



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

17 March 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, 7 April 2026**.

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Tuesday, 17 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

South Canberra Veterans Shed—petitions 52-25 and 28-26

By Ms Tough, from 104 and 326 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the following: Since its establishment in 2016, SCVS has operated as a not-for-profit charity offering a safe and welcoming space for male and female veterans (serving and ex-serving), police, fire, ambulance, and emergency services personnel, as well as their families. Through mentoring, shared activities, and skill-building opportunities, SCVS combats social isolation, promotes mental wellbeing, and strengthens community connections. However, the Shed has been forced to relocate five times, due to the lack of a stable and suitable location. This ongoing instability is severely limiting SCVS's ability to operate effectively and support those who need it most. The need is urgent and real:

- 71 veterans in Canberra died by suicide between 2020–2021
- First responders are increasingly impacted by trauma and burnout SCVS provides a community-driven, proactive solution to these challenges—but it cannot continue without a secure base of operations.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the ACT Government to urgently support the South Canberra Veterans Shed (SCVS) by providing a permanent, affordable, and fit-for-purpose facility so the organisation can continue its vital work supporting veterans, first responders, and their families.

Narrabundah baseball fields—safety—petition 12-26

By **Ms Lee**, from 49 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the ongoing and unresolved safety issues at the sporting fields in the Narrabundah area, specifically relating to field conditions and the deliberate use of inadequate lighting.

It has become apparent that the lighting is being operated at a reduced level, presumably as a cost-saving measure. This decision has created an unsafe playing environment and significantly increases the risk of serious injury to players, officials, and spectators. In a sport where balls can routinely travel in excess of 150 km/h, inadequate lighting is not a minor inconvenience — it is a serious hazard. This approach to saving money is ill-conceived and places participants directly in harm's way. It is not a question of if someone will be injured under these conditions, but when. When that occurs, the decision to deliberately operate lighting below a safe standard will no doubt present a significant liability issue.

It must also be noted that players and clubs pay fees for the use of these facilities, including lighting. Despite this, they are not being provided the standard of service for which they are charged. Participants are effectively paying to use facilities that are unsafe and not fit for purpose. This situation is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue. Community sporting clubs, volunteers, families, and players should not be forced to choose between participation and personal safety. Continued inaction exposes the community to unnecessary risk and undermines confidence in the management and oversight of these public assets.

We call on you to address this matter immediately, before a constituent is seriously injured. We request that urgent action be taken to ensure lighting and field conditions meet appropriate safety standards, and that we be advised of what steps will be taken and within what timeframe.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to address this matter immediately, before a constituent is seriously injured. We request that urgent action be taken to ensure lighting and field conditions meet appropriate safety standards, and that we be advised of what steps will be taken and within what timeframe.

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

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

SDN Bluebell—petitions 51-25 and 75-25

Ms Berry, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, dated 13 January 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cain concerning closure of the SDN Bluebell daycare.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter about *E-PET-051025* and *PET-075-25 Closure of SDN Bluebell*. I am writing to provide the Government response to the petition.

The ACT Government values and prioritises our not-for-profit early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector and is committed to enhancing partnerships with these organisations, including in relation to the prioritisation and effective utilisation of government owned premises. I recognise the importance of ensuring planning mechanisms can support the long-term sustainability and accessibility of the not-for-profit sector.

In August 2025 the ACT regulator, Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA) received notification that SDN Children's Services would be closing SDN Bluebell on 19 December 2025 due to the sale of the site to a commercial buyer. Following this notification, the Education Directorate, City Renewal Authority and Infrastructure Canberra (iCBR) investigated the matter and I advocated for a suitable solution to be identified including by writing to the developer to seek their support with ensuring the service could continue to operate. Whilst a suitable alternative government owned premises was not able to be identified, an agreement was reached between the site owner and SDN Bluebell to extend the private sub-lease of the premises to December 2026.

The Development Application (DA) 202543884 for Block 16 Section 45 has been lodged with the Territory Planning Authority (the Authority) and is being assessed in accordance with the *Planning Act 2023* and the *Territory Plan*. The inclusion of conditions to the DA cannot occur until a Crown Lease variation has been approved to remove its primary use as a childcare.

The Authority operates independently and does not have any legal ability to unilaterally impose a requirement for large developments to provide early learning facilities as part of their Crown Lease, or to provide reduced rates for commercial properties leased to not-for-profit organisations.

While these actions fall outside the Authority's remit, the ACT Government is exploring alternative avenues to support not-for-profit ECEC services. A new Community Facilities Allocations Policy will be finalised by iCBR in 2025 to reflect this commitment.

CECA is responsible for ensuring premises comply with the National Law. While CECA provided advice to SDN Bluebell on the suitability of the potential alternative site at Westfield Belconnen, they made no formal decision about the premises as they are unable to do so until an application for approval in principle is received.

Fortunately, in December 2025, SDN Children's Services confirmed that SDN Bluebell will relocate to new premises in Gold Creek, Nicholls. This move, scheduled for mid-2026, provides long term certainty for the children, families and educators of SDN Bluebell and ensures the continuation of high-quality early childhood education and care for the community and region. CECA will continue to engage with providers on matters relating to the utilisation of government owned

premises and community facilities for the purpose of ECEC.

I would like to acknowledge SDN Blubell's commitment to delivering quality early learning in the ACT community over the past three decades. The ACT Government is working to ensure equitable access to high-quality early learning services, including through not-for-profit providers who play a vital role in our communities.

I trust this information provides the petitioners with assurance that their concerns are understood and have been acknowledged by the ACT Government.

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

Ms Berry, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, dated 6 February 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Barry concerning ATAR language courses in 2026.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter dated 3 December 2025 regarding petition *E-PET-077-25 – Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026*.

The ACT Government is committed to an inclusive, equitable and high-quality public education system that recognises the right of every child and young person to learn and benefit from the opportunities that education brings.

The ACT Government aspires for the ACT to be the jurisdiction of choice for languages education, particularly given our national standing as representing Australia's diplomatic headquarters, major government departments, and multicultural community.

Language education in ACT public schools occurs in various forms from preschool to year 12. In 2025, 11 different languages were taught across ACT public schools, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, Auslan, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean and Spanish.

From 2026, the previous CIT Solutions Centre for Modern Languages delivered Board of Senior Secondary Studies-approved language courses for ACT college students will not be provided to new students.

Language education offerings for senior secondary students in our public college system will be solely a school-based decision, and students will be required to access language courses via existing school enrolment options or the Board of Senior Secondary Studies specialist education provider for Chinese language.

I understand that there will be members of the community disappointed by the decision not to centralise a language program, however I trust this information provides the petitioners with assurance that their concerns have been acknowledged by the ACT Government.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Diploma of Remedial Massage—petition 73-25

Mr Pettersson, Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations, dated

25 February 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson concerning the reinstatement of the Diploma of Remedial Massage at the CIT.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter regarding petition E-PET-073-25, lodged by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA calling on the ACT Government to reinstate the Diploma of Remedial Massage course and inquire with Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) into their handling of the review into the course and impress upon them the urgency to reinstate the course.

CIT is an independent Territory Authority with a governing Board. CIT advised me on 11 December 2025 that CIT would be seeking to reinstate the Diploma of Remedial Massage on CIT's scope of registration. This decision reflects the ongoing demand for skilled massage therapists in the ACT.

The Diploma of Remedial Massage has been reinstated on CIT's scope of registration as of 7 January 2026. I am advised that CIT is developing a revised delivery model which includes reduced delivery hours, and increased student and clinic fees to improve financial sustainability of this qualification.

I thank Mr Emerson MLA for his advocacy in this matter, and I thank you for bringing the petition to my attention.

Sport and recreation—indoor facilities—petition 63-25

Ms Berry, Minister for Sport and Recreation, dated 26 February 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson concerning indoor sporting facilities on Canberra's northside.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter about the petition No. E-PET-063-25, lodged by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, in regard to the lack of indoor sporting facilities on Canberra's northside.

The Government notes the matters raised in the petition and provides the following advice.

The provision of facilities to support sport and active recreation opportunities for the Canberra community is a priority for the ACT Government, consistent with the CBR Next Move Strategy. To help address growing participation requirements for indoor sporting groups, the Government has and will continue to deliver additional gymnasiums (indoor courts) at ACT Government schools across the city, including Canberra's northside. The below tables (Table 1 and Table 2) detail new school gymnasiums that have recently been delivered or will soon be delivered on Canberra's northside.

Table 1 – New Facilities Provided on the Northside

School	Year opened	Number of full-sized courts	Notes
Amaroo School	2018	2 (increased from 1 in 2018)	Gymnasium was expanded from a single court to a double court in 2018.
Margaret Hendry School (Taylor)	2019	1	
Franklin School	2020	1	Was originally the Franklin Early Childhood School before being expanded in 2020 and renamed.
Throsby School	2022	2	
Shirley Smith School (Kenny)	2024	2	
Aunty Agnes Shea School (Taylor)	2025	2	

Table 2 – Additional Facilities Anticipated to be Provided on the Northside by 2030

School	Expected opening	Number of full-sized courts	Notes
Strathnairn School	Late 2026	1	Expected opening timeframe relates to new gymnasium.
Second Gungahlin College (Nicholls)	2030	Minimum of 1, possibly 2	

Beyond the provision of indoor courts at ACT Government schools, the Government is also progressing a number of other indoor sport facility projects. Projects relating to the northside include the following:

- The proposed expansion of the Belconnen Basketball Stadium (BBS), in partnership with Basketball ACT. The ACT Government has allocated funding to engage a consultant to progress the planning and preliminary design phase. This work has commenced and is due for completion in 2026.
- A dedicated indoor sport facility (4 courts) is planned to be provided in Casey, Gungahlin. The Territory Planning Authority approved the subdivision of two blocks (Casey Section 132, Blocks 12 and 13) in the Casey Group Centre in December 2025 (DA No. 20244320) and the Government has allocated funding to undertake early civil construction

work to prepare the Casey Precinct for future development that enables community use and delivery of new health, emergency and sports facilities.

Several other major indoor sport facilities are also located on the northside of Canberra, including BBS, the ACT Netball Centre, National Tennis Centre, National Hockey Centre, Australian Institute of Sport, ANU, University of Canberra and some other private school facilities that support a mix of community activities (i.e. Radford College).

In relation to the potential demolition of the Dickson Squash Courts, the ACT Government is aware that a Development Application for the site of the existing courts is currently under assessment by the Territory Planning Authority. The Government also notes that the Dickson Squash Club has lodged a submission to the current *Inquiry into barrier and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT* being conducted by the ACT Legislative Assembly, with a report on this Inquiry expected in 2026. Taking these factors into account, the ACT Government is currently reviewing the matter.

Housing—establishment of rental commissioner—petition 62-25

Ms Cheyne, Attorney-General, dated 3 March 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Rattenbury concerning a rental commissioner for the ACT.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter about petition E-PET-062-25 ‘Rental Commissioner for the ACT’, petitioned by Ms Jessica Menace, and supported by Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA.

The petition

The petition calls for the creation of a Rental Commissioner to address tenancy disputes in the ACT. It proposes that the role of a Commissioner would be to provide a free service that assists both tenants and landlords to resolve disputes, with a particular focus on the establishment of a complaints mechanism for tenants. The petition seeks to draw the attention of the ACT Legislative Assembly to the Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria (RDRV), established in June 2025 which has been trialled as a branch of the Victorian tribunal system.

The RDRV, VCAT and ACAT

The RDRV is a specialist dispute resolution and case management service provided by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). RDRV manages disputes about bonds, compensation, rent increases and repairs, and provides mediation services between tenants and landlords. VCAT also provides mediation services, and hears complex dispute matters, such as those involving evictions and lease terminations.

Here in the ACT, the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) hears and determines a range of matters, including residential tenancy disputes, and provides a preliminary conference service (a form of mediation) as a precursor to contested hearings. These preliminary conferences support applicants and respondents by

providing an early mechanism to resolve their dispute.

In instances where a bond dispute is identified by the ACT Revenue Office (the Revenue Office), who are responsible for the management of Rental Bonds in the ACT, the Revenue Office will automatically refer the dispute to ACAT. This means that neither the landlord nor tenant is required to pay the application fee. ACAT's services in relation to these bond disputes can therefore be accessed free of charge and barriers to access these services remain low. In relation to other tenancy disputes where cost is a barrier to accessing ACAT services, ACAT has a process for applicants to seek fee waivers.

The Government also funds the Tenancy Advice Service (TAS) to provide free legal advice and assistance to tenants to support them with tenancy disputes.

Given the ACAT provides similar services to that of the RDRV and VACT, and the dedicated stream of funding provided to the TAS, the Government is of the view that a separate program for tenancy dispute resolution may not be necessary at this time. If, in future, considerations were given to implementing a role of a similar nature to the RDRV in addition to ACAT's existing conciliation service, the Government would need to conduct further policy work to assess whether such a role would be appropriate, given that the ACT is a significantly smaller jurisdiction than Victoria.

Previous calls for a Rental Commissioner

The Government acknowledges community advocacy for a Commissioner (or other regulatory body) to support tenants to navigate tenancy laws and bolster existing compliance and enforcement functions under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. On 24 October 2023, then Attorney-General, Shane Rattenbury, MLA gave a Ministerial Statement in response to an Assembly motion that called on the ACT Government to consider establishing a rental commissioner (or similar body) in the ACT (*ACT Legislative Assembly 2023, page 3219*).

The Ministerial Statement acknowledged the Government's continued commitment to strengthening renters' rights, including the implementation of nation-leading reforms which removed all forms of no cause evictions and introduced the first minimum standard for ceiling insulation in Australia.

The Ministerial Statement also noted that other Australian jurisdictions have supported renters through a range of different regulatory bodies with different powers, emphasising that there is no single, preferred or 'one-size-fits-all' model that the ACT could or should adopt. Rather, there is a wide variety of possible regulatory responses.

In the Ministerial Statement, the former Attorney-General committed to tasking the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) to undertake further policy development work on possible models for a regulatory body (such as an Ombudsman or Commissioner), and to detail the resourcing implications, for further decision.

Consideration of property-related Commissioners more generally

The ACT Government has committed to establishing a Strata Commissioner. As a Strata Commissioner is another form of property related Commissioner, the ACT Government considers that it is sensible to consider the scope and functions of any

potential Rental Commissioner following its consideration in relation to a Strata Commissioner.

Separate to the ACT Government's commitment to establish a Strata Commissioner, the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Legal Affairs (the Committee) commenced an Inquiry into the management of strata properties (the Inquiry) on 15 January 2025. Included in the terms of reference is the exploration of the remit for a potential Strata Commissioner in the ACT. The Committee has indicated that it will not deliver its final report before March 2026. Given this existing body of work in relation to the remit of a Strata Commissioner, the ACT Government looks forward to considering the recommendations of the Committee before undertaking further consideration of this matter.

We acknowledge the petition and thank the signatories for their interest in this matter.

Active travel—Belconnen-Kippax-Ginninderry—petitions 66-25 and 82-25

Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 3 March 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay concerning a bicycle pathway between Belconnen, Kippax and Ginninderry.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning petitions E-PET-066-25 and PET-082-25 regarding the need for a cycle path to connect Kippax shops to the Belconnen Town Centre and to also connect to the William Hovell Drive Duplication Project via an offroad path along Kingsford Smith Drive.

In addition, at its meeting on Wednesday, 3 December 2025 the Assembly passed a resolution titled '*Active travel network in Belconnen – Feasibility study and funding consideration*', which relates to petitions E-PET-066-25 and PET-082-25 as the Assembly resolution calls on the ACT Government to:

- a) Conduct a feasibility study in consultation with targeted stakeholders – children and adults who can no longer drive, Belconnen Community Council, Pedal Power, SEE-Change, Canberra By Bike, and Living Streets Canberra – to deliver a complete active travel network between West Belconnen and Belconnen Town Centre based on the MIS-05 Active Travel Facilities Design; and
- b) Table the feasibility study by the second last sitting day in 2026.

The requested path segment along Southern Cross Drive between Kippax shops and Belconnen Town Centre has also been identified as a potential future priority through ACT's Active Travel Plan. This path segment is intended to be a shared community path (e.g. for pedestrian and cyclist use) – not a dedicated bicycle-only path.

I'm pleased to advise that a feasibility study will be undertaken for the overall route along Southern Cross Drive. Funding has also been committed for delivery of two priority segments along this route to improve connectivity between Kippax shops

and Belconnen Town Centre.

The segments funded for delivery as part of the C3 Principal Route along Southern Cross Drive include:

- Segment 01 - Ratcliff Crescent to Pawsey Circuit reserve; and
- Segment 02 – Pawsey Circuit to Kingsford Smith Drive.

I note that this is an infill/retrofit project in an area with existing site constraints. However, as standard practice, the design and construction of this project will aim to be in accordance with the Active travel Facilities Design standard (MIS 05).

I also recognise your request to further construct an additional separated bike path from the corner of Southern Cross Drive and Kingsford Smith Drive up to the roundabout at Drake Brockman Drive (west side). This suggestion will be investigated following completion of other active travel network upgrades in the area, namely the William Hovell Drive Duplication and Drake Brockman Drive Duplication Projects.

I trust this information is useful and I look forward to tabling the feasibility study on the second last sitting day in 2026.

Fisher playground—upgrade—petition 32-25

Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 3 March 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Carrick concerning the upgrade of the Fisher Community Playground.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning petition E-PET-032-25, lodged by Ms Fiona Carrick MLA regarding an upgrade to the Fisher community playground.

The ACT Government manages over 500 public play spaces located across the ACT, including four in Fisher. It does so in accordance with the objectives of the ACT Play space Strategy, which are to keep playgrounds safe and welcoming for better health, wellbeing and connectedness of the ACT community.

The ACT Government's Play Space Strategy helps guide a strategic approach to investment across the entire play space network to ensure Canberrans have equitable access to a mix of district (larger, destination playgrounds like John Knight Memorial Park), central (play spaces located near community hubs, like at Holt or Cook shops), and local playgrounds (play spaces near homes with basic structured play equipment).

Feedback from the community through consultation on the Play Space Strategy highlighted a greater desire for investment in higher quality, larger play spaces in central locations.

In particular:

The ACT community supports a 'quality over quantity' approach to improving the

play space network. In the Canberra Destination Play Space Study, 84% of participants said they would prefer fewer but higher quality play spaces in their suburbs. This support for quality reflects how play spaces are used across Canberra, with many more people visiting district and central play spaces than local play spaces.

The citizen-led Better Suburbs Statement 2030 concluded: “The focus should be on quality over quantity in play spaces and... we should use the existing budget to concentrate efforts on a smaller range of better facilities.” This recognises that simply seeking to maintain all ageing, under-used play spaces does not enhance the play value within our network or help us to meet community aspirations for quality play experiences.

ACT Play Space Strategy, page 27

For this reason, the key focus area for the ACT Government is prioritising district and central play areas and spaces for investment, including refresh and major upgrades. What this looks like is continuing to strengthen the quality and availability of public amenities around district play spaces, prioritising delivery of central play spaces to older suburbs that currently do not have these, and generally directing investment in local play spaces towards safety maintenance and minor refurbishments. The ACT Play Space Strategy identifies that ideally there is one central play space per two or three suburbs.

The *ACT Labor – Weston Creek and Woden Plan* outlines the commitments the ACT Government took to the election, including in relation to new and upgraded playgrounds. I note that a central play space was constructed at the Waramanga local shops in 2021, which is adjacent to Fisher.

The Araluen Street neighbourhood playground in Fisher is classified as a local neighbourhood playground. Local neighbourhood playgrounds generally contain basic structured play equipment to support local residences (as most residences are located within 400 metres of a local playground).

The most recent playground audit found that the equipment in the playground on Araluen Street remains fit for purpose. However, I recognise that the existing play space could be a good candidate for renewal due to complementary benefits such as the proximity to the Fisher local shops and surrounding urban open space.

Whilst there are no immediate plans to upgrade the Araluen Street playground, these suggestions have been noted and will inform future consideration of capital works priorities.

Further information in relation to ACT’s investment towards playground improvements in older suburbs is available on the City Services website, which includes eight playground upgrades funded through the 2025-26 Budget (City Services website:

<https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/Infrastructure-Projects/programs/playspace-upgrades>)

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Drugs—drug-driving—medicinal cannabis—petition 46-25

Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 3 March 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson concerning medicinal cannabis and licence suspension.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning petition E-PET-046-25, lodged by Thomas Emerson MLA regarding ACT Drug Driving Law Reform for Medicinal Cannabis Patients.

The petition calls on the ACT Government to change the laws of the *Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Act 1977* to no longer automatically suspend medicinal cannabis users' licences if they are found to have delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in their system and are not impaired. It also requests the ACT Government investigate how to test levels of impairment from THC for drug driving, rather than relying on the presence of THC in an individual's system.

The ACT Government recognises that medicinal cannabis use may bring significant benefits to patients, including increased independence. We agree that illness should not have to mean less outings from home, and we appreciate that in this sense a Zero Tolerance policy may limit the benefits of medicinal cannabis. However, in a road safety context we must balance this consideration against the risks and potential impacts on other road users and the community more broadly.

The ACT Government's approach to drug driving is informed by *Vision Zero*, which is a policy outlined in the *ACT Road Safety Strategy 2020-2025*. Vision Zero aims to achieve zero deaths or serious injuries on our roads. With this goal in mind, policy decisions must be based on the best available evidence that reflects consensus advice and appropriately balances community safety against road safety risk.

This means that an amendment to the *Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Act 1977* of the nature the petitioners are seeking would only be pursued if it is supported by comprehensive evidence. It also means that while laws adopted in other jurisdictions will be reviewed as part of building an evidence base for reforms, the Government will only seek to introduce them in the ACT if they are proven to be effective in other jurisdictions.

We understand that THC impairs both cognitive and psychomotor function. For a driver this can result in decreased car handling performance, poor motor coordination, slower reaction times, reduced perceptual skills, impairment of time and distance perception, dulling of reflexes, and reduced capacity to respond in high-stress situations. The Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Guidelines identifies that “These deficits can begin at low doses and are highly individualised.”¹

Drug driving is a significant contributing factor to many serious and fatal crashes in the ACT, with 40% of all drivers involved in fatal collisions between 2010 and 2020 having either alcohol or a prescribed drug in their system, or both. In 2022 the Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics, University of Sydney undertook

¹ *Assessing Fitness to Drive 2022*, p 19 (2022).

a small study as part of the ACT Road Safety Fund Grants Program². The study considered the driving behaviours of ACT cannabis users, both prescription and illegal cannabis. The study found that medicinal cannabis users tend to have lower doses and more predictable tolerance build up to THC, which can reduce the likelihood of driver impairment compared to illegal cannabis use. An added benefit was that medicinal cannabis reduced conditions such as anxiety or pain, which can cause driver impairment. However, driver impairment was still found, and both groups were found to drive while impaired. The study also revealed all users underestimate the extent to which THC impairs their driving.

Recent evidence from elsewhere in Australia, suggests that drivers who have consumed THC are 1.9 times more likely to be the culpable driver when they are involved in a serious crash³. Further adding to this picture, a recent study in Victoria found that THC was the second-most prevalent drug found in drivers hospitalised following a crash at 11.1%⁴

The ACT Government is closely monitoring the evolving evidence base and the approach taken in other jurisdictions. This includes the new laws in Victoria and the recently introduced private member's bill in NSW.

The petition references amendments to the Victorian Road Safety Act 1986 (the Victorian Act) which came into effect on 1 March 2025. Before these amendments, the Victorian Act operated in the same way as the ACT's Act; if a driver in Victoria was found to have THC in their blood or saliva, the courts were required to cancel an offender's license. The Victorian amendments referred to in the petition do not change the nature of the offence but introduce discretion for the court not to cancel an offender's licence if the drug present in their blood or saliva is a prescribed legal medicinal cannabis product used in accordance with the prescription.

Along with the ACT and Victoria, driving under the influence of prescribed THC is illegal in New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland. Tasmania is the only jurisdiction which allows a person to drive with prescribed THC in their system, as long as the substance was obtained and administered in accordance with Tasmania's Poisons Act 1971.

In NSW, the Legislative Council is considering the *Road Transport Amendment (Medicinal Cannabis—Exemptions from Offences) Bill 2025*. The Bill seeks to amend the Road Transport Act 2013 (NSW) to provide that the offences relating to driving while a prescribed illicit drug is present in a person's oral fluid, blood or urine do not apply if the only drug present is THC and was obtained and administered for medicinal purposes. The defence is not proposed to be applicable to provisional or learner drivers.

In regard to testing for impairment, there are currently no roadside instruments that can reliably measure a driver's THC impairment level, unlike alcohol breathalysers, which measure blood alcohol concentration as a valid measure of impairment.

² MacCartney, Daniella, et al. "Driving behaviours of ACT cannabis users following the decriminalisation of cannabis cultivation and possession" The Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics, University of Sydney (2022).

³ Drummer, Olaf H., et al. "Odds of culpability associated with use of impairing drugs in injured drivers in Victoria, Australia." *Accident Analysis & Prevention* p 135 (2020).

⁴ DiRago, Matthew, et al. "Prevalence of drugs in injured drivers in Victoria, Australia." *Australian journal of forensic sciences* 53.2 (2021).

Initial roadside saliva tests in the ACT detect the presence of THC, in addition to the presence of three other prescribed drugs. However, impairment is not necessarily indicated by a positive test to the presence of THC. Additionally, the effects of impairment can differ between individuals.

It is the ACT Government's view that there is not yet a body of evidence capable of supporting an understanding of driver impairment following THC use, as is the case for alcohol. The current scientific consensus is that there is no means to consistently assess how specific amounts of THC impact any individual's driving ability. This applies regardless of whether the individual is consuming the drug in accordance with a prescription.

We acknowledge that cannabis is a legitimate medical treatment that improves the life of patients and will continue to closely monitor the scientific evidence as it evolves.

We also acknowledge the impact that zero tolerance policies have on individuals who rely on medicinal cannabis for their health and wellbeing and who may not be impaired when driving with THC detected in their system.

However, at this time the ACT Government's policy position is that presence-based drug driving offences remain the most sound means to achieve *Vision Zero*.

While I know this is not the outcome the petitioners were hoping for, I trust this information is useful.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

South Canberra Veterans Shed—petitions 52-25 and 28-26

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.04): I rise to speak about my petition for a permanent, fit-for-purpose facility for the South Canberra Veterans Shed. The Veterans Shed began in 2016, and it supports either currently serving or ex-serving men and women, as well as police, fire, ambulance and other emergency services personnel, and their families. But, in the shed's 10 years, it has relocated five times across the south side, trying to find a suitable and stable location, which is limiting their ability to retain members and attract new members. When I met with the shed last year, they were doing an absolutely incredible job of getting members together and creating a really nice warm community, but, because of that constant movement, they are struggling to keep people coming back. Where they are currently located in Gowrie, in a former Scouts hall, they are facing some issues with not being able to remove some of the Scouts' things from the walls. That is limiting their space and being able to expand to do the projects they want to do as a community.

The Veterans Shed is similar to a Men's Shed. They are connected to the Men's Shed organisation, but, because it is a Veterans Shed, it is open to men, women and their families. It is built on the recognition that it is part of the community that needs support and often finds support with like-minded people. It is a community of like-minded

people who have seen and been through some things that other people would not necessarily understand. I sat with them with Lauren, who used to be in my office. We sat down with Tina, who runs the shed, Jim and a couple of other members. It was the most wonderful environment to sit there with them, have a cuppa and talk about what the shed does. Then we got to have a tour and see some of the projects they are working on. We saw the area they have for the kids or the grandkids of members of the shed that come along. It filled my heart.

When they said, “We want to find somewhere that is a more permanent base,” I asked, “What can I do to help?” So we started this petition. Unfortunately, when we started the petition, they started collecting signatures that were out of order, so I would like to table 358 out-of-order signatures to go with the petition. While they did not get many signatures online, they got lots on paper by walking around and talking to the community, talking to their families and friends, and going to SouthFest last year. Everyone recognises that this is a part of our community that we need to support to find a stable, permanent home. Since we started this petition, they have had some really good discussions with what was Property Group to help them find where their suitable forever home might be. I hope this petition is the driver to help them. I commend the work that they are doing in supporting veterans, first responders and their families in our community. I commend the petition.

I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition along the same lines as the one just tabled.

Leave granted.

MS TOUGH: I table the following out-of-order petition:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—South Canberra Veterans Shed—Permanent facility—Ms Tough (358 signatures).

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.07): I briefly rise to add my support to Ms Tough’s petition for a permanent home for the South Canberra Veterans Shed. I start by thanking Ms Tough and the team at the Veterans Shed for the work that they have done to bring this to the Assembly and bring this to the Assembly’s attention.

The shed is currently located in Gowrie’s iconic Erindale Scout Group hall, which is on the location of the old Athllon Homestead, but it has been difficult for the team at the shed to keep providing a place where Defence veterans, first responders and their families can come together, because of the constant movement. When they find a spot where they can settle down, as it were, it will be a place where they can talk about things that only members of the shed can truly understand. It will be a safe spot, because Veterans Sheds are vital meeting points where people can reconnect, learn new skills, work on projects, have a laugh, and support each other while they are supporting the community. That is the really important point, because, by helping our community, members of Veterans Sheds are also helping themselves.

Veterans face a unique set of challenges, but being able to gather, work and laugh with people who have lived similar experiences, whether it is PTSD, trauma, health issues or the tricky transition back to civilian life, makes a world of difference. A permanent

home would give the South Canberra Veterans Shed the stability it needs to keep building an environment of empathy, support and shared purpose for current and former ADF and allied services personnel. I would love to see that happen. I again thank Ms Tough for bringing this petition forward. To everyone involved: well done.

South Canberra Veterans Shed—petitions 52-25 and 28-26
Active travel—Belconnen-Kippax-Ginninderry—petitions 66-25 and 82-25
SDN Bluebell—petitions 51-25 and 75-25

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.09): I thank the two Labor backbenchers for speaking in such an endorsing manner about the establishment of a South Canberra Veterans Shed. I thank them for actually bringing forward one of the Canberra Liberals' policies from the 2024 election. An article stated:

The Canberra Liberals will work with veterans' organisations and provide a facility for veterans groups to meet, which will include counselling meetings rooms and larger spaces for meetings, band practice and the like, along with a permanent home for the South Canberra Veterans shed with a workshop space.

In my opinion, I make a generous offer: please come and talk to me about the policies and promises of the Canberra Liberals. I am very happy to help you put that into one of your own petitions for the benefit of our community. It will make Canberra better, as you have clearly identified one need that the Canberra Liberals clearly identified leading up to the 2024 election. I thank the backbenchers of the Labor Party here for really getting on board with some wonderful ideas. If you need some other inspiration, please, you know my door is always open.

