applies. The opportunity that a roundtable presents is to bring all the different voices to the table and hear about what those concerns are, how they could be overcome, and what models exist in other cities that we could potentially adopt.

I know about the passion of members of organisations like Pets and Positive Ageing, because I was the former patron, as was Minister Cheyne in the past and, before that, it was the role of Mary Porter, a former MLA. This is one of the issues on which they have been advocating. As we now undertake some more substantial work in this area, I have stepped back from that position of patron so that we can progress some of that work, now that there is a more appropriate time to have a discussion with drivers, now that some of the immediate occupational violence issues have been addressed.

Of course, that is an ongoing issue and concern that we need to continue to work on with them and prevent. Things like the transit enforcement officers are making a difference there and, in fact, may help us to manage pets on public transport as well, as part of any potential future model that we adopt in relation to dogs. I know there is an amendment that will be moved to consider it in relation to cats as well.

Subject to consultation and the outcome of our assessment, the government is open to exploring several opportunities with those key stakeholders, including clearer public guidance on current rules and what discretion means in practice, updated internal operations, and guidance to support consistent decision-making across the network.

A targeted pilot potentially could be part of those discussions for pet-inclusive community transport, for essential travel like, for example, veterinary appointments. That is something that some local vets in Canberra recently met with me about—I think they also met with Ms Castley—to raise the idea of expanding the current policy around pets and public transport. We will also need to consider partnerships with community and animal welfare organisations to support coordinated transport and emergency needs, and align with broader government work on inclusion, accessibility and community connection.

The government supports undertaking a review of policies and regulatory settings relating to access for people with dogs to public transport and other public facilities. This review will be informed by operational advice, stakeholder input through the minister-led roundtable that I am looking forward to convening, and risk assessment, which is now being scoped by officials.

Pets are part of everyday life for Canberrans. This work provides an opportunity to

consider whether our transport settings better reflect the reality, while maintaining the essential principles of safety, accessibility, reliability and comfort for all passengers using the ACT's public transport network. I thank Ms Castley for raising this matter and I look forward to progressing this work with the community. We will report back to the Assembly by 30 June.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.15): I thank Ms Castley for moving this motion. It goes straight to the point. Pets play a vital role in the lives of many Canberrans, yet regulatory settings have not kept up. I really like this motion. Three paragraphs: it is great. My speech will be three paragraphs, too.

For people living alone, a cat curled up on the couch or a dog meeting you at the door can make all the difference to mental health and companionship; yet, for those without a car, even getting a pet to the vet or a safe park can be costly and difficult. Taxis and rideshare options are inconsistent and our current public transport rules make travelling with pets unreliable.

If airlines can safely accommodate pets in cabins, surely, the ACT can design a practical, safe system for pets on buses and light rail—one that protects drivers, passengers and our beloved animals. We also need to see a better spread of dog parks, so that people do not have to travel long distances to get to one. As I have said before, Woden and Molonglo still do not have a dog park, so I look forward to the government's options report, that is due in June, looking at that issue. Our community loves its pets, cats included, and it is time that our transport and planning policies reflected that.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.17): I will quote my father in supporting this motion. My father was a very smart man. He left school at 13, barely being able to read or write, but he was a very smart man. There are a number of things that he said to me that have stuck with me. He said, "I feel sorry for people who don't drink because, when they wake up in the morning, that's the best they're going to feel all day." I can understand that. He also often said to me, "Dogs are people." He said, "They're just people with four legs." And they are.

We love dogs. They are the world's most popular pet. Over a third of the global population is estimated to live with at least one dog, which is astounding. The research demonstrates that dogs are not just a little bit good for human health; they are exceptionally good for human health. Dog ownership is associated with reduced risk of heart attacks, decreased blood pressure, increased physical activity, and an increased sense of physical and psychological wellbeing. It is just a fact of life—and I am sure everyone in this chamber would agree—that responsible dog ownership can benefit individuals and society. As such, it is a practice that should be supported rather than hindered by the transport system.

I want to point out some of the research that we have done with regard to dogs on public transport systems in other cities. Zurich is the largest city in Switzerland, with a similar population to here. It is about 415,000, with a population density of 4,723.84 people per kilometre. Approximately 50 per cent of all trips in Zurich are undertaken by sustainable transport modes, including public transport. Dogs are allowed on all public transport in Zurich, including all trains, buses and boats. Small dogs up to 30 centimetres in height may travel free of charge in a basket or bag. Larger dogs require

a reduced second-class ticket, if you don't mind. I am serious.

An annual dog pass can be purchased, which is loaded onto a travel card that can be used throughout Switzerland, and it allows a person to take a dog with them anywhere in Switzerland for a year. The pass is not issued to a dog but to a person. In addition, for Zurich specifically, dog owners can purchase a ZVV NetworkPass. That pass is issued to the dog, and it is therefore linked to the dog and not to the person. The dog can therefore be accompanied by any person with a valid ticket. This travel card is available at sales outlets. It is issued in a paper format.

While Zurich's very own and comprehensive acceptance of dogs on all forms of public transport places their policy at the forefront of those considered dog friendly, I think it is the way that dogs are actually incorporated into the ticketing system that provides a point of difference. With the ticketing, I will leave it at that.

London is a little bit bigger than Zurich and Canberra—nine million—and approximately 60 per cent of all trips in London are undertaken by walking, cycling or public transport. Dogs on a lead are permitted to travel for free on all services, with the only restriction being that dogs are not permitted to ride on escalators. Mr Speaker, if you have ever tried to take a dog on an escalator, you will understand why, but that is the only restriction.

Berlin has a population of just over 3½ million. Just under 70 per cent of all trips undertaken in Berlin are made by sustainable modes and the entire system is open to those travelling with dogs. The service provider's website states that the preference is for dogs to be confined to a carrier. Larger dogs can travel, however, provided they are on a lead and wear a muzzle on all modes and in stations. If the dog is not in a box or a carrier, they do require a single discount ticket. That is the situation in Berlin. I have only two more to go; don't panic!

Vienna, the capital of Austria, has a population of just under two million. The entire public transport system in Vienna is open to dogs, provided they are on a lead and wear a muzzle. A discounted ticket must be purchased for dogs that are not in a container. Of note is that Vienna maintains a program known as the Wiener Hundeführschein, or the Vienna dog licence. Not all dogs in Vienna are required to obtain the licence, but the exam is required for dogs that you take in public.

In Oslo, dogs can travel for free on all Ruter services. They must be kept on a leash and must not obstruct free passage of others. The website states clearly that the dog's owner is responsible for ensuring that the dog does not inconvenience or harm other passengers. Dogs are not permitted on seats and must travel either on the floor or in the passenger's lap.

I discussed this motion at home last night, because it is the best way to get feedback. My wife does not often travel by bus, that she did state to me that, if there was a guarantee that there would be at least five dogs on every bus, she would be there every single day. I certainly commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.22): First of all, I want to reflect on how positive this conversation has been. One thing that we all agree on in this place is that dogs are a

man's best friend, and it is exciting to end the week on a positive note.

I want to thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion forward. When I saw the motion, I thought, "Absolutely, yes," because it is something that I have been thinking about, and it is something that has happened to me recently.

Imagine for a second, Mr Speaker, that you have a car and you drop your car off for service; at the same time, you have a vet appointment, and you drop your pet off for the vet appointment. Your vet appointment finishes before your car service is finished. You need to get home, and you cannot, because you cannot get on public transport. And it is at the discretion of the Uber driver as to whether to carry a pet. You spend four hours calling around for someone to pick you up, on a hot, sunny day, to go home. That is something I experienced two weeks ago, when I had a vet appointment, so this is a very timely motion, and I cannot tell you how much I love it.

Importantly, it also speaks to something that is at the core of the experiences that Canberrans face; that is, the cost-of-living crisis. Imagine that it is a vulnerable person who cannot afford an Uber, for example. They would have to spend money trying to transport themselves from point A to point B, and I think that is not acceptable.

This is a very welcome motion. I spoke to the Animal Defenders Office. They deal with vulnerable clients all the time, and they have welcomed this consideration of changes to our regulatory services.

Mr Speaker, this motion brings us into line with other states in our country. In Victoria, I think, and New South Wales you can already travel with your dog on public transport. If we are looking to be a progressive city, it is something that we need to consider seriously.

I acknowledge that there are people in the community to whom this would probably cause discomfort. I welcome the minister's extensive list of considerations that would need to go into the policy settings on this issue. I look forward to the review and the outcomes of that review.

Sometimes good policy is not about grand announcements; it is just about removing unnecessary barriers. I think this is one of those moments when we can agree as an Assembly that this is an important issue. I thank Ms Castley for the motion.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.25): The Greens will be supporting this motion that comes after a long history of ACT Greens advocacy in this space. Former Greens MLA, Caroline Le Couteur had a history of advocacy for small pets on Action buses going back as far as 2018. Shane Rattenbury, as Greens Minister for Road Safety, introduced legislation to allow pets to travel on light rail.

Speaking from a personal perspective, I am a dog person. I currently have at home one very senior dog who is a retired assistance animal. I can assure Mr Parton, who unfortunately is not in the chamber at the moment, that it is possible to get a dog to go on an escalator. They have to pass that as part of doing a public access test. Likewise, they also have to practise going past the meat section in supermarkets—if you were not aware of that little fact.

But I would be remiss if I ignored pretty much the other half of the population who are not dog people, and hence why I move the amendments circulated in my name. By leave, I move:

1. In paragraph (2), after “dog”, insert: “or cat”.
2. In paragraph (3), after “dogs”, insert: “and cats”.

Let’s face it, half of the population seems to fall into the category of being dog people; the other half of the population fall in the category of being cat people, and I do not wish to see them ignored as part of this motion. However, I understand the emphasis of Ms Castley in originally moving the motion and examining for dogs.

Cats also play a central part in many people’s lives. I wish to draw your attention to one very small cat and his owner who are right here in the gallery right now. I congratulate Anthorr and his assistance pet—or cat I should say—Bandit. For those of us who have taken a dog for a public access test, we would recognise that we have a well-established pathway to doing so. It is far more challenging for a cat in that there is not much guidance or assistance to be able to assist you. You also have to deal with resistance within a bureaucracy, particularly in domestic animal services, to help explain how a cat can actually perform as an assistance animal and can provide essential functions for those who are in need of such an animal. It should be remembered that assistance animals or any pets provide untold benefits to people in terms of mental health, physical health, dealing with situations—whether it might be PTSD or social anxiety—and just helping them in various different ways. It is amazing how animals can be of assistance to us.

In a world where we want to support the use of public transport and active transport, it is important that people be capable of using public transport to get their pets to places like the vet or a boarding kennel. Not all of them can be assistance animals and not all of them will pass the public access test, but we still need to ensure that we can help those people and their pets get to where they need to go. As most Canberrans own a pet of some kind, it must be as convenient and accessible as possible to travel with them. From an environmental perspective, it is also important that we do all we can to encourage more Canberrans to shift away from car use.

