



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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18 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 **Wednesday, 8 April 2026**.

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Wednesday, 18 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation:

Planning—Griffith—petition 26-26

By Ms Lee, from 5 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 Draft Major Plan Amendment 06 (DPA-06) – the Inner South Health Centre (HC). DPA-06 proposes to rezone and use highly valued open space and parkland behind the Griffith shops for a large \$22m facility, providing a restricted range of health services by appointment only, during standard weekday business hours. Disappointed inner south residents were led to believe the facility would offer similar services to the popular Walk-In Centres at Belconnen, Gungahlin, Dickson, Tuggeranong and Weston Creek. The ACT Government has now declared the HC to be a Territory Priority Project (TPP) which will preclude appeals by residents.

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

Reconsider the location of the proposed Inner South Health Centre (HC) in order to protect the character, established trees and amenity of the open space and recreational parkland behind the Griffith shops, and instead utilise currently zoned community facility land in either Manuka or Kingston Group Centres, or the West Deakin health precinct, undeveloped land in Eastlake or the Kingston Foreshore; and

Provide a full range of Walk-In services; consider inner south residents' future needs; undertake genuine, open consultation with residents (including a town hall meeting) on the Health Centre's location, design and service model; and reverse the decision to declare the Health Centre a Territory Priority Project.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.

Motion to take note of petition

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

Planning—Griffith—petition 26-26

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.02): For the benefit of the chamber, this petition has been closed because the principal petitioner requested a change to some of the wording and is seeking some advice from Committee Support about the best process to do so. There will be another petition on this topic which will be tabled in due course.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economy—economic development Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.02): In the last 12 months, we have seen significant progress in the economic development of the territory. Our economy continues to deliver what businesses and investors value most: stability, resilience and sustained growth. Gross state product has expanded by 3.5 per cent, marking three consecutive decades of economic growth for the territory. This result is running well above most other states and territories and above the rate of growth experienced in the national economy. It has been supported by strong public demand, growth in real wages, and high labour force participation.

For fiscal 2024-25, state final demand rose by 4.1 per cent, again reflecting strong public demand and growth in household consumption. The economy has continued to perform strongly in 2025-26, with state final demand increasing by a further 0.5 per cent in the December quarter to be 3.4 per cent higher through the year, again supported by strong public consumption and public investment. The outlook remains positive at this point. The forecasts for future growth are robust, with continued strength expected in public demand and services, and a resilient and growing building sector alongside a gradual pick-up in private investment.

Beyond the public sector, our growth is driven overwhelmingly by service exports, which have also seen a significant increase over the reporting period of two per cent. If one section of our services export sector deserves special mention here—as I have alerted the Assembly before—it is international education, which is the territory's largest source of export income. Between 2015-16 and 2023-24, that export income from international education has more than doubled, growing from around \$630 million to \$1.54 billion, highlighting the sector's growing contribution to the territory economy.

Beyond international education, we have seen the remaining major service exports grow by around 18 per cent, from just a tad under \$850 million to now over a billion dollars of economic contribution. This growth highlights resilience and momentum in other parts of the territory's economy, particularly tourism and professional and business services. Tourism now accounts for 16 per cent of our major services exports, up from 11 per cent previously. We have seen inbound tourism surge strongly, increasing by \$132 million to reach \$389 million.

Our labour market performance also remained strong, with low levels of unemployment, at 4.3 per cent at the beginning of this year, and the second-highest labour force participation rate in the country, at 71.4 per cent. These results show that the territory has been successful in attracting skilled graduates to stay here, while educational tourism, for example, is generating significant flow-on benefits across accommodation providers, hospitality venues, retail and transport services across the city.

As we reflect back on this century, Canberra's population has grown by nearly 50 per cent over the last 25 years. We are approaching half a million residents and the fundamentals point to continued growth for the territory. We are focused on the delivery of 30,000 additional homes for our city by 2030 and growing the housing stock from around 200,000 dwellings to 230,000 dwellings, supported by planning reform, land release and investment in public, social and affordable housing. It is pleasing to see that we are leading the nation in housing delivery under the National Housing Accord. Of course, with more people choosing to call Canberra home, there will be a need to strategically invest in new and renewed infrastructure to support this increased population.