I want to speak briefly—

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MR CAIN: I am thankful for Mr Rattenbury's sudden endorsement. I am really thrilled at the moment here. But I want to speak briefly about a couple of other responses to petitions, including the minister's response regarding the path connecting Belconnen, Kippax and Ginninderry. Canberra is such a bike-friendly city. More power to that policy driver. I am not sure that the Minister for City and Government Services will enjoy my extra commitment in this area. I know she loves my posts about footpaths in West Belconnen. I know she loves them. It was actually nice to see something that I posted about just a few weeks ago being improved almost immediately. As I said in this place, does there really need to be a social media post to get an improvement in such basic infrastructure as a quality footpath, particularly one connecting suburbs to a school? But I am glad that there is an improvement in the footpath—a temporary improvement. This was reported to me by one of the community members. They saw the improvement that was promised—this is in Charnwood—but unfortunately the permanent repair will have to wait until December.

I mention that because I now have a stronger interest. I have always had an interest in the quality of our bike paths. I am sure the minister is looking and longing for my next post about an area of our bicycle pathways that really needs some attention. There will be some to find, unfortunately. I will be happy to keep the minister in the loop on my

discoveries, either through social media, briefings, questions or ministerials.

The government response I wish to speak to is with regard to the petition on the closure of SDN Bluebell. It is a petition I was very proud to sponsor last year. It is pleasing to see a positive result for that community. I thank the parents, the staff and those who support in principle not-for-profit childcare businesses and placement. I thank all who got behind the petition. We got 596 electronic signatures. It is pleasing to see a positive outcome. I thank the community for contributing to an improvement and an outcome that otherwise would not have happened.

Narrabundah baseball fields—safety—petition 12-26

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.14): I rise to take note of the petition which raises concerns about the condition of the playing fields at Narrabundah. This issue was first brought to my attention by John from the Weston Creek Indians Baseball Club. I thank John for his efforts in raising this issue, getting the petition going so quickly and getting traction on this. As the petition points out, there have been ongoing concerns from players, families, volunteers and supporters about the condition of those playing fields. Most concerning is that I have been told by a number of people who use these playing fields that they are concerned the government is deliberately keeping the lighting at inadequate levels. Obviously, it would be incredibly concerning if this government, having got itself into such a diabolical financial situation, is literally having to turn off the lights because it will be a cost-saving measure, but, of course, nothing would surprise us.

Baseball, as you may be aware, Mr Speaker, is where pretty hard balls can travel up to 150 kilometres an hour, so it becomes a safety issue if there is inadequate lighting and it puts at risk the safety of players, officials and spectators. Like I said, there is concern within the community about whether this is done deliberately. I ask that the minister reassures the community in her response to this that it is clearly not the case, because that would be a very, very serious matter. What makes this situation even more unacceptable is that these clubs are paying full fees for the use of the facilities and are not receiving the level of service that they are paying for. They are effectively paying for the use of facilities that are unsafe and not fit for purpose. I understand that, following the petition, the lighting situation improved—which, if it remains so, is a positive move—but it should not have taken a petition and local players, spectators and volunteers feeling that they had to lobby to just get adequate lighting at the playing fields.

Local communities, players, families, volunteers, supporters and spectators have been raising concerns for far too long about sporting fields generally in Canberra, as we know from many debates in this place. I am sure that many here have also received numerous concerns raised by their constituents directly. These fields are vital community spaces used by people of all ages and varying degrees of capability and they deserve to be maintained to appropriate safe playing standards. Again, I thank John from the Weston Creek Indians Baseball Club for raising this issue with me. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

Drugs—drug-driving—medicinal cannabis—petition 46-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.17): I would like to speak today to the ministerial response to the petition on drug-driving law reform for medical cannabis patients. I thank the minister for her response. As a former Minister for Road Safety, I absolutely share the government's commitment to road safety. However, the point of this petition is that the evidence has moved forward and there is a risk that, in maintaining the current position, the government maintains a double standard that the evidence no longer supports.

The Greens are also committed to ensuring the ACT government takes a harm-reduction approach to drug use. For this reason, we believe it is no longer tenable to continue to criminalise people for using their prescribed medication just because it is cannabis. The people who signed this petition are not asking for a special exemption; they are making a request for harmonisation, to bring medicinal cannabis in line with every other prescribed psychoactive drug. Opioids, benzodiazepines and antipsychotics are all regulated by an impairment standard. Medicinal cannabis patients are asking for the same treatment—nothing more, nothing different; just the same treatment.

In 2024, the Therapeutic Goods Administration authorised at least 979,000 medicinal cannabis prescriptions. Chronic pain, anxiety, PTSD, Parkinson's disease, ALS, multiple sclerosis, cancer and epilepsy are all represented in these prescriptions. Nearly 18 per cent of patients are aged 65 or over, so, when people cannot legally drive with cannabis present in their systems, we have veterans choosing between their medicine and their licence. Women with endometriosis are pushed towards opioids because a lawful cannabis prescription makes driving a criminal risk. A man with Parkinson's whose minor tremor is controlled by cannabis is considered a criminal if he drives, while his counterpart on opioids drives without restriction. These are patients, but the law treats them otherwise.

I would like to touch on four peer-reviewed Australian studies from two independent universities, none of which are referenced in the government's response to the petition. Arkell et al 2023 and Manning et al 2024 from Swinburne looked at 40 patients, did cognitive tests, used a driving simulator and found no impairment. THC was detectable at six hours and patients were safe on the simulator, but they would have failed a roadside test here in the ACT because of the presence requirement. Stefanidis et al in 2025 and Schiemer et al in 2025, from the University of the Sunshine Coast, studied 78 patients and found no significant changes in hazard perception, following distance or gap acceptance. We see two universities and four studies, and the same findings.

Driving simulators are the internationally accepted standard for this research and are considered a reliable surrogate for real-world performance. The Swinburne team has now moved further, with the CAN-TRACK trial—a world first on-track, real-world driving study of medicinal cannabis patients—which is currently underway. This underlines the fact that the science is continuing to progress.

Patients prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines are regulated by an impairment standard. They drive in consultation with their doctor. No metabolite of their prescription triggers a roadside offence. A 2021 peer review analysis in the *International Journal of Drug Policy* concluded that road safety risks from medicinal cannabis are similar to or lower than other impairing prescription medications, and that presence base enforcement is derived from cannabis's prohibition history, not from

evidence. The government's own reply concedes that a positive test does not necessarily indicate impairment and acknowledges the real harm that this causes. The policy is maintained none the less.

Leading Australian road safety researcher Dr Michael White has concluded there is no rational, scientific basis for this distinction, and it is a view from within the road safety establishment. The consequence is documented. Patients are substituting opioids and benzodiazepines to avoid positive tests. We have seen commentary from other jurisdictions. In March this year, Chris Minns described the current law as not fit for purpose and confirmed legislation is being drafted. Tasmania has put a model in place.

The Greens take an interest in the subject of this petition. We are concerned that the government is looking at this too narrowly. Regarding impairment testing, the framework already exists—clinical guidance and behavioural assessment—and the same approach is used for opioids today. We will be investigating this issue further to advocate for the veterans, the women with endometriosis and the man with Parkinson's—not for special treatment; just for the same legal treatment as every other patient using medical drugs.

Active travel—Belconnen-Kippax-Ginninderry—petitions 66-25 and 82-25

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.22): I want to speak briefly to the government response to the petition for a connection between Belconnen, Kippax and Ginninderry on the active travel network. It was really pleasing to get this response from the government. We have had a petition and a motion on the same subject. The government has actually done some really good work on mapping out where our active travel missing links are and what our network needs to be like so that people can have really good access to walking and riding around Canberra. A lot of Canberrans now want to see the next step and make sure that the network is built.

It is good to see that we are getting a feasibility study that will be undertaken along the Southern Cross route and that funding has been committed for delivery of two priority segments along the route to improve connectivity between Kippax and Belco Town Centre. It has been a pretty poor area. West Belconnen has not been well served by our public transport and our active travel connections. There are a lot of missing links and a lot of areas where it is quite difficult to ride to the rest of Canberra—other parts of town that people would like to be connected to. And it is the same for ready access to walk some of the distances that are walkable. Of course, the area lost the R2 and R3 connections and was pushed back onto the local network. It is really good to see that this is coming along.

I am glad to see that the feasibility study is going ahead. We have a commitment that it will be done in consultation with the parents and the children who use that path, along with a whole lot of other really well targeted community and stakeholder groups, like the Belconnen Community Council, Pedal Power, SEE-Change, Canberra by Bike, and Living Streets Canberra. It is really important that the consultation on the route picks up all of those groups, a lot of community members and users. People have a lot of opinions about where routes should go and what the best routes are. Every time I post anything on this topic, I get a lot of views. We understand that we will not always come up with the perfect solution that pleases everyone, but it is really good when

governments use their resources and it is really well targeted—that we are making really well-informed choices. It is good to see these next steps coming along, and we are looking forward to seeing further progress.

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

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.25): I rise to speak to Ms Berry's response to the ATAR language course petition. I thank the minister for her response. It is pleasing to see that the government is still committed to high-quality and inclusive education. However, merely stating that language offerings will now be a decision of schools does not really guarantee that there will be access to children who are willing to study ATAR languages in years 11 and 12. In fact, current evidence indicates that children in some areas who want to study ATAR languages in years 11 and 12 will not have the opportunity to do so.

The key question remains: what is the government doing to ensure that children who need to study ATAR languages in years 11 and 12 have the opportunity to do so? But we will not need to ask that question for much longer. I am glad to see that the social policy committee will be inquiring into this petition. The matter is not going away. We will ensure that children have access to study languages in years 11 and 12 if they choose to do so. Minister, this matter will keep going until there is a resolution.

Standing orders—suspension

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

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

Public schools—senior secondary language courses—petition 77-25 SDN Bluebell childcare centre—petitions 51-25 and 75-25

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.27): I rise to speak to two petitions today. The first I rise to speak to is the petition for the years 11 and 12 language courses, which was tabled in December. This petition, with over 500 signatures, shows very real community concern for the ACT government's decision to essentially not continue to deliver the program for years 11 and 12 ATAR language courses. It shows that the people we represent value learning languages and that they know that whether someone can access language courses should not be decided by their postcode.

In my personal capacity, as a member for Brindabella and as the ACT Greens' education spokesperson, I am very glad to see that this issue is going to an inquiry. I look forward to community voices being heard through this process. I would like to remind us all, when we inevitably talk about education across the day, that this petition is ultimately about equity in education. Every Canberran deserves the chance to continue their learning of language. If we take pride in educational outcomes in the territory, access to education must be a pivotal part of that. I thank the petitioners, the educators and the community advocates for their commitment, especially Frank Keighley, who has championed this cause with dedication.

I will not speak long on the petition to save SDN Bluebell, because, with full credit to the community, by the time we are debating the government response, the whole thing will have been sorted out. That is awesome. I am really pleased to hear that, after fears that the community would lose a highly regarded not-for-profit early learning centre, they found a home at Gold Creek. On a personal note, I am fiendishly jealous because they get to be close to the bird aviary and the Dinosaur Museum. I believe that, for children, this is considered a huge win. We have loved hearing about the three super-cute pups—soft toy puppy dogs—that live in the new centre and will bring photos, videos and stories to the children. We love that the children get to provide feedback to the pups through their floor books, because the Bluebell team is taking their idea seriously and bringing it into the new centre’s design.

None of this could have happened without an incredible community campaign run by parents and educators who care deeply about children’s education and were never going to let a good thing go. I acknowledge my colleagues across the chamber: Ms Clay, who co-sponsored a motion with me, and Ms Barry and Mr Cain who also stood up as Ginninderra members and sponsored this petition. I think we all in this chamber are looking forward to hearing how the community at SDN Bluebell enjoys their new digs. We wish them the best of luck.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Diploma of Remedial Massage—petition 73-25

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

Drugs—drug-driving—medicinal cannabis—petition 46-25

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.29): I rise to speak to several of the government responses to petitions that have been tabled this morning—first of all, the petition regarding the Diploma of Remedial Massage at CIT, a petition I had sponsored. I thank Minister Pettersson and CIT for committing to reinstate this program. This is very welcome. I thank Angus Collins, Brad Hiskins, Lisa LaMaitre and others for their advocacy in achieving this outcome. I very much look forward to the recommencement of this course and the reopening of a pipeline of highly competent remedial massage professionals in the ACT, courtesy of the great work that goes on at CIT.

I also want to speak to the petition sponsored by Ms Barry regarding ATAR language courses. I thank Jim Gilchrist, who I understand brought this petition forward, whose daughter is affected by these changes, and also Frank Keighley for his advocacy in this area. From 2017 to 2023, the Canberra Academy of Languages, founded by Mr Keighley, provided courses for years 11 to 12 students to learn ATAR accredited languages where they were not available through their own local schools. From 2024 to 2025, that program was delivered by the Centre for Modern Languages at CIT Solutions. The winding down of CIT Solutions announced in April of last year created ongoing uncertainty around the delivery of languages into this current year. While students who are already enrolled in this program are able to continue, no new enrolments have been accepted as of this year.

This has been discussed extensively in this place, including courtesy of a motion brought to the Assembly late last year by Ms Barry. In the minister’s response to this motion, she stated that one option for students wishing to continue to pursue languages was to put in an application for out-of-area enrolment consideration at a college that

offers the student's chosen language. But, in January of this year, we learnt through media reporting on FOI documents that the government has placed caps on out-of-area enrolments at certain schools. I am awaiting a response to a question on notice about how many out-of-area enrolment applications submitted for language studies have been rejected because of these caps, which would suggest that, in fact, this is not a viable pathway.

Importantly, the government response to this petition does not actually detail why the directorate is not taking over management of the centralised senior secondary language program offering, as multiple state governments across the country currently run their own programs of this kind. I very much welcome the committee's inquiry into this petition and look forward to receiving further evidence in that regard.

Another petition that I sponsored for which we have received a government response regards indoor sporting facilities for Canberra's north side. I want to thank Ben Phillips and Dick O'Rourke for their advocacy in relation to squash facilities in the ACT. They will be affected by the Tradies development and the impending closure of the Dickson Squash Club there. While the petition is broadly about indoor sporting facilities, it was brought forward by members of the Dickson Squash Club who are concerned about their future. The real concern, of course, is that none of the facilities listed in the government response are specifically for squash. Analysis from a 2015 indoor sports facilities study that was commissioned by the ACT government identified that, at that time, around six to eight new courts would be required by 2030, based on the then current rates of participation. But, instead, with the closure of the Dickson Squash Club, it looks like we will be going backwards. So I hope to see this specific issue more closely considered in the forthcoming work on community sport infrastructure planning and delivery across the ACT, including, I hope, the 10-year Community Support Infrastructure Plan, which is a source of frequent discussion in this place and I imagine will continue to be until we get that committed and delivered.

Finally, I want to speak to the government's response to the medicinal cannabis and licence suspension petition that I sponsored. Our current rules do not strictly prioritise road safety in this respect, criminalising all detectable presence of drugs, including cannabis rather than measuring levels of impairment. As Mr Rattenbury articulated—and I welcome his remarks—this is deeply problematic for patients who have been medically prescribed cannabis and it is inconsistent with the way that other prescribed drugs are regulated. Other prescription drugs are only criminalised while driving if drivers are deemed to be impaired. As we heard from Mr Rattenbury, New South Wales is developing legislation to allow medicinal cannabis patients to drive without automatically being considered to have committed an offence if THC is detected during roadside drug testing and, importantly, if the driver is not impaired. That is the key point here. We need to continue exploring how to do that. Tasmania has already enacted these reforms and there is a call in this petition not to automatically suspend licences where THC is detected. I would very much welcome the opportunity to work constructively with the Attorney-General and her office and Mr Rattenbury and his on this issue moving forward.

Fisher playground—upgrade—petition 32-25
Public schools—senior secondary language courses—petition 77-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.34): I rise to speak to the government's response to the petition on the upgrade of the Fisher playground and, briefly, to the ATAR language courses. The government's Play Space Strategy talks about equity, quality of play and prioritising district and central playgrounds so that communities have access to high-quality places to play. Yet across Weston Creek I continue to receive many representations from constituents about the poor state of local playgrounds. Fisher is just one example of a playground that is old and tired, despite being well used by local families.

I acknowledge the recent upgrade to the Waramanga playground, which is welcome, but the reality remains that Weston Creek has no district playground at all. Given the government's own emphasis on investing in larger destination play spaces, Weston Creek is clearly being left behind. I would like to see a centrally located district playground delivered in Weston Creek, ideally around Coleman Court, perhaps co-located near the skate park, to create a true community destination for families, young people and carers. Weston Creek deserves the same level of investment and opportunity as other parts of Canberra.

I would also like to speak briefly to the government's response to the ATAR language courses. Canberra aspires to be the jurisdiction of choice for languages education; yet, from 2026, the ACT government ended the centralised senior secondary language program that once made this aspiration real. Students will now rely on whether their individual college can offer an ATAR language, reducing access, choice and equity. In a multicultural city and a national capital, this is a step backwards for students who deserve consistent, high-quality language pathways.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Reference

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

That petitions relating to South Canberra Veterans Shed facility be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

Education—public schools 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) (10.37): Today I rise to talk to the ACT government's continued commitment to investment in our education system. This government is proud of our significant investments in public education. The ACT continues to be the only jurisdiction that funds our public schools above the School Resourcing Standard, which is something we have done for many years. As outlined in the 2025-26 ACT budget, education spending accounts for 22 per cent of all ACT government spending, second only to health, with more than \$1.9 billion of investment in just one financial year, with more than \$1.2 billion of that into the public education system specifically. We have

made significant investments in improving education in Canberra in the last several years, some of those I want to touch on today.

As our city grows, we have been building new schools as well as modernising others. Building new public schools and staffing them is a significant but vital expense. Since the start of 2016, we have opened Charles Weston School, Margaret Hendry School, Evelyn Scott School, Throsby School, Shirley Smith High School, Aunty Agnes Shea High School and Strathnairn School, with the new school in Whitlam under construction now to be opened next year. Each of these schools serves their local and growing communities and required significant financial commitment to bring to life. These are necessary spends. These new schools are an investment in the future of our city.

Many of our other programs are also an investment in our future. For example, we have introduced up to 300 hours a year of free preschool for three-year-olds across Canberra—an achievement of which I and this government are particularly proud. Decades of evidence tells us that the early years are the most critical period of development in a person's life. When we invest in a child's earliest years, we are not only supporting that child but also strengthening families, communities and the future of our city. We have worked with more than 140 early childhood education and care services across Canberra to deliver this, and now we are entering our third full year of this program. There is more capacity to build in the early childhood sector, but we still intend to expand this program to 600 hours a year of free preschool for three-year-olds in the future.

We invest heavily in equity measures as part of our investment in public education, because you cannot have excellence without equity. Members in this place will be well aware of our Chromebooks program, which provides laptop devices to all public secondary students, ensuring all students have access to the technology they need. Our Future of Education Equity Fund supports families who need it with the costs associated with schooling like uniforms, excursions, sporting equipment and music lessons. Just recently the 2026 round of the equity fund provided \$2.5 million in support directly to Canberra families. The ACT government has also invested in a 10-year inclusive education strategy for ACT public schools. A key focus area of this strategy is to invest in the capability of staff in our public schools. We are committed to and focused on making our schools more inclusive. This may cost money, but it is vitally important work. The ACT government is also implementing all eight recommendations from the Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel's final report. In response to the education expert panel report, the ACT 2025-26 budget funded the delivery of the Strong Foundations program, which included funding for professional development as well as resources like decodable readers.

These significant investments are all crucial in the delivery of high-quality and equitable education systems. But also crucial is ensuring that we have enough teachers and that they are well paid for their important work. Put simply, schools cannot operate without teachers, and I think we need to acknowledge a couple of truths about this. There are some unique factors worth taking into account regarding education investment in Canberra. One of those is our commitment to closing the equity gap with measures like those I outlined earlier. The government is investing in providing extra supports to students that most need it. I am absolutely committed to that. Another

important factor in the cost of our education system is our labour costs. We value our teachers, which is why they are among the highest and best paid teachers in the country. However, it is also true that we also have to compete with other high-wage employers in this city for great public servants, which includes the federal government. This is a cost associated with running an education system in Canberra that does not exist on the same scale in other parts of Australia.

We know these investments are paying off. The ACT performs well in NAPLAN every year. In 2025, ACT students were at or near the top in every domain across every year level. But a careful reminder is that NAPLAN is one point-in-time measure—useful but is not the only outcome that matters. There are other outcomes that also need to be considered. The most recently published Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA, data from 2022 showed very strong results for the ACT. In reading and literacy, students in the ACT performed at a higher level than students in any other jurisdiction. The ACT mean score would have ranked us second behind only Singapore internationally. Strong results were also registered for maths and science literacy. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS, is conducted every four years. In 2023, the ACT’s results were higher than or equal to other Australian jurisdictions in mathematics and science for both year 4 and year 8 in TIMSS 2023. In both maths and science, in both year levels, more than 70 per cent of ACT students achieved at or above the “intermediate benchmark”, which is the National Proficient Standard for Australia.

But what about finishing school? Last year, nearly 91 per cent of ACT students finished year 12—higher than the national average of 81.3 per cent. This is a significant outcome for the ACT school system. We know that finishing year 12 sets young people up well for life after school. The 2024 Post-school Destinations Survey showed that 93 per cent of 2023 year 12 graduates were employed or studying—another great result.

The point of all this is that our system does great things, both academically but also when it comes to preparing our students for life after school. The ACT public school system is a force for good in this city. That is not to say we cannot improve. We can always improve. There is always work that needs to be done when it comes to the equitable funding of our schools, which is why we commissioned the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review last year. This review is examining how ACT public schools are funded, including equitable resourcing across the system, to make sure all students are well supported. The outcomes of this review and the government’s response will be tabled in this place by May 2026.

This government will continue to invest in our public school system, and I look forward to working with our community and stakeholders as well as updating the Assembly on this important work.

I present the following paper:

Education Performance—Ministerial statement, 17 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.45): I rise to take note of the minister's statement in relation to education performance. I found the statement interesting, not in terms of what it says but what it does not say. The minister talks about how this government values its teachers but what the minister does not talk about are the ongoing issues around teacher workload, wellbeing and occupational safety.

I have met a number of times with Angela Burroughs, the President of the Australian Education Union in the ACT. Those in this place who have had the chance to work with Angela knows that she is a very passionate advocate for our hard-working teachers and staff. You yourself, Mr Speaker, would have met with Angela a number of times. The AEU have been raising with us their concerns about teacher wellbeing and increased workload and their serious concerns in relation to school infrastructure. This has also been backed up by the AEU's latest survey of their members working in ACT government schools.

Let's have a look at some of the key findings from this survey: "Too much time is spent on low-value work; we want to prioritise teaching and learning activities but spend excessive time on administration and compliance"; "Most teachers and school leaders, 80 per cent, cannot complete their work during work hours;" and "Managing complex student needs without support affects both staff wellbeing and student outcomes." Ninety-two per cent say that schools lack adequate resources implement strategic initiatives. "Top priorities for our teachers include more access to specialists"—82 per cent; "alternative programs"—82 per cent; and "adequate staffing"—77 per cent. Only 51 per cent reported well-maintained schools and 29 per cent adequate heating and cooling. These are pretty damning findings.

The minister also, once again, did not address the rising rates of occupational violence in ACT government schools—an issue about which her own annual report says, "Occupational violence remains the most significant work health and safety risk across the Education Directorate." I find it very telling that, in the minister's statement, she did not mention the state of school infrastructure in the ACT—the fact that we have schools that do not have basics like adequate heating, cooling and toilets. The minister promises equitable resourcing, but that access to support facilities and basic infrastructure varies dramatically between schools. Equity must not depend on which priority enrolment area you happen to live in or how loudly a principal advocates.

I note that the minister spoke specifically about the Strong Foundations reforms—reforms that she was forced to implement following the push from the Canberra Liberals—but there has been little accountability. We have heard concerns from parents, from staff, from teachers and from the broader school community about the implementation of the Strong Foundations program—concerns about whether it is adequately funded, whether it is ready on a system-wide basis, whether there is consistency and whether there is confidence that the reforms are working and delivering better outcomes for our students. Earlier this year, the minister said that she would be tabling the annual review of the implementation of Strong Foundations, but we are yet to see it—just as we are yet to see the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review. I cannot help but wonder and question whether these key reports will surface before the middle of this year.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.49): I thank the minister for her statement on schools and early childhood education centres in the ACT and commend the acknowledgement that there is a lot of work to be done before our education system is up to scratch. There are a few points that I would like to speak to—which Ms Lee in fact put quite eloquently already—in the hope of providing a fuller picture as we reflect on the current state of our education system.

When we talk about educational outcomes in the ACT, I think it is important that we are careful with the data we reference here and how we use it. Sure, while the ACT's standard performance is positive that our high performers are doing well, using those as a representation of our NAPLAN scores does not tell us anything about the variation within the territory nor the large proportion of students who are not meeting NAPLAN minimum benchmarks and whose needs currently are not necessarily being met in school, despite the best efforts of educators. Moreover, we know that NAPLAN is a narrow measurement of educational outcomes in that it does not capture what actually happens in the day-to-day of a classroom. I believe it was originally designed as a way of understanding which schools needed more funding, not as a comprehensive diagnostic tool for students' learning journeys. We want to tell the full story, and I think if we want to improve the system we need to tell the story that includes the children who are at risk of being left behind by the system. The minister spoke about equity. Earlier in the day I referenced how access for students to continue language courses is a key part of this. We must ensure that our educational outcomes are for all students, not just the portion that shows up on paper through standardised testing.

In terms of the public school resource review, it is a crucial step. It is one that the AEU has been calling for for a long time. I also note that we do not have the results of the school infrastructure audit. We are hearing from the community and from teachers that they do not know when their classrooms will be brought up to a proper standard. One of the most common stories I hear from parents and educators when I am on the ground in Tuggeranong, an area with a lot of old, aging infrastructure, is that their classrooms and other school facilities are not up to scratch. They put that pretty mildly. Young people are boiling in summer, they are freezing in winter and sometimes their bathrooms are completely unapproachable. The teachers struggle to keep classes going during a heatwave. Interim solutions—while they are well-intentioned and they take the edge off—like HVAC machines were noisy enough that students sometimes really struggled to hear what their teachers and peers were saying and were also a little bit of a sensory nightmare. I ask the chamber: is it really fair that we ask young people and their educators to spend all day in these conditions?

We have also heard that classes are already being split, collapsed and cancelled this year. I am eager to see the numbers on that when the minister comes back to us. I believe she took that question on notice in the last sitting. When we asked about this in question time, we received a response about COVID's long tail and teachers staying home. Yes, absolutely, but the reality is that kids still need to learn and go to school every day. I think what we are actually hearing from teachers in practise is that many are not adequately supported.

Lastly, in response to the minister's account of Strong Foundations, I want to reiterate that, while investing in programs that promote inclusion is critical, these reforms will only work if the system is actually resourced to implement them. Teachers cannot

deliver targeted intervention, explicit instruction or small group support if they are also simultaneously covering the class next door because someone is sick and because there is no relief teacher available. I would also like to echo calls from parents I have spoken to that we need more clarity for students with a disability about how they will practically receive support, both through Strong Foundations and through the sort of disability funding model in schools, and whether any of that will be integrated at all with the Thriving Kids initiative. I know there is a lot of uncertainty around this space and I think the opportunity, and the need, right now is for different parts of government to be working together on that. As it boils down to, these families and students deserve clarity.

So, ultimately, it is positive to hear the minister agree that we have a way to go before we are meeting the needs of all students, teachers and families in the ACT. We have the responsibility to ensure that when we reform our education system we are looking at the whole picture which captures all students.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Public Service Closing the Gap measures Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.54): I rise today to speak about the important work underway to build a culturally safe ACT public service. In doing so, I acknowledge the truth-telling that is occurring both internally and externally in relation to cultural safety experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as public servants and community members. It is extremely important to deeply listen to these stories and reflect on what we can do better to improve cultural safety and the cultural capability of the service. This is not new work for the ACT public service but it is a defining moment. We are moving from commitment to accountability; from acknowledging the problem to delivering sustained, system-level action.

Nationally, we know that the community experience of racism is real. While it might make us uncomfortable to face this reality, it is vital that our staff are able to come forward to share their experiences, to help improve the system so that the lived experience of institutional racism is eliminated. Let me be clear: this work is ongoing, and true cultural safety and healing can only occur when this work is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That principle underpins every stage of our implementation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants and community members are valued for their knowledge, skills, capabilities and community experience. But relying on them to be a sounding board for all First Nations matters can create additional pressure and cultural load that is not always clear to their colleagues. This is why cultural load has been embedded as a psychosocial hazard in the ACT Public Sector Work Health and Safety Framework—to explicitly ensure this risk is considered.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have clearly had poor experiences and felt dismissed. That is not okay. We know this not only from individuals but also because the most recent ACTPS staff surveys included two new questions aligned with

cultural safety outcomes. What this survey shows, and what I also hear directly from staff, is that there are other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the ACTPS who do feel culturally safe and work alongside phenomenal allies who turn up and continue to take action to support improved cultural safety. It is important to recognise this so we can learn from those areas that are demonstrating success.

I know there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants who do challenging work to support their own communities and Canberrans more broadly. My message to them is that we know we cannot close the gap without you, and we want to ensure you can do this work in a safe environment. To support this, yarning circles have been regularly held for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across the service to support cultural connection and healing, and the Cultural Transformation Group in CMTEDD has been delivering cultural safety workshops for allies, including for directors-general and deputy D-Gs.

Importantly, the ACT Public Service is prioritising co-design of critical initiatives with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to support the implementation of the Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Act 2025 across the ACT public service. I encourage all public servants and, indeed, members of this place to lean into activities that further develop their understanding and practical application of cultural capability, cultural safety, addressing institutional racism and understanding how their role aligns to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Cultural Transformation Group is leading the implementation of whole-of-service transformation and systemic reform, while directorates are stepping up and taking the lead in a variety of training, tools and resources being developed with cultural advisers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Consultation is central to this approach, and the Cultural Transformation Group is committed to ongoing engagement with staff, stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. Feedback mechanisms, listening sessions and collaborative forums will guide implementation, ensuring diverse voices shape the journey to healing and cultural safety.