We are aware that Transport Canberra has an existing policy on animals which allows for clean and well-behaved assistance animals, plus other small animals in carriers, subject to driver discretion. The Greens are very comfortable with the call for the ACT government to review this and any associated policies, including with a view of allowing other well-behaved animals on the public transport, such as dogs and cats. Current policy settings suggest this might not be permitted for medium-size dogs that do not fit in the carrier but otherwise are well-behaved. The Greens also recognise that some safeguards need to remain in place to support the wellbeing of passengers against threats presented by poorly behaving dogs and some other animals kept as pets. Public policy needs to consider both animal welfare and community wellbeing in our shared spaces. A review is entirely in order and will be welcomed by Canberra’s pet owners. My thanks to Ms Castley for bringing on this motion today.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (3.29): I think this motion is an excellent

motion, and I thank Ms Castley for bringing it. This motion is exactly what local government is about. It is about seeking a small positive policy change around an issue that not everyone might realise is a problem—a small positive change that will make a big positive difference to the lives of some of our fellow citizens. That is why it is important. That is why we should be discussing it. Anyone who would come here to suggest that this is a minor and frivolous issue, as Ms Castley fears, does not get it. Anyone who would pompously think to ask in this chamber why we are wasting time debating a people-first issue like this, or who would not be able to believe that we are having this debate when there are so many other “larger” problems should take a good hard look at themselves.

I am not angry with the people who would think or say those things; I am just disappointed. Some of those people would probably complain that, instead of thinking about how or if dogs can be accommodated on public buses to help Canberrans live better, we should confine ourselves to addressing the cost of living or the challenging cost of finding housing. They might be frothing with anger that we are not offering practical suggestions to the Minister for Health right here and right now. It would never occur to me to say things like this but, sadly, we know that there are people who might feel compelled to come into the chamber purely to make snide and unworthy remarks about their belief that this might be one of the weakest motions they have seen. They probably and contemptuously dismiss this motion by suggesting it is not even worth a 90 second statement, that motions like this could be addressed with a quick word to the minister in the corridor. I would not say this, but some people might, and I think they are wrong.

As I said, I agree with the motion and have no truck with anyone who might suggest that, if the member of the Yerrabi thinks this is the most important issue to people in her electorate, she has probably stopped listening to them. Who are they to say that the people of Yerrabi have significant issues and that this motion is hardly one of the most pressing issues that the community has raised? Who are they to say that this is not an issue keeping people up at night? I have risen in support of this motion, and I want to make it clear that it would be absolutely wrong for anyone to decide for themselves what issues a community should rightly expect a local member advocate for.

I reject statements made in this chamber to the effect that every motion we debate must be about self-servingly defined “big” issues and real concerns of our community, because that exposes a fundamental misunderstanding of the responsibilities of local government. This motion demonstrates that Ms Castley has had a Road to Damascus moment over the summer, and that like me she now understands that some lesser known and lesser understood issues—the things that the government needs to be thinking about, that keep it in touch, that make people’s lives a bit better and that make our community a bit stronger, like enabling people to safely take their dogs with them on public transport—should be discussed in the chamber instead of a furtive corridor conversation with a minister.

I agree with Ms Castley. I thank her for the motion and likewise commend it to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.33): Just briefly in closing, the comment on a Road to Damascus moment is interesting. I did get a puppy over the Christmas, and that might

have something to do with it. He is very cute. My daughter will be very unimpressed with me because she does have a cat that she would love to put on a bus, and I did not expand this motion specifically because I believe that, with any sort of changes, a safe, slow and steady approach is best, and I feel if the government are happy to support this amendment, who am I to oppose. For me, it was just about starting with dogs and moving forward from there. Thank you, everybody. I am very happy with everyone's contributions and really appreciate everybody talking me through this and the great discussion on the amendments today. Thank you.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Budget—Financial Management Act

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.35): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the importance of the *Financial Management Act 1996* to honest budget processes, and trust and confidence in the Budget and the Government;
- (2) further notes the:
 - (a) *Financial Management Act 1996* has been amended on multiple occasions, including by significant amendments in 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and
 - (b) last major whole-of-Act review of the *Financial Management Act 1996* appears to have occurred in 2015;
- (3) acknowledges that the *Financial Management Act 1996* and the budget processes that it prescribes are inconsistent with those of other Australian jurisdictions; and
- (4) calls on the Government to amend the *Financial Management Act 1996* to improve honesty and transparency.

The Financial Management Act is important. It, along with the Procurement Act, is the cornerstone of the ACT's projections against fraud and corruption in government. In many ways, it is the government equivalent of the Corporations Act that covers the operation of private businesses. In the same way as the Corporations Act protects shareholders from risks from management, the FMA protects the ACT taxpayer from the risks of mismanagement by the executive, or at least it should. Unfortunately, the reality is that that is not quite what it has become.

The last significant review and amendment process for the FMA occurred over a decade ago, in 2015. The now Chief Minister, then Treasurer, brought a suite of amendments ostensibly to improve the efficiency of the FMA. Basically, it made life easier for the public service and for the Treasurer to shift money around between appropriations and financial years without immediately telling the Assembly. The requirement at that time, for example, was that the Treasurer had to table documents within, I think, three days of one of these rollovers being approved. Do not get me wrong: there are still reporting requirements, and we will come to that. Under 16B of the act, for example, the Treasurer

is required to attach these instruments to a financial report. But, at the time of these amendments, the Canberra Liberals did warn of the potential for these provisions to be misused—the risk of being administratively efficient and then using that to block transparency. Sadly, that is exactly where we are at today. What started as a simple administrative efficiency measure is that no longer.

Last year, the treasurer was signing off these adjustments as late as 28 May, a full 11 months after the end of both the financial systems for 2023-24. That is not honest budgeting; it is retrospective budgeting. But it gets worse. I do need to apologise for some technical budget nerd speak, but the 2024-25 budget was delivered in June 2024 and there was a pre-election budget update delivered in September. That PEBU, as it is called, suggested that there was little change in one-year budget deficit at around \$635 million on the government's preferred measure, reducing to a \$147 million deficit in 2025-26 and reaching a surplus of over \$280 million by 2027-28.

That was the budget trajectory every party used as a basis for their election commitments and the baseline the community used to assess Labor's fiscal competence: a large deficit, supposedly because of circumstances out of their control, followed by large and growing surpluses as you head into the future. The Canberra Liberals submitted all of our election commitments to Treasury for costing with plenty of time before the election, allowing scrutiny of the promises before the election. Labor, of course, did not. Labor had multiple costings deemed withdrawn due to insufficient time. By February, the illusion of the pre-election budget update was gone. A 50 per cent degradation in the deficit had become \$971 million, blamed on health demand, led to a secondary appropriation bill being passed under threat of the health system running out of money.

But the bad news was not over yet. The financial year ended on 30 June 2025, but the financial reports do not get released until November and the final deficit is not really reported until the following February in the budget papers, in the budget review. So just weeks ago we finally had a budget update that disclosed the final deficit was another \$160 million worse, reaching \$1.131 billion, on the government's measure. From the time of the election to the end of that financial year, the government added \$496 million—nearly half a billion—to that deficit. For most people this begged the question: how did they get it so wrong? But a different question has been lingering in the background: how did they spend that much extra legally?

Here is where the Financial Management Act comes into play, because that is what regulates how the government spends money by using appropriations. That is what we debate when the Legislative Assembly considers the budget: how much goes to who and for what. Spend more than the appropriation and you have seriously breached the Financial Management Act. That is what additional appropriation bills are for: asking permission from this Assembly to spend extra. So, did Labor spend more in a year than they said they would without doing that? This week the answer is starting to emerge.

The Financial Management Act gives the Treasurer a range of powers to make the everyday operation of the territory finances simpler for the government. Under sections 14, 15, 16, 16A, 16B and so on, the Treasurer can adjust the appropriation without a new appropriation bill—indeed, without going back to cabinet. For example, if the government has a \$1,000 payment that does not go through before the end of financial

year cut-off, the Treasurer can authorise a section 16B instrument to say that the appropriation could be moved to the next financial year. Sounds reasonable. Then the Treasurer attaches a copy of that instrument to the next lot of financial statements to be tabled, and everything gets logged into the budget and everyone can see the updated position at the next update. That is how the system was designed. That is not unreasonable. But there is a trick. If you held off on signing those instruments for long enough, the effect never becomes visible in the budget. It never appears in that budget review process. That is what happens if you hold off until April, the year after the budget closes, until you sign those papers—millions of dollars shifted in secret that no one sees.

On just one day, 10 April—one day; this is the only day I am talking about, though there are—the Treasurer signed off on \$99.9 million in rollovers from the previous year for expenditure that the government had not made in the previous year, with no need for Assembly consideration, no need for sign-off and after the budget update had already been delivered. Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek leave to table the *June Quarter 2025 Consolidated Financial Report*.

Leave granted.

MR COCKS: I present the following paper:

June Quarter 2025 Consolidated Financial Report (2024-25 Interim Result) for the financial quarter ending 30 June 2025.

By not signing the rollover instruments until April, they were excluded from the budget review. The additional expenditure does not count toward the total and no-one saw the complete reality until, effectively, an entire year later. There was nothing in the budget statement of risks to let us know this was coming. It is impossible to imagine the government had not known about the need for each rollover covered in these papers for at least nine months. For the government to not know what they had not paid for or, even in some instances, contracted, would be an incompetence of an inconceivable level. I do not accept that the Treasurer is that dumb.

This is why other jurisdictions have a process that operates far earlier. In the commonwealth, the rollover process essentially happens before the end of financial year and usually through appropriation bills. In Queensland, you have two weeks after the end of the financial year to sort out the issue. In both cases, the parliament and the community end up with a more honest picture of the budget far earlier, because the government knows straight away what it has spent and what it still needs to spend.

What the government have done have implemented a form of retrospective budgeting. They did not have enough money allocated to a project when they made payments, so they have retrospectively gone back in time to adjust the appropriation. And just to make sure no-one notices, they have done so not through coming to the Assembly and not by revealing it to the community; they have done it through secret instruments not revealed for another five months. Importantly, that means the Assembly does not know and the community does not know. It means that ratings agencies do not know. This \$100 million was not visible the five months after the Treasurer signed off on those numbers.

The reporting requirement in the Financial Management Act is clear and unambiguous. There is no room for interpretation here. Section 16B(6) of the Financial Management Act says:

If the Treasurer authorises an amount to be disbursed under this section, the Treasurer must—

“must”; no room for any other interpretation—

attach a copy of the authorisation to the next financial statement presented to the Legislative Assembly—

not, as the Treasurer tried to assert today, to the financial statement relevant to the period in which he signed the instrument; the next one presented to the Assembly. It is clear and it is unambiguous. There is no room for interpretation. For the benefit of those opposite, we have raised these concerns with the Auditor-General.