We are pleased to see that the federal government is playing a supporting role—for example, in the future development of a convention and entertainment precinct in the CBD. We know that our existing centre is at capacity and the scale needs to expand to meet future demand. A new and larger facility will allow our city to host more summits, conferences, entertainment and sporting events, and support further growth in our visitor economy and further jobs growth in tourism, hospitality and construction. This new precinct is a crucial part of our longer term economic strategy. It supports growth in non-government sectors and will assist in attracting more people to the city. The government has now completed the first stage of the funding agreement with the commonwealth, and procurement has commenced to undertake further work to get the project to both investment-ready and shovel-ready status. The precinct contributes to what is a very significant transformation of Canberra's CBD.

I turn now to the digital economy. It is pleasing to see companies like CDC continue their strategic and significant investment in world-class infrastructure, strengthening Canberra's position as a secure and trusted location for data, cybersecurity and cloud services. CDC's expansion reflects not only growing demand but also our territory's unique advantages: proximity to the federal government, a highly skilled workforce, and a strong reputation in national security and technology sectors.

I also welcome the launch of the ACTivate Capital Fund. This is a new Early Stage Venture Capital Limited Partnership venture capital fund, delivered in coalition with Epicorp as the general partner and UNSW Canberra and local family offices as limited

partners. The fund has commenced operation, with \$23 million in committed capital and a capacity to grow to \$50 million. Over the next five to seven years, the fund will be actively seeking out high potential ventures, helping to grow emerging sectors and strengthen the territory's position as a hub for innovation, talent and investment. I can advise the Assembly that the fund has been undertaking its due diligence on the first tranche of investment opportunities in its first few months and will be aiming to make investments shortly.

Turning now to property and precinct development, it is pleasing to see both the Capital Property Group and the Scentre Group helping to shape precincts across the territory, delivering major commercial, residential and mixed use developments that support jobs, attract businesses and create lively urban environments. Their continued investment in the territory demonstrates confidence in Canberra's population growth and its long-term economic trajectory.

In tourism and hospitality, we are seeing global brands recognise Canberra's growing visitor economy. The arrival of Crystalbrook, through the development of their new Aurora hotel in Garema Place, is a strong vote of confidence in the city centre as a destination for both business and leisure travel. High-quality accommodation like this not only supports tourism growth but also enhances our ability to attract major events, conferences and international visitors. Together, these investments are telling a clear story: Canberra is attracting private capital, businesses are seeing opportunity, and long-term investment is being made across technology, property and tourism.

The significant overhaul of the CBD is also supported through the growth of our tertiary education sector, reinforcing our position as Australia's knowledge capital. Our largest export industry is expanding, and the new UNSW Canberra City campus—which, members would be aware, has commenced construction in the south-eastern corner of the CBD—will soon be home to around 6,000 students and educators. We are very proud to be home to world-class institutions, including UNSW Canberra, the Australian National University, the University of Canberra, and the Australian Catholic University, alongside our very own Canberra Institute of Technology.

We are encouraging, and we are continuing to see, growth in this sector of the economy. 2025 saw the second-highest level of international student enrolments on record—a little over 21,000—and we have grown well beyond our pre-pandemic numbers. This long-term growth does matter. Each additional student represents a potential future researcher, entrepreneur, community leader or worker, but we have also welcomed the favourable commonwealth policy settings that have helped expand our international student capacity.

At the same time, we seek to strengthen pathways between vocational and higher education, including new collaborations between the Canberra Institute of Technology and the University of Canberra. This is important because the workforce of the future will be defined by flexibility, lifelong learning and, of course, increasingly strong connections between education and industry.

As I touched upon at the beginning of this speech, tourism continues to play a major role in our economy. It is an industry that now contributes almost \$8.5 million every day to the territory economy. For the year ending September 2025, we welcomed

approximately 4½ million visitors. They spent \$3.1 billion across our accommodation, hospitality, retail, tourist attraction and transport industries, which in turn supported tens of thousands of jobs in our city's economy.

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

In seeking to build on this and our long-term success in growing our tourism sector, in December last year I launched phase 2 of the 2030 Tourism Strategy. This strategy has an updated and ambitious objective: to grow visitor expenditure in the territory by an additional billion dollars over the next five years. In this context a thriving tourism industry relies on ease of access to our city, and it is for this reason that we remain very focused on making it cheaper and easier for people to travel to and from Canberra.