Senior executives will now have performance obligations and reporting requirements to ensure cultural capability uplift is delivered with integrity and transparency, driving leadership action and fostering genuine accountability. By July 2026, all SES in the ACT public service, including those in mainstream roles, will be expected to understand and articulate their role in cultural capability. Critical activities before 1 July include the establishment of cultural capability performance standards for the senior executive service, cultural safety mandatory learning programs and the launch of the BRAVE Program for senior executive leadership. The BRAVE Program—standing for Bias, Racism, Allyship, Validate and Empower—will strengthen leadership, embed cultural safety and support the ACTPS to deliver culturally responsive services. Senior executives are expected to demonstrate visible and sustained commitment, with ongoing evaluation to ensure impact. Success measures for cultural capability uplift are being co-designed, ensuring transparency, integrity and community confidence in how progress is assessed.

I acknowledge the potential sensitivities and perceptions associated with progress and implementation. Risks include resistance, misunderstanding and the need for shared

responsibility across all levels. Leaders will mitigate these risks through clear communication, inclusive leadership and proactive engagement. It is also vital that senior ACT public servants remain sensitive to the stories and experiences shared both publicly and within our service. We must all deeply listen to these lived realities, honouring the courage and honesty of those who speak. However, listening alone is not enough. We must make meaningful shifts in our thinking and our decision-making so that the ACT public service and, indeed, the Canberra community become a more culturally safe environment for everyone.

The Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Act 2025 requires a new set of accountabilities. Our commitment is to deliver meaningful outcomes, foster genuine partnership and build a culturally capable public service grounded in partnership, integrity and outcomes that endure for generations. By listening deeply and acting decisively, our public sector leaders are reshaping the ACT public service into one that is culturally capable, accountable and worthy of trust, closing the gap and fulfilling our responsibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today and into the future.

In closing, I want to particularly thank the members of the Cultural Transformation Group, who have worked and continue to work so hard, with the support of allies across the service, to deliver these outcomes.

I present the following paper:

Implementation of the Public Service Closing the Gap Measures—Ministerial statement, 17 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.01): I want to briefly thank the minister for today's update, including in relation to implementing the provisions of the closing the gap bill I brought to the Assembly last year—and I again thank members for supporting the passage of the legislation.

Like the minister, I also would like to thank the many hardworking public servants who are doing this important work, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff tasked with leading this whole-of-government transformation and driving cultural change across the public service. In doing so, I am keen to acknowledge the unique pressures that they are likely to face and field from both sides, from government in delivering on ambitious commitments that have been made through multiple agreements and reviews of those agreements and other reports and the recommendations coming out of those reports, but then also from community asking, "Where is the government is up to in improving our life outcomes?" and "Where is the government falling down and delivering on these commitments?" This is a unique pressure that it can be hard for us to comprehend, but it is something I have heard a lot about—that that is very real and creates additional load for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. So I acknowledge that and hope that this transformation signalled in the minister's update today lessens some of that load and instead distributes the load more

broadly across the entirety of the public service, particularly at the senior executive level.

It is encouraging to hear that shared decision-making with the Elected Body is being prioritised. I received an update, which I appreciate, from the minister's office regarding the development of annual reports directions—that that is being done in a genuine codesigned way, which I think is really fantastic. I also note the swift joint response from the Head of Service and the Elected Body to complaints from the former head of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs which were made public recently. I think that is really encouraging. It is the kind of shared decision-making and joint position development and announcement that the First Nations community has been really calling for. So I welcome more of that.

On that, of course, I note the recent public attention on this issue which has created significant concern across the local First Nations community and also note the need to ensure not just that adequate and timely responses to issues being raised are being made and are being implemented but also that these responses are effectively communicated back to community in the interest of restoring trust and moving forward together. To restore that trust and reaffirm a real clear commitment to accountability, transparency and genuine shared decision-making, that ongoing communication is necessary and is required, and in that context I welcome the minister's update this morning.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Light rail stage 2A—update

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.04): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on the extension of light rail from the city to Commonwealth Park.

As Canberra grows towards a projected population of 780,000 by 2060—the largest transformation of our city centre in the territory's history is underway, with major infrastructure projects being delivered by the ACT government, the National Capital Authority and private business to shape a more connected, sustainable and liveable city.

The extension of our existing light rail network through to Commonwealth Park is a keystone project in the centre's transformation. Light rail stage 2A will strengthen connectivity to workplaces, health services, education and recreational activities from Gungahlin and North Canberra into City West, the ANU, New Acton, Commonwealth Park and Lake Burley Griffin. Enhanced public transport access and supporting active travel infrastructure, including new cycling and walking facilities, will bring the city centre to the lake and create a more vibrant urban precinct by unlocking opportunities for new mixed-used development and public spaces in under-utilised parts of City West.

I am pleased to advise the Assembly that construction progress continues to track strongly, with actual delivery trending ahead of several baseline targets in the construction program. This year's January construction blitz provided significant momentum, with nearly 400 workers working around the clock between 4 January to

the early hours on 2 February to complete substantial works along Northbourne Avenue between Vernon Circle and Cooyong Street, including at the Alinga Street intersection and light rail stop.

I would like to thank the community for their patience during this busy period, which although disruptive in the short term, avoids up to 30 separate weekend closures. The January construction blitz is an example of how Infrastructure Canberra is continuing to work closely with our delivery partner, CMET, to minimise construction impacts, including sequencing construction staging to keep disruption as low as reasonably possible and to realise efficiencies in the program where feasible. This has included prioritising the completion of light rail works in the vicinity of Bailey's Corner loading zone, which was reopened before Christmas and allowed the temporary loading zone in the Theatre Lane car park to be converted back to additional, accessible parking spaces.

As another example, approval was granted for a modification to the construction schedule to accelerate construction of the public realm precinct in front of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings to be finalised around the middle of this year. This means access to private land in these areas is now required for shorter periods of time and will allow construction fencing to be moved from the colonnades of both buildings to the outside, opening up a wider public realm than previously enabled as soon as paving works are complete. These accelerated works will also enable the partial reopening of London Circuit east to general traffic, now expected from quarter three this year, ten months earlier than originally scheduled.

Mr Assistant Speaker, with utility upgrade works almost complete, over the coming months Canberrans will start to see more above-ground work occurring with crews turning their attention to further trackwork across London Circuit west and Commonwealth Avenue. Major structural elements on the new 775 tonne Parkes Way Bridge are now complete and ready for the installation of the new light rail tracks and Canberrans may have also noticed the new light rail stops at Edinburgh Avenue, City South and Commonwealth Park coming to life.

Construction of all stops and rail alignment, including new landscaping and street amenities, are expected to be substantially complete later this year, which will allow initial systems and commissioning to commence this year also, and major construction on on-site activities are on track for completion by early 2027. We will then see impacts ease as sections of the corridor progressively reopen during testing and commissioning activities throughout 2027.

Unlike light rail stage 1 which runs down the median of the road corridor, light rail stage 2A introduces on-street running, alongside Canberra's first protected intersections to improve safety and predictability for people walking and cycling through the area once operations commence. The introduction of these new elements will require comprehensive testing and a considered approach as to how they are integrated into our transport network, including our existing light rail services and general road and pedestrian traffic, so that Canberrans can expect a staged reopening of road and verges throughout the year ahead of new light rail services to Commonwealth Park commencing in 2028.

Light rail will transform our CBD as a vibrant and well-connected place to do business and the ACT government remains committed to listening to and supporting local businesses, particularly hospitality businesses, throughout this transformation period. The government is working closely with businesses to attract customers during construction and ensure the area remains as active, attractive, safe and easy to navigate for the community as possible. This includes identifying new ways to minimise disruption and encourage the Canberra community to get out and enjoy our city.

In May 2025, we announced the expansion of the Business Partnership Plan through a targeted business support package to assist local business impacted by construction works for the light rail project in and around London Circuit, with additional initiatives introduced since this announcement. To ease cost pressures, outdoor dining permit fees were waived for businesses directly impacted by construction activities and significant liquor licence fee reductions were expanded to included eligible ACT hospitality businesses up to a 350-person capacity.

Infrastructure Canberra and the City Renewal Authority also launched a trial of business activation grants in September 2025 to support businesses affected by light rail construction which was extended in March 2026 to provide a further \$50,000 in grants which is planned for release by the end of this financial year.

These grants have been used to deliver 22 business-led events, providing a mix of activities and experiences such as the retro Halloween party held by 88mph, a dog-friendly “Puppers of Cuppers” day out at The Cupping Room and the launch of local artist Micah Heathwood’s EP with a live jazz event at Bar Rochford. Further to this, Infrastructure Canberra and the CRA partnered with the National Multicultural Festival to provide micro-grants enabling city centre businesses to deliver multicultural-themed activations, with 14 grants provided for the February NMF. Additional activation grant initiatives are currently under consideration for the upcoming Wonderful World Festival in April and the Winter in the City event in July.

Complementing measures to ease cost pressures for businesses are those aimed at attracting Canberrans to visit and support these businesses during the construction period by ensuring the area remains active, attractive, safe and easy to navigate. These have included delivering place making improvements, including additional lighting and enhanced screening to soften the appearance of construction fencing, with further improvements to the temporary fencing to align with the Open for Business campaign and area beautification that is in train, and introducing free parking from Wednesday to Sunday evenings from 5:30 pm at nearby public car parks, alongside the free public transport trial that operated over the 2025-26 summer period, including fare free evenings to encourage people to travel into the city. A trial is also underway for new dedicated rideshare pick-up and drop off zones in the city.

We have also provided wayfinding maps and information to businesses to share with their staff and clients and encouraged local cafes and suppliers to provide takeaway menus and business cards to be placed at construction sites, offices and project offices, to encourage the hundreds of people who working on these projects to use the local businesses.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the city is open for business, and the ACT government will

continue to engage closely with city businesses to ensure they are up to date with the latest construction information to help them prepare for potential impacts. I met with some of the local businesses in the city last week to check in on how they are managing through this period of disruption and to consider their ideas. The City Construction Information Group continues to meet regularly—with the next meeting scheduled for Monday next week—as the key forum for businesses to share their feedback on the impacts of construction and identify potential measures and initiatives to minimise these impacts, which will continue to be considered by the ACT government as they are raised.

I present the following paper:

Light Rail Stage 2A Update—Ministerial statement, 17 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.14): I love it when the transport minister stands in this chamber and announces that the city is open for business. I love it when someone who has never ever run a business gives advice to people who have been in business all their lives on how they can actually make it work. I love it that the minister stated that he has met with some local businesses this week to check in on how they are managing through this period of disruption and consider their ideas. I am kind of surprised that the minister did not share some of that feedback from business this morning. But then again, I am kind of not surprised, Mr Assistant Speaker, because I am sure that much of the feedback would have been laced with words that you may have considered unparliamentary.

I love it that the government has gone with the free parking Wednesday to Sunday nights in the war zone, with an additional prize to motorists if indeed they can find a car park. And seriously, we are providing wayfinding maps to businesses, so that customers can somehow navigate their way through this mess to get to the struggling business. I want to know what responses came from businesses to the suggestion that maybe they should provide business cards or take away menus at construction sites. How did those business owners respond to that advice on how to suck eggs?

You would have read the *Canberra Times* reports about the struggles being faced by Bar Rochford. They pointed out that the Chief Minister used the bar as a backdrop during the 2024 election campaign when he was announcing a policy position. So he was there, larger than life, in the lead-up to October 2024. Has he ventured—? No, he has not. No, he has not gone back. He has not been back since then. It must be said that Bar Rochford is doing a hell of a lot better than the ACT government in that the bar owner, Nick Smith, pointed out to the *Canberra Times* that he has only broken even once in the past eight weeks. Balancing the budget one week out of eight is a much better record than both Mr Steel and Mr Barr as Treasurers. But unlike the ACT government, Bar Rochford cannot keep on running budget deficits because that is not how it works in the real world.

Mr Smith has not conceded defeat just yet. He is hanging on it there and he is hanging

on it there with genuine optimism because he has got a wonderful venue and he has pumped so much of his life into it and he wants it to succeed, and so do we all. He said in the *Canberra Times*:

The way the city appears, and also the functionality of the city, makes people not want to come here.

Mr Assistant Speaker, it is difficult to argue with him.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.17): I welcome this update from the minister this morning regarding construction of light rail stage 2A. I did want to acknowledge and support the construction blitz that occurred over the summer—a fantastic approach to accelerate the timeline. I am very much looking forward to the completion of this project, as I think many Canberrans are, and it is exciting to see tracks being laid and changes being made along the way.

I also welcome the minister's remarks regarding the level of support being provided to local businesses impacted by these works. It is clear, though, based on the feedback that I have received from those affected businesses, that the level of support is not sufficient. I have repeatedly called for means-tested rates and rent relief to ensure businesses affected by these construction works in the city survive to the other side to enjoy the benefits of them, but you do not need to take my word for it. Here are words from Bar Rochford in a social media post from last week:

Whilst we support the changing face of Canberra & its progression into a more vibrant place, the Government hasn't considered the local businesses in its changes.

In the last 8 weeks, Bar Rochford has broken even only once. So how sustainable is running a business on London Cct at present and into 2027, 2028, 2029?

The Canberra Light Rail 2A Project will cease construction at the end of 2027 & the ACT Government has conveniently also sold & de-commissioned both large carparks adjacent to the Sydney & Melbourne buildings (at the same time as the Light Rail works). Both of these additional projects will be completed at the end of 2028 and 2030. As a city venue, we are feeling completely cut off from society.

Since January 2025 we have received a \$5000 Music Grant, \$4000 off our annual Liquor Licence and 15 Free Parking Tickets to pass onto our customers from the ACT Government. Nothing else.

Anyone who has run a Hospitality Business in Australia over the last few years would know that right now is one of the hardest periods our industry has faced. So how can a 3 Yr. Multi-Million Dollar Government project not even consider 0.5% of the Light Rail Budget to support the small businesses already affected on this strip?

Businesses should expect to have to deal with Government projects & upgrades. 6-12 Months is OK, but 36 Months is a death sentence for small business.

Restaurants, bars and music venues are essential to a cities culture. It takes years to build & foster that culture and identity & the ACT Government doesn't seem to care.

At the end of the day, our priority is to simply be the business we have always been, keep paying our staff on time, keep paying their super on time and continue contributing to Canberra's vibrant Hospitality scene.

And in further public remarks, Nick Smith, the owner of Bar Rochford, said:

That's what disappoints me - the government hasn't really looked at what happened in Sydney, looked at what happened in other places like Adelaide and Melbourne, and didn't think ahead and say 'well, if we want to be a progressive city, let's think about the businesses that are around'. I don't think it would cost that much to help businesses out, to be honest. I think it was just a too-hard-basket situation.

I feel like I would have liked to have seen more from ACT Labor.

Bar Rochford is coming up on their tenth anniversary and is one of the most reputable hospitality businesses in the ACT. This is not a business that was struggling before these works commenced and is asking for handouts, but instead is a business calling for tangible, meaningful supports that will allow them to get to the other side. So the ask is for Canberrans to continue coming into the city and supporting venues like Bar Rochford, but also for the government to step up and deliver sufficient support to meet the shortfalls that have been created by this project.

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) (11.21): I thank Minister Steel for the update this morning, and I acknowledge the other comments in the chamber. Mr Assistant Speaker, I start by acknowledging the significant disruption that has occurred, and continues to occur, in the city as a result of the light rail stage 2A works. We well recognise the impact this has had. We work here, after all. We visit here, we drive through here, we take public transport here. We are impacted by this.

But of course, it is our venues who are the most readily impacted by this.

I think I would caution the talking down of our city. I think that is the kind of rhetoric that feeds the community's fear or concern or hesitation to come to the city, if we say it is so bad you cannot get around. We are all here.

It is an issue to learn to navigate. Things do change. But as much information is provided as possible online. We do make it as clear as possible that it may feel different and it may look different. Indeed, it will feel different and it will look different. The way to get there might be different, but our venues are open.

I do not think, as Mr Parton seemed to characterise it, that is giving venues advice; by telling them that they are open. They are open and we want people to know that they are open. We want people to visit them. That, actually, is the best thing that people can do.

I think, as Nick from Bar Rochford has pointed out—and for the record, I have been there recently, and before that article came out. I was there in January for my husband's

50th birthday and I certainly can see by my bank balance that we had a very good time there. So, Mr Assistant Speaker, Bar Rochford is a favourite of ours. It is often where we go for anniversary or celebratory events, and we did speak to Nick at that time.

And so those comments—and any time we have been there beforehand, they have not been forgotten and in fact, they have been front of mind—I certainly took to heart those comments that appeared in the *Canberra Times* yesterday, as well. I have reached out to Nick to have another catch-up with him, hopefully this week. But Bar Rochford absolutely is integral to our city, to our community's fabric, and long may it continue. And we congratulate it on 10 years in its venue, where it has always been and where we hope it will be for many, many years to come.

I do acknowledge that we really did test the community's patience in January. That was the logical and obvious time of the year for us to do a major, major disruption. It became very busy in January nevertheless, when there were significant closures between Vernon Circle and Barry Drive.

That intense month of activity, however, has avoided up to 30 separate weekend closures. And I would just like to ask people to stop and think about that for a minute, what that would have looked like; what 30 separate weekend closures would have looked like.

We actually got a taste of it at the end of last year when we had several weekends in a row of those weekend closures. It was very disruptive to the ability to way-find and to move around the city; things change, then they change back, then they change and then they change back. That was a really difficult time. Imagine doing that 30 times. That is what we have avoided. I am not saying that everything is perfect and sunshine and lollipops by any means, but it could have been much worse and we have made some hard decisions—and some other decisions that have caused distractions—to avoid something that really would have had a huge impact on our venues in the city, especially those who rely on that weekend trade.

I think perhaps one of the most pleasing things from Minister Steel's statement is that actual delivery of light rail stage 2A is trending ahead of several baseline targets in the program. That is very welcome news, and it is incredibly pleasing to hear, I think, for anybody who lives or works in the city and also for anyone who owns a venue in the city, that delivery is trending ahead. We hope that continues and I certainly congratulate all involved for doing as much as they can to ensure that this thorough, very significant project is delivered, still, as quickly as possible, recognising the impact on our venues.

Again, it is not like the city is closed. There are 5,000 car parks in the city. The city is serviced by seven rapid buses and light rail, connecting Gungahlin, the airport, Kingston, Fyshwick, Woden, Tuggeranong, Lanyon, Erindale, Wanniasa, Weston Creek, Cooleman Court, Duffy, Canberra Hospital, Narrabundah, Griffith, ANU, UC and Belconnen.

But, of course, there have been changes. And so, in recognition of that, to help address current access issues as a result of some of the ongoing construction activity, we have created new dedicated rideshare zones. There are six new dedicated rideshare pick-up and drop-off zones available in the city now. These are dedicated zones to help

rideshare drivers drop off and pick up passengers safely from more easily accessible parts of the city centre late at night. These are opposite or close to existing taxi zones, providing people with convenient choice between rideshare or taxi services, depending on availability and when they are ready to leave the city and head home. They are located along Northbourne Avenue, platform six of the City interchange after the bus service has ended for the night. There is one just outside here. You may have seen the sign just near the bus stop outside our Assembly on London Circuit. There are three others as well.

In terms of our venues: venues continue to have access to free authorisations for extended trading hours and for changes to the floor plan of their premises. The head of Access Canberra has declared several special events this year, meaning that licensees supplying liquor at their licensed premises can automatically trade until 2 am on these days. That includes this Friday and Saturday night, where licensed venues anywhere in Canberra can trade until 2 am in recognition of the Canberra Comedy Festival. And next month, licensed premises can stay open until 2 am at no extra cost on all four days of the National Folk Festival. The same goes for the Saturday and Sunday of the Canberra Marathon Festival and for the opening and closing ceremonies of the FIFA World Cup.

Venues with up to 350-person capacity can apply for liquor licence fee reductions of either 50 or 80 per cent depending on their size, and so long as they can demonstrate hosting 10 events which showcase arts and culture across a 12-month period. Around 60 per cent of the venues accessing these discounts are located in the city. CRA also has a new website in which it invites businesses in the city to be featured. And over \$100,000 has been offered to venues impacted by light rail construction for activations ranging from creative marketing to cultural experiences.

Notwithstanding these offerings, Mr Assistant Speaker, we appreciate that the pressures in the city do remain, and we continue to reach out to—and to invite feedback from—venues and advocacy organisations. In recognition of MusicACT's recent advocacy to myself and to Minister Pettersson, I am pleased to advise that the ACT government will be providing MusicACT with a one-off donation of \$20,000 to assist it to further enable and promote live music in the city.

This is another practical measure which helps remind the community that the city is open—these venues are open—and that the best way to support them is to visit them and to enjoy reminding yourself, and reminding those around you, why these venues are so integral to the fabric of our city. The best way to do that is by being in them.

I commend Minister Steel's update to the chamber.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Lakes and waterways—order to table documents—documents tabled

Pursuant to Standing order 213A, the Clerk presented the following documents, which had been circulated to Members on 27 February 2026, pursuant to standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly of 28 October 2025, as amended 4 December 2025,

together with the transmittal letter from the Head of Service, ACT Government to the Clerk, dated 27 February 2026:

ACT Water Resources—Documents—Order to table—Copy of—

Index of returned documents (Second tranche).

Interpretation of scope.

Privilege claimed on certain returned documents—Letter to the Clerk from the Chief Minister, dated 27 February 2026.

Returned documents (11 folders) (*see* Appendix 1).

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 16

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.31): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 16, dated 10 March 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny Report No. 16 contains the committee’s comments on one bill, 13 pieces of subordinate legislation, one national law and two government responses to subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Report 6

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.32): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25*, dated 11 March 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

Mr Assistant Speaker, this is the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly.

The 2024-25 annual and financial reports were presented in the Assembly on 21 October 2025. Clause 4 of the establishing resolution refers all calendar and financial year annual and financial reports to the relevant standing committee for inquiry and report. The committee held public hearings between 10 and 21 November 2025. Fifty questions were placed or taken on notice. The committee makes eight

recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all ministers, statutory officials, directorate officials and other witnesses for their assistance to the committee and their significant contributions to this inquiry. We also thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting the committee. I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbins and Mr Rattenbury.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statement by chair

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.33): Pursuant to standing order 246A I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs relating to a new inquiry, and the conduct of an existing inquiry.

On 4 February 2026, the committee was referred the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 and decided to inquire into the bill on 11 February 2026.

On 24 February 2026, the committee was also referred the Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026 and, given the significant new search powers that would be granted to ACT Policing under this bill, we have decided to inquire into this bill on 4 March 2026.

I wish to inform the Assembly that, given both bills are together part of a wider reform to firearms legislation in the ACT following the Bondi Beach terror attack, and involve similar stakeholders, the committee has decided to inquire into both bills simultaneously, as part of a single inquiry. I will therefore be moving a motion to extend the reporting date of the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 from 3 May 2026 to 24 May 2026 to align with the due date for the Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026.

In acknowledgement of this, the committee has extended the existing submission deadline for the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 to 10 April 2026 so that stakeholders can have further time if they wish to also comment on the Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026.

Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.36): I am pleased to present the Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2026 today. This bill introduces offences under the

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 to prohibit the practice of claim farming, and it imposes a duty on organisations responsible for a child to take reasonable precautions to prevent an individual associated with the organisation from perpetrating child abuse.

Claim farming refers to the exploitative practice where a third party, the claim farmer, pressures an individual to make a redress or other personal injury claim for the claim farmer's own benefit. Claim farmers use a variety of tactics to pressure potential claimants and survivors of child abuse such as inducing, soliciting or pressuring claimants to make claims, procuring personal information or referring claimants to other fee-paying services without informing them that free legal advice and other support services may be available.

Claim farming undermines the ability for community members to make informed decisions about accessing redress or a civil claim and can result in reduced compensation given to victims, with claim farmers unethically profiting from the claim. In recent years, governments and stakeholders have grown increasingly concerned about claim farming practices operating in Australia in the context of the National Redress Scheme, in particular. I have discussed the issue of claim farming with ministers through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General and the Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board.

In the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme's 2024 report *Journey to justice*, the committee cited concerns about claim farming and its impact on victim-survivors of child abuse. During the inquiry, the committee heard evidence of unscrupulous and exploitative organisations and law firms targeting victim-survivors to make a redress application, with contingency fees from successful claims leaving victim-survivors with decreased settlement and inadequate or no redress for the harm that they have encountered.

In submissions to the standing committee's inquiry, law firms, survivor advocates and redress specialist services shared stories and accounts of victim-survivors being predatorily targeted and harassed daily by claim farmers offering free services with hidden costs. In particular, since the 2024 redress reforms allowed prisoners to apply for redress, claim farmers have been targeting prisons, which is problematic as an environment where misinformation disseminates quickly.

Claim farmers are deceptive and difficult to identify by claimants and victim-survivors, as they are often acting under the pretence of victim support services, and they may operate through third-party agents. While there have not been formal reports of claim farming in the ACT, the national concern about this practice provides an impetus and strong community support in the ACT for intervention to ensure that vulnerable members of our community are protected when seeking justice.

This reform will see the ACT join New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland, states which have all legislated to prohibit claim farming activity. It introduces offences into the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 to prohibit a person from contacting claimants about claims for a fee or benefit, and giving or receiving, or arranging for someone else to give or receive, a fee or benefit for claim referrals.

The offences will apply in relation to personal injury claims and redress claims under

the National Redress Scheme. The bill does not impact motor accident claims, which have existing protections and safeguards from fraudulent activities under the Motor Accident Injuries Act 2019. Each offence will attract a maximum penalty of 300 penalty units—currently \$48,000. The penalties reflect the seriousness of engaging in the conduct, and they are within the range of penalties set by other jurisdictions.

The legal profession plays an important role in the ACT, supporting community members to understand and pursue their options through the justice system. This bill is not intended to hinder these activities, in acknowledgement that members of the legal profession overwhelmingly act in accordance with the applicable ethical standards. To ensure that the new offences do not unnecessarily impede on the proper and efficient function of legal services in the ACT, the bill establishes exceptions to claim farming offences. The exceptions ensure law practices that contact a claimant to genuinely provide services for civil action or a redress claim, or are legitimately promoting and advertising their business, would not be unintentionally captured by the offence. Exceptions are also made for when a claimant is being contacted for class actions; where the claimant has a prior relationship with the law practice; where the claimant has been referred by a community legal centre; where a law practice is being sold to another practice; and where a law practice acting for the claimant refers them to a third party for the purpose of providing a service to the claimant.

The Legal Profession Act 2006 regulates the legal profession in the ACT, and its purpose is to uphold the administration of justice while safeguarding the integrity of the legal profession and protecting the public generally. To support this aim, this bill amends section 389 of the Legal Profession Act to confirm claim farming as an action that can amount to either unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct. These reforms will strengthen the framework requiring legal professionals to engage ethically with vulnerable groups, restrict their position of power to confer monetary benefit, and ensure that lawyers are working towards their obligations to act in the best interests of their client.

The bill will also require that if a law practice is convicted of a claim farming offence, the law practice is not entitled to charge or recover costs and must immediately refund legal costs to the claimant or victim-survivor. This provision, which aligns with the approach taken in other jurisdictions, adds an extra layer of protection for claimants and victim-survivors who find themselves exploited by claim farmers and further ensures they are not left with financial detriment. I am confident that, through these reforms, this bill will send a strong message and deter potential claim farmers from operating in the ACT.

In addition to the prohibition of claim farming, this bill also amends the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 to impose a statutory duty of care to make organisations liable for child sexual abuse by persons associated with the organisation, unless the organisation proves it took reasonable precautions to prevent the abuse.

The High Court recently decided, in *AA v The Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle*, to overturn a common law precedent from *New South Wales v Lepore* and found that a non-delegable duty can be breached by the intentional criminal conduct of the duty-holder or their delegate. The impact of this decision is not limited to institutional child abuse survivors. It will enable tort claims,

including historical matters, to be brought at common law alleging a breach of non-delegable duty by intentional criminal conduct. Noting this recent change at common law, this bill will provide clarity in statute for organisations responsible for children and possible future claimants in relation to civil claims arising from contemporary child abuse that occurs after commencement of the bill.

Organisations responsible for children are also subject to obligations to safeguard children in their care. This includes child safety legislation, standards, schemes, policies and guidance that have been developed and implemented in recent decades and particularly following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This reform reinforces these important measures, and it confirms that organisations must take reasonable precautions to prevent child abuse

Individuals associated with an organisation include office holders, officers, owners, employees, agents, volunteers and contractors. For a religious organisation, religious leaders such as priests and ministers and other member of the personnel of the organisation are included. The non-exhaustive definition in the bill is consistent with the legislative approach taken in other jurisdictions that have implemented similar reforms.

An organisation will be liable for child abuse perpetrated by an individual associated with the organisation, unless it can prove that it took reasonable precautions to prevent the abuse. The rebuttable presumption, also known as a reverse onus of proof, shifts the evidential burden from the victim-survivor onto the organisation.

The bill introduces a list of factors the court may consider when determining whether an organisation has taken reasonable precautions. These factors are intended to guide courts in their decision-making while allowing them to consider any other matters that the court considers relevant.

This reform implements recommendations from the royal commission to introduce a non-delegable duty on organisations, and it builds on the ACT government's commitment to improve civil litigation pathways for victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. In line with the royal commission's recommendation, these reforms will operate prospectively from the date of commencement.

The codification of a non-delegable duty on organisations responsible for children adds to the existing suite of measures to protect and safeguard children in our community. It supports civil litigation claims for contemporary child abuse, and it brings the ACT in line with other jurisdictions that have enacted similar reforms to improve civil litigation pathways for victim-survivors, as recommended by the royal commission.

Mr Assistant Speaker, in 2018, the ACT stood among the first jurisdictions to join the Australian government's National Redress Scheme. This bill builds on the ACT government's commitment to that scheme and our progress in implementing recommendations from the royal commission.

Since that commission, the ACT government has acted swiftly to remove barriers in accessing the ACT's civil litigation pathways. This bill builds on the government's history of reform by protecting victim-survivors and personal injury claimants from

further harm and preventing the risk of re-traumatising and deterring survivors from accessing redress and support.

This bill will prevent the detrimental impact of claim farming on victim-survivors of child abuse and personal injury claimants in the ACT who are seeking compensation and redress. These measures send a clear message that claim farming will not be tolerated, and those who engage in this deceptive activity will face consequences.

The introduction of a non-delegable duty on organisations responsible for a child provides certainty and clarity for victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, and it continues the ACT government's progress to remove justice barriers for victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge all stakeholders who have contributed to the development of this bill, and particularly Knowmore for their tireless advocacy on behalf of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. Their close engagement with the ACT government has been instrumental in raising awareness about claim farming and the measures to prevent its harmful impact on our community.