The concerns go somewhat deeper than that once you start digging through the different instruments and the detail. As I said, there is \$100 million worth of projects in these 16B rollovers. There are other rollovers, this is just one signed on that day. As you start to dig into the details around that and start to open up the contract documents, you see that maybe there might be a few other issues in terms of, if not compliance with the FMA, some of the issues around specific projects.

One of those that we have been asking about today, which is I think very relevant, was the refurbishment of Fitzroy Pavilion at Exhibition Park. The Chief Minister has on many occasions, as has the Treasurer, told us that they do not publish numbers about upcoming projects because those numbers would prejudice the market—if you told the market, they might come back with a number that would, I do not know, maybe fill up the appropriation and we would not get best value for money. The project management agreement work order for the refurbishment of Fitzroy Pavilion is a very interesting document. This is a \$300,000 contract signed while those NFP numbers were still in play. Under this work order, it is very interesting to have a look at the actual description of the work to be done. The work order states that that contract management company, engaged at a cost of \$300,000, was required to price the project to a level in line with—and this is the critical part—the full budget appropriation, and it provides that appropriation. These are deep concerns about the way the government is operating both its procurement and its budgeting processes.

I think it is again worth having a look at exactly what this is and what it means. Essentially what we have here is the Treasurer has signed off on \$100 million in appropriations, transferred in secret on a single day, transferred from the previous year, essentially giving himself and the government an extra \$100 million spending permission without going to the Assembly or potentially even cabinet. The government had already had an opportunity to make every adjustment covered by those instruments by the second Appropriations Bill. The Treasurer held off on tabling those documents and revealing them publicly until September, four months after the statements that he tabled and he was required under law to attach this to. This is the precise period of time that ratings agencies were considering the ACT's credit rating. What is more is that,

when you look into specific line items, you find deeply problematic procurement and payment activities in relation to projects like the Fitzroy Pavilion and indeed, as you start to look further, contracts like the actuaries and insurance brokering contract we were discussing in question time. That is what is visible. The vast majority of projects do not have their contracts published.

Repeatedly in question time this week, government ministers, including the Chief Minister, have said that they do not believe there are any breaches of the FMA. If that is the case, the Financial Management Act needs to be fixed. At the same time, based on the information I have seen and based on the papers I have tabled, I believe there are clear breaches of the FMA and other potential breaches.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.50): Transparency and integrity are core Greens values, and it is essential that we see ACT budgets and financial reports that are transparent and give an honest and true reflection of the territory's finances. Having faith in the numbers presented ensures trust in government and ensures that the priorities the ACT government has picked can still be funded. Providing information on time is a key element of responsible and transparent budgeting and a legal requirement of the Financial Management Act. The government needs to be held to account to meet these requirements. In the case where money needs to be rolled over from one financial year to the next, those requirements are outlined under section 16B of the Financial Management Act, as has been outlined by Mr Cocks. The Greens agree that wherever possible Treasury should seek to ensure that ACT budget presentation is clear and gives an honest depiction. We obviously need to be taking care with our procurements.

I listened to Mr Cocks's speech on this motion. He raised some serious matters in that speech. He has talked a great deal about the alleged transfer of close to \$100 million in funds between the 2023-24 and the 2025-26 budget and whether these transfers comply with the Financial Management Act requirements. He has mentioned compliance with some of our procurement standards. It looks to us in the Greens that the best way to find out a little bit more about this is to support the calls in the motion to set up a committee to look at this issue. That is a really good way to dig down into these issues, to get a bunch of witnesses, to get the submissions, to have a really good look at the papers and the documents, to have a really good look at the provisions in both the Procurement Act and the Financial Management Act and to determine if things have been done correctly and, if not, to find out what has gone on there. So the Greens are happy to support Mr Cocks's motion today.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.52): I move:

Omit all words after paragraph (1), substitute:

- “(2) notes the importance of the *Government Procurement Act 2001* for honest and transparent procurement processes;
- (3) further notes that significant issues and potential breaches of the *Financial Management Act 1996* and *Government Procurement Act 2001* have come to light; and
- (4) establishes a Select Committee to:
 - (a) inquire into:
 - (i) the ACT Government's compliance with and potential breaches of

- the *Financial Management Act 1996*;
 - (ii) the ACT Government's compliance with and potential breaches of the *Government Procurement Act 2001*; and
 - (iii) any other related matters;
- (b) be composed of:
- (i) Fiona Carrick MLA, who will chair the committee;
 - (ii) one member of the Canberra Liberals;
 - (iii) one member of the ACT Greens; and
 - (iv) one member of ACT Labor; and
- (c) report back to the Assembly on 10 June 2026.”.

In light of the seriousness of the potential breaches raised by Mr Cocks, I have moved an amendment to establish a committee to investigate potential violations of the Financial Management Act. We think this amendment is necessary because the issues identified are not minor administrative oversights; they raise legitimate questions about the integrity of the territory's financial governance. As representatives of the people of Canberra, we have an obligation to investigate those questions and investigate them thoroughly.

As Mr Cocks has made clear, fiscal accountability is not optional; it is the basic starting point for honest and sustainable financial management. Without proper oversight of how much public money is procured and spent, feedback loops develop, figures become distorted and governments begin budgeting on numbers that may not withstand scrutiny. Budget dishonesty poisons the well and compromises the government's ability to plan for the future. The consequences are well known: rising debt, underfunded services, declining public trust and a cycle of financial mismanagement that hurts every Canberran. But those consequences can be avoided. The Assembly has both the constitutional authority and the responsibility to demand transparency in the management of public funds.

The territory's finances are public property—they belong to the people—and the government must account to the Assembly. Accountability requires transparency, and this amendment ensures that government procurement practices are brought into light. This is not a witch-hunt, nor is it a fishing expedition, despite what one minister has suggested. This is the necessary work of democratic oversight and parliamentary inquiry. The committee established by this amendment may well have the power to examine government compliance with the territory's financial laws and procurement processes and it will report back in June. We were not satisfied by the clarification in matters arising from question time that came from the minister, and we believe that there has to be some more examination.

I would also note that the project coordination contract seems to have disappeared from the contracts register on the Procurement ACT website in the last hour, which seems a little troubling to me. We have spent a lot of time in the last 30 minutes trying to track it down again, but I do not know that it is there. Maybe after mentioning this it may magically reappear. I am not sure. I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (3.56): The government will not oppose the amendment. I will make some observations in relation to process here. I thank Mr Rattenbury for alerting me to the fact that this would be coming on Monday afternoon in some form but not in the detail obviously that has been dropped in this preprepared amendment. So let's not have the pretext that this has not been set up all week. This is not a result of something that was coming from question time today; this has been a predetermined course of action. So let's just drop all that rubbish and get to the heart of the matter.

The committee process that is being proposed does, of course, see a report back on budget day and does appear to overlap with elements of work that is already underway in other committees. But, if it is the will of the Assembly to establish a committee with these terms of reference and with no notice to the government, other than about 15 minutes ago, and this is the way this Assembly is going to operate and that is the level of distrust that there is in relation to these matters, it does represent a new form of operation for the Assembly—but it is what it is. The government will participate in the inquiry by way of nominating a member as well as, obviously, cooperating through officials with the assistance of and provision of information to the committee as the committee requests.

But I think the tactics here and the politics are not a good sign for this place. This should have been on the notice paper at the start of the week in this form. People would then have had time, as is the common courtesy in this place, to prepare for the debate on the matter. That is how we have operated in this Assembly for decades now. So I think I need to call this out this afternoon. I do thank Mr Rattenbury for at least giving me a heads up that something was coming. That shows a level of courtesy, at the very least, that has not been afforded to the government by the opposition on this matter. I do not think it is a good precedent to be moving amendments to motions that substantially change what the Assembly thought it was debating this afternoon. But, having said that, my colleagues can of course respond to the original intent of the motion, as they were preparing to do. It is clear that the select committee will be established and the government will participate through that process.

It seems heroic to think that everything will be concluded by 10 June, but I have also been around this place long enough to know that extensions of time and extended committee reports happen most of the time in relation to committee inquiries. They are very, very common indeed. With that, I will allow others to speak on what they thought they were speaking on, which was the substance of the motion that was placed on the notice paper.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.59): I thank Mr Cocks for bringing a motion to the Assembly again that acknowledges the broad suite of practical commitments that the ACT Labor Party took to the election in 2024. Labor took a suite of commitments to be delivered over the entire four-year term. Ours are still publicly available for every member of the community to read, unlike some other parties.

If those opposite were interested in honesty and transparency, they might leave their

election commitments on their website and might actually consider submitting them for costing during the campaign as well, earlier than at one minute to midnight. But it shows consistency with today's motion and the amendment that has been put forward at one second to midnight as well.

One of our many commitments that we made at the election was to review the Financial Management Act. Specifically, Labor committed to undertake a review of the Financial Management Act to modernise it and bring it into line with community expectations and standards. I think it would be perfectly reasonable for the community to expect that the act should provide for honesty and transparency.

Considering Mr Cocks's proclivity in quoting the act to me, I hope that Mr Cocks is also familiar with the existing provisions of the act, including 11A, which is the financial policy objectives and strategy statement. The purposes of the financial policy's objective and strategy statement included in the proposed budget under section 11(1)(a) are:

- (a) to make transparent the government's financial strategies; and
- (b) to establish a benchmark for evaluating the government's conduct of financial policy.

Mr Cocks brought a motion to this place yesterday using detailed numbers provided in the budget prepared in accordance with the FMA. Yesterday, he complained that he did not get the opportunity to criticise our forecasts for being inaccurate because we did not need to come back to the Assembly for another appropriation, because our forecasts were accurate and because they show a three-quarter per cent variation from the one presented in June. Today, he brings a motion saying the Financial Management Act is inconsistent with other jurisdictions and that we need to improve policy and transparency, but Mr Deputy Speaker, I appreciate that Mr Cocks has not spent a long time in this place, but even a cursory review of the legislative history of the FMA shows that the key differences between our act and others are there to improve transparency and not to hide from it.

So I ask him what elements would he like us to remove from the act, because I will take this opportunity to recognise that the government currently provides a much greater level of transparency that the Financial Management Act requires. Our budget papers and our financial statements are abundantly transparent, above and beyond not just the requirements of the act, nor the demands that Mr Cocks brings into this place, but to support greater community understanding of our budget.

Mr Cocks notes our budget is inconsistent with other states and territories but he fails to note that each state and territory has unique circumstances and financial management laws that respond to their unique requirements, standards and practice. Indeed, other states and territories have different presentation requirements consistent with the needs of their parliaments. We provide our accounts consistently and transparently across a range of standardised metrics consistent with Australian Accounting Standards which all jurisdictions uphold.