Easier access means more visitors—more students, more business delegations and more trade in Canberra—increasing investment and supporting businesses, events, hospitality and the broader tourism sector. Land transport delivers a significant volume of activity for Canberra. Our biggest domestic market is Sydney, and most people who visit from Sydney are using a form of land transport. But, for most of the rest of Australia and, of course, all of the world, the government recognises that aviation is important. We will continue to work closely with the commonwealth and the New South Wales government on Infrastructure Australia's priority project—the Canberra to Sydney railway line—but flying is how most people get here.

Investment in our aviation sector has seen significant returns. Over the last four years and the year to date, to 2025-26, VisitCanberra has been very active in running marketing campaigns—25 of them—with an average return on investment of 117 to 1, contributing \$236.8 million to the visitor economy. This work, often conducted in partnership with Canberra Airport and airlines, has supported a significant expansion in the domestic aviation network in 2025, and now, increasingly, an expansion in our international aviation network. We have already welcomed Virgin Australia's announcement of its first direct international service from Canberra going to Bali, and Link Airways' announcement of a further connection to the great state of Tasmania, the northern part of that state: Canberra to Launceston direct.

This means we are the most connected we have ever been to more domestic and international destinations than ever before. But we do need to continue to engage—with the airport, with Qantas Group, with Virgin Australia and with the smaller regional airlines in our nation—to further connect us directly to other capital cities and major population centres. We have identified Adelaide for more frequent services, the Sunshine Coast for direct services, and Cairns for direct services, as major population centres that would benefit from more services direct from Canberra.

Following a very productive meeting with the Western Australian tourism minister on the sidelines of the Australian Tourism Awards, we will be working with them on Canberra-Perth services, which I know the Leader of the Opposition might appreciate,

given his family connections in the west. We will also focus on other major regional population centres that are not currently serviced. This work is critical to the tourism sector and to its ongoing economic success.

Tourism is ultimately about confidence—confidence that visitors will choose our city, that businesses will invest, and that all of this comes together to bring benefit for our community. This is important. At the heart of all of this progress is a simple goal: to ensure that Canberra remains one of the best places in the world to live, study, work and build a future. Strengthening our city’s position as a distinctive international travel and export market will be a key driver of our success.

So, from billion-dollar international education exports to cutting-edge technology companies winning customers around the world, our jurisdiction is proving that knowledge and innovation are, indeed, powerful export commodities. Our international engagement strategy is central to leveraging these strengths, seeking to open new doors for trade and collaboration, whilst also presenting opportunities to engage with industry to attract higher yield travellers, international students’ families and friends, and visitors linked to business and government travel.

Through making targeted investments and through important strategic partnerships, we seek to build an economy that is outward-looking, resilient and inclusive. We are, as a city, continuing to evolve—more diverse and more dynamic, with a strong public sector at its heart but a growing private sector; a growing innovation ecosystem; and, alongside the economic development progress, the delivery of city-shaping infrastructure that makes us one of the most liveable cities on earth.

I present the following paper:

Economic Development of the Territory—Ministerial statement, 18 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.20): Sometimes it is difficult to ascertain whether the Chief Minister is appearing as an illusionist or a stand-up comedian. On many occasions, he is doing both. When it comes to Barr-enomics, there is a sort of Houdini feel to it, because, at the core of every Barr ACT Labor budget—and not much has changed with Mr Steel in that role—there is a whole “now you see it, now you don’t” feel. You thought there was a surplus, but it turns out there is not.

The comedy component comes in when we have the political leader of the territory making such absurdly positive claims about how we are tracking, when most Canberrans are fully aware that we are in an uncontrollable nosedive and the ground is rushing towards us much faster than any of the passengers can bear, yet we have Mr Barr sitting in the pilot seat making an announcement to the passengers that everything is okay. He has turned off the seatbelt sign—“It’s all fine. It’s all going to be okay.” Is he David Copperfield or is he Jimmy Carr? It would appear that he is both.

It is truly bizarre that, in the space of a few short weeks, we have had two major statements on how the territory is tracking economically, and they are both completely different—they are radically different. The respected economist, Saul Eslake, released his interim report for the Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT in recent days and he painted—I do not know how to summarise it—a dire picture of a jurisdiction that is almost heading towards failed state status, but, within days, we have a sunshine and lollipops report from the Chief Minister.