In saying that, I also sincerely thank our policy team in LPP in JACS and our legislative drafters for preparing this bill. It is something that certainly was raised with me within days of me becoming Attorney-General. I am pleased to have been able to move as quickly as possible on such an important reform and to ensure that the ACT is not out like a shag on a rock and being the only jurisdiction not to make this deceptive practice illegal.

I do recognise that we have heard that the evidence of this might not be as strong as it has been in other places, but that is never a reason not to do something. This is about prevention of such a deceptive act which has such severe consequences in terms of the re-traumatisation for someone who is subject to it, as well as enforcement against it. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 11.49 to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice

Fuel security

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, who is responsible for the Fuels Rationing Act. Minister, given concerns about a potential national fuel shortage, does the government have an emergency fuel supply plan for the ACT? If so, when was it last reviewed and tested?

MS ORR: I will take the detail of that question on notice. But what I can provide in the interim is assurance to Mr Parton that there have been many conversations, particularly with the federal minister, around the impact to fuel coming into Australia. All the advice to me at the moment is that we are not needing to activate certain levels of responses because of shortages, that we are still monitoring and assessing, and that we will continue to monitor and assess. Certainly, that is the context and all the advice to me.

I will take the detail of Mr Parton's question on notice and come back to him with further information.

MR PARTON: Minister, have you spoken to your ACT federal Labor colleagues—in particular Senator Katy Gallagher, a member of the National Security Committee—about the risk of fuel shortages affecting the territory? And, if not, why not?

MS ORR: My conversations have been with Minister Bowen, as the minister responsible for energy policy.

MS MORRIS: Minister, can you guarantee that ACT families and small businesses will not be caught out by a lack of fuel?

MS ORR: What I would say to Ms Morris's question is that we are in an international situation, in looking at how we do this. The ACT government does not necessarily have all the levers on that particular international event, but we will continue to work with other jurisdictions and our federal counterparts on how to best ensure that Canberrans are provided for.

Fuel security

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, there are significant concerns in the ACT, as throughout Australia, about fuel security. Given your ministerial responsibilities, what advice have you sought regarding current fuel availability and potential shortages in the ACT, including from fuel retailers?

MS ORR: I would refer Mr Cocks to my answers to the previous questions, noting the advice that has been provided to me and the work that continues to be ongoing within the public service to monitor the situation within the ACT, nationally and globally.

MR COCKS: Minister, how many weeks supply of diesel fuel is currently located within the ACT?

MS ORR: I will take the detail of that question on notice.

MS LEE: Minister, are you considering imposing restrictions under the Fuels Rationing Act 2019?

MS ORR: I would again refer Ms Lee to my previous answers and the advice that has been provided to me to date.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, under 118AA, I do not believe that the minister's previous responses did actually go to that specific question. Indeed, the question that was just asked was about the consideration of imposing restrictions. The minister has previously largely discussed what the federal government considers.

Ms Orr: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I was referring to my initial answer, which said that the advice to me was that there was no need at this point in time to be imposing

any further measures and that we will continue to monitor.

MR SPEAKER: I do not believe there is a point of order, Mr Cocks. The minister has been responsive to the question and she has also indicated that she will be taking the detail on notice. So I think that is sufficient. She has been responsive.

Fuel security

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy, and Water. Minister, the last disallowable instrument under the Fuels Rationing Act 2019 was issued five years ago and did not anticipate the current global conflict. Is the current instrument applicable to today's situation?

MS ORR: I have not received specific advice as to this. Again, I would point to my previous answers that I have provided as to where our considerations are up to. I can take the substance of the question on notice and come back to Ms Lee, noting that perhaps the question might be getting a little bit ahead of where considerations are up to.

MS LEE: Minister, have you prepared, or provided instructions to prepare, an instrument for fuel rationing in case it becomes necessary?

MS ORR: Again, I will take that on notice. Again, I will refer to my previous answers—I think this is getting a few steps ahead of where considerations are up to, noting that there will be contingencies there and there will be processes and thresholds for when different measures and different responses will come into consideration. Again, referring back to my original answer, which is the advice to me is that we are in a monitoring situation and will continue to work with the other jurisdictions and our federal counterpart in what is a rapidly-evolving and changing situation.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order. Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance as to whether it is reasonable for a minister to respond to a question about their actions, whether they have prepared an instrument, by taking it on notice on the basis that they have not received advice about what they have done.

MS ORR: On the point of order, Mr Speaker. I would note that I do not think that any minister personally writes the instruments themselves. We work on the advice of our directorates as to when these need to be considered and to be enacted upon. Certainly—as I have said in all my answers, it has not been provided to me that I need to do this now, but I can take on notice as to whether there is any considerations that are afoot or where the thresholds would come in—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Orr. On the point of order, Mr Cocks, you might not like how the minister answers it but she is being responsive. She is answering the question. She has provided an answer. So there is no point of order. You might not like the way she has answered. You might find it insufficient, but it is not inappropriate in terms of the standing orders.

MR CAIN: Minister, what is the threshold, in terms of available litres or days supply, for the introduction of fuel rationing in the ACT?

MS ORR: I will take the detail of that on notice. I appreciate the opposition would probably prefer if I memorised every act and clause that sits under my ministerial portfolio, but I must say that level of detail—there are a lot of acts that sit under my jurisdiction and I think I would rather take that on notice and double check than give an incorrect answer.

Again, I would point the members opposite to all of my answers in previously provided information in that this is being monitored. We have a group within the public service that stands up when we enter into considerations such as fuel shortages, to monitor the situation, to work with our counterparts and to make sure that clear and timely advice is provided to the minister. Again, while the opposition is very diligent in their concerns, I think they are getting a little bit ahead of where we are actually up to and perhaps maybe just need to take a deep breath and not put out alarmist concerns.

MR SPEAKER: I remind you not to be debating the answer as well. Thank you, Minister.

MS ORR: Okay, I will sit down, Mr Speaker.

Planning—Hume Circle proposal

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for planning. Minister, on 4 November last year, the Chief Minister teamed up with the federal infrastructure minister, Catherine King to announce new funding for the planning of the East Lake precinct in Canberra's south. Then just two months later, on 5 January 2026, the National Capital Authority announced commencement of consultation on National Capital Plan draft amendment 102 covering the Hume Circle precinct. This proposal covers some of the same land as the East Lake proposal. Minister, can you please explain the relationship between the East Lake proposal and the Hume Circle proposal, particularly given some of the land is covered by both projects—seemingly.

MR STEEL: Thank you, Mr Rattenbury for his question. As he has noted, the National Capital Authority is proposing draft amendment 102 to the National Capital Plan, to enable the renewal of the Hume Circle precinct. It has been proposed in response to Australia's national urban policy to improve housing supply and affordability—and to reflect the significance of this precinct.

That is one of the reasons why the National Capital Authority is leading this work. It does require changes to the National Capital Plan. We do have a dual planning jurisdiction here in the ACT and so we will certainly make—and we have already made—comments through the Territory Planning Authority, through to the National Capital Authority in the consideration of this proposed draft amendment, to make sure that they consider matters raised in the East Lake Place Plan which also covers this precinct—and to raise broader comments from across government in relation to this proposal, which is being put forward by a private proponent.

We are engaged with the National Capital Authority on this. It does require, because of the national significance of this particular area, an NCP amendment. But we will be continuing to raise a range of issues throughout this process. This is, as I understand it, the first stage of a two-stage process. What has been proposed at the moment is at a

relatively high level but, in the future, we expect there to be much more detail around the conditions for the site, which would then be consulted on again.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, did the ACT government seek the opportunity to lead this project rather than hand it over to the NCA?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Obviously, this does require a National Capital Plan change and so we did not object to the National Capital Authority undertaking the work, given that it would require them to have the lead involvement, anyway, in the process. But we are contributing to the NCA's process in a very detailed way and there have been submissions made.

The Chief Minister and I also wrote to the NCA to ask them to extend the period of consultation on the draft amendment, as well. We will continue to also consider feedback from the community, which we may also reflect in feedback through to the NCA—although they would also be hearing that feedback through their own consultation and in future consultations as they undertake the next stage of work.

MS CLAY: Minister, what coordination mechanisms have been put in place between the ACT government and the NCA to facilitate the provision of community infrastructure like schools, shops, pedestrian and cycling access?

MR STEEL: These are all issues that we have raised in the submission to the National Capital Authority. We understand that the level of density being proposed is significant in this area. It would be one of the densest parts of the ACT should the proposal go forward in its current form. The purpose of the consultation is to look at what the impacts of that potential change to the National Capital Plan would be, and we have raised the increased demand on, particularly, schooling and other sorts of infrastructure in that area should there be that level of high-density development.

There may be opportunities for a slightly lower level of density, and we will be in discussion with the NCA about that. Certainly, I think it is acknowledged by those who are asking me the questions that the East Lake Place Plan did not propose that level of density in this area. So, it has gone beyond what was proposed in the plan. That is a point that we have made to the NCA.

Climate Change Strategy—emissions targets

MR EMERSON: My question is to the minister for climate change. The ACT has missed its 2025 interim emissions reduction target. Recent projections show we are not on track to meet future targets either. Minister, when did you first learn we were unlikely to achieve our 2025 target, and what immediate actions did you take in an attempt to avoid missing this target?

MS ORR: As I have said many times on the record, there have been indications that we were not necessarily going to make our interim target, and that advice was provided to me very early on in my taking on my portfolio. And I say “indications”, because the accountancy goes through month by month—so we can certainly have the concerns, but you almost do not know until you know.

As to the steps that I took—I cannot remember the exact phrasing of the question—to ensure that we are back on track for our target or are not missing our target, or what not, there is not a simple answer to that question. The lead time on a lot of the actions that we need to take in order to decarbonise and in order to meet our emissions reductions will often take more than 12 months and more time than what I would have had within the portfolio to address that target difference.

The other thing I would point out too is that the missing of the target was largely based around changed methodology for the land use emissions, which acts as a sink in the ACT. There is a reduction across all the years that we have measured our emissions for the LULUCF stream. We have seen a reduction not just of 2025; we also saw a reclassification of every year preceding that and a downgrading of the number of emissions we were having within 2024. We had hit 50 per cent in 2024; that came back down.

It is a little bit more complicated and nuanced than just saying there was a particular action we could have taken to account for that. All indications were that we were on track. We are seeing emissions from sources that are emitting come down. We are seeing reductions across the board there. But in getting to the 2025 target, where it really—*(Time expired.)*

MR EMERSON: Minister, why weren't any of the tangible policy measures proposed by stakeholders during the government's consultation on its next climate strategy included in the discussion paper that is now out for consultation? And if time permits, feel free to finish the previous answer?

MS ORR: I would probably need about five hours to go through all the emissions, so I will just talk to Mr Emerson separately, and if anyone else wants to have a chat, I am always happy.

In regard to the supplementary question as to why the feedback from the targeted consultation did not go into the discussion paper, the targeted consultation was to get initial feedback and to further refine the discussion paper. Then the discussion paper has gone out for public consultation, and everyone again is able to have input into that. The government and the directorate, on our behalf, are collating all that information, and we will be providing that as part of a listening report, as outlined in all the information we have put out to date and on the YourSay website.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the first action plan for the next climate change strategy be published at the same time as the strategy, or will further consultation be needed to develop an action plan following the publication of the strategy?

MS ORR: I believe I have said publicly quite a few times, and I am happy to clarify for the benefit of the chamber, that we will move into action plans of shorter periods—so one to two years—and there are some actions where government will just need to get on and do some things. There might be quite technical aspects of decommissioning the gas network, for example, and we would be certainly wanting to get on with them. We would not necessarily need to do a broad public consultation. There will be other things, particularly things that will have quite a big relevance to people's day-to-day lives—this would be things within the transport section—where we would, as we work

through these shorter-term action plans, look to do broader public consultation.

In moving to the framework and the shorter action plans, and having that agility, I acknowledge it does mean that there is a little bit of variance in what might be done and when, but that is also, I think, key to being able to move in a timely manner against some of the actions that we need to do, and the challenges we are facing that we need to respond to, but also balancing that with consulting with the community. It will be a mixture of things government needs to crack on with and things we need to have a broader conversation about.

Mr Emerson: Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance about responsiveness of the minister to the question, which was specifically regarding the first action plan and if it would be tabled at the same time as the strategy.

Ms Orr: On the point of order, the climate change strategy and potential first action plan that we are discussing has not been to cabinet yet, and I would not want to pre-empt the decision. I would point the member to my answer in trying to explain the rationale and thinking behind the approach.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think there is a point of order, Mr Emerson.

Public schools—performance

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, your statement this morning on education performance relied on selected indicators, such as averages, rankings and completion rates. However, the Productivity Commission's *Report on government services* is the nationally agreed independent framework for assessing the effectiveness, equity and efficiency of school education systems, and it presents a broader picture of outcomes in the ACT. In addition, the minister recently responded to a question taken on notice about Strong Foundations, and advised us that multi-tiered systems of support, including small group learning, will only be piloted in 2026, that the number of schools to pilot the model has yet to be determined, and that the full rollout will commence in 2027, subject to the pilot outcomes.

Minister, why didn't your statement on education performance reference the Productivity Commission's *Report on government services*, given that it is the primary national framework used to assess school education outcomes and equity across jurisdictions?

MS BERRY: I could have spoken for a very long time about our public schools in the ACT, including every single reference to success in our public schools, and all the work that we need to do to ensure that our schools improve. I have not ever denied that there is movement for change and improvement in our schools. That should be the case in learning environments like education, where there is continuous change, based on the most expert advice at the time, to make sure that they are the best that they can be. It was not that I was choosing to miss out different bits of information. If I were putting forward every single measurement or assessment that is occurring within our public schools, it would have been a very long statement.

MS CARRICK: Minister, why does the ACT still not have a clear, publicly agreed set of system-wide performance metrics aligned with RoGS to assess whether education reforms are improving outcomes for students, particularly those experiencing learning difficulties? When will such metrics be established and reported to this Assembly?

MS BERRY: There are so many assessments that happen in our schools, and we rely very much on the professionalism of our teaching workforce, who assess children at every moment of every day during their lessons. There are also assessments in kindergarten; there are assessments in year 1; there are the NAPLAN assessments; there are the international assessments that I have talked about. School assessments and testing should not just be as a matter of course; we want students in our schools to be spending time learning and teachers to be teaching. The primary focus of our public schools is on giving teachers the time to make those professional assessments at each and every different time of every day, and then engaging with parents and students on how to improve, if that is required.

Ms Carrick: A point of order. The question was about the ACT's system-wide performance metrics to inform them of how the students were performing. It was not about what teachers are up to. It was about—

MR SPEAKER: I think that, in her answer, the minister discussed a range of performance measures across the school system, so she has been responsive. She may not have given you the precise answer, but she was certainly responsive, and she was, I think, relevant. Ms Lee, do you have a supplementary question?

MS LEE: Yes. Minister, why is the implementation of Strong Foundations tiered support and small group learning delayed until 2027? Why doesn't the government know which schools will pilot the tiered support model this year, given that the school year has already commenced?

MS BERRY: I think we are aware of a number of schools that are implementing the small group program, or the different tiered approaches within our schools. We are going through a pilot so that we do not burn out teachers and learning support assistants, and that we do not make mistakes for vulnerable young people who need the additional learning supports. In fact, I am giving a report tomorrow on Strong Foundations. I know that Ms Lee referred to that in her speech this morning, so she will be very interested in that report. I am very happy to, as I have said previously, provide reports, statements and updates every step of the way. Ms Lee is always welcome, as she knows, to come to my office and ask questions about any of those processes going forward.

With all these things, we take time to phase them in, working with the teaching workforce, particularly, to make sure that we are not overloading them with a range of different policies and procedures. With the significant change that is happening across our school system this year and in the coming years, we need to do it carefully, so that we get it right.

Education—attainment

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you update the

Assembly on Canberra's nation-leading levels of educational attainment?

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the very timely question. Surprise, surprise—yes, I can update the Assembly.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: Whilst there may be some guffawing from those opposite, I think we should all be proud that Canberra continues to lead the nation when it comes to educational attainment. We have the highest proportion of residents of any jurisdiction in Australia that hold a bachelor's degree—more than 46 per cent of our population, which is well ahead of the national figure. We also have the highest proportion of people with postgraduate qualifications—nearly double the national average—and we sit above the national average for those holding advanced diploma or diploma qualifications. These results collectively reflect that our institutions continue to attract talented students from across the nation and around the world, all of which contribute to Canberra's reputation as the most educated city in Australia. We are increasingly seeing that the talented people who come here to study are staying in Canberra, and that concentration of skills is driving innovation, economic activity and jobs across many key parts of our economy.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how does growth in our international student numbers strengthen Canberra's education profile?

MR BARR: We are Australia's leading knowledge city, and that is reflected not only in the educational attainment of our residents but also in the public sector research output that we see across our city. International students also play a critical role in contributing significantly to our social, cultural and economic life, and in supporting jobs, local businesses and sustainable growth across the territory. The territory government continues to work closely with our institutions to diversify our student market, including in large markets like India, where we have been recently promoting Canberra as a world-class study destination. We do wish to strengthen our partnerships with the largest country in the world. This growth is further supported by significant investment in purpose-built student accommodation in the city, with developments ensuring that students have access to modern housing close to our universities.

Distinguished visitor

MR SPEAKER: Before we take your supplementary question, Mr Werner Gibbings, I would like to acknowledge and welcome to the Assembly the Honourable Milton Dick MP, the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives. Welcome, Mr Speaker. I am sure the members will be at their best behaviour in your honour.

Questions without notice Education—attainment

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Werner-Gibbings?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

Chief Minister, how is Canberra continuing to attract high-quality students to our city?

MR BARR: We are in a unique position. While many jurisdictions are experiencing challenges in higher education, our universities are seeing increases in student placements alongside strong demand from high-quality applicants who are choosing to study here in Canberra. For students, though, Canberra means more than just a qualification. We offer a city with an unmatched concentration of universities, research institutes, national cultural institutions and, of course, access to leading policymakers in this nation, and we find that, with the highest employment rate and highest average income in Australia, students can find work here readily. Graduates continue to be in strong demand across the public sector, in research, technology, health, defence and cybersecurity industries, but, perhaps most importantly, it is Canberra's high quality of life, our accessibility, our strong community sentiment and the value that we place on education that makes it easy for students to succeed here and build long-term community networks, ensuring that those who choose to call our city home feel welcome, recognised and highly valued by their fellow Canberrans.

Cost of living—public transport fares

MR PARTON: My question is to the Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport. Minister, other governments, including New South Wales, have convened various fuel security round tables and have floated measurable steps to increase supply and provide cost-of-living relief. These steps include increasing capacity on public transport networks and providing free or lower-cost public transport fares. Treasurer, what meetings have you held to consider possible measures to reduce the cost-of-living impact that the current global situation is having on Canberrans?

MR STEEL: We are very proud that we are a public operator of our public transport system, unlike other states that have had Liberal governments that have privatised them. So we could talk to ourselves about the pressures that we are facing in relation to fuel. This is a discussion that we have had, because Transport Canberra uses 13 million litres of diesel fuel per year. So this is, of course, something that we have been discussing with our bus operator, Transport Canberra Operations in the City and Environment Directorate. We have also been in discussion with Park Fuels, who is our industrial supplier of diesel, around the risk presented by the current conflict in the Middle East. We are also, of course, continuing to monitor the situation.

Transport Canberra has the capacity to hold approximately 10 days worth of diesel fuel, based on current network usage. We have increased the monitoring of fuel. We are currently taking daily readings and providing that to Park Fuels to inform their suppliers. They provide five deliveries to Belconnen per fortnight and four to Tuggeranong. Also, given the current concerns around fuel, we are actually looking at extending diesel storage to the Woden depot. Even though Woden depot is for our battery-electric buses, we are going to be holding some diesel fuel there, to make sure that we have that fallback option as well. We are continuing to monitor the situation.

At the moment, we are receiving the supplies that we need. We are also continuing to

monitor the situation in relation to diesel fuel additives like AdBlue. I was a minister during the pandemic and I know the supply chain issues then affected the AdBlue supply. So that is something that we have been looking at very closely as well.

MR PARTON: Minister, have you engaged with representatives of the Transport Workers Union regarding increasing services on the transport network?

MR STEEL: Yes, I have—and not just in the context of the war in the Middle East but also in the context of wanting to respond to the current traffic environment that we have post the start of construction of the NCA’s bridgeworks on Commonwealth Avenue. We will be putting in some timetable tweaks in the next few weeks to address early running issues on the network. We are currently working through the arrangements for a revised and updated timetable and network, and we hope to bring that in as soon as possible.

In accordance with the Assembly resolution that we debated in the last sitting week, we will look to do that as soon as we can. At this stage, the current timing proposed is in term 3, and we will be looking to increase the capacity of particularly those west Belconnen services R2 and R3, looking at extending those, and also, of course, looking at the capacity issues on the R4 and R5 buses as well as other issues that have arisen, as they would usually do in any new network and timetable. So we are working through that. There is a timeframe that we need to work to under the enterprise agreement. So, yes, it does involve the Transport Workers Union and engagement with them. We will look to do that as soon as we can, and we will provide an update to the community. For those who want to jump on public transport, we have a good network that they can use right now if they choose to make that choice, but we will be making further improvements to it as soon as we can.

MS BARRY: Minister, what direct and additional steps is your government considering to provide cost-of-living relief, given the current fuel crisis?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We have had a range of measures in place to support cost of living. It is in the “cost of living” chapter in the budget papers. Of course, one of those measures was Fare Free Fridays. We also introduced the trial for free evening travel on Fridays and Saturdays. As we committed to do in the context of the 2026-27 budget, we will also be looking at what we can do around concession fares for students. That is part of the consideration in every budget. We look at the economic circumstances the territory is facing and make decisions in that context as well as looking towards the future. We are in very uncertain times. We do not know how long this particular conflict will last in terms of the impact on oil prices and other commodities. We will have to look at that very closely as we pull together the 2026-27 budget.

Belconnen library—accessibility

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services.

A constituent, Rohan Goyne, is very concerned about the inaccessibility of the area around the Belconnen public library. Minister, as you know, the Belconnen Library is right next to the Senior Citizens Club and Capital Region Community Services. The

ramp down to the library is missing a safety railing at the bottom on a slope, the steep stairs have no handrails on one side, and there are no reflective markings for people with low vision. That makes it unsafe for people who are vision impaired or have other disabilities. Rohan was told over 18 months ago this area was on a list to be fixed, but so far nothing has been done. Can you give an update of when this area will be accessible to people with limited mobility and low vision?

MS CHEYNE: I will have to take that on notice. I thank Ms Clay for the question. Specifically, as I live right near there, and in terms of that accessibility, I would not say the stairs are steep. I think they are certainly the same as what the standard was at the time. I will check for an update on the other issues raised.

I do believe there has been some complication here due to the heritage listing of the area around the library and that may have delayed some of those improvements, which largely will involve capital works, but I will come back to the Assembly with as full an answer as I can provide.

MS CLAY: Have you or the directorate sought advice as to whether this area in its current state of disrepair breaches the ACT government's legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act?

MS CHEYNE: No.

MR BRADDOCK: Has the ACT government conducted an accessibility audit of ACT libraries?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

Canberra Health Services—performance

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the interim report conducted by Saul Eslake into the fiscal sustainability of the ACT highlights the shocking incompetence of this government, specifically when it comes to delivering better health outcomes for Canberrans. Minister, the report states:

The ACT spends more per person on public hospitals than the national average, but in important respects the patients get worse results.

Minister, despite spending being at out-of-control, record highs during and under this Labor government, why are health outcomes for Canberrans getting progressively worse?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I do not think that Mr Eslake has said that results are getting worse. So I think that is a misrepresentation. But I would also note that we are working—I know that health officials and Treasury officials have been providing some feedback to Mr Eslake on his interim report, which was pulled together very quickly and contains some very useful information—but his commentary, for example, about emergency department performance is belied by the graph that is in the report. The ACT now has the best emergency department performance in terms of seen-on time, other than the very large

jurisdictions of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland which have significant advantages in their structure that the other smaller jurisdictions cannot match.

That has gone from being the longest wait time in the country to the best of all the small jurisdictions. We also have the best time in the country—and Ms Morris is over there smirking—but we have the best time in the country in terms of getting people in and out of the emergency—

Mr Cocks: Point of order just on reflections on other members—

MR SPEAKER: I think if you could just refrain from commenting on the other members, and address your comments directly to me, and—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I apologise to Ms Morris. Mr Speaker, what I was saying, which is important, is that, of the single most important measure of emergency department safety—which is the proportion of people that are getting into the emergency department, seen, and either being admitted or discharged within four hours—the ACT is the best in the country.

Mr Eslake did not pick that up. We have provided him with that information. In terms of elective surgery performance, we know we have work to do. We are about on a par with New South Wales, but that is why—(*Time expired.*)

MR PARTON: Minister, the interim report identifies the waiting times for elective surgery in ACT public hospitals are in the 90th percentile. What immediate action are you taking to address these concerning figures, to improve access to elective surgery for Canberrans, now?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure what Mr Parton means by “are in the 90th percentile”. I suspect the figure he used was the 90th percentile wait times, which is specific measure of performance.

As I was about to say, we have invested significantly in elective surgery. We saw far-and-away the largest number of elective surgeries performed in the ACT last year that has ever been performed; more than 16,500 elective surgeries last year. We are on track to deliver 70,000 elective surgeries over the next four years, as we committed in the election—as the Canberra Liberals committed in the election. We actually made the same commitment.

We are on track to deliver that, and we have continued to see improvements in elective surgery over the last couple of years—since one year when we had a very significant impact. We already had a significant impact from COVID, and then we had a theatre fire at Calvary public hospital which significantly impacted our elective surgery performance in that one year, and we are still catching up on that.

That is because we do have a level of capacity constraint across our system—in terms, not of infrastructure, but actually of people to perform these elective surgeries. But we are continuing to improve that performance, and Mr Parton’s original comments about going backwards are absolutely incorrect.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, who is to blame for the current state of the public health system in Canberra, given you have been responsible for health since July 2019; nearly seven years.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am very happy to take responsibility for the improved performance that we have seen—particularly the emergency department going from the longest wait times in the country to the best of all of the smaller jurisdictions; seeing the highest numbers of elective surgeries that have ever been delivered in the ACT, by miles; now being on track to deliver our target 70,000 elective surgeries; and to have implemented the integrated operations centre—something that those opposite constantly questioned and sought to undermine—which has seen that emergency department flow-through to now having the best four-hour performance in the country.

That is something that those opposite have never recognised—probably never will recognise. Every step we take to improve the performance of our hospital system which subsequently demonstrates success—every step we take—is criticised and questioned by those opposite.

Canberra Health Services—elective surgery wait times

MR PARTON: My questions to the Minister for Health. Minister in the first Assembly sitting of this year you tabled the half-yearly performance report for Canberra Health Services. The report confirms Canberra Health Services has once again failed to meet elective surgery targets for the second half of 2025. In fact, Canberra Health Services has missed its elective surgery target every year that you have been Minister for Health. We have heard via various sources, including specialties such as cardiology and orthopaedics, that this Labor government does not listen. When elective surgery wait times are in the 90th percentile, the government blames “a small number of surgeons”. Minister, with elective surgery wait times consecutively among the worst in the country, why are you not supporting patients, clinicians and staff to get elective surgery wait times under control?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What I can point Mr Parton to is the latest update on the health service data dashboard for 16 March 2026, which shows that the median waiting time for elective surgery in the period 1 July 2025 to 1 November 2025 has come down from the 2024-25 number of 54 days to the number, for that period of four months, of 41 days. So that is a 24 per cent reduction in median waiting times. The number of patients waiting has reduced by 13 per cent. The proportion of surgeries that were performed within clinically recommended timeframes has increased by 8.8 per cent. The number of removals from the waiting list for elective surgery has increased by 4.8 per cent. So on all of those figures, we are actually continuing to improve.

MR PARTON: Minister, why are clinicians and staff at the Canberra Hospital reportedly resigning in protest due to unsafe working conditions, risks to patient safety and poor culture, and what impact is this having on elective surgery wait times?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I totally reject the premise of Mr Parton’s question. The Leader of the Opposition may be talking about a very small number of clinicians who over time have expressed these kinds of concerns. By and large, these are extremely complex matters that relate to the way that workplaces operate—industrial disputations

within the workplace. But what I can say is that we have seen, between 2024-25 and the five months from 1 July 2025 to 30 November 2025, a reduction in the number of overdue patients of almost 10 per cent for elective surgery. None of the data that we have would support the proposition that the Leader of the Opposition is putting forward in terms of impact on patients.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when will you and your government stop ignoring the expert clinicians and frontline staff treating Canberrans and start backing them instead of working against them?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It was a very articulate question, and I thank you for it, Mr Milligan! I totally reject the premise of your question, however, because I have never stopped listening to clinicians and to our support staff, as well as to the leadership of Canberra Health Services. The reality of health services is that staff do not always agree with each other. Clinicians do not always agree with each other. The solution that one lot of staff will put forward will not always be supported by another lot of staff. But what we have done is to continue to listen to our staff as we have implemented innovative solutions like the integrated operations centre.

I certainly heard for example, from some of our emergency department clinicians that initially, when the integrated operations centre had a focus on the emergency department, they were a bit sceptical. They were not quite sure that it was going to work out. They had seen change before. Now they understand that the operation centre is there to help them and to help their patients and to ensure smooth flow through the hospital, and they think it is fantastic and they can see the difference that it has made.

Change is difficult in hospital environments, but change is necessary if we are going to improve the efficiency of our health services. To go back to Mr Parton's first question about the amount we spend on health services, we know we need to improve the efficiency. We are seeking to do that in collaboration with the staff, but it does require some changes in processes, some consistency of processes, and not everyone is always on board with some of those changes at the beginning.

Emergency Services Authority—alerts and warning systems test

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. The *Emergencies (Alerts and Warning Systems) Commissioner's Guidelines 2025*, issued on 26 May 2025, states:

Testing of warning capability is critical to ensure systems and processes are operationally ready. The ESA aims to undertake alerts and warning testing on an annual basis ahead of each high-risk weather season. This raises the profile of alerts and warnings within the ACT community and assists with training of public information and engagement staff.

Minister, when were you advised that the emergency warning systems test should not be run in September, as has previously been done, and that, instead, it should be delayed until well into the high-risk weather season?

DR PATERSON: This narrative that the shadow minister is running with is incredibly

damaging for—

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: I believe that the minister has immediately started to debate the question rather than answer it.

MR SPEAKER: She is about three seconds in, Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: On the point of order, Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Let us see where it goes; then, if she is debating, I will rule on that. At the moment, she is about three seconds in.