The territory's Financial Management Act 1996 is structured similarly to the financial governance legislation of all other states and territories and the commonwealth, and

while other jurisdictions have multiple pieces of legislation to support budget and financial management, this is entirely contained in the FMA in the territory. Notably, compared to other jurisdictions, the territory has some of the strictest legislation governing the quantum and limit of the Treasurer's Advance available within a financial year.

Beyond the legislative framework of the FMA, there is also no standard approach across state and territory budgets for reporting the net budgetary impact of new decisions. The approach adopted in the ACT budget facilitates transparency in financial reporting by providing both the gross and net costs of initiatives as well as the gross and net capital impacts. Some jurisdictions do not report on the net cost of services, expenses minus offsets or revenue, or, if they do, do not report on an initiative basis.

Some jurisdictions also do not transparently report offsets to new spending decisions. This transparency is supported by the section on page 52 of the 2025-26 budget outlook that assists in interpreting the net cost of services and net capital line, including how offsets are reflected. Budgets from other jurisdictions do not always provide this information. S&P, in reviewing our finances, notes that the ACT continues to benefit from its strong financial management by global standards, and that the financial framework the ACT operates under promotes high levels of financial disclosure and transparency.

Now one of Mr Cocks's favourite topics is in relation to the Uniform Presentation Framework. It is worth noting that:

The ACT's superannuation investments are structured in a form that makes the ACT's GFS net operating balance, as presented in the Uniform Presentation Framework statements at Appendix E, appear weaker relative to other jurisdictions. This difference arises because state governments generally hold their superannuation investments in forms that allow the expected capital gains on these investments to be implicitly included in the calculation of their GFS net operating balances.

This is a significant matter for the ACT as the long term capital gains on superannuation investments are around \$70 million to \$90 million per annum.

In order to ensure that the ACT's budget is measured on a consistent basis with state governments, it is necessary to adjust the GFS net operating balance reported in the UPF statements in Appendix E, for expected capital gains on its superannuation investments.

It should be emphasised that this adjustment is not simply required to ensure consistency with the GFS results reported by state jurisdictions, it is also required to provide an accurate assessment of the longer term sustainability of the budget position.

That is a quote from the 2006-07 budget prepared by Treasurer Jon Stanhope. The Treasury official Mr Ahmed also worked on the budget as well. At some point, the Canberra Liberals and Mr Cocks will come to accept that, unlike other states and territories, the ACT is precluded from holding its superannuation assets in the CSS and PSS funds. The superannuation assets are instead held in the Superannuation Provision Account, a statutory fund in the general government sector.

So as you can see, there are good reasons why the ACT government presents its finances transparently in a range of different ways, in the way that we do in our budgets and other financial statements. They have been criticised time and time again, despite the rationale underpinning the way that we present the finances—to make sure we properly and transparently reflect the true state of finances and the long-term sustainability of the ACT's budget.

So we will be supporting the thrust of the original motion put forward. I understand that there is an amendment being circulated. There has been no discussion with me about that amendment whatsoever and what is contained in it, but we do not hide from transparency. We have to, of course, balance at all times administrative efficiency in managing the ACT's finances, and that is part of the rationale for the changes that were made to section 16B of the FMA Act, if you read the explanatory statement when changes were made there many years ago.

We will continue to deliver on our commitment to review the FMA in this term. We do think that there will be commonsense things to consider there. Providing transparency, I am sure, will be part of that but that also needs to be balanced with administrative efficiency as well. If the Assembly wants to grind down the government by making it impossible to fund the delivery of services and infrastructure in the territory, that is their choice, but they will be accountable for that in the process that is being established today, and in the Assembly, and to the public.

I hope that is not the intent of the motion. We certainly hope that it provides a good outcome. But yes, the Assembly does have a choice to make about whether it wants to stop the government delivering services and infrastructure and not make it possible to have rollovers where all of the funding has not been spent at a particular point in the financial year. That is up to the Assembly to determine. We will see what comes through the committee process. It is clear that there is a predetermined outcome in relation to the amendment that is about to be moved. Of course, we will participate and provide, as we always do, based on the advice of the Treasury, transparent information.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.10): I will speak very briefly on the amendment, just to point out that Mr Cocks has used a number of assertions about contracts and behaviour as a basis for this motion. One of those was a contract that the ACT insurance agency has entered into that he has made claims about in question time. The ACT insurance agency—

Mr Cocks: Asked questions about.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Asked questions about? Made assertions about in the context of asking his questions. The ACTIA has come back with some further information. They have advised that:

ACTIA, of course, manages the territory's reinsurance program. Payments to reinsurers are managed by Marsh via its trust account due to the complexity of the program and the number of insurers both in Australia and overseas. ACTIA has paid \$39.7 million in reinsurance premiums over the period 2024-25 and 2025-26. These are simply pass-through costs, and not a payment to Marsh for services

delivered under the contract. The pass-through of costs is described as the premium payment in various invoices. For invoices relating to the provision of professional services by Marsh to ACTIA, such as brokerage and claims services, these are listed as such on the relevant invoices. ACTIA has clearly advised that there is no breach of the professional services contract as has been suggested, nor is there any variation required.

So yet again, the Canberra Liberals are setting up some kind of straw man to create an impression that, if they had just asked a question and waited for the answer, it would have turned out to be absolutely a scarecrow and not a scary, real person to actually scare away the birds.

I am tempted, in looking at the proposed terms of reference, Mr Speaker, to move an amendment to add that it ask the select committee to inquire into something along the lines of any occasion on which non-government members of the Legislative Assembly have supported motions that would require the ACT government or ACT public servants to breach the FMA or the Government Procurement Act, because regularly we get asked to do things in this place without due process because somebody wants somebody to get funding for something and they cannot wait and they do not think it should go through proper process.

So, I think if Assembly members are going to go down this route, that is fine. As the Chief Minister said, we are not going to oppose this. As the Treasurer said, we are all for transparency, but I would encourage members of the Assembly to hold themselves to the same standards.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.13): I do find it quite extraordinary, the hypocrisy of again not following standard procedure in this place in terms of creating a select committee through a last-minute amendment. Even Mr Emerson, who I have been known to criticise for his last-minute amendments, even he gives more time on a circulated amendment than this was. So shame on you.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair. Mr Cain, I have asked you to desist. And Ms Cheyne, I ask you to direct your comments through the chair.

MS CHEYNE: I shall, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also think it is quite remarkable that there are a lot of inferences and, indeed, explicit points in here about being honest and transparent. So where was the honesty and transparency with this amendment? If there are such breaches as have been claimed—which I would note Mr Parton was required to withdraw some of his claims during question time because the imputations were highly disorderly under standing order 55. If there are such concerns, create a privileges committee, or make it clear to everybody, do not just spring something on at the last minute. And do not lecture us about honest and transparent processes if this is what you

are going to do. Now, the Greens in particular—

Mr Parton: Is it within the standing orders? Is it within the standing orders or not?

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Parton.

MS CHEYNE: Well, I saw the flurry that happened up here, Mr Parton, because they were not sure, were they? I mean, if you were, please correct me. But I do not think so. It took quite a lot of time before it was actually circulated. I am glad that advice was sought, and it has been circulated, but just because it is within the standing orders does not mean we have not set a new precedent. In terms of precedents in this place, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think this is what I have started to find quite extraordinary, that for two other parties who are widely reported as wanting, and getting quite close if reporting is to be believed, to getting to a point of being in government—well, all of these precedents that you are setting through all of these actions, if it ever comes to pass that you are in government, they will be applied to you.

Ms Morris interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, please.

MS CHEYNE: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would implore Ms Morris or anybody else to look at the last year-and-a-bit of all of the new precedents that have been set in this parliament. Now, again, it is the absolute hypocrisy of which I think is starting to be known—we are being asked about it more—that this Assembly is doing a lot to tie up government resources while also saying, “Do more.”

Now, again, what sort of precedent is that setting for any parliament, for any government? I would have hoped that every single person in this place was here because they wanted to get things done, but what I am seeing are games. I know that Mr Rattenbury brought the Latimer House Principles into this place. I think we have talked countless times over the years about being transparent, the importance of process and certainly in previous parliamentary and governing agreements, “no surprises” have been part of that.

So if we are being led to believe that all the questions this week got us to the point that Mr Parton just had to move this amendment at the last minute because of the amazing case that Mr Cocks made in question time, well, that is hilarious. Mr Cocks made no case. Anyone who goes and looks—I have actually no idea what he is talking about. The instruments are there. I have looked at 16B(6)—thank you, Mr Cocks—and guess what? I have gone through the explanatory statement. I have gone back to the presentation speeches. I have also looked at exactly what has been tabled in this place, and I cannot see an instrument that Minister Steel has not signed that he was not supposed to. So everything—and again, how much time have I had? Not much. But I do not think that there was a case clearly made today, especially when it is clear that this has been in the works all week. I do not think any case was made today, or on any day, to get us to this point. And for the behaviour of people in this place, whose integrity and integrity in government has been a hallmark of their election campaigns, to behave so—it is just duplicitous and so disingenuous.

Mr Cocks: Point of order.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: Just on the Attorney-General's accusations of duplicity, I would like you to consider whether that is unparliamentary.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please wait whilst I get some advice.

MS CHEYNE: It probably is. I withdraw. I am pretty familiar with the list.

Now, as I mentioned, I went back and I had a terrific look in the last 20 minutes or so at the original speeches when the amendments to the FMA Act were being debated back in 2015 and there are some really helpful contributions. One of them said:

This bill covers a range of changes to the Financial Management Act, including the provision in the act which currently requires reporting in the Assembly on a range of appropriation variations within three sitting days of the appropriation being authorised. This bill removes those reporting requirements to instead move to a quarterly financial statement from the Treasurer that covers any of these changes.

This speech also goes on to say:

Many of the changes in the bill are largely related to rollovers. Members would be aware of the onerous rollover reporting and tabling requirements that currently exist. Given that these rollovers are individually tabled in the Assembly on a regular and ongoing basis under the current arrangement and many of these rollovers are quite small and fairly insignificant, the Treasurer can now direct transfers of capital works funding to other appropriation outputs, noting that if the transfer reduces the appropriation... This is an increase on the current threshold. I think the new approach retains the suitable level of transparency.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, when members have been in this place for some time, things come back around, don't they? With that quote—there were three people in this chamber who are still in this chamber today from back then. They are Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister and Mr Rattenbury. Those quotes are not from Mr Speaker and they are not from the Chief Minister.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.22): Well, the outrage is interesting today, very interesting. The indignation of the government around the implication of no surprises being the way this place always works, particularly given the approach of some of those members on the government benches who not infrequently will drop a full rewrite or an amendment to a motion while it is in the process of being debated or immediately before. Now, that said, what I have brought today—or what we have shifted to today, as Mr—

Ms Cheyne: Oh, that is right, because you did not plan to.

MR COCKS: No, no, indeed.

Ms Cheyne: Do not mislead. Do not mislead.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Cheyne.

MR COCKS: I have spent a large amount of time over recent weeks, indeed, looking into exactly this. I have spent a large amount of time this week investigating and trying to work out exactly how it is that the government is possibly able to spend so much more every year than it tells us it can spend. This seems to be part of the equation. This seems to be part of what is going on. And yet the government is still misreading exactly what not only the legislation says but what the debate said way back in 2015, because I have read those speeches too and this is not in any way what any of those speeches anticipated would be happening under the Financial Management Act.

It was never anticipated that instead of three days' turnaround to table these documents, it would take five months. That was never the intention. It does not say in the legislation or in those speeches that the government should only table things associated with that quarter. What it says is "the next quarterly financial statements tabled with the Assembly". That is what the law says. If you were in a private corporation, if you breached a similar provision, you would be looking down the barrel of potentially up to 15 years in prison. You would be looking down the barrel of million-dollar fines. That is what you would be looking at.

There have been concerns raised about some of the contracts that we mentioned. So I would like to table them—the ACTIA agreement. This Territory Insurance Broking Services contract, GS2593938, has no mention, in the quick look through I have just done, of pass-through agreements and it is very clear about the maximum amount of payments under the contract. I will also table—

I seek leave to table the following papers:

ACT Government contracts—

Project Management Agreement Work Order—Refurbishment of Fitzroy Pavillion at Exhibition Park, dated 6 October 2023.

Services Agreement—Marsh Pty Ltd and Territory Insurance Broking Services, dated 16 August 2022.

Leave granted.

MR COCKS: The other document, of course, that I am seeking leave to table, and that I will be tabling, is the project management agreement work order for the refurbishment of Fitzroy Pavilion, which explicitly identifies that access to the remaining capital provision of \$2.85 million—so, specifying the amount of the allocation—would be subject to a PCAM variation. That is, project control agreement management variation, which would be issued to increase the project manager's budget for the construction phase of the works. This looks very much like the sort of provision of a contract to quote the project. I table those documents.

This is a serious matter. It does need to be looked at. The Treasurer was not sure what sort of issues might need to be reviewed in the Financial Management Act. Well, it turns out it is precisely the sort of modernisation provisions that he was talking about.

The word modernisation is precisely the rationale that was used to bring in these variations in the first place. In those speeches, Mr Smyth did state that we would be watching closely. Well, we are watching closely. We are watching closely. The Canberra Liberals are watching closely. What we are doing is a very sensible approach to make sure every detail is correct, to make sure every detail is examined, to make sure the government is complying with the Financial Management Act. As far as I can see, it is not.

I would also like to note that I have some concerns that the Chief Minister seems to think that this process would take an inordinate amount of time, because if these are straightforward, if the government has nothing to hide, it should not. If there is a large amount for the committee to examine in terms of potential breaches, then that is a deeply concerning.

I am glad that we will be agreeing to this today. This is not some revolutionary approach to undermining the stability of the Assembly. This is an important step. We have spent a lot of time going through these papers making sure what we think is going on is fairly certain. It is not something that could reach the bar of privilege. That is something we considered. So the appropriate way to examine this is through a committee process. That is the amendment that Mr Parton has tabled and we need to do it so that the ACT community can understand exactly what is going on.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Inquiry into ACT health system data, demand and processes—progress report

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.29): I rise today to speak about the progress report for the independent Inquiry into ACT health system, data, demand and processes. The inquiry was established in August last year following a motion which called on the ACT government to:

... establish ... an independent inquiry into identifying relevant health data and processes that would allow Canberrans, clinicians and policy makers to be best informed about the functionality of the ACT health system.

The inquiry is being led by Mr Michael Walsh, PSM, who was appointed to the role based on his extensive skills and expertise, which have equipped him to deliver the broad and complex functions required by the inquiry. KPMG Australia has also been

engaged to provide technical expertise, to undertake research and analysis, and to provide administrative support for the consultations and report writing. The team brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the inquiry and further ensures its independence.

Since the inquiry's establishment, Mr Walsh has undertaken extensive consultation across a broad range of key stakeholders, including ACT government directorates, national health bodies, community and industrial partners, non-government organisations and some members of this Assembly.

On 4 February 2026, Mr Walsh provided me with the inquiry progress report. Mr Walsh also provided the report to the chair of the ACT Health System Council and has discussed it with the council. The council acts as the steering committee for the inquiry and comprises members with a depth, breadth and diversity of experience in health or a health-related field. This means they can contribute to the inquiry from a broad range of perspectives.

The progress report describes and provides a factual baseline of the ACT's health system. It further provides a useful summary of the different aspects of our health system and how the National Health Reform Agreement might be implemented. It provides an initial high-level descriptive and thematic summary of Mr Walsh's consultations, written submissions received, data collection and analysis to date, and an indication of areas where more inquiry will be undertaken.

It is important to note that the report does not contain any findings or recommendations. Mr Walsh has advised that these will be in his final report. Given the broad and complex terms of reference for the inquiry, this informative report will provide staff, consumers, stakeholders and partners with the opportunity and time to digest and understand the context and arrangements of our health system. In doing so, it provides a solid basis for any further feedback they may wish to provide and for the development of findings and recommendations.

Unsurprisingly, the report does identify ongoing challenges and opportunities for improvement. When you ask people for feedback, generally speaking, they want to tell you what they would like to see improved. I look forward to the outcomes of the inquiry and to receiving Mr Walsh's final report.

As required by the motion, I will table the inquiry final report in the Assembly by 30 June 2026 and a government response to the recommendations by the last sitting day of 2026.

As part of the ACT government's commitment to improving transparency and public trust in the health system, I commend the inquiry progress report to the Assembly and note that it will also be made available on the ACT government website shortly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Caretaker Conventions—Select Committee Report

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.33): I present the following report:

Caretaker Conventions—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into Caretaker Conventions, dated 24 February 2026, including a dissenting report (Mr Werner-Gibbings), together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the first and final report of the Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions for the Eleventh Assembly. The Assembly established the committee on 5 March 2025. The committee received four submissions and held two public hearings. The committee examined the operation of caretaker conventions across Australia and the application of guidance material prepared by the ACT public service.

The three findings and seven recommendations address the transparency of information and decision-making during caretaker periods and propose amendments to the ACT caretaker guidance to provide greater clarity for the ACT public service, ministers, members of the Assembly and the public.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all who contributed to this inquiry, including the Chief Minister, Minister Stephen-Smith, directorate officials, and witnesses who appeared before the committee.

I thank the other members who participated in this inquiry: Deputy Chair Leanne Castley and Mr Werner-Gibbings. The committee looks forward to the government's response to its recommendations.

I would also like to thank the committee secretariat for their diligent work on this report, and I commend the report to the Assembly.

Having made those remarks as chair, I would also like to make some comments on the committee's report in my capacity as an individual member of the Assembly. The committee, as members will recall, did start around a specific question relating to health information. Concerns were raised by Ms Castley in the Assembly, and the view was formed that the way to resolve some of those questions was to establish this committee to look at them.

Further issues came into focus during the period the committee was operating following the release of documents under freedom of information, and that led to the committee undertaking a second hearing and seeking an extension of its reporting date in order to be able to consider that material. The issues explored had a degree of political contention, and the committee has worked to develop recommendations that practically move us forward in terms of addressing the issues.

Recommendations 1 and 2 are designed to provide greater transparency and focus on the caretaker guidance that is prepared ahead of each ACT election. The action of tabling it in the Assembly by May of an election year brings transparency and allows any concerns to be aired prior to the election period. One may not expect concerns, but

under this proposal there can be no question that there has been an opportunity for all participants in the process to see it, to understand it and, if they have any concerns, to air them prior to the ACT reaching the election period. There was discussion over whether it should be codified or legislated, but the committee resolved that the best way to proceed was to create that step of transparency, and I think that is the right approach.

The committee has explored at some length the appropriateness of provision of information to ministers during the caretaker period, given that this was the basis on which this committee arose. It is evident that ministers are still ministers during caretaker. The government needs to continue functioning, albeit with the expectation of a more limited scope. But the caretaker period is also not a normal period of the political cycle. To that end, a majority of the committee has proposed a new approach: that factual information provided to ministers during the caretaker period should also be provided to the community as a whole. The election period is a critical one, where people are assessing who they want to govern for the next four years, and the best way for that contest to occur is if as many people as possible are as well informed as they can be. If the public service forms a view that it is important enough for a minister to have access to new information during the election period, then it is important enough to be shared with the community. To ensure that information can inform the election and to ensure voters are making their choice with full information, the committee has recommended that factual information that is provided by the ACT public service to ministers during caretaker should be published at the same time to ensure equal access to factual information during this election period.

The committee was mindful of this not becoming an administrative burden and has made a broad observation about having a single portal or website, where this information can be placed. That was very much in the spirit of trying to convey the intent of this recommendation. I certainly do not want to see some large process here, in my view, and I think it is manageable to do this.

I would now like to turn to finding 2. Again, part of the information and the discussion in the committee process was around the information the minister had received that had affected the financial process and whether there was more information that should have been shared. The committee did not form a definitive view on that; those who read the report will see that. But the committee did make a finding that if it is the preference of the Assembly to have a full quarter of financial data to inform the pre-election budget update—or the PEBU, as it is more commonly known—then the ACT government would need to consider introducing legislation to permanently change the dates of both the PEBU and the ACT election to occur later than are currently scheduled.

The delay of the election—and the expectation was that would be in the order of three to four weeks—will allow more comprehensive information, because it would push it past the period in which the first quarter of financial information becomes available. And if the Assembly is of the will to receive that information before the election, that will necessitate a change of the election date. The committee did not make a definitive recommendation around whether the election should move. We have tried to draw out the point that if the Assembly wants this information before it goes to an election, that would be the logical consequence.

There is a flip side to this, and that is that if you push the election back that far, it also

then moves out the other side, and by the time you finish the election, the counting process, come back to the Assembly, elect the Chief Minister and all the things, you are much closer to the Christmas shutdown, which carries its own set of issues. We believe this is an issue the Assembly may want to consider, but it was not one that the committee wanted to make a definitive finding on because of the wider implications and the broad views that people have on it.

One issue that did emerge was the timing of the incoming government brief, and questions of imbalance in the information during the post-election negotiation period. Freedom of information documents revealed that the Head of Service sent a letter of congratulation and the incoming government brief to the leader of the Labor Party on election night. My impression was that many people were surprised to discover that this had happened quite so quickly. Ultimately, the committee acknowledged the strong concerns of some that the Head of Service demonstrated unnecessary haste in her decision to provide the incoming government brief in the timeframe she did, noting that this may have contributed to a perception of partiality within the ACT public service, given that negotiations continued up until shortly before the election of the Chief Minister and that there were publicly reported conversations about other possible governing formations.