DR PATERSON: Maintaining public confidence in our emergency services warning systems is absolutely critical. I have had multiple, very vulnerable citizens in our community contact me about this absolutely damaging narrative that has been run. At no point was the emergency services warning system not working—

Ms Morris: A point of order. I have simply asked when the minister was advised that the emergency warning systems test should not be run in September, and she is referring to some narrative that she is—

MR SPEAKER: I hope she will be getting to the nub of the question shortly.

DR PATERSON: The emergency warning system runs all the time. There is continuous testing; there are continuous upgrades that the ESA will run with. But the emergency warning system runs all the time.

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: Under 118AA, I do not believe that the minister actually answered the question regarding when she was advised that the emergency warning systems test should not be run in September.

MR SPEAKER: The minister's answer is that it runs all the time, Mr Cocks, so I think she has been responsive.

Mr Cocks: I don't believe so.

MR SPEAKER: You may disagree with the answer, but I think she has been responsive.

MS MORRIS: Minister, when was the need for “enhancement work” first identified?

DR PATERSON: The New South Wales Rural Fire Service did some upgrades to their

system, which then required us to do some upgrades to our system. This was a public-facing opportunity to run some testing and system enhancements that ESA took. It is a very productive thing to run these publicly, because it gives the ESA an opportunity to talk with the community around how testing works, what it looks like when they get an alert, and how they can be prepared in the case of an emergency.

Most of the testing is done routinely and back of house, but occasionally, and particularly at the start of a bushfire season, it is very productive to work with the community and with the ABC. This is something on which we were very proactive with the community. I was briefed on it before it happened. It was a matter of an hour—the exercise. At no point was the system down. The system was running routinely. This was a routine test and upgrade.

MR PARTON: Minister, did you consider running the emergency warning system test in September to see that it was fully operational before the commencement of the high-risk weather season, and conduct a further test when the “enhancement work” was completed, irrespective of any narrative?

DR PATERSON: No, because the RFS had not done their upgrades by that stage.

Yarralumla Primary School—language programs

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, on 10 February this year, two weeks into the school year, I believe families at Yarralumla Primary School were informed, without any prior consultation, that the school’s longstanding Italian-English bilingual program would cease immediately, meaning that classes are no longer taught fifty-fifty in English and Italian. Forty-three per cent of the school’s enrolments are from out of area. Parents have told us that they chose Yarralumla primary for its bilingual program and are extremely disappointed with the announcement, especially after the school year had already commenced.

In a letter to parents, the school stated that the decision was made to align with the Education Directorate’s new teaching and learning policy, which requires 90 minutes of English literacy and 60 minutes of mathematics every day. Minister, can you please explain whether there was a specific directive or advice from the Education Directorate which meant Yarralumla primary was required to stop its fifty-fifty bilingual program?

MS BERRY: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. No; I do not believe there was a directive from the Education Directorate. I am aware of the bilingual program at Yarralumla Primary School and I have been contacted by a couple of parents whose children attend that school and participate in that program. I am also aware that the school is consulting with its board and the P&C, and furthermore with parents and the school community, about the bilingual program at the school. That is all the advice I have at this stage. I understand there is some significant interest in the program, of course. I have asked the Education Directorate to inquire further with the school to understand what parents have been told and the consultation plan going forward.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, given that other ACT bilingual schools, like Mawson Primary and Telopea Park, continue to deliver approximately 50 per cent of their curriculum in a second language, what would be the basis for Yarralumla Primary being

unable to do so?

MS BERRY: As I said, I have asked the Education Directorate to make some further inquiries with Yarralumla Primary, although I would say that Telopea Park School has a very different bilingual program compared to Mawson and Yarralumla. In fact, they all approach bilingual education through three very different models. Telopea Park receives significant funding and support from the French embassy to run their bilingual program. Mawson Primary is associated with the Chinese-Australian preschool and runs on a different model as well. With regard to Yarralumla Primary, as I said, I have asked the Education Directorate to make some further inquiries on the issues that have been raised with my office by parents at that school.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, as it appears the decision was taken prior to consultation with families and students, will you advise the directorate to pause implementation, conduct meaningful consultation with parents and the school board, and examine practical options to preserve the fifty-fifty bilingual program at Yarralumla Primary?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to my previous answer. I do not believe that there was a direction made by the Education Directorate to change the bilingual program. I am aware that consultation and conversations are happening with the school, with school staff and leadership, the board and, coming up, the P&C, if they have not done so already, and, furthermore, with the rest of the school community. I will wait for further advice from the Education Directorate as I have asked them to get me more information on the issues that parents have described to me.

Yarralumla Primary School—language programs

MS LEE: My question is also to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood and also in relation to the Yarralumla Primary School's decision to immediately cease its fifty-fifty bilingual model, meaning that it will no longer be classified as a bilingual school. We have also heard concerns from parents and families that there has been a lack of consultation, including from some parents who only heard of this incredibly important decision in passing at school pick-up. Minister, was this decision in any way driven by budget pressures?

MS BERRY: No, that is not my understanding. Again, I have not been advised that the program has ceased. I understand that there are conversations happening at the school level. So I do not think it is correct to suggest that the Education Directorate has made a direction. I understand that there are parents who have concerns about the bilingual language program at Yarralumla. However, as I said, it operates on a different model to the Mawson and Telopea schools. We are looking to get more information to find out what is going on there and what parents have heard. But I know that the school is committed to working with their school communities around this issue.

MS LEE: Minister, was staffing shortage a factor in this decision?

MS BERRY: Again, I just do not have enough information to provide an answer on that one. It could be the case, as is the case with seeking out bilingual teachers who are qualified and registered with the Teacher Quality Institute to deliver language programs. That could have been the case at this school, but I would be guessing as I just

do not have that advice to hand at the moment.

MR COCKS: Minister, why were parents told that the fifty-fifty program would cease when there had been no consultation with the school community?

MS BERRY: I think I probably covered all of that in my previous answers. I do not think there is anything more I can offer, other than to say that I am aware of the issue. I have been written to—as it appears other members in this place have been written to—from parents at that school. I am investigating those concerns and have asked the Education Directorate to provide me with further information.

Hospitals—emergency departments

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, earlier this hour, you alluded to recent data which has shown improvements in ACT emergency department activity and performance. Can you update us a bit further on what the data is telling us?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. As he has noted, I have already spoken to some of this data, but we are very conscious of emergency department wait times as one indicator of the experience that people have in our public health system. It is really important to recognise that actually the Health Care Consumers' Association has never focused on this as being the key indicator of the success of the health system.

I am pleased to say, as I indicated in response to earlier questions, that our data has improved and our performance has improved, both in and of itself and in comparison to other jurisdictions. Also, the amount of positive feedback that I am getting from the community, both written to me and also when I am at mobile offices or just at community events—the number of people who are coming up to me and telling me that they have had a positive experience in the emergency department and how happy the staff have been.

So the performance outcomes that we have seen in 2024-25, include a median waiting time of 25 minutes, which is a significant reduction from a previous, unacceptable, time of around 40 minutes. The proportion of ACT patients seen on time across all categories is 62 per cent. As I say, better than all of the other jurisdictions, other than New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The proportion of ACT patients who were either discharged or admitted to hospital within four hours or less—61 per cent—the best across all jurisdictions.

I really want to highlight that this performance was achieved while simultaneously experiencing a 7.4 per cent increase in the number of presentations compared to the previous year. So thank you to our staff right across our hospitals and particularly in the emergency department.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, do you have any further information on how the ACT's performance compares to other jurisdictions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary question.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report, table 5.1, showed the ACT's median wait time was the second-best in the country, following—sorry, it was the fourth best in the country, following Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, who all had median wait times of about 15 minutes. They were equal first, so we were fourth, not second. That is an error on our part. Apologies. But at 25 minutes, significantly better than all of the other jurisdictions, and that is a real turn around.

Our seen on time performance was the third best in the country following New South Wales and Queensland. Sorry, the fourth—sorry again, fourth best following New South Wales at 73 per cent and Queensland and Victoria at 72 per cent. And of course the proportion of presentations to the emergency department was the best in the country at more than 61 per cent, followed by New South Wales as the next best at 56 per cent. So it really is a significant difference.

The ACT's increase in the number of presentations was also the largest in the country at 7.4 per cent, significantly higher than the next highest in Tasmania at 3.1 per cent. So this is an outstanding result for the ACT when you consider that increase in presentation and the performance metrics compared both with other jurisdictions and with the improvement in performance that we have seen across our EDs.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what is the health service doing to achieve these results?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Ms Tough, because I am really pleased to say—and I mentioned some of the things earlier in terms of the integrated operations centre and the way that has been working. As members who have been in this place for a while and paying attention to the changes we have made would be aware, we established the acute medical unit to improve flow out of the emergency department to free up those beds and ensure people could get treated in a timely way.

In 2024-25 we invested more than \$31 million to continue improving patient flow across our public health services, including the permanent expansion of the acute medical unit to 24 beds at Canberra Hospital and supporting patient journeys across public hospital services through the new integrated operations centre. That was established in early 2024 to reform and streamline systems and processes for patients that require services to ensure they get the services they need when they need them. Initially, the operations centre specifically focused on the journey through the public health system from the emergency department, and it helps to identify early identification of congestion or other blockages or constraints in the system that might slow down a patient's journey through the system. The staff in the integrated operations centre work specifically with clinicians to identify those blockages, to understand the blockages and to help clinicians resolve them.

The integrated operations centre now comprises three streams, acute care, planned care and subacute care, and each stream focuses on the related part of the patient's entry and journey through the health system. Of course, acute care refers to all care experienced by patients accessing clinical services that are classified as emergency or unplanned admissions. So these improvements really show that the integrated operation centre has made a massive difference in the emergency department and we are starting to see that in planned care and subacute care as well, Mr Speaker.

Public service—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff safety

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, in recent media reporting, the former executive branch manager of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Mr Brendan Moyle outlined serious concerns about the treatment of First Nations staff within the Health and Community Services Directorate. Specifically, Mr Moyle states:

There are increasing reports of physical, mental and psychosocial stress being reported by OATSIA staff through various forums.

Minister, when did you first become aware of Mr Moyle’s concerns about the treatment of indigenous staff within the Health and Community Services Directorate?

MS ORR: I believe I have had questions similar to this. So, I would refer the member to the answer that I previously provided. I can add, for the record, that certainly instances have been raised with me and I have been briefed by the directorate as to concerns. I am going to have to give a rough timeline off the top of my head—I cannot remember the exact date—but it was towards the end of last year, following the Closing the Gap subcommittee where Mr Moyle first publicly made his comments.

The other thing I would note is that a lot of the reporting, a lot of the consideration of these instances does go through the public service and does go through the Commissioner for Public Service Standards as to reporting against other bodies. They are not necessarily something where individual instances would come to the minister—which is a little bit different, I think, to what Mr Parton is asking, which is the broader question of the culture across the public service.

So, again, I will come back with a bit more detail where I can. But, certainly, again, I can reiterate, as I have put on the public record, that, yes, I have been advised of concerns of cultural safety within the directorate, and we continue to work through those. I know my colleague, the Minister for Finance and for the Public Service, has provided an update today and has also put a lot of information on the public record around the work that the government is doing and the seriousness with which we take this.

I would also note, Mr Speaker, that, as well as that formal feedback of information, there are many people who will come and have a chat with me, have a conversation—just, when you are out and about, when you are at events—and there is certainly an anecdotal aspect—

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, Point of order under 118AA, and you may have to review this: I am not clear on whether the minister has taken the question on notice, as asked, but nothing that she has responded with so far has gone to the question very specifically asked, of when she first became aware of Mr Moyle’s concerns.

MR SPEAKER: I think it did, Mr Cocks, because she said “towards the end of last year”. I think she did respond. She was directly relevant and responsive. She did not give you an exact date, but she gave you a pretty close-enough “towards the end of last year”. So, I do not think there is a point of order.

MR PARTON: Minister, is it acceptable that your directorate reportedly willingly and knowingly ignored or dismissed Mr Moyle’s warnings that the mental health of Indigenous employees was at risk? Is that acceptable?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, while the allegation that Mr Parton is putting forward in his question has been made, these matters are under consideration and I will not be making any comment or entering into a line of discussion such as that phrase by Mr Parton, prior to due processes being undertaken.

MS BARRY: Minister, given that you stated that you only became aware during Closing the Gap debate, are complex layers of bureaucracy to blame for your not knowing what is going on in your own portfolio?

MS ORR: Again, I would point Ms Barry to my previous answers to questions that have been provided around the allegations that have been raised—the circumstances and the concerns within the public service workforce would not necessarily be reported to ministers. There are a range of reporting processes, and avenues for raising these within the workforce. Ministers are not necessarily, and perhaps should not be, involved in individual instances. There should be a level of independence in how these are assessed and how they are responded to, and that is a key component of industrial relations that underpins all these frameworks.

Certainly, again, I have been provided with information when the public service has briefed me. And, again, I would point to my previous answer to Mr Parton, I am not making any judgement on whether appropriate reporting avenues or information flows have been provided. I think these things are under consideration, and we will follow due process.

Planning—Gungahlin cinema

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the minister for planning, and it is regarding lease condition enforcement.

The lease for block 2, section 12, Gungahlin is for the purpose of an indoor entertainment facility which must include a cinema. The lease contains provisions for the completion of development by 28 February 2024. The government has previously responded, saying for the first four years of noncompliance with lease provisions the fee is nil. Now has the government approved in writing under, “Completion of development” lease provision, clause 3(a) of that particular lease, any further time for the completion of the development of the Gungahlin cinema?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice. It is a matter for the independent Territory Planning Authority. So I will come back to the Assembly with some information about that matter.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, has the ACT government considered seeking a controlled activity order under the Planning Act, given the lease holder is not compliant with their lease?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I appreciate the question. But I want to make it absolutely clear that those are independent decisions that are made by Access Canberra, who are the delegate for the Chief Planner and the independent Territory Planning Authority.

Under the Planning Act, there is, of course, the ability to seek a controlled activity order. That is there. I know that Access Canberra is aware of this particular lease. I have also made it clear in information provided to Mr Braddock on a previous occasion that there is another development in the Gungahlin town centre which may have the possibility of including a cinema, should there be a commercial agreement that is struck. So that is also a relevant factor that I am sure will be considered as well. But those are independent decisions that are made by the authority. They may choose to take regulatory action, and, if they do so, they will be using the powers set out under the Planning Act, which include a controlled activity order.

MS CLAY: Why does the Planning (General) Regulation specify a four-year period of nil fees for non-compliance with a lease?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am happy to come back with some further information in relation to that regulation. Obviously there are a range of factors in the territory that affect development and whether a developer can complete their development within the timeframe associated with a particular DA. There has to be some flexibility that takes into account some of those factors. But I will come back to the Assembly with some further information.

Mr Barr: Mercifully, all further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General’s Report—No 2/2026—Management of the Home Buyer Concession Scheme, dated 4 March 2026.

Legislative Assembly Budget Protocols Agreement—11th Assembly, dated 5 and 6 March 2026.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—Bills—Inquiry—Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 4 March 2026.

Standing orders—

99B—Petitions—Referral advice—Correspondence—Petition—Not inquired into—e-Pet 077-25—Years 11 and 12 ATAR language courses—Continuation—Copy of letter to the Speaker from Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 3 March 2026.

191—Amendments to the Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, dated 2 March 2026.

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report—2024-2025—Suburban Land Agency—Corrigendum, dated March 2026.
Public Sector Management Standards 2016, pursuant to section 56—Engagements of Long-term ACT Public Service Senior Executives—1 September 2025 to 28 February 2026.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Building and Construction Industry Training Levy Act and Financial Management Act—Building and Construction Industry Training Levy (Governing Board) Appointment 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-12 (LR, 19 February 2026).

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—Cemeteries and Crematoria (Gungahlin Memorial Hall and Condolence Lounge Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-16 (LR, 26 February 2026).

Major Events Act—Major Events (2026 Winter Sports Season Events) Notice 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-15 (LR, 24 February 2026)

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Corrections Management) Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-13 (LR, 23 February 2026).

Climate change adaptation and emissions reduction

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.15): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the ACT has a long and nation-leading record on climate action, including being the first jurisdiction in Australia to achieve 100 percent renewable electricity and legislating some of the strongest emissions reduction targets in the country; and
 - (b) a new climate change strategy for the ACT is being developed this year and strategic direction is essential to guide the Territory in the next phase of emissions reduction and climate adaptation;
- (2) acknowledges the:
 - (a) importance of strong and sustained climate action to Canberrans, who consistently identify climate change as a key priority for the wellbeing of the people who live in this city, now and into the future; and
 - (b) growing impacts of climate change on the Territory, including increased severe weather and associated social, economic and environmental pressures;
- (3) further acknowledges climate change is a collective problem and the responsibility for solutions should not rest solely with individuals and households. The next phase of transition must include clear responsibility for governments and industry and this should be reflected in the new ACT climate change strategy;

- (4) calls on the Government to consider the following areas of policy and action in the development of the next Climate Change Strategy:
 - (a) ground transport emissions reduction, including clear actions to drive the phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles, the large-scale rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and action to support the shift for Canberrans to move to lower-emissions modes of transport;
 - (b) further initiatives to progress the phase-out of fossil fuel gas, providing assurance and certainty to households and businesses;
 - (c) investment in climate adaptation and disaster readiness, ensuring Canberra's infrastructure, emergency response, ecosystems and communities are resilient to worsening climate impacts;
 - (d) the monitoring, reporting and reduction of Scope 3 emissions and industrial processes and product use emissions for Canberrans;
 - (e) a requirement for government to consider future generations in decision-making on climate, to accurately represent the duty of care we owe to future generations;
 - (f) restrictions on fossil fuel sponsorship or advertising in the ACT, to align public communications and community spaces with the Territory's climate goals; and
 - (g) ways of improving governance between the portfolios of climate, planning, environment, transport and treasury are able to work constructively together, including the potential development of a cross-government coordination mechanism;
- (5) further calls on the Government, in a downpayment of goodwill to the people of Canberra on their stated commitment to climate action, to consider specifically as part of the 2026-2027 Budget:
 - (a) additional funding and technical support for low-income households to transition off the fossil fuel gas network through electrification; and
 - (b) invest in further funding and long-term assurance to Canberra's climate and environment community partners; and
 - (6) report back to the Assembly on how these calls were incorporated into the final climate change strategy by the first sitting day in October 2026.

I rise today to speak on this motion concerning the development of the ACT's next climate change strategy. I want to begin not with policy, targets or strategies but with people. Over the past few weeks, the ACT Greens have been holding a series of community consultations across Canberra focused on climate change: what people are experiencing now, what they are worried about, and what they expect from their government in the years ahead.

We have heard from renters worried about soaring energy bills; from parents anxious about extreme heat in schools; from volunteers in our environment and climate organisations who are stretched thin, doing essential work with short-term funding and long-term uncertainty; and from young people who feel the weight of decisions made today falling squarely on their shoulders tomorrow. What has been striking is not just the depth of concern but the consistency of the message. Canberrans want strong climate action to continue, and they do not want the burden to fall on them as individuals. They want government to lead the way.

This motion is about bringing those community voices onto the floor of this Assembly. It is about ensuring that the next climate change strategy reflects the lived experience, priorities and expectations of the people we represent. The Greens have brought forward this motion to bring the voices of the people to the government and to ensure we are all working for the people we represent.

The motion first notes the ACT's long and nation-leading record on climate action. As people in this place would know, the ACT was the first jurisdiction in Australia to reach 100 per cent renewable electricity, and we have legislated some of the strongest emissions reduction targets in the country. We have shown, time and time again, that ambitious climate action is not only possible but popular when it is done well.

The reality is that the next phase of emissions reduction and climate adaptation will be more complex than the last. The low-hanging fruit has largely been picked. The decisions ahead will touch transport, housing, industry and planning, and they will require strong and decisive leadership. It is not just the responsibility of the climate change minister to lead the charge. All government ministers need to come together and make it clear that climate action deserves their attention and investment. It is what our community expects.

The motion acknowledges the importance of strong and sustained climate action to Canberrans. This is not abstract. Climate change consistently ranks as a top concern for people in this city. This motion is about the kind of city we want to live in and the kind of life we want to leave to future generations. They expect this Assembly, and this government, to act accordingly.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the motion also acknowledges the growing impacts of climate change on the territory. We do not need to look far to see them: more frequent and intense heatwaves, increased risk of bushfire, severe storms that strain infrastructure and emergency services, and pressure on ecosystems that are already under stress. These impacts are not evenly distributed. They hit hardest those with the least capacity to adapt: low-income households, people with health vulnerabilities, renters and those living in poorly designed or poorly insulated housing.

The climate change strategy needs to be about equity—making sure the impacts of climate change are not unevenly distributed across our society. The poor, the marginalised and the disadvantaged cannot face the brunt of this crisis, which is not of their own making. We ask the climate change strategy to recognise that this is a social and economic problem as well.

A critical part of this motion is its recognition that climate change is a collective problem. Too often, the burden of action is placed on individuals—“change your behaviour; invest up-front for the right appliance; forget about the weather and get on your bike and ride”—while the systems around people make those choices difficult or impossible.

A young woman named Gaby came to our climate town hall. She is passionate about food—where our food comes from, how we treat the earth that feeds us, and the emissions impacts of agriculture. While she has adjusted her diet and way of life to be

more in line with her values, she came to our town hall with questions. She knows she has done everything in her power to make a difference. Is government making the same commitment to her?

The next phase of transition must clearly articulate the responsibilities of government and industry, not just households. Government must plan, invest, regulate and coordinate. And the ability of industry to operate at scale makes it a clear target for our decarbonisation priorities. This principle of collective action over individual responsibility must sit at the heart of the next climate change strategy.

The motion calls on the ACT government to ensure the next climate change strategy addresses a number of key areas. I would like to touch on each of them—first, ground transport emission reduction. Transport is clearly our largest source of emissions here in the ACT, at well over 60 per cent. The strategy must include clear actions to drive the phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles, not vague aspirations but timelines, signals and policies that give certainty to households and businesses.

It must support the continued roll out of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, not just in new developments but across existing suburbs and multi-unit housing. And critically, it must support a genuine shift to lower-emission modes of transport—walking, cycling and public transport. That means planning for a more walkable city, safe and connected active travel infrastructure, and transport choices that work for people’s daily lives. Again and again in our consultation, people said they did not want small changes or adjustments. They want to live in a clean, green city that is leafy and walkable, where they do not ever have to get in a car if they do not want to. Getting transport right is fundamental, and it does not just fall in one minister’s remit.

Second are the further initiatives to progress the phase-out of fossil fuel gas. Canberrans want clarity and certainty. They want to know what the pathway is, what support will be available and how costs will be managed. Electrification is the pet issue of many an enthusiastic climate warrior, but our consultation found there are many people who want to electrify who are not motivated by a need to save the planet, although they do not mind it as a trade-off or side benefit.

I think of Michael, a man we met at our climate town hall. He was practical and sensible and could tell you very easily off the top of his head how much each renovation saved in energy bills, and he could guess how much you might save too. His latest crusade is against his daughter’s apartment complex. The apartment still has gas cooktops and gas hot water, and the price to maintain the gas connection is money he wants to see back in his daughter’s pocket. But complex strata arrangements and the decisions of developers years ago have locked his daughter into a bind from which there is no easy exit. On behalf of him and others, we are bringing the problem to the Assembly and letting it know the next phase of climate action must address this problem.

We know people in Canberra want to get off gas. The numbers are already very encouraging—of people who are starting to move. There are so many reasons to get off gas. People do not want to pay gas bills. They do not want to put up with the health impacts of gas stovetops in the home, and, incidentally, they also do not want to contribute to the production of fossil fuel emissions and kill the planet. Let government make some small and sensible interventions to accelerate the transition we know is

coming.

Third is investment in climate adaptation and disaster readiness. Even as we reduce emissions, climate impacts will intensify. Unfortunately, climate change is no longer abstract, and we need to consider it now for the future. Climate change is here, and we are seeing it in increasing severe weather events, including the extreme heat we saw over the summer just gone in Canberra. My colleague Mr Braddock has done some excellent advocacy in this space, and I will leave it to him to discuss it further.

The community are worried about natural disasters, and they are right to be worried. They asked simple questions: “Do you know where to go if there is bushfire smoke hanging in the air?” “Do you know what to do if there is an extreme heat event and you can’t stay at home?” At one of our small discussion groups some community members asked, “Why don’t we invest in air conditioning systems for schools and make them refuges when we need them during high-risk weather? It would mean you know where to go in severe weather, and if air conditioning helps the kids learn better, then surely that is a win for everybody.” These are the kinds of ideas the community wants to see, and which we are bringing to the floor of the Assembly. It is the kind of investment we need to ensure that Canberra remains resilient to the changing climate and that we should see in the new strategy.

The motion also calls on the government to work towards frameworks for monitoring, reporting and reducing different types of emissions. Scope 3 emissions are the emissions embedded in the goods and services we use every day. While they are not part of the ACT’s greenhouse gas inventory under carbon accounting rules, as a wealthy, high-consuming city we must be considering these emissions as part of our global responsibilities.

In addition to Scope 3 emissions, the ACT’s latest greenhouse gas inventory highlighted industrial processes and product use emissions from refrigerant gases found in air conditioning and refrigeration systems are a significant and growing proportion of the ACT’s emissions. Work on monitoring and reducing these emissions is the sort of finicky, in-the-weeds work Canberrans expect government to be getting on with. They want to see action, and for this reason we have also brought it to the floor of the Assembly.

The motion also calls for a requirement to consider future generations in climate decision-making. We note the work done by federal colleagues on advocating for a duty of care in climate change legislation, requiring decision-makers to consider the health and wellbeing of children and future generations when approving decisions that would significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions. We believe similar obligations should govern decision-making here in the ACT.

We hear it again and again in consultation: the young people who know they have been given a raw deal, and the parents who are devastated at the world they might be leaving behind for their children. I think of Rebecca and Emily, two young women who came to our climate town hall. Enthusiastic and passionate about climate, the environment and sustainability, they had already done some impressive things in their brief careers as activists. But it did cause me to reflect. I have been working on this problem for so long. How do these young people feel when they still have so long and so far to go?

Considering duty of care as part of the climate change strategy would reflect the truth: climate change is a long-term problem and decisions made today will shape the lives of young people who do not yet have a voice in this Assembly. Embedding a duty to consider future generations ensures that short-term pressures do not override long-term responsibility.

The motion also addresses restrictions on fossil fuel sponsorship or advertising in the ACT. In our climate consultation, community members were clear that they believe Canberra is different. Canberra is a progressive jurisdiction that cares about climate change, and so our government should reflect that. When the territory lends its name, assets or platforms to commercial promotion, it inevitably carries a degree of endorsement. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether those platforms should be used to promote industries whose business models depend on expanding fossil fuel production. In the ACT our climate commitments are clear, and the management of public assets should align with them. The motion does not mandate a particular outcome. It simply invites the government to examine the issue and consider sensible, proportionate rules, consistent with community expectations and responsible climate governance.

Finally, in this section, the motion highlights the need for better governance across climate-relevant portfolios. Climate policy does not sit neatly in one ministerial box. It cuts across planning, environment, transport, treasury, health and more. The strategy must address how these portfolios work together constructively, potentially through a renewed or a new formal, cross-government coordination mechanism, so climate outcomes are embedded across decision-making and not treated as an add-on.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the motion then turns to what this Assembly can do now—not in theory, not in future strategies, but in the very next budget. We are mindful that, given the likely timeline of this strategy, it will not be ready in time for the coming budget, and that leaves question marks about where and when the resources will become available. So this is framed deliberately as a downpayment of goodwill to the people of Canberra, a signal that the government's stated commitment to climate action is matched by practical, budget-backed decisions.

First, the motion calls on the government to consider additional funding and technical support for low-income households to transition off the fossil fuel gas network through electrification. We know that electrification is central to the ACT's decarbonisation pathway. We also know that without targeted support, the benefits of that transition will flow first, and fastest, to those who are already better off.

Low-income households, renters and people in older housing stock face real barriers: up-front costs for appliances, limited control over energy decisions, and a lack of trusted, accessible technical advice. The kinds of practical steps the government could invest in could include: targeted grants or rebates for efficient electric appliances; practical, on-the-ground technical assistance to help households understand their options; and programs that actively reach people where they are, rather than expecting them to navigate complex systems alone. This is not about forcing people to change; it is about giving people options. And it ensures that the move away from gas does not deepen inequality but instead improves comfort, health and energy affordability for

those who need it most—those who are struggling the most with cost of living.

Second, the motion calls for further investment and long-term assurance for Canberra's climate and environment community partners. Those organisations play a critical role in delivering climate outcomes in this territory. They engage communities, restore ecosystems, build resilience, support behaviour change, and often act as trusted intermediaries between government and the public. Yet many of these organisations operate on short-term, insecure funding cycles. Investing in these organisations is not an optional extra but crucial for government action. It strengthens community trust, increases delivery capacity and ensures climate policy is grounded in lived experience.

Taken together, these budget commitments send a clear signal. They are practical, proportionate, and entirely consistent with the values Canberrans expect from their government. Finally, the motion calls on the government to report back, as you would expect. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (3.30): I thank Mr Rattenbury for moving this motion—a motion that was clearly borne out of frustration with the Labor government in this space. It is concerning, of course, that the government has not met its own interim climate targets, and the delay in releasing the updated strategy only adds to those concerns.

Taking meaningful action on climate change is essential to protecting our environment, strengthening our economy and safeguarding the wellbeing of future generations. For these reasons, the commitment to achieving net zero by 2045 remains an important goal. Maintaining this target provides certainty for industry, supports innovation and ensures that our transition is sustainable, orderly and achievable.

Importantly, real progress on climate change comes from balance—from finding a path that safeguards our environment, whilst also ensuring that individuals have a choice and our small businesses remain strong and competitive. We must support innovation that allows businesses to transition at a realistic pace by giving them the tools, incentives and flexibility they need to adapt and adopt cleaner technologies without compromising their viability. Just as important is the fact that we must take into consideration that individuals and families, particularly those on low incomes, are not left to bear the brunt of these changes.

There are a few parts of this motion that raise some concern for us. The Canberra Liberals have long raised concern about the government's plan to phase out internal combustion engine vehicles. This motion calls on the government to consider actions to drive the phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles, and we remain concerned that this carries real risks for Canberrans, and it is not something that we support.

Electric vehicles, even with rebates and incentives, remain financially out of reach for many households, particularly those on low incomes. The government's failure to put in place the infrastructure that Canberrans need to support EV usage means that many businesses, tenants and apartment residents will find it difficult to adapt. There are, of course, other factors that are outside the control of the ACT when it comes to this issue.

In addition, calling on the government to consider further initiatives to progress the phase-out of fossil fuel gas is something that we are concerned about. We did not

support the blanket ban on gas when the government first announced it, and we do not support it now. Of course, we are not arguing about the evidence of the impact of natural gas on emissions. However, we do remain concerned about the impact that this action will have on Canberrans, particularly as we remain in a cost-of-living crisis. Any move to progress the phase-out of gas will have a disproportionate financial impact on our struggling small businesses and vulnerable households, who may face higher up-front costs.

In terms of the “calls on”, the Canberra Liberals have consistently raised our concerns about the impact of the phasing out of gas on families and businesses in Canberra, and we do so again today. I do acknowledge that Mr Rattenbury’s motion calls on the government to consider these issues, and I think it is sensible and prudent to do so. I would also call on the minister to take into consideration the inadvertent and disproportionate impacts on small businesses and vulnerable members of our community.

In terms of the call to provide long-term funding assurances to our climate and environmental community groups, again, this is something that the Canberra Liberals have raised for some time; in fact, we have raised it across the entire community sector. Back in 2019, I raised this very issue in the Assembly, in calling for funding security for the Landcare groups. I have a long history in that regard. The community sector, including the groups that do work in environment and climate change, is an integral part of the ACT community, and it makes a significant and essential contribution to Canberra.

In closing, the Canberra Liberals remain committed to the net zero target by 2045. In doing so, we urge the government to always consider a balanced approach that works to achieve this target, at the same time as considering the impact on Canberrans, particularly those from a vulnerable cohort.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (3.35): I will take the opportunity to provide a few remarks on Mr Rattenbury’s motion and thank him for the preliminary discussion we had about this yesterday afternoon. Minister Orr will respond in some detail later in the debate, and I understand that there are a number of amendments that we will be discussing as well.

I want to make some broad opening remarks in relation to the government’s direction here, and respond to a couple of specific elements within the motion that could have some impact across portfolios for which I have responsibility, noting, with respect to section (4)(g), that this is indeed a broad policy area that cuts across most areas of government and economic activity.

Firstly, and broadly, we welcome the motion today, the specific areas that have been identified for consideration, and the context in which it has been brought forward, inasmuch as the language calls on the government to consider a range of issues, and we will do so. I do not think that this list is exhaustive of all the issues that we will need to consider, but it provides a series of areas on which I think there is a degree of consensus, at least on the progressive side of politics, in relation to both priority and intent to address, through future strategies and actions that we have already undertaken.

Part of my discussion with Mr Rattenbury yesterday was about whether the dot points (a) to (g) in section (4) broadly reflected an order of priority for consideration. Taking on board the facts around the emission reduction task, clearly, transport is an area of considerable focus and priority. Within the subpoints, in (4)(a), of course, as Ms Lee touched on, some elements are more within the control of the territory government than others. I am particularly conscious of the need for further investment in charging infrastructure. I know that that is a priority of the Australian government and, indeed, a priority of many private sector partners. I think there is scope for further work there, although I note that we set an ambitious target for the most recent period, and I believe we have achieved, if not exceeded, it.

There will be a need for further action to support Canberrans to shift to more low-emission modes of transport. Minister Cheyne announced one of those yesterday, with an expansion of the last-mile electric transportation, being scooters and bikes, through a big shift coming in the next couple of months.

In relation to internal combustion engine vehicles, obviously, that is a long-term ambition, but the phase-out of those will take longer, I suspect, given international trends. Mr Assistant Speaker, if you had asked me this question several years ago, I was more optimistic about the rate of transition from the auto manufacturers to electric-only. There appears to be a winding back of some of that ambition by international manufacturers. Of course, we do not manufacture vehicles in Australia, so what is on offer in our market is a reflection of the new national vehicle emission standards that certainly are seeing more and cheaper electric vehicles on the market, but there will still be legacy internal combustion engine vehicles throughout the next decade. I am afraid that is a reality that we must face. As it goes to broader net zero emission ambitions, we will need to factor in offsets. The fact is that there will still be internal combustion engine vehicles driving on roads in the ACT well into the 2040s. That is very clear.

We will also need to focus on the transition away from gas. That is where there is quite a difference, from what I have just heard from Ms Lee. We did sign up to this on a pathway that is achievable, and we believe that it will result in lower costs for households. It is a cost-of-living initiative. Why? Because moving to an electric-only outcome means reduced supply costs—households not paying connection fees into the gas network. That is why we are already seeing a pretty strong movement, and I suspect that that will continue.

We also need to be honest regarding the reality that the electricity network will need significant augmentation over the coming decade. That will not be cost free, but it is an exercise that is being undertaken at a national level as well and, for the first time, almost, this century we have a supportive federal government driving this change. I am optimistic about the electrification pathway—perhaps more so in relation to the transition away from gas for household use than I am in relation to the outcomes around internal combustion engine vehicles.

With respect to the other points that are raised within section (4) of Mr Rattenbury's motion, the government will certainly engage with them. With respect to (4)(f), this is an issue that has come up before in relation to fossil fuel sponsorship and advertising. It is important that there is clarity in relation to what is meant by a fossil fuel

sponsorship. Where this will get tricky and definitional will be in the energy companies themselves.

The government, through Icon Water, owns 50 per cent of the energy retail business ActewAGL. ActewAGL is active in the renewable energy space, but it is also a retailer of gas. If the suggestion here is that a company in which we have a share will not be able to advertise in the ACT, I think that is problematic. As the minister responsible for certain venues in the territory, those venues have commercial sponsorship arrangements. I do not think there is any intent for the ACT government to be seeking fossil fuel sponsors for those venues, but I am conscious that there are teams that play in national sporting competitions, and who play at those venues, who do have sponsors who, it could be argued, are fossil fuel sponsors.

Mr Parton: Just ban those teams, then.

MR BARR: I do not support that approach, to be clear.

Mr Parton: Don't you love the planet?

MR BARR: In going down this path, I appreciate the words that Mr Rattenbury used in his remarks—that we need to be sensible and pragmatic about this. This is not about banning the Giants from playing in Canberra; nor is it about banning the West Coast Eagles from playing in this city or, indeed, teams—

Mr Rattenbury: Freo, maybe.

MR BARR: Maybe out of pity for the Leader of the Opposition, we should ban them, so that he does not have to suffer the humiliation of watching their on-field performance. There we are: this is what gets a rise out of the Leader of the Opposition! I am kidding.

To come back to the point, we need to be careful about this and its implications. I do need to be clear that it is certainly not the government's intent that Woodside, Santos or some energy company that is focused solely on fossil fuels would be a sponsor of an ACT government venue. That is clearly not the case. I do want to encourage and support energy companies who are making the transition away from fossil fuel to renewable sources, and for them to play a role in our city in the way that ActewAGL does. I think that is important.

Looking at the specific measures that are called for in section (5), the government will be considering those. Again, this comes down to definitional questions around where that support should be prioritised. Is that in public housing, for example? What is the collective view of the community in relation to the Sustainable Household Scheme and its support for low income households to transition off gas? It is extensive and it has been well utilised in this city.

These are all areas that we certainly have a positive disposition towards considering, as part of this strategy, and we look forward to undertaking that work and the next steps. I am conscious, though, that the political debate in this country at a national level has taken a very sharp turn since the last federal election. At a national level now, the three

major conservative parties in this nation—One Nation, the Liberal Party and the National Party—all now have positions in opposition to the direction that is being talked about here. What happens nationally, in that national debate, does have an impact here in the territory, in terms of both people who might align themselves with the political views of those national parties and the national policy settings that the federal parliament puts in place and that have obvious flowthroughs into the ACT.

Time will tell; we will know on Saturday whether One Nation's polling is reflected in One Nation's votes in the ballot box. That will be very telling for the future of centre-right politics in this country. Regrettably, with the stampede away from net zero ambitions—even 2050, which is less ambitious than our current agenda—it is worth observing that those three parties—and, collectively, nearly half the country who will express a primary vote for those three parties—are now pulling in a very different direction. It is a different climate in which we undertake this debate.

I welcome Mr Rattenbury bringing this issue forward. There are some good and practical issues to work through. The government looks forward to doing that with the community and this place in the coming weeks and months.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.47): I rise today to speak on this motion regarding the development of the next Climate Change Strategy for the ACT, and I do so with a particular focus on one of the most urgent and tangible aspects of climate action for our community—climate adaptation. For many years, climate change was spoken about as a future problem—something abstract, something that might affect other places, or later generations. That framing no longer holds.

Climate change is here. It is shaping the way Canberrans live, work, travel and stay safe. While we must continue to reduce emissions with urgency, we must also be honest about this reality: adaptation is now an essential part of responsible government.

We were very lucky to have Anjali Sharma, a young climate change activist and the lead litigant in *Sharma v federal environment minister*, speak at the Assembly to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change through extreme heat. At that event, she let us know that adapting to climate change is responsible and sensible, while surrendering to climate change is not. Adaptation is about protecting our community from foreseeable harm, not accepting that climate damage is inevitable.

This motion rightly acknowledges the growing impacts of climate change on the territory. Canberrans are already experiencing longer and more intense bushfires, heatwaves and severe storms. These impacts are not just environmental; they are social and economic. They affect health outcomes, energy demand, productivity, and the resilience of our infrastructure and our communities. Adaptation is about recognising these risks and acting early, because the cost of prevention is always lower than the cost of recovery.

One of the clearest and most immediate adaptation challenges facing Canberra is heat. As our city grows and densifies, we are seeing the effects of the urban heat island phenomenon, where hard surfaces like roads, roofs and car parks absorb and retain heat, driving local temperatures higher, particularly during extreme heat events. This is not evenly felt across our city. People in newer suburbs with less established tree cover,

renters in poorly insulated housing, older Canberrans, and those with chronic health conditions and/or disabilities bear the greatest burden.

The Climate Change Strategy must directly address heat as a public health and planning issue, not as an afterthought. This could mean embedding heat resilience into urban design, prioritising cooling in public spaces, and ensuring that new developments do not lock in hotter, less livable neighbourhoods for decades to come.

One of the most effective, affordable and community-supported tools that we have to combat urban heat is tree canopy cover. Trees cool our streets, our homes and our schools. They reduce heat stress, improve air quality, support biodiversity, and enhance mental wellbeing. Tree canopy should be treated as essential climate infrastructure, not decorative landscaping.

The next Climate Change Strategy must strengthen commitments to protect existing mature trees, expand canopy cover in heat-vulnerable suburbs, and ensure that canopy targets are meaningful, measurable and enforced through planning systems. This is particularly important in areas with historically lower canopy cover, where heat impacts are already more severe. Encouraging canopy cover is not anti-development; it is pro-livability. It ensures that growth does not come at the expense of comfort, health or resilience.

The motion calls for investment in climate adaptation and disaster readiness, and this is an area where strategic direction is critical. Adaptation is not just about responding to disasters when they occur; it is about preparing communities, systems and ecosystems before they are tested. That includes ensuring infrastructure is designed for future climate conditions, not past averages, strengthening emergency response capabilities, investing in ecosystem resilience to reduce fire, flood and risk, and supporting communities to understand and manage climate risks locally.

Climate adaptation must be coordinated across government. It touches on planning, transport, health, emergency services, environment, and treasury. The strategy must ensure that these portfolios are working together, not in silos.

Climate impacts do not fall equally and adaptation must not, either. Low income households are more likely to live in hotter homes, have fewer resources to retrofit or cool them, and face greater health risks during extreme heat events. Adaptation policy must therefore be explicitly equity-focused. It must prioritise support for vulnerable households, investment in community facilities that provide refuge during heatwaves, and targeted action in suburbs most exposed to climate risk.

If adaptation is left to market forces alone, inequality will deepen. Government has a responsibility to intervene. That is why I am pleased that this motion includes a call to consider specific investment for low income households to transition off the fossil fuel gas network. The transition needs to be equitable. It needs to include everybody.

Mr Assistant Speaker, a particularly important element of this motion is the call for government to consider future generations in climate decision-making. While you, I and other middle-aged men may hold power today, we do not own the future. Climate change is a long-term challenge, and the decisions made in this Assembly about land

use, infrastructure, energy and transport will shape the lives of people who are not yet able to vote, speak or advocate for themselves.

A duty of care to future generations means taking climate risk seriously, avoiding short-term decisions that lock in long-term harm, and being honest about the legacy we are creating. Embedding this duty into climate governance is not symbolic. It is a practical tool to ensure long-term thinking in a system often driven by short-term pressures.

It is important to be clear: adaptation does not replace emissions reduction. We must do both. Adapting to climate change is sensible. It protects people and places. But surrendering to climate change, accepting ever-worsening impacts as inevitable, is not. Every fraction of a degree of warming avoided makes adaptation easier, cheaper and more effective. At the same time, every delay makes the task harder. The Climate Change Strategy must therefore integrate adaptation and mitigation, recognising that resilience and emissions reduction are two sides of the same responsibility.

Finally, this motion calls on the government to report back to the Assembly on how these issues are incorporated into the final Climate Change Strategy. This matters, because adaptation cannot be treated as a secondary chapter or a vague aspiration. It must be clearly articulated, properly resourced and transparently monitored. Canberrans deserve to know how their government is preparing the city for the climate realities ahead and how decisions today are protecting tomorrow. In conclusion, climate adaptation is about foresight, fairness and care.

I will talk very briefly to Ms Carrick's proposed amendment, which has not yet been moved. We will be supportive of the amendment because transport makes up 63 per cent of our emissions. Electrifying our vehicle fleet will help, but it is not sufficient in itself to eliminate the emissions. Embedded emissions in a vehicle's construction, plus the road infrastructure, mean we must look at modal shift.

I note the Chief Minister's comments today in terms of the continuation of internal combustion engines as part of the mix. While we have to accept that, in that they may continue for a period of time, we need to be doing everything in our power to reduce those as quickly as possible if we are to achieve our emissions reduction targets. Changing to electric vehicles will not, in itself, be sufficient. That is why we need to look at modal shift—not just because it is cost efficient for government budgets, particularly during a fiscal emergency, but because modal shift is cost efficient for individual household budgets during cost-of-living emergencies.

Modal shift will require a behavioural change; hence that is why we need to have detailed information on how to help this behavioural change. One data point could be the preference survey referred to in Ms Carrick's amendment. Another could be the next iteration of the household travel survey. The last one was conducted in 2022, and the next one is due in 2027.

I would note that, in order to achieve this, it would require funding in the budget coming up, the one for the 2026-27 budget year, to establish such a survey, which we see as an important marker in terms of how we will help to drive household travel so as to achieve this modal shift.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.57): I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing forward this motion. I move the following amendment that has been circulated in my name:

After paragraph (4)(g), insert:

“(h) investigate how to encourage mode shift to public transport and active travel, including undertaking a stated preference survey across Canberra.”.

My amendment asks the government to consider how to actively encourage mode shift to public transport and active travel, including by undertaking a stated preference survey across Canberra. The reason for this amendment is straightforward. The government’s own draft discussion paper tells us that transport accounts for around 61 per cent of the ACT’s emissions, with the overwhelming majority coming from private vehicle use. If we are serious about the next phase of climate action, transport cannot be a side issue; it has to be central.

Mode shift does not happen by wishful thinking. It does not happen simply because one major project is underway. It happens when people are offered public transport that is frequent, reliable, direct and easy to use. It happens when walking and cycling are safe, practical and connected.

A stated preference survey would give the government valuable evidence about what services would genuinely attract people onto public transport, what improvements matter most, and where gaps in the current network are still pushing people back into their cars. That is exactly the kind of evidence we need for better policy, better service planning and better investment decisions.

I also support stronger action to help households to transition off gas. The ACT already has loans, rebates and support programs, including the Sustainable Household Scheme, and that is welcome. But I have heard directly from constituents who want to electrify their homes and are facing a significant cost simply to decommission their gas meter. If the government wants people to make the switch, the system needs to be clear, practical and fair. That means taking a serious look at existing subsidies, caps and concessions, and reviewing how they apply to gas disconnection.

Good planning of the built form is one of the most powerful tools that we have to improve livability, while responding to a changing climate. The draft strategy already recognises the importance of tree canopy, urban heat mitigation, climate-ready homes and low-emission buildings. But we can be more explicit about what that means in practice.

In our town centres, well-designed podiums can provide human scale, activate public spaces, support deep soil zones and trees, and create more comfortable places for people to walk, gather and spend time. Above that, slim and well-spaced towers matter. They reduce windshear, limit overshadowing, and allow sunlight and sky views to reach the street. If we are serious about reducing urban heat, climate-responsive built form should be a core requirement of our planning system, not an afterthought.

Finally, looking after our natural landscape is central to how Canberra adapts to a

changing climate and protects community wellbeing. The strategy rightly highlights tree canopy, biodiversity, healthy waterways and the role of the new landscape plan. But we should go further and be clearer about the importance of wide riparian corridors that allow for naturalisation, with restoration prioritised over hard-edged concrete responses.

Yarralumla Creek is a clear example, and it has flooded recently. This creek needs room to function as a creek. In major weather events, it needs space to flood safely. Constraining floodplains with development, hard edges or narrow corridors simply shifts risks downstream and increases damage to homes, infrastructure and habitat. Leaving adequate buffers around waterways is not wasted land; it is critical climate infrastructure. Yarralumla Creek runs through the new north Woden proposal under the southern gateway planning framework. You can deal with the flooding by engineering away our creek, but it is not clear how that action would align with the Climate Change Strategy. Let us have our creek.

If we plan with nature, not against it, we can reduce flood risk, protect wildlife, and build a city that is safer, cooler and more resilient for generations to come. I support this motion and, above all, I want the next strategy to be practical—on transport, electrification, built form, and the protection of our natural environment.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.01): I want to echo the words of the Liberal environment and climate change shadow minister, Ms Lee, whose contribution to this debate, I think, has been the most practical, sensible contribution, and the one that is most grounded in day-to-day reality. Very specifically, as the Leader of the Opposition, I want to make it clear that the Canberra Liberals position in this portfolio space has not changed over a period of time. It has remained the same. I want to make it abundantly clear that the Canberra Liberals do not support the Labor-Greens fixation on phasing out the household gas supply. We also do not support the concept of outlawing the purchase or sale of any internal combustion engine or even hybrid motor vehicle in the ACT at any future date. I want to make that clear.

As this motion calls on the government quite simply to consider a number of policy and action areas, we will not be opposing this motion. When it comes to considering the listed policy and action items, the Canberra Liberals say: knock yourself out. Consider away. Please consider, and consider very deeply, but please take into account the very real, negative impacts on many Canberrans, as outlined by Ms Lee.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.03): As the opposition shadow minister has already spoken to this motion, I do not want to take up much time, but I want to make a point about the broader context facing the territory and how this weighs on climate policy.

Today, we have more than \$17 billion in territory debt, and it is costing \$660 million a year to service the debt. Despite all the spin that the government tries to put on the situation, the truth is that this is an enormous burden. And it is a burden that will grow, because our debt is forecast to grow rapidly, and interest rates are forecast to grow, as events overseas push up inflation and the risk premium. Within two years, we will be paying \$1 billion a year in interest, compared to the total territory spending of \$10 billion.

This burden is the legacy of the Barr government. It is a burden that cannot be managed with new revenue. The opportunities for the territory to increase tax revenue are limited, if not already exhausted. Local households are struggling with affordability, and lower income families are moving across the border. Local businesses are barely surviving, and many are closing down. The commonwealth has shown quite clearly that it is unwilling to pick up the tab.

We can all see the pressure that this is already putting on the territory government and our public services. Most members realise that this pressure is likely to get more pronounced over time, and that is before we consider the growing spending pressures, as our population grows and ages, further adding to the demand for public services like education, health care and community safety.

In short, the territory's fiscal position is poor, and it is only getting worse. This is the context in which the new climate strategy is being developed. The Greens motion would mean substantially increasing spending, both by the territory and by households, on climate policy. But the motion is not up-front about that, and they should be. They should be honest about what this means for the budget and where the money will come from. While I suspect most local households support more climate action, I am not sure they would be as supportive if they knew it meant cutting back on education or health services, or paying thousands of dollars more in rates each year.

I note the motion does call for more support for low income households, but the truth is that genuinely low income households are not looking for low-interest loans for EVs or new household appliances. They simply cannot afford them. Many of those lower income households in my electorate do not want to change over to a government-approved car, heater, cooktop or water system.

The territory has legislated climate targets, and I am not suggesting that we should change the law or fail to comply with them. But we have choices about how we achieve those targets. The Greens' approach is to spend much more, regulate more and subsidise more until the job is done. The alternative approach is to place value for money at the heart of our climate policies.

In response to questions that I put to the minister and officials at estimates, it is clear that nobody is tracking the cost or value of our current policies, or how much we are paying for each tonne of abatement. Given our fiscal position, this is shocking and it is unsustainable. It needs to change. We should be transparent about all of our climate policies—the cost and the amount of expected actual abatement. We should report how much we are paying for each tonne of abatement and be willing to redirect spending from high-cost to low-cost abatement. We should be open to any opportunities for low-cost abatement by local organisations and businesses. If they can help to get emissions down at a lower cost than other initiatives, we should embrace them. That is how we can achieve our emissions targets at lower cost to taxpayers, with less regulatory intervention and more collaboration with the community.

This approach is the right one, given the territory's fiscal position. It is the right one for taxpayers, who have to pick up the tab for the Greens' largesse. And it is the right one for Canberrans who rely on public services. They do not deserve to have them cut because Labor cannot manage money and the Greens do not understand value for

money.

I will touch briefly—even though he has not moved them yet—on Mr Emerson’s amendments that he has circulated. I do not think anybody in this chamber knows what it will cost the territory to meet our legislated target and achieve net zero in 2045. We know that it will be expensive. The current policies that we have in place are not cheap and, as we learned in last year’s update, they are also insufficient. Much more will have to be spent if we are to achieve our targets, but I do not know how much that will be. I am not sure anyone in this place knows what financial demands it will place on us.

Despite all of this, Mr Emerson proposes that we bring forward the target from 2045 to 2040. We cannot know the actual cost that this will impose on the territory, but a quick, back-of-the-envelope calculation based on current market forecasts suggests that it could run to \$100 million if we rely heavily on carbon offsets. If we forgo carbon offsets, as I suspect Mr Emerson would urge us to do, the burden will be much heavier. Full abatement of gas and transport emissions would probably require \$200 million to \$300 million, but the abatement task would need to go further than this.

My personal view is that the Assembly should not make a decision involving hundreds of millions of dollars in expenditure as part of a rushed, uncosted amendment to a private member’s motion, provided to the Assembly at late notice, with no plan as to how this can possibly be achieved. It is absolutely not how business should be conducted in this place. It is irresponsible and, frankly, it is disrespectful to the Assembly.

If Mr Emerson believes this is an issue which is worth the Assembly’s time, he should work through the usual channels. He should have an inquiry, after which he can move motions and introduce legislation, so that members have the chance to fully consider the proposal and its implications. But that supposes that the outcome is what matters, rather than a member grabbing whatever headlines he can.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.10): I am speaking in support of the motion that Mr Rattenbury has brought before the Assembly today. In particular, I want to talk about the call for restrictions on fossil fuel sponsorship and advertising in the ACT, and the call to align our public communications and our community spaces with our climate goals.

The motion speaks to a simple principle about how government operates. Put simply, if the ACT funds it, owns it or endorses it, it should not be used to promote industries that conflict with the territory’s policy objectives. That is the principle behind that very simple idea. That ensures our public resources, our government assets, our government funding and our government endorsements—those assets that are funded by our community—are not used to promote fossil fuel companies that are driving the climate crisis that our young people are going to have to live through.

The ACT has made really clear commitments when it comes to the climate. Across many years and across this Assembly, there has been a shared understanding that the ACT should demonstrate credible climate leadership, but at the moment we have a small but important inconsistency. Our existing commercial arrangements mean fossil fuel companies can still promote their brands through territory assets, sponsorships or

government-supported activities, and that creates some obvious tensions.

It means that, while the ACT is investing in reducing emissions and accelerating the clean energy transition, government-enabled arrangements might simultaneously provide promotional platforms to industries whose core business relies on expanding fossil fuel production. It sends mixed signals to the community, our institutions and investors about what direction we are trying to go in.

The ACT has already shown leadership on this issue. After the Greens introduced a motion, by my colleague Miss Nuttall, the Assembly voted to prevent fossil fuel and gambling companies from sponsoring school programs. That decision recognised something very important. Our schools should be places for learning. They should not be platforms whose activities are driving the climate crisis that young people will inherit. We should not let these predatory companies have access to our children in order to teach them what they want to sell to them.

The ACT has set the standard for keeping fossil fuel sponsorship out of kids' education. It is time to ensure that the rest of our territory-controlled assets align with that same principle. The same logic applies. If we recognise that government institutions should not lend credibility or endorsement to fossil fuel companies in schools, it is reasonable for us to ask government not to lend their credibility and endorsement more broadly. We need to recognise that fossil fuel advertising today is just about selling a product, like all advertising, but it is also about building social licence for a product that has lost its social licence.

Sponsorships and branding allow companies to position themselves as community partners, as climate leaders, as part of the transition, even while their core business is still relying on expanding oil and gas production. That is why these sponsorships appear in trusted public settings like schools, community events, public transport infrastructure and government-supported programs.

Mr Rattenbury's motion covers an awful lot of ground that we need to make sure we are covering in the next strategy. One aspect of it is to make sure that government assets are not used for that purpose. In part, the motion calls on government to consider, as part of its climate strategy, preventing our agencies from entering into new contracts or new arrangements that allow fossil fuel companies to advertise or promote themselves where the territory is directly involved.

It might include advertising on public transport infrastructure. It could include corporate branding on government buildings or facilities. It could include digital advertising on government websites or applications. We would want it to include sponsor branding at events that are supported by the ACT government or naming rights attached to any territory program or service. We do not envisage that this restriction would apply to advertising on private property, commercial television, radio, print or digital advertising, or to private events that do not have any ACT government involvement.

That principle would set really clear rules for how public assets and public funds should be used. They should be used to deliver public benefits. It will align public spending with our stated policy objectives. It will protect the integrity of public assets, and it removes avoidable policy contradictions. It reinforces the ACT's reputation for credible

climate leadership, and it makes sure that we are getting value for money. We should not be promoting an industry that is causing the damage that we are trying to deal with, that we have a huge amount of cost and government services to deliver, to make people safe to deal with that damage. We should not be doing both those things at once. It makes no sense.

It is also about the small decisions that government can make every single day, including how we manage our public assets, how we structure our procurements, how we ensure our government institutions are reflecting the values and policy commitments that have been made by the territory that are so strongly shared by our community. If the ACT funds something, owns something or lends its name to something, the community reasonably expects that it should not be supporting fossil fuels with that decision.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.15): I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing this motion forward today. Thanks to recent media reports, we know that Mr Rattenbury has some strong views about the Climate Change Strategy and the minister responsible. On a first reading of this motion, it would seem that Mr Rattenbury has decided to help the minister out by giving a few pointers about what should be included in the strategy.

The motion calls on the government to “consider” a few areas of policy and action. But the Greens are really calling for “clear actions to drive the phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles”. To me, that sounds like more of a direction than a consideration. I wonder whether it is also the job of the taxpayer to pay for electric charging stations across the territory, given that only around 10 per cent of the population drive electric vehicles, leaving 90 per cent driving petrol and diesel vehicles.

In terms of banning gas, the Greens are claiming that it will provide assurance and certainty to households and businesses, but we currently have a chef and restaurant owner in Campbell who says that the current electricity supply is “woefully inadequate” to operate his business. The power trips three or four times a day. This business is not alone. Businesses and households across Canberra are feeling the impacts of constant blackouts, with some costing tens of thousands of dollars in lost products when the fridges go out.

There is one point in the motion, however, that I do agree with; that is, the duty of care that we owe to future generations. A child born today is born into the crippling debt that this Labor-Greens alliance has created over the last decade. We owe it to future generations to stop racking up debt and start spending responsibly.

Mandating the phase-out of petrol vehicles, restricting advertising and accelerating the removal of gas without clear, affordable alternatives will push up costs at a time when households are really feeling the pressure. Climate policy that ignores cost-of-living pressures is not compassionate; it is careless. It is about extending government control deeper into how Canberrans live, how Canberrans travel, and even how they heat their homes and run their businesses.

Ms Carrick’s amendment agreed to.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.18): I rise to speak in support of Mr Rattenbury’s

motion and thank him for bringing it forward today. Globally, if we do not change course, we are barreling towards two degrees or more of warming. According to the United Nations Environment Programme's *Emissions gap report 2025*, current levels of global action mean that temperatures will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. As we all know, this alone will have severe consequences: more extreme weather, more extreme heat, more massive environmental disasters, and more vulnerable people, including children and future generations, being subject to a worse life because of decisions that people in positions of power, like us, made or did not make and actions that we took or did not take—priorities we choose that will directly impact the lives of our kids and grandkids. This is a collective responsibility, not just an individual one, and government policy needs to reflect that reality at all levels.

I am confident, based on some of the remarks we have already heard, that some members, in listening to my remarks on this motion and reading the amendments I have circulated, will roll their eyes. Yes, the ACT contributes a very small share to total global emissions, but that does not mean that what we do does not matter. That is a cop-out. Far from it. The ACT has long been considered a climate leader and, with our reputation as a testing ground for bold, evidence based reform, we have the chance, and I would say responsibility, to show the country—even the world—what is possible. We have an opportunity to implement ambitious measures that disprove arguments that urgent action is just too hard, too complex or does not have community support.

More can be done and must be done. I for one believe that what the ACT does in this area and what we do in this chamber matters deeply. The next Climate Change Strategy should match the urgency of the crisis we are facing. It should match the ambitions of our community and it should lean into the potential we have in the ACT to show real leadership on climate action. Caution and fear should not dominate this conversation; nor should fatalism or nihilism. We need to work constructively across the whole Assembly and, just as importantly, the whole government to articulate a positive, ambitious, community backed vision of the sustainable, climate-friendly Canberra we want for future generations, and to follow through on implementing the policy measures we need to realise that vision.

To that end, I am really keen to work with the minister and her team and other members with an interest in these matters, including Mr Rattenbury, as evidenced by this motion and a lot of work in this area, current and past. I am keen to work to amplify the voices of our community and to bring their policy proposals to life so that action on climate mitigation and adaptation is informed by community perspectives, ensuring we are taking quick, meaningful steps to drive down emissions and prepare for a warming climate. This is what Canberrans want: for our city to serve as a test case, demonstrating what it looks like to do this and to do it right.

Last month, I hosted a roundtable here at the Assembly with more than 20 local climate organisations, experts and advocates. Based on the wide-ranging discussion at this roundtable and further input before and after it, I have today put forward more than 30 concrete community-initiated policy proposals in my submission to the ACT government's consultation process on its next Climate Change Strategy. These measures align with many of the policy areas Mr Rattenbury has rightly highlighted in this motion as critical to the development of the next strategy.