Under a Hare-Clark election system, where the vote tally and final seat allocation is only completed a week on from election day, and in a jurisdiction that has rarely returned a majority government, meaning a range of negotiated outcomes are possible, it raises the question about when the best time is for the Head of Service to form a view on the outcome of the election and, therefore, provide the incoming government brief. It is of course a question of judgment, which is why the committee has recommended this matter be given further consideration in future guidance on caretaker conventions.

The provision of the incoming government brief, and the information it contains, to one political party during the post-election period also invites a question of who should have what information and when they should have it. Through this discussion, the committee made a finding that the existing caretaker conventions enable an imbalance of information between parties during post-election negotiations to form government.

From a community point of view, I anticipate that most people would want any post-election discussions and negotiations to be as well-informed as possible. They are political discussions, but they should also be about getting the best outcomes for our community, and well-informed players in that process should produce better results. It invites the question: can we do this process better? Can we correct the imbalance that exists? It is probably not in the interest of the incumbents to do so, but I do believe that it is in the interests of the community to think about how we might find a better model.

It is worth looking at what other jurisdictions have done, because there is a strong sense in Australia that “this is the way we do it, and this is how the caretaker convention works”. I have heard that perspective. In Australia, we do have a strict model and a set of conventions about who we think should have access to information. But it is worth noting that in the UK, which is the home of Westminster traditions, they have been more flexible in their procedures to match the circumstances they find themselves in. During the post-election period following the 2010 election, there was an inconclusive result, and the cabinet secretary provided support and information to the Labour,

Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties during the negotiations that followed that election. Clearly, there, they sat and thought, “Well, we want each of these players in this process, and in trying to form an agreement to establish a government for the future of this country, it is best that these parties all have access to a shared level of information to enable a better level of discussion.”

I think the UK example is a good one for the ACT context, where we frequently and most commonly find ourselves in a position after an election where at least two parties—and possibly in the future, other combinations—will need to sit and work together to establish an agenda over four years.

I do note the dissenting comments of my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings. I do not wish to pre-empt his remarks, but as I am speaking now, this is my moment to make my contribution. Mr Werner-Gibbings has disagreed with some of the views of the committee, and he will, I am sure, outline his reasons. Fundamentally, his argument is that these are the rules, and this is how it should remain. I simply counter that by saying that as issues emerge, we should look to improve. We should not be constrained to remain with the status quo. Instead, we should look to evolve, to recognise our circumstances and to see if we can do better. I believe we can do better. The UK has been able to evolve, and I look forward to working with colleagues in this place to seek out those improvements for the benefit of the ACT community.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.45): Politics is a funny old game, isn't it? The very hour that I get to step off a stitched-up, made-up, policy-light, politics-heavy inquiry, I have to hitch my saddle onto one that is even more confected, made up and meaningless. That is all right; I do not know who my colleagues will be, but I look forward to working with them and eating the popcorn while they struggle their way through trying to put together a rational, intelligent, serious report in a very short timeframe, a process to which I will be adding my helpful two cents worth. I will definitely be foreshadowing my contributions when I think to make them. I will definitely not be wedging them in at the very last moment.

Be that as it may, I wholeheartedly echo the chair's thanks to the secretariat for gripping up this inquiry, as well as its participants. I thank my Assembly partners in the inquiry, Mr Rattenbury and Ms Castley.

I would like to draw the Assembly's particular attention to the finding recommending that we discuss moving the election back a month or so. Colleagues, we should discuss moving the election to November, because that would enable the distribution of a comprehensive, up-to-date pre-election budget update that includes quarterly September financial reporting, rather than the partial data that it currently contains.

Otherwise, I note for the Assembly's information that the committee accepted that the caretaker conventions did not require the ACT government to share health data that it received during the run-up to the election, and I have dissented from one recommendation and made additional comments on three other issues.

Essentially, I make these very well-founded points. Firstly, caretaker conventions are not an equality mechanism. They serve only to ensure governments do not make decisions during an election period that may bind an incoming government. Secondly,

the committee heard no evidence that the ACT Labor Party received any imbalancing information in the lead-up to or during post-election negotiations. Thirdly, the time taken and the information used by the Head of Service to make their judgement after the election about who would be the leader of the next ACT government, a decision that was the Head of Service's to make, and a decision that was—excuse me, Mr Deputy Speaker, while I check my notes, yes, correct—entirely appropriate because it is incumbent upon a Head of Service to furnish the leader of the party they believe has won the election with the necessary information as quickly as possible.

Fourthly, the suggestion that a new subset of caretaker conventions providing for greater equality of information in the quite specific circumstances of post-Hare-Clark election negotiations be discussed, developed and agreed prior to the 2028 ACT election would drastically expand the scope of extant caretaker conventions and be a revolutionary departure from any set of Australian caretaker conventions.

My clear, precise and persuasive statements expounding on the above stand for themselves in the report, even if I do say so myself, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I will make some brief observations on this inquiry's foundational driver—whether actions of the ACT government and the ACT public service in the caretaker period before and after the 2024 election breached the ACT's caretaker conventions. No, they did not—in no way, shape or form. And that conclusion was obvious from the beginning.

Even so, because constitutional law was one of the two university law subjects that I did not have to hang onto by my fingernails, and because I am an avid Anne Twomey fan, I found this inquiry's topic and our discussions very interesting. I found caretaker conventions as an inquiry topic interesting because of their elusive nature. They are not rules—hard and fast, or otherwise. They are not laws. They are behaviours, shared norms, mutual understandings in the Australian Westminster system that have developed over time, conventions whose observance, unlike laws, requires the exercise of judgement in dynamic and evolving political environments. If the conventions are breached, their penalty is political; it is not legal.

I found our committee discussions very interesting because they confirmed my initial scepticism that this inquiry was, in fact, a political dummy spit, poorly disguised as a serious conversation about the Australian interpretation of caretaker conventions within our Westminster political system. I fear that, when it is read, much of this report will present to the reader as a sulk about the asymmetry of information that exists in all Australian parliaments.

From the inquiry's beginning, its focus was completely divorced from examining a breach of the caretaker conventions—as well it had to be, because, as was patently obvious during the debate about its establishment, no breach existed. From the off, the inquiry was focused mainly and merely on what information the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens wanted but were not entitled to under the ACT's caretaker conventions.

The Canberra Liberals wanted access to information they were not entitled to under the caretaker conventions during the election campaign. The ACT Greens wanted access to information they were not entitled to under the caretaker conventions during the post-election negotiations.

In my opinion, the key unrecorded lesson from this inquiry is that the basic framework of Australian democracy is not scrupulously fair. Information is not distributed evenly in the Australian political system as a rule. Welcome to Westminster.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Report 5

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.52): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 5—Inquiry into Magistrates Court (Indicative Sentencing) Amendment Bill 2025, dated 24 February 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. The Magistrates Court (Indicative Sentencing) Amendment Bill was presented in the Assembly on 30 October 2025 and referred to the committee. The committee resolved to inquire into the bill on 5 November 2025. The bill proposes a new indicative sentencing scheme for the ACT Magistrates Court, which would allow a defendant to request an indication of the sentence that the court would impose if the defendant pleaded guilty.

The committee received seven submissions to this inquiry. The committee makes one finding and 18 recommendations, including that the bill be passed by the Assembly subject to consideration of the committee's recommendations. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all who made submissions to the inquiry. I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbings and Mr Rattenbury, and I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.54): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT relating to the appointment of a specialist adviser.

The resolution establishing the committee provided for the engagement of external expertise to independently review the territory's finances. On behalf of the committee, the Office of the Legislative Assembly conducted a procurement process and engaged Mr Saul Eslake in this capacity. Mr Eslake is an independent economist and conducted the 2024 review into Tasmania's state finances. The committee looks forward to working with him on this inquiry.

Statements by members

European Union

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.55): On 7 February, I had the honour of opening the European Union Village, as part of the National Multicultural Festival. As members are aware, Australia and Europe are very reliable partners, and we share the same values and recognise the vital role of economic security and prosperity.

The ACT government continues to support relationships with EU member nations by building awareness of Canberra’s key areas of strength. We will be conducting a trade mission to the EU later this year. We look forward to that being an early engagement, following the successful conclusion of an Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement. This agreement has been a long time coming, but it is one that is increasingly important, given where world trade is at, at the moment.

I thank the EU Ambassador, Mr Gabriele Visentin, and the staff, volunteers and organisers of the EU Village at the National Multicultural Festival. It is one of the most popular parts of the festival and I think it speaks volumes about the strength of the Canberra and Australia-European Union relationship. We look forward to building on that and seeing more investment from EU countries into Canberra. Examples in recent times have included in renewable energy and public transport. It is a good thing; let us see more of it.

Legislative Assembly—procedures

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.56): I want to rise to respond briefly to some criticisms and assertions that were made in this chamber earlier from Mr Barr and Ms Cheyne, in particular, regarding the motion of Mr Cocks and the timeliness of amendments. It is rare for those of us in this line of work to stand up and say, “Do you know what? I might have got that a little wrong.” But I will rise and say that I potentially could have circulated that amendment a little earlier.

Despite the assertions from Mr Barr that somehow this was signed, sealed and delivered, and baked and got out of the oven on Monday, it is not the case. That amendment was finalised just prior to question time. As Mr Barr knows, having known me for a long time, I do like to play fair, and I take on board the criticism about the timeliness of the circulation of that particular amendment.

I note the comments from Mr Cocks earlier, who referred to the many times in this place when we have had amendments circulated very close to the time, or even during the time, that we were debating something. I also note the importance of the amendments and the importance of that motion. I am standing to say that I take that on board; potentially, I could have got that circulated a little earlier.

Diabetes—Diabetes Australia fundraising events

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.58): I am rising with a big up for every participant and supporter of the Breakthrough T1D One Walk taking place this Sunday at Rond Terrace—part of a national event that brings thousands of Australians together

to support research, awareness and community connection for those living with type 1 diabetes. I will not be there wearing my “Sorry for what I said when my blood sugar was low” t-shirt, but I will be there in spirit. To make up for my absence, in just over two weeks time, I will ride around Southern Tasmania as part of Diabetes Australia’s PolliePedal Tasmania. Rain, hail, hill or shine, the peloton will be riding 100 kilometres a day for three days and will be led by Guy Barnett, former Liberal Senator for Tasmania, and now Deputy Premier, who has had type 1 diabetes for many years.