For instance, to reduce transport emissions, one proposed measure is to bring back initiatives like the ACT Walking Bus program, which ran from 2004 to 2007 with funding from the health portfolio. This initiative was co-ordinated by the YWCA and oversaw the safe transportation of children to and from school, walking together in large groups, or “buses”. There were a total of 55 walking buses per week, enabling parents to not rely on their cars at drop-off time and to foster healthy habits in the next generation. These kinds of programs should be reinstated with appropriate cross-portfolio funding.

To provide renters and those living in strata complexes with greater access to being part of the renewable energy transition, we could look at enabling plug-in balcony solar panels, as have already been rolled out extensively in places like Germany, as well as establishing a right to charge for renters and addressing cost barriers to the electrification of apartment complexes, so that EV uptake and other opportunities to electrify are not restricted largely to homeowners living in standalone dwellings. We need policy settings that address the fact that those least able to tolerate crises like fuel price shocks and power price increases have also been least able to access electrification opportunities that can protect them against those crises.

With regard to adaptation, community feedback I have received is focused on simple steps like including air conditioning in every classroom, which has often been discussed in this place, including in committee reports; mandating minimum shade levels over school playgrounds; and restricting the use of materials like metal surfaces and synthetic turf in playground construction as a way of preparing for a warmer climate.

We should also consider introducing a duty of care to future generations as part of the next ACT Climate Change Strategy, as Mr Rattenbury’s motion proposes, to ensure we have the backing needed to protect the interests of those who come after us. Surely that is our responsibility and should be our aim as elected representatives tasked with doing what is right by our community, not just now but for the future. Surely we all want to be able to tell future generations that we did everything we could to make their lives better than ours, and that we were willing to bear some small costs and change our behaviour in some small ways in the short term so that they did not have to bear catastrophic costs in the long term—that we were willing to “pick up the tab”, to borrow Ms Castley’s phrase.

One step in this direction would be to give the ACT Wellbeing Framework some teeth as a way of addressing government siloing and accelerating whole-of-government climate action, which could include establishing a requirement that budget proposals identify the costs and benefits of their implementation across other portfolio areas. In that respect—Ms Castley, I am sure, will also be interested in this—I would like to reference some recent modelling by Ortec Finance that found that, if climate change is not sufficiently addressed, Australia’s GDP would be nine per cent lower than it would otherwise be in 2050, which would amount to a difference of several hundred billion dollars.

The findings of this modelling highlight how political hesitancy, particularly in the lead-up to the federal election that is upcoming in 2028, has the potential to seriously impact the speed of Australia’s transition to net zero. Even short policy deferrals of as little as five years could have a lasting impact. Under such a delayed transition scenario,

the average Australian superannuation fund could see around a nine per cent decline in investment returns by 2050. It is very interesting and worth a look.

Ground transport accounts for more than 60 per cent of our emissions, according to the most recent Greenhouse Gas Inventory. We know we need to massively accelerate modal shift across the ACT. We already know how to do this. Better active and public transport is the answer, and I welcome Ms Carrick's amendment along those lines. Constructing a cycling network in the ACT Active Travel Plan would be a good first step, as would delivering long-discussed separated bike lanes on key transport corridors like Northbourne Avenue. This would send a clear signal that we are actually ready to move away from Canberra's deep-seated car dependence and to make cycling and other forms of active travel a far more attractive option for far more Canberrans. This is not about punishing people; it is about articulating a clear vision for the city we want.

These are just some of the many steps we can take to reduce emissions and get back on track. In this vein, I want to highlight that, as simple as some of these measures are, they require greater ambition on the part of the government. The need for more ambition is reflected in the amendments I have circulated—specifically the amendment calling for the government to bring net zero forward, from 2045 to 2040, which reflects a core recommendation from the *Independent review of ACT Government action on climate change*, published in December 2024, which I would also encourage Ms Castley to read if she thinks I have just dreamt this up myself overnight.

On that, I hope that Ms Castley's remarks today are not representative of the Canberra Liberals' party room more broadly. They were very much sounding like: "We really care about climate action unless, of course, any action is involved." So, while I welcome her remarks, I think it is absolutely critical that this remains a multipartisan issue with multipartisan support in this Assembly. It is clear from my conversations with Canberrans and from multiple surveys that that is what they expect as well.

I understand this will be difficult. I understand it will be complex. But complexity and difficulty do not make this goal any less critical or any less urgent. We need to meet the urgency and seriousness of this moment with the action it deserves. To be clear, I do not propose bringing forward the target on a wing and a prayer. As mentioned, I have put forward a range of policy proposals in a submission to the government's consultation process.

I seek leave to table that submission for the benefit of members.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I present the following paper:

Developing a new Climate Change Strategy for the ACT—ACT Government Discussion Paper—Response from Mr Emerson, dated 17 March 2026.

I hope to see the government consider the many proposals put forward by our community in the submission. It is not so much my submission; it is a collation of ideas that Canberrans have put forward that they wish to see implemented in the forthcoming strategy.

I call on the government to do everything they can to communicate a clear vision for the sustainable city we are working to create here and to be bold when it comes to climate action. I thank Mr Rattenbury again for bringing forward this important motion today and share his ambitions in this respect.

I seek leave to move together the amendments circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(b), insert:
 - “(c) responses to the 2023 *Living Well With a Changing Climate Survey* showed Canberrans support strong climate action, and identified ‘a sense of helplessness, with many people not confident they could adapt to the effects they expected climate change to have in their lifetime’;
 - (d) the ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory: 2024-25 showed that in 2019-20, there had been a 46.8% reduction in emissions from baseline levels, and come 2024-25, there had been a 46.9% reduction – a 0.1 percentage point difference;
 - (e) while recent changes to the methodology for calculating net emissions may have impacted the ACT's measured progress toward net zero, much more needs to be done to rapidly reduce emissions in the ACT; and
 - (f) the December 2024 *Independent review of ACT Government action on climate change* recommended bringing forward the ACT's net zero emissions target from 2045 to 2040;”.
2. After paragraph (5), insert:

“(6) further calls on the ACT Government to:

 - (a) reaffirm its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions as an urgent priority; and
 - (b) bring forward the ACT's net-zero target to 2040; and”.

Very briefly, these amendments acknowledge the clear social mandate across our community for strong climate action. They acknowledge that we have not seen significant emissions reductions since making the switch to 100 per cent renewable electricity sources in 2020, as evidenced by the Greenhouse Gas Inventory. They acknowledge that greater ambition is needed to rapidly reduce emissions and that doing so needs to be made an urgent priority to keep feelings of helplessness from taking hold and, worse, becoming normalised in the face of such a complex and consequential task as confronting the challenge that is climate change. I commend these amendments to the Assembly.

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) (4.30): I will speak to all of the amendments and input to the debate today in one go. I thank all members here today for the various contributions they have made to this debate. I note

that the tone has been quite respectful and constructive, and I hope that is an indication of how we will continue to have discussions around this topic in the chamber in the future.

It is fair to say that it is evident that, while there may be points on which we can all agree, we still all sit across a spectrum of differences about how we achieve what we maybe do agree on for the longer term. How we get there is a bit open for continued debate, by the sounds of it. I would like to address some of the matters raised in the motion, noting that most of this is asking government to consider. We will be supporting that and are happy to consider the points that were made. Looking at the calls-on section, about supporting ground transport and looking at that within the Climate Change Strategy, I am absolutely happy to do that and we are already doing it. If you look at the discussion paper that is out, there is a whole section on proposed next steps that takes in a number of things that are raised in Mr Rattenbury's motion.

Also, looking at further initiatives to progress the phase-out of fossil fuel gas, we continue to look at how we can move through what is a very complex phase-out process that means significant policy areas will need to be determined. We are leading on this. There is not a lot of precedent to point to, so we are doing the heavy lifting for everyone who will come after us on that. We will still need to work through that in a measured way. As reflected in the debate today, this is one of the areas with more varying opinions, as to how we go about that. I am certainly happy to always consider ways that we can progress it.

As to the investment in climate adaptation and disaster readiness, again, we are more than happy to consider it and are already considering it. As is noted in the discussion paper, we have two key challenges on our journey to net zero: one is reducing our emissions and the other is adapting to an already changing climate. That is what has framed the discussion paper and the approach that we are taking to the new strategy. We have also have the section on wellbeing and resilience. The proposed steps go to a number of the points that have been raised under this topic.

On the requirement to consider future generations in decision-making on climate, I see that one point goes specifically to duty of care. This is certainly an emerging area within environmental discussions and one that we can continue to discuss. While we work through that, I would reassure people that, under section 3A of the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act, we have a commitment to intergenerational equity. I know that is not quite the same. It is a bit of a precursor to duty of care. Duty of care goes a bit further, but there is certainly a requirement in there for it to be considered. We also have the right to a healthy environment in the ACT. I would say that part of any consideration for adding in a duty of care or progressing either of the established ones would be how they would all interact with each other. I think that is something I will have to leave to people who do legal analysis and are far more educated than me.

I am not going to go too much into the fossil fuel sponsorship restrictions, other than to say that we have had this discussion a few times and it always brings out passionate views. I dare say that anyone who has a team that would be banned from playing in the ACT would probably feel quite strongly about this. Some who might have a significant dislike for a team that might be banned from playing in the ACT might be very enthusiastic for this one, but, either way, this one might not be the highest priority, in

the sense of the tasks that we have. I am again certainly happy to consider where there might be some space or time for that one.

On improving the ways that governance works between portfolios, I am certainly always happy to look at that. We already do quite a lot of work. The climate change strategies sit across government. The formation of the new City and Environment Directorate is also a really important step towards how we more constructively integrate all the functions. As a minister who has to report to it, I am already starting to see benefits from that.

Regarding section (5), on the further calls-on and the budget, I am certainly happy to consider these things. I just note, being a diligent member of the cabinet and for the purpose of not being scolded by the Treasurer, that, while we can consider these things, consideration is not tacit support. But, certainly, we can look at those within the context of all of our other considerations.

I would also like to address the following. The timelines and so forth have come up a number of times in this debate, today and previously too. Looking at how we develop the strategy and the timeframes that are taken, and particularly on the question of having strategies in place before others expire, and also looking at the timing of action plans coming into place prior to budgets and so forth—because all these issues have come up—I note that, within the commentary to date, there has been a focus on expediting and putting forward a new strategy and a new action plan in a timeframe that is, I think it is fair to say, unprecedented and does not follow the timeframes that have been afforded to previous ministers. In coming into the portfolio in November 2016 and taking on the requirement, it was put to me that we would have to develop a new Climate Change Strategy. We would also have to review the government’s climate change policies and settings, as per the requirements of the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act. That review commenced in August 2024 and came to government in February 2025. That then progressed through cabinet. We responded to it, and I tabled the report and the government response to it.

Not long after that, we put out the targeted discussion paper. That was at the end of 2025, and we have broader consultation in 2026. That consultation closes tomorrow, so I think all members here today who have provided their input through a very unique channel, in a YourSay conversation. We will take that on board. It is fair to say that, if you actually sit down, which I have done, and look at how it compares to other processes for the multiple strategies that we have had on climate change, you will see it is actually a quite quick timeframe. In continuing to put haste on it, I would caution members that—and it is particularly evidenced through this debate—there is a balance to be had between wanting to do everything yesterday and taking the time to properly consider the diversity of news and the intricacies of the challenges that we face. Striking that balance will continue to be a challenge. Again, I hope, with the uplift of the tone of today’s debate, we continue to see an uplift on that front as well.

There has also been a bit of public commentary, I think it is fair to say—not necessarily by people in this place but in general—around the approach the government has taken to consultation and putting out a discussion paper. Some people had an expectation that there would be a ready-made strategy in place that they could then just review and provide their feedback on, but that is not the government’s approach. Consistent with

our previous approaches, we put out the discussion paper to start seeking the views and will warm it up from there. I encourage everyone who is concerned about having a discussion paper to look at the previous strategy's discussion paper. They are pretty consistent. Having a discussion paper feed into the shaping of the strategy has been proven in the past and should be continued.

Regarding the next step, consultation will finish on the Climate Change Strategy discussion paper on 18 March, which is tomorrow, and the government will then review it, put out a listening report and seek to develop the strategy. Some questions have already come up—not necessarily in this debate; in other parts of the chamber's business—around the actions and the action plan. I would like to put on the record my comments. There are some things that the government just needs to get on with. There are other things about which we will need to have a bigger discussion. The challenge that we have for reaching net zero is not one that will— (*Extension of time granted.*) Now I have to remember where I was up to. This is a longer challenge. We have already had a number of strategies and action plans. Each of them takes us through phases as we work towards our ultimate goals. This is not something that I think we can answer in one go. We would love to be able to do that, but I think that is unrealistic. There will be lots of opportunities to talk about what we do, but there are some things, as we have already noticed, that we just need to get on with.

That goes to point (3) of the motion. It says it is a collective problem and that it should not rest solely on individuals and households. I have heard some public commentary that some of the comments I have made about the next phase will require more individuals. I think that has been misconstrued to think that is going to be individuals having to take on the responsibility for everything. That is absolutely not the case. Government is very much minded, in particular, to where we can continue to support individuals, households and businesses, but also to areas which are quite unprecedented for reform—how government can pave the way on that and get the learnings and the knowledge to share and make it easier for everyone else. That will definitely be a continued aspect of our work.

In the interests of time, I will not say too much more about Mr Rattenbury's motion, but I will speak very quickly to Mr Emerson's motion. While I certainly appreciate Mr Emerson's consistent and enthusiastic support for always being as bold and having the longest stretched goal you could possibly have for everything—that is how I would perhaps phrase it, a little bit tongue in cheek—bringing forward the net zero target to 2040 is definitely a much bigger conversation. Throughout the debate, we have seen that there are varying views on where, I think it is fair to say, the government stands at this point in time. Our focus is on the commitments we have, the targets that we already have in place, and making sure that we are firmly on track for those. That will continue to be our focus at this point in time.

We will not be supporting Mr Emerson's amendment today, not because we do not necessarily disagree with his want to move forward. All the science is out there. It is important to acknowledge too that the science needs to be a contributor and a driver to this. It is about balancing the want and the commitment with having a clear understanding of how we can get there. That is what we will continue to work through with our current targets. What happens in the future is a discussion for the future. In this instance, where our focus is very much put and where our resources are very much

put is on making sure that we are getting to the targets we already have set and are doing that expediently as possible. Before my time runs out, I will sit down.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.44): I want to touch on a couple of issues in this debate today because I think it is an important discussion that we should be having. I want to thank Mr Rattenbury and his colleagues for bringing it forward today, but this motion really should not be necessary. It highlights that, when you do not see action from the government, other people will feel the need to step forward and try and fill in the gaps.

While most of the community and, clearly, many of my colleagues are keen to see leadership from the government, that does not seem to be what we have seen from this minister. I note that she has spoken about how positive and collegiate the tenor of the debate has been, up to this point. Perhaps I can take away from that, somewhat, because I think it is emblematic of the leadership problem that we are facing in the climate space that we have a climate change minister who, when a climate change strategy motion is moved, waited until at least 10 other members had spoken, from across this chamber. Mr Rattenbury, Mr Barr, Ms Lee, Mr Braddock, Ms Carrick, Mr Parton, Ms Castley, Mr Milligan, Ms Clay and Mr Emerson all spoke on this before the climate change minister even made a move to get up and speak about climate change.

My view of leadership is that someone should be stepping up and setting out their vision, rather than waiting for everyone else to tell them what they should think, or indeed what they think. Today, we saw the minister once again wait until everyone else had put forward their view before she even moved to stand and speak on this issue; and still, when she did, we did not get a clear idea of where the government is actually going when it comes to climate change or the strategy.

We got a lot about process. We got a lot about the proposals from the Greens, but we did not get a clear articulation of where the government stands. We did not get a clear articulation of where the minister stands. I think this is the very problem which has driven the Greens to bring forward this motion today, because, for too long, this government, on a whole range of issues this term, has failed to show the leadership that Canberrans are looking for from it. It is emblematic of a minister who failed to be able to answer simple questions on legislation that she is responsible for throughout question time.

People in Canberra are looking for leadership on a whole range of issues, and I think they deserve to have it. They deserve a clear statement. That is not what we have seen from this minister today, and we should have had it far sooner than we are looking at now.

I also want to echo the comments of my colleagues who, very sensibly, made some points about the importance, effectively, of considering the deep evidence around the issues that have been put forward. As Mr Parton said, we are happy for these options to be considered, but you have to look at the actual impact of them.

I hope that when the government actually consider each of these options, they consider how much it does cost, what the benefits are and, indeed whether it is actually achieving the things that it is intended to achieve; otherwise all that ends up happening is you have

grandstanding at the expense of everyday Canberrans who cannot afford to keep bearing the cost of this government's mismanagement again and again.

Ms Castley spoke about the deep debt, the deep financial impacts, of this government's missteps. Everything that they do must be paid for, yet that is not what we see. We see the financial position going backwards and backwards. When the government look at the Climate Change Strategy and coming up with actions, I hope that, for once, they will bring a plan to the Assembly, along with a plan for how they will actually pay for something, because we have not seen that for a very long time.

I spent a long time working in the public service in the space of evidence-based policy, and I understand that it is very important that we consider what the community's views are, and the actual impact of things. You have to look at cost-benefit analyses. You have to justify what you are doing. But it is not the job of government ministers to be the bureaucrat; it is the job of the government to lead. I think it is about time that this government found a way to do that.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.49), in reply: I agree that it has been a long and interesting discussion. I have appreciated the opportunity to hear different members' perspectives, to emphasise the importance of this issue and to hear the commitment of members to addressing climate change. There is obviously some difference in how members would get there. I particularly welcome Mr Milligan joining in the debate. I would encourage him to take Mr Parton to dinner at the Southern Cross Club in Tuggeranong, where they have installed a fully electrified kitchen, which has been widely supported by their kitchen staff, because it provides an easier-to-clean kitchen and a cooler kitchen with reduced bills. It is definitely possible. They are one of the forerunners, I must admit. But, just for Mr Milligan's reassurance, it is possible to run an industrial kitchen entirely on electricity.

Mr Braddock has spoken to Ms Carrick's amendment, and I will not add to that. I will speak briefly to Mr Emerson's amendments. I certainly welcome his underlining of the necessity of ambition and the importance of going as fast as we can. It is a view that we share and one that I think is worth emphasising in this debate. While my focus in this motion has been very much on the immediate plan, those long-term issues and the long-term ambition remain fundamentally important. I will touch very briefly on points (d) and (e) in Mr Emerson's amendments, where he makes the point—and picks two dates in point (d)—around the perceived lack of movement in the ACT's emission reduction. When you pick those two data points that is true. The important point here is (e), where he goes on to talk about the need to increase ambition. But it is fascinating to examine points in time.

The ACT Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory for 2023-24—so the year before 2024-25—states:

The ACT's total net GHG emissions in 2023-24 were ... down by 50% from the 1990 baseline and 4% from the previous year.

It goes on to note that the ACT's per person emissions, or per capita, were 3.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, a decrease of 7.1 per cent from 2012-13 and six per cent from the previous year. It states clearly:

The inventory results show:

1. The ACT achieved and has maintained the 2020 emissions reduction target (40% reduction on 1990 levels) and is currently on track to meet the 2025 target of emissions reduction by 50-60%.
2. The ACT continued to meet the annual per person emissions reduction target, i.e., per person emissions peaked in 2012-13 and there has been a pronounced downward trend since.

That was the 2023-24 emissions inventory issued in December 2024. We then go forward to the 2024-25 one which Mr Emerson is quoting. It notes:

- Fossil fuel gas emissions continued to decline, falling 10% year-on-year ...
- Ground transport emissions fell 1.1%, supported by improved fuel efficiency and electric vehicle uptake.
- Aviation emissions declined nearly 10%, due largely to newer, more efficient aircraft entering service.
- Waste emissions decreased slightly.

It also notes that industrial processes and produce use, IPPU, emissions “rose significantly compared to what was reported in previous reports, following a methodological update that better captures refrigerant leakage across commercial and residential sources.” While that it is the accurate and technically correct thing to do, I think it disguises the progress that is being made.

We are seeing a significant movement in gas usage. In 2023, around 5,000 people got off the network. I have not yet had a chance to look up the 2024 figures, but we know literally thousands of people are leaving the gas network. So there are measures being put in place, or that have been put in place, that are sending us in the right direction. I think probably everybody involved was a bit frustrated and disappointed by the technical adjustment. That happened; it is the reality. But they do disguise some of the progress that has been made. Nonetheless, we support Mr Emerson’s amendments and we would be happy to agree with them today.

I thank members for their contribution. We are in a really important time. The point is: we need to get on with it. We need to be really clear about where we are going. We need to continue to up the ante. Each of the ACT’s emissions strategies has moved us forward, and this one needs to continue to move us forward. We need new measures constantly because, as we move through certain areas and address them, we need to start figuring out what the next areas are. We have no time to rest. We need to keep moving forward. That is the intent of today’s motion—to provide some focus on how we do that. I thank members for their contributions and commend the amendments to the Assembly.

Question put:

That Mr Emerson’s amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Noes 17

Andrew Braddock
 Fiona Carrick
 Jo Clay
 Thomas Emerson
 Laura Nuttall
 Shane Rattenbury

Andrew Barr
 Chiaka Barry
 Yvette Berry
 Peter Cain
 Leanne Castley
 Tara Cheyne
 Ed Cocks
 Jeremy Hanson
 Elizabeth Lee

James Milligan
 Suzanne Orr
 Mark Parton
 Marisa Paterson
 Michael Pettersson
 Chris Steel
 Rachel Stephen-Smith
 Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Emerson's amendments negatived.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Health Services—workplace culture

MR PARTON(Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.00): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) despite past initiatives including the *Independent Review into Workplace Culture within ACT Public Health Services (2019-2021)* and subsequent reviews conducted in 2020, 2021 and 2023, culture within our valued public health services remain as quoted in the original independent report "worrying and pervasive"; and
 - (b) in the recent progress report of the ongoing inquiry into ACT health system data, demand and processes dated February 2026, Michael Walsh the independent chair of the inquiry reiterates that as of April 2022, Canberra Health Services had the highest number of open workforce complaints over a 16-month period and that complaints with the former ACT Health Directorate also appeared to be increasing;
- (2) further notes the failure of this Government to hold itself to account for its own initiatives when it comes to culture and workplace safety across the public health system; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) report to the Assembly on the current state of culture, including psychosocial risks and impacts the ongoing negative workplace culture is having on front-line health workers;
 - (b) reinstate annual reviews to closely monitor the culture and report on system-wide challenges poor culture is having on our public health system, including the impacts to staff and patients; and
 - (c) ensure adequate reporting and complaints mechanisms are in place for staff and patients within the public health system to access.

I rise today to speak about workplace culture within the ACT public health system and, more specifically, about the persistent gap between what governments say they will do

to address cultural problems and what actually changes in practice.

Workplace culture in health care is not an abstract organisational issue. It determines whether clinicians feel safe to raise concerns, whether management listens to frontline expertise and whether patient safety is protected when systems begin to fail. When culture deteriorates, the consequences are not limited to staff morale; they can directly affect patient outcomes. I would draw the attention of members to the recent report from economist Saul Eslake, who stated that, when it comes to health outcomes in the ACT, they do not reflect the huge amount of money that we pour into health. It is sometimes difficult to put your finger on exactly why the ACT is being shortchanged in this space, but I think we all know that this is one of the reasons. It is for that reason that the ongoing cultural issues within the ACT public health system should be a matter of serious public concern.

These issues were most clearly documented in the *Independent review into the workplace culture within ACT public health services* report, which was commissioned by the ACT government and released in 2019. The review was established following significant complaints from clinicians, unions and professional bodies who argued that workplace culture within the system had become deeply problematic. The findings were stark. The review identified systemic problems, including bullying and intimidation, ineffective complaint processes, lack of accountability in leadership and a widespread perception among staff that, if you speak, things may not roll your way—a perception among staff that raising concerns could very well lead to professional consequences. That should not be how we roll. Hundreds of submissions from healthcare workers described an environment where staff felt ignored, unsupported and, in some cases, actively discouraged from speaking out.

The review produced 20 recommendations aimed at reforming leadership structures, improving complaint mechanisms and rebuilding trust between management and frontline clinicians. The ACT government formally accepted all of these recommendations. At the time, ministers described the report as a turning point and they promised a program of cultural reform. However, the years that followed raise an uncomfortable question: if these problems were so clearly diagnosed in 2019, why do so many of the same concerns continue to be raised today? That is essentially why this motion has been moved today. I ask members to reflect on that fact: if the problems were so clearly identified in 2019, why is it that they still hang around the neck of ACT Health today?

Despite the government's claims that all recommendations were implemented through an internal culture reform program, independent reporting has continued to highlight serious concerns about the workplace environment within the health system. Investigative reporting by the *Canberra Times* has repeatedly quoted senior staff specialists and clinicians warning that cultural and governance problems within the system are affecting staff morale—and, as soon as you are in that space where you are affecting staff morale, you are potentially compromising patient safety.

We know that these issues are ongoing. We know that there has been little change since the review of 2019 and we know that this is contributing enormously to the outcomes for regular Canberrans, who are being shortchanged by our health system. Clinicians and care providers have described environments where raising concerns can still be

professionally risky and where management structures remain resistant to criticism from frontline clinicians. That is not acceptable. When senior medical specialists feel compelled to raise concerns publicly—when they feel that their only way they can really be heard is to go to the media—it suggests that internal systems for addressing these issues are not functioning effectively. This is particularly concerning given the government’s repeated assurances that cultural reform has already occurred. They say, “Nothing to see here; it has already happened. Everything is on track here.”

Another troubling pattern has emerged over time: this government’s reliance on distraction through repeated reviews and inquiries that they do not take seriously, rather than sustained structural change—which is what is required. Since the 2019 review, the government has pointed to implementation programs, internal monitoring and bureaucratic reporting processes as evidence that the recommendations have been addressed. But we know that they have not. From the perspective of many clinicians, these processes often appear to function more as administrative exercises than as genuine cultural reform. Policies are written and reports are produced, but the underlying concerns continue to surface.

This pattern becomes even clearer when we consider the most recent development: that being the appointment of Michael Walsh to conduct another independent inquiry into the ACT health system. This inquiry is examining governance, system demand, workforce pressures and operational processes across the health system. On many levels, the inquiry is welcome. Independent scrutiny is essential in complex systems like health care. But it also raises some difficult questions about accountability. If the government accepted that workplace culture required urgent reform in 2019, why is the system now undergoing another major independent inquiry less than a decade later?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Because the Assembly asked for it.

MR PARTON: The health minister continues to add backing vocals to my speech today. But the point that I am making is that this Assembly came together and agreed that this independent inquiry was needed, because it was needed. So the question is: why was it needed? How much for time and how many more resignations are needed for this minister and this government to take accountability and support effect change? At some point, repeated reviews begin to look less like a commitment to reform and more like a cycle of diagnosis without treatment. For frontline clinicians, this cycle can be deeply frustrating. Many healthcare workers have already contributed to multiple reviews, surveys and consultations over the years. When those contributions do not translate into meaningful change—and that is the most important point to make here—trust in the reform process begins to erode.

More importantly, this issue cannot be reduced to workplace dissatisfaction alone. In healthcare systems around the world, a strong safety culture is recognised as one of the most important protections for patients. Staff must feel safe to challenge decisions, report mistakes and raise concerns about unsafe practices. When organisational cultures discourage openness or criticism, the risk of systemic failure increases. That is why the warnings from senior clinicians reported in the media should be taken seriously. These are not abstract policy debates; these are warnings from people responsible for delivering care on the front lines of our health system.

Real cultural change requires leadership, accountability, genuine engagement with clinicians and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about how institutions operate. It also requires governments to move beyond the comfort of reviews and reporting frameworks and commit to sustained, measurable reform. Until that happens, there is a real risk that the ACT health system will continue to cycle through various recommendations and implementation programs while the underlying cultural problems remain unresolved. Ultimately, workplace culture in health care is not just about organisational performance; it is about whether all health staff, doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals, feel empowered to advocate for their patients. If the system cannot create that environment, no number of policy documents or review reports will be enough for this government to take these issues seriously.

I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.10): I move:

Omit paragraph (2).

The amendment proposes to remove part (2) of Mr Parton’s motion, because we absolutely do not agree with the statement that we have failed to hold ourselves to account for our initiatives when it comes to culture and workplace safety across the public health system. Indeed, as Mr Parton pointed out throughout his speech, we have not only undertaken numerous reviews and reviews of implementation but also established structures to ensure but the recommendations from those reviews were in fact implemented. Following the 2023 final report of the review and inquiry into the workplace culture within the ACT public health system, the third and final annual review, the Culture Reform Oversight Group was stood down. This was one of the most transparent processes the ACT government would have ever seen. At the time that the Culture Review Oversight Group was operating, minutes and papers from the meetings and papers from the meetings were all published online. There were annual reviews of implementation, as Mr Parton has pointed out. In the third and final review, the conclusion was drawn that the ACT government had indeed implemented or addressed all 20 recommendations of the original review, and we have seen significant improvements as a result of these changes that have been made.

Mr Parton said—and I am pretty sure this is a word-for-word quote—“We know there has been little change since 2019.” This is simply not supported by the evidence. It is not supported by our all-staff surveys across Canberra Health Services; it is not supported by the medical training surveys that our junior doctors undertake every year; it is not supported by the feedback from our unions; and it is not supported by the feedback that we get from consumers. I mentioned during question time that not only have I been getting not only positive feedback about the professional care that people have been receiving in the ACT public health system recently but also, really pleasingly, so much of that feedback has been about how happy the staff seem and how collaboratively they are working together in delivering these services to the Canberra community. That has been some of the best feedback that I have received. It is one thing to say, “I received good care,” but it is another thing to say, “The staff seem busy, but they also seem happy. They are working collaboratively together and they are treating patients with respect and kindness because they are comfortable in the work that they

are doing.”

I do have a newsflash for Mr Parton, the Leader of the Opposition, and that is that senior consultants are not the only people who work in the hospital system. There are a lot of other groups working in the hospital system and, from them, we are hearing significant improvements in culture. There is a small number of specialties where there are some significant complex issues that have been made public. Mr Parton noted that there is currently an independent inquiry underway, being conducted by Mr Michael Walsh, as an independent person, that touches on some of these issues in relation to cardiology, in particular. Mr Parton, as Speaker, sent the outcome of this motion to the Assembly. He supported, as a member of the Canberra Liberals, the establishment of Mr Walsh’s work, and I understand that he has had the opportunity to meet with Mr Walsh as part of his work.

The terms of reference for Mr Walsh’s inquiry specifically include “investigate factors affecting recruitment, retention and morale of medical, nursing and allied health staff”. Mr Walsh’s progress report does provide some commentary around some of the feedback he has received, and he will provide conclusions and recommendations before the end of June. Indeed, the terms of reference require him to make evidence-based recommendations to improve governance, resourcing and data required to facilitate patient policy in clinical outcomes and staff wellbeing.

Mr Parton, of course, during his speech expressed a concern about the proliferation of reviews, inquiries and reports, and yet his motion itself calls on the government to report to the Assembly on the current state of culture, including psychosocial risks; the impact of ongoing negative workplace culture—that he asserts is having an impact on frontline workers; to reinstate annual reviews to closely monitor culture—and I understand from conversations that my office has had with Mr Parton’s office that those would be annual independent reviews; and to ensure that adequate reporting and complaint mechanisms are in place for staff and patients within the public health system to access—which should not be hard because they already exist.

Annual reviews with new recommendations every single year are one of the things that challenges the implementation of ongoing cultural change. If you are constantly churning through, as Mr Parton pointed out, asking people to provide the same feedback when they are in the process of working through cultural change, it is not necessarily helpful. We do, of course, ask our staff to complete culture surveys on a regular basis. The most recent culture survey results show that there are strong foundations in areas, including customer service culture, with 88 per cent positive; role clarity—very important for staff wellbeing—85 per cent positive; and job security, 81 per cent.

They also, of course, highlight clear opportunities for improvements. That is why we do staff surveys—so that we can take the temperature of the organisation and identify particular areas that are struggling. It is in fact specifically in response to previous staff surveys at Canberra Health Services that actions have been taken in areas where there have been challenges. There have been challenges as a result of some unacceptable behaviour, and that has come to light in the media. It is a response to staff telling us through culture surveys that they do not feel safe and staff telling the CEO that they do not feel safe and action being taken.

In terms of the junior medical officer survey results, the medical training survey that I mentioned earlier is conducted annually by the Medical Board of Australia and provides insight into workplace culture, supervision, education, wellbeing and overall training quality for JMOs. Although workplace culture remains a challenge nationally across health services, CHS has shown measurable improvement over the last few years. In 2025, 79 per cent of JMOs reported a positive workplace culture, increasing from 75 per cent in 2024. At Canberra Hospital, 81 per cent of JMOs in 2025 indicated they would recommend their workplace as a place to train, compared to 78 per cent in 2024. CHS has continued to demonstrate improvement in the medical training survey results for these cohorts.

Our perceptions of staff wellbeing have also improved as part of these results. The results indicate that CHS strategies focused on training, quality, supervision and workplace culture are having a positive impact. Indeed, when we welcomed our new group of interns this year, one of them noted that the implementation of specific psychological support for junior doctors was a unique thing in Australia and that one of the things that had attracted them to stay at Canberra Health Services was the support that junior doctors are now getting as a result of the significant investment that the ACT government specifically made in better supporting our junior doctors.

As I mentioned earlier, our feedback from consumers has consistently highlighted positive experiences across a range of health services, with patients and families describing care as courteous, timely and delivered to a high professional standard. Overall, the feedback is reflecting strong confidence in the quality of care provided and gratitude for the dedication of staff across the health system.

Part of the ACT government's commitment to the health and wellbeing and improved culture of our workforce has been funding for a health and wellbeing fund. There has been \$390,000 allocated to the Health and Community Services Directorate for staff wellbeing initiatives for this financial year and money also for Digital Canberra. This includes work around development of training content on early intervention, occupational violence and cultural capability and a small subsidy for support staff-led networks.

Really importantly in terms of the wellbeing of staff, we have worked very closely with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation over a number of years through the Nurses and Midwives: Towards a Safer Culture strategy, which commenced in 2018. This is a long-term commitment to address the psychosocial risks and hazards that are, unfortunately, prevalent in modern health care. Last week, we celebrated two of the many effective strategies of the "towards a safer culture" strategy: the implementation of the Safewards model of care and the clinical implementation of the clinical supervision framework for ACT nurses and midwives.

Safewards, in particular, is an evidence-based model that reduces conflict and containment by strengthening staff and patient relationships and addressing figures for restrictive practice and occupational violence. It was initially developed for mental health environments, but the ACT has successfully expanded the model to 18 inpatient services across mental health, medical and rehabilitation and culture units. More than 450 Safewards champions have been trained and 467 education stations delivered to sustain implementation. We have heard from staff in Safewards wards—of which I have

visited a few—that this is one of the most significant changes that they have seen in terms of improving culture on the ward. It is about everyone getting to know each other, providing certainty around the difficult conversations that people often need to have in medical and health settings and ensuring that there is a structured way of senior nurses rounding the ward every day to talk directly with patients, specifically as Mr Parton has said, to enable patients to escalate any concerns quickly to senior nursing staff.

Clinical supervision has also been implemented for medical practitioners, and ACT hospitals are accredited for prevocational rotations through the Canberra Region Medical Education Council. The Canberra Hospital Director of Prevocational Education and Training and team and the Medical Education Unit have been highly commended by CRMEC for their commitment to prevocational training and their ongoing support and advocacy for prevocational doctors. The following training terms were particularly commended in mid-2025 during the Canberra Hospital facility accreditation review. These specific prevocational education programs were identified as being of high quality and valued by prevocational doctors who have had the opportunity to work in these units: emergency medicine; renal medicine; vascular surgery; paediatric medicine; the mental health, justice health and the alcohol and drug services team, including all the adult psychiatric training teams; and acute geriatric medicine. Some of these will be familiar to members of this place as parts of the organisation that have previously experienced cultural challenges.

Of course, we have also committed \$4 million through the most recent budget to primary care wellbeing initiatives, including support for Doctors for Doctors, which is run by the AMA and is a support service for all doctors. Doctors for Doctors is a free confidential service for all doctors and medical students who have concerns about their health and wellbeing, such as stress, mental health problems, substance abuse issues and any other health issue. The overall focus on the welfare of doctors has also led to us creating a new peer support program led by a psychologist within the prevocational team called Blue Buddies, which I mentioned earlier. I could go on because we have so much that we have been doing that has been effective to support the culture in our workplaces.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.25): In speaking to the amendment, the Canberra Liberals, believe that the government has failed to hold itself to account for its own initiatives when it comes to culture and workplace safety across the public health system; and, as such, we will not be supporting the amendment.

MR RATTENBURY(Kurrajong) (5.25): I rise on behalf of the ACT Greens in support of this motion addressing workplace culture in our health system. At its core, this motion is about accountability, transparency and the wellbeing of the people who care for our community every single day. We know that a safe, respectful and supportive workplace culture is not a “nice to have” in health care; it is fundamental to patient safety, staff retention and the quality of care delivered across the territory.

Over recent years, there have been multiple reviews identifying serious and persistent concerns about workplace culture. According to the health inquiry progress report, in 2022 Canberra Health Services had the highest number of workforce complaints ever reported. The reviews have not lacked insight, but perhaps what we need in addition is clear visibility over what has changed as a result. What have been the impacts of the

actions taken as a result of these reviews? That is the crucial step that I am keen to understand.

This motion seeks not just to acknowledge the problem but to ensure that recommendations lead to meaningful, measurable change. Without that, reviews risk becoming shelf documents—well intentioned, but ultimately ineffective. If we are serious about cultural reform, we must ask: what worked, what did not, and why? Most importantly, what difference has any of this made to the lived experience of healthcare workers? Without this level of transparency, we cannot learn from the past, and we cannot build a better system for the future.

We also know that poor workplace culture comes at a cost, not just to staff but to patients and to the sustainability of the system itself. Burnout, attrition and unsafe environments undermine the very foundations of our public health system.

This motion, in my mind, is not about revisiting old ground for its own sake; it is about ensuring that commitments translate into action, and that action translates into real change. Certainly, from the Greens' perspective, we will always stand with healthcare workers in calling for safe, respectful workplaces. We will continue to push for the kind of accountability that ensures reforms are not just promised but delivered.

In terms of the amendment, we will be supporting Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment to omit paragraph (2). She has outlined a range of steps that the government has taken that mean that that descriptor is not an appropriate one, and I think it is not an accurate account in this motion. Nonetheless, we support the rest of Mr Parton's motion, and I believe that Minister Stephen-Smith also does.

I have also circulated an amendment, and I am conscious that we need to deal with the first one. I will speak to it now, for the sake of continuity, and deal with it in a little while, because it goes to this point as well. My amendment calls on the government to table any evaluation or analysis of the impacts of the implementation of workplace culture initiatives.

What we have seen in the Assembly is that the government, under various reporting requirements, has been required to come back and report on what has been done, and that is valuable. But what I am interested in—and I am not expecting new work here—is whether the government, and particularly Canberra Health Services or the Health Directorate, have done any work that analyses the impact of the implementation of those things.

That is different from reporting on what has been done. I trust that that subtlety is clear, and I am certainly not expecting any new work, but if the government has information that is valuable for the Assembly to understand on that impact of the amendments, that would be valuable to be told about in this place. I will move that formally by way of a motion, but that is the rationale. I think it fits in with explaining our positioning on this motion.

We are pleased to support Mr Parton's motion, as well as the amendment from the minister.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 7

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Stephen-Smith's amendment agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.35): I want to reflect briefly on some things, because the minister seemed to find this motion and, indeed, Mr Parton's speech somewhat amusing, when she stood up to speak. Personally, I do not think that this is a laughing matter. I do not think that it is good leadership to display the sort of derisive and dismissive attitude that this minister has displayed today—and, indeed, has displayed in this place on countless occasions when people attempt to raise issues regarding the way that the health system is operating.

I do not think it is good enough for the government to ignore the problems—or, even if the minister says that they are not ignoring the problems, to try and minimise them, to try and distract from them, to try and use one piece of statistics to combat another. That is the type of leadership that means people do not feel that they will be heard when they raise problems. That is the type of leadership that means people start becoming afraid to raise issues, because they do not know that the minister, the person at the top of the chain, has their back.

Mr Speaker, the minister seems to think that there has been a miraculous turnaround in the workplace culture in our health system, but I have to tell you that, when I knock on doors around the place, I run into all sorts of people. Occasionally, you will find someone who works in the health system. You will find a doctor, a nurse, one of the wardies or administrators.

Mr Speaker, I have to tell you that when you meet an experienced doctor who looks at you and breaks down in tears because they are afraid that, if they tell you anything about the way things are going in the hospital, they might be identified, and that there would be repercussions, you cannot tell me that that person is in a psychosocially safe environment. You cannot tell me that the people who are holding their head in their hands from the stress and the pain of having to deal with some of the problems to which

Mr Parton has attempted to raise attention are being looked after.

The problems are definitely not all fixed, and it is not good enough to try and dismiss the issue. It is not good enough to say, “The Assembly said that this independent review should be done.” It is not good enough to take that line, Minister, because the Assembly should not have to be the ones telling you what needs to be looked at. The minister should be across the problems in the health system. The minister should be the first one out the door to address them, not waiting for media coverage to be the trigger finally to accept some sort of action.

The staff of our hospitals and our health system deserve better. It does not matter whether you are talking about the doctors, the nurses or the midwives. It does not matter whether you are talking about our wardies, paramedics or nurse practitioners. Every one of them should be able to go to work in a safe environment. Sadly, too many of them do not feel that they are. That is at the heart of Mr Parton’s motion today and that is what we ought to be addressing, not trying to sidestep the issue by having some debate about who decided that we ought to have an independent inquiry.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.39): I move the following amendment that has been circulated in my name:

After paragraph (2)(c), add:

“(d) table any evaluation or analysis of the impact of the implementation of workplace culture initiatives. Including recommendations from the third and final annual review”.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.39): Speaking to the amendment and in closing, we will be supporting the amendment from Mr Rattenbury. Throughout this debate, one thing has become clear: the cultural problems within the ACT public health system are only disputed by one person. The only person who thinks that the government has done enough is the minister, and the evidence suggests that it has not, despite the fairytale that we heard from the minister.

The 2019 independent review into the workplace culture identified serious systemic issues—bullying, poor leadership, accountability, and a culture in which staff often felt unsafe raising concerns. The government accepted all the recommendations and promised meaningful reform. Based on the feedback that we are getting, we do not believe that that reform has occurred in a meaningful way.

The Minister for Health, when speaking on this motion, referred to recent staff surveys and suggested that they provide valuable insight into the culture within our health system. I agree that staff surveys can offer useful information. However, I would ask the minister to consider who is actually completing them. Do we really believe that the doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers on the front lines, the people who are working long, exhausting shifts to keep our health facilities running, have the time or energy after finishing those shifts to sit down at a computer and engage in what is ultimately one of the most impersonal forms of feedback? That is what it is.

These are the very staff who are already telling us through other channels that there are serious issues within the system, yet the government seem to rely heavily on the idea

that a safe online survey will capture the full reality of their experiences. Common sense suggests otherwise. When healthcare workers are already stretched to their limits, it is unrealistic to assume that anonymous surveys alone will accurately reflect the depth of concern that exists within the system. If anything, they risk underestimating the problem rather than revealing it.

Healthcare workers have repeatedly participated in consultation, surveys and investigations. They have described the same cultural problems again and again. When those warnings continue to emerge years later, it suggests that the issue is not a lack of information; it is a lack of decisive action. We think healthcare workers and patients deserve better than that.

Mr Rattenbury's amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Statements by members

United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.42): Today I wish to recognise the United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia, which was recognised on 15 March. It is a day to say clearly and collectively that religious and ethnic hatred have no place in our community. It is a moment to recommit ourselves to ensuring that everyone in Australia can live, work, connect and worship in safety and dignity.

The reality is that Islamophobia is not abstract and it is not rare. The Australian National Human Rights Council has reported an alarming surge in Islamophobic and anti-Muslim incidents. Reports point to a rise in threats, hate correspondence directed to mosques and Islamic centres and instances of verbal and physical violence. Disturbingly, many of these attacks disproportionately target visibly Muslim women. As the council has rightly stated, when any community feels unsafe, the strength of our national fabric is weakened. Every one of us benefits from living in a community defined by trust, respect and cohesion. A society where people feel safe is a society that is less fearful, less divided and better able to work together for a common good. So this day is not symbolic alone; it is practical and it is necessary. At a time where division is too often amplified, choosing cohesion is an act of strength.

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia reminds us that building a safe, inclusive society is not someone else's responsibility; it belongs to all of us, particularly those of us in positions in this Assembly. It is important to recognise that this commitment cannot begin and end on 15 March. Combatting Islamophobia must be an ongoing responsibility. It requires each of us every day to choose to respect, to

challenge prejudice and to stand against hate. Only through a sustained commitment can we build a society where everyone, regardless of their faith, can live, work and thrive safely.

St Patrick's Day

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.45): Happy St Patrick's Day everyone. Each year on St Patrick's Day, millions of people, as I am informed, who are not Irish suddenly discover they just might be, even if for a day. I look forward to joining many, I am sure, at the Irish Embassy later this evening to celebrate this important day for our Irish community.

Today in Canberra alone about 40,000 people claim Irish ancestry, and I am one of those. St Patrick's Day celebrates St Patrick, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland in the 5th century, living himself from about 385 to 461. His original colour, and I only found out this recently, was actually blue. But, with the Emerald Isle being such a popular byline for the nation of Ireland, green has become the colour of St Patrick's Day. As we know, the shamrock became a powerful symbol of Ireland as well, because St Patrick is said to have used its three leaves to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity. I actually found a shamrock lying around our building, which I have stuck onto my phone if you want to see what one looks like. It is celebrated worldwide with such landmarks around our world and around our city. Happy St Patrick's Day, everyone.

Animals—wildlife-safe netting

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.46): I am happy today to talk about wildlife safe netting. In 2021, I moved a motion asking the government to explore how to ban non-animal friendly netting. In great news, government did that, and since 2023 unsafe fruit tree netting has been banned here in the ACT.

Animal friendly netting must have a mesh size of five millimetres by five millimetres or smaller. If you can easily poke your little finger through the meshing of your net, it is likely that animals can also get tangled in it. I recently heard from ACT Wildlife great news: they have not had to care for any flying foxes injured in wildlife safe netting, which is incredibly heartening. This stuff really does work. However, unfortunately, ACT Wildlife has so far this summer attended to seven grey-headed flying foxes in illegal fruit tree netting. Two of the flying foxes were found to have died prior to rescue and, of the five brought into care, three are suffering significant wing injuries and may need to be euthanised.

The residents that I visited said that they were not aware that the netting they had used was now banned. So I think a lot of our residents here in the ACT do not actually know that there is this netting still around that can injure our wildlife and that there is a better kind around that they simply should be using instead. March is usually our busiest month for rescuing flying foxes from fruit-netting entanglement. So I am speaking today to remind Canberrans to use animal-friendly netting on their trees. We would love to see the ACT government amplify this reminder to help save our grey-headed flying foxes from getting caught in the illegal netting.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Harmony Week

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.48): I wish to acknowledge Harmony Week this week, leading up to Harmony Day on Saturday 21 March. It is a day and a week that reminds us of the extraordinary strength found in our diversity and that, when we practice tolerance and respect, we find we are benefiting so much as a community from that. It reflects who we are as a city and as a nation. The diversity comes to life in our schools through our children and the children of people who come to call Australia home, our workplaces and our neighbourhoods.

Interestingly, yesterday was a very thematic day for me on this theme of harmony. Yesterday morning I was, again, a guest speaker at a citizenship ceremony—in this case, at the Arboretum. It is really one of my favourite things to do—to welcome people who have undertaken a fascinating and interesting journey, for each one of them, to leave their country of origin and to call Australia home—some of those, as we would recognise, not because they wished to leave their home country but because it was no longer safe for them to be there. At the ceremony yesterday morning, where I was a guest speaker, I joined local federal representatives, Mr David Smith and Sonia Di Mezza from the MARSS organisation. We welcomed 14 individuals from 14 different countries as they took the oath to become an Australian citizen.

It is something that I love doing, as I have said, and something that is in my own background—not being a child of migrant parents, but my mother’s parents arrived from overseas. My surname, Cain, is certainly Irish in heritage—and I have just spoken about St Patrick’s Day. Obviously, that meant my forebears came over some time ago to this country. My own upbringing, as I have talked on other occasions, in the migrant village in West Cessnock, where I spent five of my high school years, put me in contact with the newly-arrived community to our country—I have a brother-in-law from that community—and it shaped my life, my heart and my appreciation, as a young Australian boy who had not really had much experience with people from other countries. That has affected my perspective significantly ever since.

Then, yesterday evening, here in this chamber, hosted by the Speaker—thank you, Mr Speaker, for doing so—we had a Speaker’s Citizenship evening, where those who had recently become Australian citizens had been invited through various organisations and contacts to come and gather and be introduced to the workings of this Assembly by our wonderful Assembly staff, hosted by Mr Speaker. It was good to be joined by Ms Stephen-Smith and also Ms Carrick for the early part of that proceeding. It was very enjoyable doing a question-and-answer session in this chamber late yesterday afternoon with those interested and brand new citizens. One of the treats for me in particular was I had a couple come up to me and one of them said, “I just had to come and say hello to you because you attended my citizenship ceremony late last year, in November, at the Hyatt Hotel.” It was a delight and joy to meet someone who I had an earlier engagement with.

In Harmony Week and leading up to Harmony Day, I do not think there is any real

dispute among the parties from a political point of view as to what we are all committed to, because we really are committed to the same thing. We all have our own interesting and different backgrounds, family connections, friendship connections and community organisation connections. So, as I will be attempting to do at a Harmony Day event on the weekend, let's use the colour orange as a bit of a signal, as a bit of a sign of our support—each one of us—for Harmony Day and for a harmonious, tolerant and respectful ACT community, as part of a wonderful nation that I think has done multiculturalism very, very well comparatively speaking. Let's continue to invest in that success story.

Aunty Pat Turner AM—retirement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.53): Before starting my speech, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, as the traditional custodians of the land on which we are today and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and recognise any other family or people with connections to the lands of the ACT and the region. I would also like to extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person here today. In doing so, I recognise that the very ground we stand on in this capital has been the stage for some of the most significant chapters of our nation's history, many of them written by the woman that today I am here to honour.

On 4 March 2026, Aunty Pat Turner AM announced her retirement from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, also known as NACCHO, convener of the Coalition of Peaks and as co-chair of the Joint Council for Closing the Gap. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body for their collaboration on a joint statement acknowledging this important moment for our community. Together we acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary career of Aunty Pat Turner AM, a proud Gudanji-Arrernte woman, who has dedicated over 50 years to the service of her people.

Aunty Pat's retirement marks the end of a landmark era in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, but the structural changes she has built will stand for generations. From her early days in the public service in the 1970s to becoming the most senior Indigenous government official, as CEO of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, she has never wavered from one core truth: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have both the right and the capacity to lead their own futures.

As the lead convener of the Coalition of Peaks and CEO of NACCHO, Aunty Pat changed the way governments work. She did not just ask for a seat at the table; she rebuilt the table. She co-chaired the Joint Council on Closing the Gap and has been the force behind the landmark National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It was Aunty Pat's steely resolve that secured the historic National Agreement on Closing the Gap in 2020. She shifted the national focus from mere targets to real structural reform, ensuring that shared decision-making and community control are now at the heart of our national health system. Because of her leadership, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are receiving culturally-safe care through the ACCHO model, a model she has championed as essential infrastructure for our nation. Aunty Pat also led the national

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander COVID-19 response, coordinating early preventative measures, culturally-informed public health information and support for ACCHOs across Australia. This work protected communities nationwide, including here in the ACT.

In the ACT, we have seen first-hand the fruits of her labour. Aunty Pat holds a master's degree from the University of Canberra and was recently awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the Australian National University. Her presence in this city has been a constant reminder to every minister and public service that accountability is not optional; it is a requirement of partnership. Aunty Pat, as the Prime Minister recently said, is a "formidable advocate and our nation is a better place because of her". She has challenged us, guided us and, most importantly, she has made the voices of First Nations people impossible to ignore.

Today, here in this place and on behalf of the ACT government and the people of Canberra, we say thank you. Your legacy is not just in the record of organisations or agreements signed but also in the lives saved and the futures empowered. We wish you a well-earned rest and a wonderful retirement. You leave NACCHO and the Coalition of Peaks strong and committed to carrying your vision of self-determination forward.

Aunty Pat Turner AM—retirement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.57): I also rise to acknowledge the enormous contribution of Aunty Pat Turner AM, who recently announced her retirement from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, NACCHO, as Convener of the Coalition of Peaks and as Co-Chair of the Joint Council on Closing the Gap. Aunty Pat has worked for more than 50 years to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including being at the forefront of community efforts to close the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is appropriate that that we take a moment to celebrate and thank Aunty Pat for her dedication and service to First Nations communities.

The daughter of an Arrernte man and a Gurdanji woman, Pat is a champion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights movement. First moving to Canberra in 1978, she worked across government to break down systemic barriers for First Nations people in government policy and services. In 1994, she became the first Aboriginal woman to lead a commonwealth government agency when she was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Pat was appointed as NACCHO's CEO in 2016, and this is where I got to know her. NACCHO, earlier this month, said:

Pat strengthened NACCHO's national influence and authority, ensuring governments and the health system could not ignore what ACCHOs have long demonstrated, that community-controlled health delivers better care because it is designed, governed and led by community. Under her leadership, NACCHO consolidated its role as a strong, credible national peak body, grounding advocacy in evidence and positioning the ACCHO model as essential health system infrastructure.

In 2019, as Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks, Aunty Pat played a pivotal role in negotiating the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Make no mistake, this was breakthrough work. In one of my previous jobs, we often reflected on the power of the unintended consequence. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap, as signed in 2019, was the unintended consequence of the former coalition government's complete failure to consult and engage meaningfully with First Nations communities when it came time to refreshing the Closing the Gap framework.

In 2016, the Council of Australian Governments recognised that four of the seven previous targets were due to expire in 2018 and that the framework needed to be refreshed. While you will not pick this up from the Closing the Gap website, the 2017 consultations were so badly handled that NACCHO—that is, Aunty Pat—brought together the Coalition of Peaks' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to demand a clear commitment from COAG, underpinned by genuine co-design and co-production. This was one of the most positive things to happen in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in many years. First Nations leaders literally demanded a seat at the table and went about working to establish reform priorities, governance arrangements and accountability mechanisms.

From 2019, Aunty Pat co-chaired the joint council with the commonwealth minister. In this role, she drove real action and held governments at all levels to account. Having respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders at the table with commonwealth, state and territory ministers, as well as representation from the Australian Local Government Association—I have to mention that because we always forget them—was a game-changer. We went from a group of, frankly, mostly pretty privileged white people discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs to a majority of people who are deeply embedded in their communities and work every day in community controlled organisations. Although Aunty Pat often acknowledged the ACT's leadership in a range of areas, I was not immune from the odd sharp rebuke, and I know that everyone else around the table had that experience as well—Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous!

I will conclude with the words of NACCHO Chair, Donnella Mills, when Pat's retirement from NACCHO was announced. Donnella said:

Pat's legacy at NACCHO is one of lasting reform. She strengthened this organisation, elevated the national standing of community-controlled health, and helped secure a new relationship with governments based on shared decision-making and accountability. Pat has led with strength, clarity, and an unwavering commitment to self-determination, and that legacy will continue to shape our work.

Hear, hear! To Pat Turner: thank you, Aunt, for everything.

Diabetes Australia—PolliePedal fundraiser

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.02): I have returned from Tasmania, where I did a thing called PolliePedal 2026, which is an event organised by Diabetes Australia for the past 12 years but has actually been rolling since 2006, when its inspiration, Guy Barnett, who was then a Liberal senator for Tasmania and is now the

Deputy Premier of Tasmania, began cycling around various parts of the island to raise money for diabetes research. I want to thank a few people for putting that together, as well as put a few stats on the board—what a group of 20 riders did and what they achieved in raising money.

When I arrived on Wednesday, the weather was atrocious, and when I left on Monday it was even worse, but I grudgingly admit that, on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday, as we rolled up hill and down dale, it moved into desperately pleasant. There was a moment on the Sunday when we were sitting in Dunalley and the Deputy Premier had shouted the riders some oysters. It was about 24 degrees and it was beside the water, and it was extremely pleasant. One of the best parts about that was sharing that experience with a group of people who did not know each other when they started the ride, but, by the end, because of the shared experience that we put ourselves through by choice, some real friendships were made. That is how friendships are borne: through a shared experience that you can refer to and hope to build on.

That shared experience was over three days. We rode for 11 hours and 40 minutes, over 263.2 kilometres. We climbed, in total, 3,865 metres at an average speed of 22.66 kilometres per hour. Obviously, that is the average. Going up a hill, that could be slow, depending on the grading. The maximum was 18 per cent. That was about eight kilometres per hour. Coming down, my fasted observed speed was 69.9 kilometres per hour as we came down the slopes of Mount Arthur after visiting McHenry Distillery, which was basically up a cliff—Tasmania’s most isolated whiskey distillery.

The money that the team of 20 riders raised is currently at \$55,623, which is a really good effort. For my part, friends, family and work colleagues supported me. I am honoured to share this chamber with a couple. They wish to remain anonymous. I will call them “Rachel” and “Mark”, just for—whatever! I raised \$1,927, and I really thank those people for their support and encouragement.

I have already thanked the Deputy Premier. He was a wonderful and generous host. His commitment to his electorate and his belief in its constituents does him great credit. And, finally, to Simon, Pip, Claire and Ange—the team at Diabetes Australia who were responsible for organising the ride, putting together and pulling it off: thank you very much for all your hard effort. It was a lot of effort, but I hope you thought it was worth it, because I know all the riders did. I am actually looking forward to PolliePedal 2027.

Territory Rights—voluntary assisted dying

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (6.06): Mr Speaker, your postcode should not determine your rights. Your postcode should not determine your rights. This may sound familiar to many people in this place. Indeed, it was a common refrain for us for years, including in this place, when we were fighting for territory rights: when we were fighting for our democratic rights for the ACT to have the same say about its laws on voluntary assisted dying as the states.

It was what we were saying when we were subject to a federal law that was outdated, a law that restricted the ACT and the Northern Territory, but nowhere else, from being

able to have a conversation in a legislative way about a framework, a scheme, for voluntary assisted dying. We were treated differently because of where we live. We were treated differently thanks to a postcode. We were treated differently thanks to not being in the constitution and our very existence being through the effect of the self-government act and the insertion in that act of just a handful of words—and for the Northern Territory, their self-government act. Those handful of words restricted us for so long.

We fought against that. It was not easy, and it took time, and at some points it felt like it would never change. But it did. The community's outrage grew. Eventually the nation's outrage grew. Other parties and federal candidates started to make it their issue too. Ultimately, we won, and the law was set right in 2022, and you know what has happened since.

But I regret that we are here again. The commonwealth law, written before any voluntary assisted dying scheme was legislated anywhere in Australia, is actively undermining access to that framework for some of the most vulnerable people in our community and across the country. The law is not just restricting access in the territories this time, but it is restricting equitable access to voluntary assisted dying right across Australia.

Section 474.29A of the Criminal Code Act makes it illegal to use a carriage service to counsel or to instruct on suicide. It was written to stop people using the phone or the internet to encourage self-harm. No-one disputes that intent, Mr Speaker. But it was a Federal Court decision in 2021 that confirmed what many feared. The term “suicide”, in that provision, does apply to a person ending their life lawfully through voluntary assisted dying.

The effect is that doctors cannot use telehealth to consult with terminally ill patients about the voluntary assisted dying process: no phone calls, no Zoom calls, no Skype, no whatever else people are using. Every assessment has to be face to face. For people living in regional and remote Australia—and remember these are people who are already dying, who are already in insufferable pain—that can mean travelling hundreds or thousands of kilometres, or their practitioner travelling the same distance, or them otherwise not accessing care at all.

This sounds like it may not be an ACT issue, but of course we do have rural areas. We are a regional area, and our laws enable persons who live outside the ACT to access voluntary assisted dying here if they have a connection to the ACT. Even then, it is not just about distance. For some people it is about access, due to their own mobility or their own vulnerabilities that simply mean face to face is not possible.

Mr Speaker, we know too well what it was like to have our options restricted when it came to voluntary assisted dying. We know, also, what it felt like to have people everywhere stand with us in that fight. So we should not now stand by while a different federal law makes that framework inaccessible to people who are dying.

Different rules should not apply to people simply because of where they live. Your postcode should not determine your rights. Tomorrow I will share some stories of the very real effect, and the very devastating effect, that this outdated commonwealth law

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is having on people at the end of their lives.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.11 pm.