This is a fundraising effort. I can be supported by friends and colleagues. The link to my fundraising page is on the window outside my office. I will just note that I emailed the link to my fellow Assembly sugar babe, Mr Milligan, about three weeks ago, but he has not yet made a donation—which I am sure is an oversight and not a slight. Be that as it may, events like the Breakthrough T1D One Walk and PolliePedal Tasmania are not fundraisers; they are statements of solidarity. This week, the *Canberra Times* highlighted three remarkable young Canberrans, Maya, Emma and Rocco, whose determination and optimism remind us why these events matter. I congratulate the volunteers, organisers, medical teams, and advocates who are making the walk happen, and the many Canberrans who will be participating.

Multicultural Festival

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.59): I want to talk about the Multicultural Festival. Two weeks ago we celebrated an incredible event that portrays the beauty of this city. The multicultural community came together to celebrate what makes us Canberra. It was a very exciting event. I was pleased to see my colleagues Mr Rattenbury and the Attorney-General, Ms Cheyne, attending and participating as well. I also joined in the festival parade. I tried, as much as possible, to join every group that was parading—just because I love the Multicultural Festival. A festival like that reminds us of the importance of the multicultural community here in Canberra and the importance of ensuring that we are supporting the multicultural communities. Genuine consultation is one way we can support the multicultural community as is ensuring that their voices are heard when significant matters that relate to them are debated in in this place. So, once again, it was a good celebration and it was a lovely event.

Skateboarding—Belco Bowl Jam

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.01): Members may have noticed last Friday afternoon that there was a gathering of skateboarders outside the members entrance. I made some inquiries. I originally thought it was a skateboarding flash mob. It was one of the Canberra-wide opportunities for skateboarders to gather as part of a wonderful weekend, called the Belco Bowl Jam, and the Belconnen skatepark was really the focus. It was great to pop along on Saturday to see some of the really wonderful skateboarding that was going on. I take the grandkids there occasionally when they are up from the Hunter Valley. It was all very gnarly and there was lots of shredding. Somehow, I feel a little bit cooler, having said all that.

I want to give a special shoutout to the Canberra Skateboarding Association, who work with the local sponsor. I would just highlight that this sport of skateboarding maybe does not get the attention it deserves. But there are so many participants, from family age right up to old citizens of our community, who just love getting on a skateboard

and taking some risks with some very adventurous gnarly and shredding activity.

Dementia—fundraising event

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.02): Last Sunday I attended Dementia Australia's Memory Walk and Jog. The event raises much needed funds for education, resources and support for Australians living with dementia, their families, carers and friends as well as innovative Australian research.

Canberra hosted the first walk for 2026 with 1,389 registered participants. It also provided an opportunity for people to come together to raise money and share stories of dementia. Canberrans have so far raised \$304,700. I would especially like to recognise Dementia Warrior Don Horsley, who has raised \$27,339 himself—an incredible effort. I would also like to recognise the efforts of Zoe the dog and Bree, from JD Group. All contributions, no matter the amount, help in the fight against dementia. You can still donate by visiting thememorywalk.com.au website. If you would like more information, visit Dementia Australia's website.

Volunteering—conservation

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.03): I rise to acknowledge the fantastic volunteer group, organised by the Conservation Council in collaboration with researchers at ANU. This group is currently mapping almost every single nature reserve in the ACT to determine whether there is viable habitat for the reintroduction of koalas to any of these reserves. This is obviously an immense effort, as I found out when Keith Joliffe, leader of the group, put me to work at Mount Mugga Mugga last Wednesday. I acted as scribe, which I am sure reflects my skillset in this area, while Keith and other committed volunteers—Kathleen, Gavin, Liwei, Green and Chris—identified eucalyptus species, tracked elevation, calculated canopy coverage and tree height, logged weather conditions and checked GPS coordinates. After these transects are completed, the group will then move to analysing leaf nutrients.

These efforts started around June last year, and it is expected the project will take two to three years to complete—all done with no funding, just dedicated volunteers. This kind of work is critical. It gives us a better idea of how native species, like koalas, might be able to live in what we have here in the ACT, which is an increasingly fragmented habitat or otherwise, so we can make more responsible policy decisions about preserving and enhancing the ecological diversity of our beautiful bush capital. I want to offer my sincere thanks to this group for the huge amount of work they are doing and for having me along last week. I hope to see the government get behind their initiative and initiatives like it in every way possible.

Discussion concluded.

Financial Management Act—Select Committee Membership

MR SPEAKER: I have been notified in writing of the following nominations for the membership of the Select Committee on the Financial Management Act: Mr Werner-

Gibbings, Mr Braddock and Mrs Morris.

Motion (by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) agreed to:

That the Members so nominated be appointed as members of the Select Committee on Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance.

Public housing—maintenance—standing order 118AA

Ruling by Speaker

MR SPEAKER: Earlier today, Mr Emerson took a point of order under standing order 118AA that a minister had not been responsive to a question without notice. Ms Carrick asked the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs the following question:

Minister, has the government set a goal of at least meeting the national average for the condition of our public housing stock or of having the highest quality public housing in the country?

The minister responded by stating:

We have certainly been running a growth and renewal program, unlike any other any other state or territory. It is something that the ACT government is keen to ensure—that our public housing stock meets the needs of all our tenants, regardless of their needs or their backgrounds, including the increase to public housing of another thousand homes. It will make a difference to the sustainability and liveability of our homes. We are also, as members know, looking at insourcing our housing maintenance program as well as making sure our homes are electrically efficient, have electrical upgrades and have ceiling upgrades to ensure there is appropriate insulation. So there is a range of different work happening in the ACT and I am sure that there will be better outcomes as we continue with that work.

While the minister did not go specifically to the goals that Ms Carrick referenced in her question, she did outline the goals that the government were using to deal with public housing. Accordingly, I do believe that the minister was responsive to the question and I do not uphold the point of order.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr Nick Abel

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.07): Today I pay tribute to an outstanding Canberran and a good friend Dr Nick Abel, who lives in Spence. We have a lot of Nick's friends and the climate community here with us today to share this moment and to celebrate this. Nick is over 80 years of age and he has dedicated his life to research, political activism and the climate. Nick cares deeply about creating a better world and a better future, and

we need a lot more people like him.

Nick was born in Zimbabwe but he grew up in Kenya and he worked widely in Africa before ending up in Australia. He was in Ethiopia, Botswana, Somalia, Swaziland and Zambia. He has been an academic at the University of East Anglia, the University of Canberra and the CSIRO, and he continues to work in an honorary position at the ANU. He has also worked for the International Livestock Centre for Africa, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Zambian National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Nick was one of the CSIRO's climate adaptation scientists. CSIRO has gone through waves of defunding that have lost over a thousand jobs, many of them in environment and climate. His CSIRO retirement fellowship was cancelled in 2016, because he leaked inside information about the organisation's budget cuts to politicians and he spoke about them on ABC's *Lateline* program. The climate wars have been fought on many fronts. Nick's research focused on the frightening reality that, as he said "the rate of human adaptation into the escalating pace and consequences of climate change is too slow to avert current and impending catastrophic environmental and social tipping points."

Nick is an amazing and tireless activist and volunteer. He has incredible courage and grit. During the school strike era, Nick appeared on national TV, being berated by Andrew Bolt for supporting the schoolkids. Bolt said Nick was irresponsible because, according to Bolt, "Climate change is a hoax." Nick turned to Bolt and said very gently, "Oh, Andrew, I so wish you were right but the science shows otherwise." It is one of the best responses to a climate-denying media that we have ever heard.

During one of the climate rallies, there was a satellite due to pass overhead at Parliament House. So Nick and another friend, Frank, did the calculations on the size of banner needed to make it visible with the words "Stop Adani". It took up the whole of Frank's three-car garage and it took a long time to paint. But the day the satellite was due to pass, there it was, on the lawns of Parliament House, clear as day and visible from space.

Nick was arrested in 2023, along with several other activists of conscience, for blocking the Civic office of the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association. They held this protest on the anniversary of the Lismore floods. Five activists, including Nick, sat in rubber duckies with life vests. A couple of them climbed up to the first floor terrace to show where the flood water level had been in Lismore. The Lismore floods, at over 14 metres, would have reached the fourth floor of the building. Nick and friends were arrested and Bernard Collaery represented them pro bono. They had a series of expert witnesses willing to speak on their behalf about why, in a climate crisis, these actions were justified, including the former Chief Scientist Penny Sackett, former MP John Hewson and retired Admiral Chris Barrie, who was formerly head of the Australian Defence Force. All of these people were motivated by the urgency and they were trying to do whatever they could from wherever they were. These celebrated folk offered to present evidence, but the court declined to hear them speak. Sometimes our system does not want witnesses who tell the truth.

That was not Nick's first arrest in the cause of climate activism. A member of the climate movement has shared some stories of Nick's role in a wave of duty of care

climate actions in 2021. Violet Coco lit a pram at Parliament House to signify the destruction of our children's futures. Nick and three others distracted the police and all refused to sign bail and they spent a week in AMC where they spent their time recruiting new activists from amongst their fellow prisoners. In 2021, Nick spoke powerfully about why he felt he needed to take this action instead of keeping his focus on research. Nick said:

Most of my time I realised should be spent on trying to change the way government responds to climate change, because they are not responding at all. They do not believe they are responsible. Sussan Ley, our environment minister—

as she was then; times have changed—

—is challenging the decision by a judge that the Australian government does have a duty of care to our children.

Speaker, I seek a brief extension under standing order 69J.

(Extension of time granted.)

As we know, that challenge was successful, and I think about that a lot—that the Australian government does not legally have a duty of care to our children. It is beyond shameful. They took a legal action to ensure they would not have a duty of care to our children. Nick continued:

[I'm] going to do as much as I can to take responsibility for the future that our generation has created and change it so that the future of the planet becomes hopeful, as it could easily be. We know how to do things much better, and we know how to stop doing the things we're now doing.

Nick is wickedly funny with a very dry sense of humour. During COVID I hosted a Greens social gathering and Nick was there fresh off his latest experience in the watchhouse. He traded tales with another Greens member who was ex-security guard and we workshopped some feedback to the Attorney-General, who was Shane Rattenbury at the time.

In the climate movement we have been swapping tales of Nick's jokes. A lot of people remember sitting around with banners and beer and chocolate—a great combination. They remember putting together actions that need art and life and humour and sometimes dog vests or prams. A couple of folks have shared tales from the back of a cop car. Every single story has one thing in common: Nick is an amazing human being. He is kind, funny, generous, wise, compassionate and courageous. He is full of the black humour that grows in a smart person living through crazy times.

Nick has been an inspiration to climate activists and the thorn in the side of MPs for decades, trying to get his message out about the urgency of climate action. Our planet, our community, our climate movement and we in the Greens will miss Nick when he is gone. He is worried we have left it too late and he has given all he can, including his career, his time and great personal sacrifice. It is up to the rest of us to continue. Nick, we will remember you, clear as day and visible from space.

ACT Greens and Canberra Liberals

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (5.15): I rise this evening to address the proposed alliance of the Canberra Liberals with the ACT Greens. I have not wanted to speak about this publicly—given it is the responsibility of Mr Parton as our party leader and my position has not changed since I publicly rejected any prospect of a deal after the last election—but I have become aware of information that has been circulated to media, and I wanted to set the record straight. I understand the Greens have told journalists that there were discussions about a possible alliance with my office while I was leader. Let me be clear: this is not true. While I was willing to work with the Greens on specific issues, I have never, and will never, supported any kind of power-sharing agreement. To the extent there were any discussions, there were informal advances repeatedly raised by the Greens with my chief of staff, who repeatedly rejected them. The fact that these private conversations have been leaked and deliberately deceitfully made to suggest that there was some interest or discussion in forming government together demonstrates a lack of honesty, integrity and ethics by some members of the Greens. Such conduct is not merely dishonest; it is reprehensible.

As my position has been linked to the media, I want to put on the record that I have consistently opposed such a deal and why. I opposed it when Ms Lee was leader, I opposed it when I was leader and I oppose it now that Mr Parton is leader. I also want to put my reasons on the record. I am a member of the Liberal Party. I am not a member out of tribal loyalties; I am a member because I share the principles and values of the Liberal Party. I am committed to individual freedom and responsibility, to free markets and to our traditional institutions. I am committed to these principles because I believe they are the foundation for strong communities and better lives. I want to work towards building a better Canberra through the application of these principles. The Greens do not share these principles and these commitments. They have their own principles, principles which are not only different to ours but fundamentally incompatible.

We have different visions for what we want Canberra to be, different views about how to get there and different views about what trade-offs are worthwhile—and that is fine. A healthy democracy is one which embraces a plurality of views. But I believe you cannot expect two parties to effectively govern together when their core principles are incompatible. Some have suggested putting our principles aside and just implementing the policies where the two parties have a common view. But what is the point of being in government if we cannot apply our principles and our values? What is the point of a Liberal government with a Greens Chief Minister that does not deliver on a Liberal vision for a better Canberra? The only thing we have in politics is our principles. If we sacrifice those, what do we have left? What is left to guide us other than our principles, our convictions and our values?

I fully understand how dispiriting it is to spend 20 years in opposition and the intensity of the desire to experience something different. But I do not believe this deal is one that allows us to experience something different while remaining true to our principles. So I cannot and I will not support it. If the two parties want to go down this path and form an alliance, something which the Greens membership have now wisely ruled out, then I think it is only reasonable that we allow the voters to decide if this is how they want the territory to be governed. As we all know, election campaigns are gruelling experiences, and I understand that no member wants to go through the ordeal

unnecessarily. But, if we are seriously proposing to change the government, not just the leader of the government but also the party of government and the direction of the territory, the decision ought to be made by the people we represent. After all, it is their government, not ours, and we should never forget that.

Ms Lauren Hession—resignation

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.19): I am rising this evening to pay tribute to a member of my staff who is listening online right now. She is finishing up today. She has no idea I am doing this and she is listening in under the belief that something might happen and she needs to be online just in case. So I am sorry, Lauren. Lauren Hession has been in my office for the past year. She joined my office as an ANU intern in the first semester last year when my office and I were still finding our feet and were not really sure how having an intern was going to work. But we took the plunge after the ANU sent us her resume anyway after we had said no, and we thought, why not; let's do it. How lucky we were and how lucky I have been to find Lauren.

After completing a 4,000 word report on the early childhood and education care sector and the state of it here in the ACT last year, including research where she looked at the cost of every centre in the ACT and then matched it to the quality as rated by the national regulator and made a beautiful Excel spreadsheet to back up her research, she took on the role of adviser with a focus on media and social media, taking on some really interesting projects and long-term constituent matters.

Lauren is an incredible writer. You have probably come across her work, because many of the speeches I have delivered in this chamber, except for this one, have been drafted by Lauren. She pumps them out really quickly and to an extremely high standard. I can say to her at lunchtime, "I need a speech for adjournment this afternoon," and she will put together the skeleton of something. There have been some that I have barely edited, because she not only captured what I needed but also quickly learnt to match the tone that I speak in, and that is such an incredible skill.

Lauren has always acted professionally and has been a huge asset to the team, from the day we ended up walking up a playground wearing heels together—and I had to take mine off to get back down while she managed to do it—to meeting with constituents at their homes and talking through some quite serious and emotional issues. We visited ACT Housing homes together. We have met with some constituents in some really tough times. We have been to the Veterans Shed together and sat around having coffee with veterans and first responders talking about what the shed means to them and how important it is to have community. So she has been leading the charge on the petition I have sponsored for the Veterans Shed and has done so much work with that group to make sure that we are doing it all properly and getting it out to as many people as possible.

I am going to miss Lauren as she moves on to bigger and better things now that she has graduated uni. She has her whole future ahead of her. I do hope to see her again around this place or, hopefully, making a difference somewhere in the world. Who knows what her future will bring, but I wish her all the best and thank her for working with me for the last year.

Belconnen—footpaths

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.22): I want to speak briefly—we will see how it goes, I guess—about the really disappointing disregard that this government has for the people of Belconnen, in particular when it comes to basic city services. I have been prompted to do this because I have been doorknocking in West Belconnen. Again, I am not giving away a secret here, because once my car is parked somewhere I am sure it gets reported—the “Cain Train”, in other words. Knocking on doors, walking around the streets and seeing the state of disrepair is a real discouragement to me and even more so to the people who live near those areas.

I will give a very recent example. As I was walking between homes, I came across a nanna and her granddaughter walking from school. They had walked on a path and taken some photos of the path. This is a path connecting a school to the suburbs. I have sent those photos to the minister—this was only about a week ago—and I did a social media post on it. It was pretty disgusting with uneven and broken paths that not only children but also, obviously, the elderly and those who may need some assistance with walking are meant to navigate.

I have some good news and yet it is kind of disappointing at the same time. I got an email this morning regarding my ministerial. I am happy to show the photos. I am sure Minister Stephen-Smith and Ms Tough would love to see them as testimony of the government’s care for our community. But I did get an email this morning and, again, it is both encouraging and disappointing and I will mention why. It says that Roads ACT inspected the area on 25 February—and it is really about a week since I wrote to the minister and just over a week since I put these pictures on social media—“and have created a work order for replacement of 123 square metres of concrete footpath”—that is a fair chunk of footpath that needed fixing—“with an expected completion date of December 2026.” There is an interim work order for temporary repairs in the form of cold mix that they hope to complete in 10 days.

So there is a mix here. One, I appreciate the work is going to be done, but not permanently for quite a long time, but, two, did this prompt even the cold mix happening within a few weeks? I guess it is something, but I will be checking on it. I know exactly where it is. But it kind of begs the question. I would hate to think that, because I did a social media post—which got lots of comments and support—of photos of this pretty disgusting path and because I wrote a ministerial, I got special treatment just because I made a big deal of it. I would hate to think that. The feedback I get from the community supports that view that maybe it is only if it becomes a public embarrassment to the government in a forum they cannot control that they act. But shouldn’t they be acting for the sake of the community much more promptly and, in particular, in response to a Fix My Street query?

So it is kind of a mix—“Gee, I am glad it is getting fixed, but not permanently until December this year.” I will see what this cold mix repair looks like in a week and a bit. As I continue to walk around Belconnen—as I have been doing since the 2024 election—looking at issues to do with potholes, trees and the state of community parks, unfortunately, it reinforces my view and the view of many in our community that this government does not have a civic pride mentality. I would suggest that, if they take up that challenge, there would be no question our city would be a much more beautiful

place to live and have our family enjoy.

ACT Food Relief Action Plan

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.27): I would like to take the opportunity during the adjournment debate today to briefly revisit yesterday's debate regarding the government's new ACT Food Relief Action Plan. On reflection, I think it was encouraging to see the level of multi-partisan passion in the chamber regarding the need for action when it comes to providing food relief for Canberrans who most need it.

I have since had some constructive conversations with Minister Orr, and I am reassured that the document tabled yesterday is intended as a starting point, not an end point. I believe she and I both agree that there is significant work required in this area and, based on the conversations we have had, I believe we are aligned in our assessment of the importance of this work. So I thank the minister for her engagement with me, and I am really keen to work collaboratively on this moving forward.

Based on the strength of the remarks across the Assembly yesterday, I would encourage others with a passion for this issue to do the same. The intent of a dedicated Food Relief Action Plan clearly has unanimous support in this place now, as it did when that motion was passed 12 months ago, which presents a rare opportunity to galvanise our community and our collective resources to create long-lasting change when it comes to the provision of a coordinated, integrated, efficient and effective food relief system here in the ACT.

As much as many of us, myself included, are critical of the level of detail in the plan that was tabled, I hope we can focus our efforts on channelling that energy into positive outcomes for our community and into establishing a food relief system that does not allow any Canberran to go hungry—that ensures all hungry mouths do get fed and that nobody is left behind.

It is intended also as a commitment from me to do the same—to put my efforts into getting the Food Relief Action Plan that Canberrans need from us, rather than us getting absorbed in the political dynamics that are at play that also came up during yesterday's debate, some of which I am not convinced are of much help or, really, of much interest to the people that we are here to represent.

Government procurement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.29): Very briefly, because the Assembly will not sit again for a little while, I want to take this opportunity to draw the Assembly's and Mr Cocks's attention to a couple of clauses in the ACTIA contract with Marsh that he tabled earlier, when he indicated that he could not see anything in the contract that indicated there would be pass-through of ACT government funding for our insurers.

I would refer Mr Cocks to schedule 2 of the contract; specifically, the scope includes “placement of the ACTIA annual re-insurance program ... and placement of direct insurance policies on behalf of the Territory” at paragraphs 2.1.4(e) and (f). Even more

specifically, at paragraph 3.1.1(k), which is under “Service requirements” it includes:

... arrange for disbursement to insurers and the appropriate Authorities of premiums and any related statutory charges received from the Territory and provide proof of payments to the Territory. This includes provision of a full breakdown of any commission earned by the Territory Broker ...

The clue is in the name, Mr Speaker. This is a broker service for a complex set of insurance and reinsurance arrangements.

I do need to express again, in that context, my disappointment that Mr Cocks is essentially accusing ACT government officials of what would be pretty gross misconduct if they were spending \$40 million under a contract for \$2½ million. All of our agencies are subject to significant risk and audit processes, and I am sure that somebody would have picked this up if this were the case. I think, when we return in our next sitting, it would be appropriate for Mr Cocks to apologise for the imputations against ACTIA and, more broadly, CMTEDD officials.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.32 pm until Tuesday, 17 March at 10 am.