Today we have more than \$17 billion in territory debt. It is going to cost \$600 million a year to service the debt. It is going to get worse. Interest rates are on the rise. It is going to get even tighter. Within two years, we will be paying a billion dollars a year in interest, compared with the total territory spending of \$10 billion. It is remarkable. And now we are feeling it on the ground. We saw the Productivity Commission report earlier in the year which clearly alluded to the fact that we are past the point that the jurisdictional fiscal squeeze is being felt in the provision of day-to-day services. Again, I refer to the Saul Eslake interim report. I will quote directly from Mr Eslake. He said:

The fiscal position of the ACT's general government sector has deteriorated over the past decade, and particularly since 2022-23

The deterioration in the ACT's fiscal position over the past decade is entirely attributable to 'policy decisions' ...

I will repeat that. He said:

The deterioration in the ACT's fiscal position over the past decade is entirely attributable to 'policy decisions' ...

So, despite Mr Barr's upbeat words, local households are struggling with affordability, lower income families are being crushed, local businesses are barely surviving—many of them are closing down—and the commonwealth has shown quite clearly that it is not willing to pick up the tab. The territory's fiscal position is poor and it is only getting worse.

The speech from Mr Barr celebrates public investment because there is a fair bit of that, but it does not really address how it is being funded and what it means for debt. It does not really address what it means for the long-term fiscal position. Where is the money coming from? The omission is extremely significant given the reliance on government spending to drive growth rather than looking at growing productivity. Major projects like the Convention Precinct are presented as economic drivers, but they remain in the early stages. Procurement and shovel-ready—there is no timeline, there is no cost transparency, and there is no evidence that the projects will deliver the promised economic return.

Saul Eslake reports that infrastructure projects have been completely funded by debt, and he is right. The rebound in tourism largely reflects a post-pandemic recovery rather than new economic strength. Stakeholders that I have spoken to in this space are of the belief that the government is not playing a large enough role when you compare us to similar sized jurisdictions like the Northern Territory and Tasmania. When you see the sort of funding that the Northern Territory and Tasmania are putting towards tourism compared to ours, there is a stark difference. Presenting this as structural growth ignores

that visitor numbers and spending are still vulnerable to external shocks and cost pressures, particularly given Canberra's accessibility challenges.

The government presents 3.5 per cent growth as a stand-out result, but it fails to acknowledge that much of this is driven by government spending rather than a genuinely expanding economy. An economy propped up by public demand is not the same as one that is powered by productive, self-sustaining growth. The Chief Minister continues to deliver good news, but nobody believes him anymore.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Education—Strong Foundations

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) (10.26): I am pleased today to provide the Assembly with an update on the ACT government's implementation of Strong Foundations, our system-wide program to establish a consistent and evidence-informed approach to learning across all ACT public schools. While Strong Foundations has a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, the key message we all received from the literacy and numeracy inquiry was that, for our kids to thrive, we need one shared approach to learning. I am proud of the progress that our schools have made. When visiting our primary schools, you can already see changes.

Listening to advice from the Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel, the government adopted a phased implementation approach. Our phase 1 plan was released in September 2024. Good and sustainable change begins from a shared understanding, so the public education system is taking the time to support our school leaders and teachers to understand the evidence behind Strong Foundations. By providing teachers with clear guidance, shared tools and high-quality resources, Strong Foundations will make it easier to plan, teach and respond to student needs, while reducing duplication and unnecessary workload. Last year, the new learning and teaching policy was launched, providing a clear direction for the new system-approach to learning.

For schools with a long history of local decision-making, this is a big but important change. The policy was supported by practical guides for educators, covering what to teach, how to teach it and how to assess what students have learned. The guides help educators to have a shared understanding of effective teaching. In addition, a more specific approach to literacy and numeracy has been developed and is currently being reviewed by school leaders and national experts. A specific approach to literacy and numeracy, curriculum resources and evidence-informed professional learning will support learning to be consistent across all public schools.

Through Strong Foundations, the government has also invested \$2.4 million in quality-assured materials, including making sure there are decodable readers in every ACT public primary school. Decodables are supporting explicit teaching of phonics and early reading skills and align with the research that tells us what works best for children learning to read. It is something I have also been able to see in person.

Last year, the Year 1 Phonics Check was successfully rolled out across all public schools. This is a critical reform, enabling teachers to identify early reading difficulties and provide targeted support when it is needed most. This year, schools are implementing a new assessment schedule, which is another big change for our system. This means that primary and high schools will test students at the same time across phonics, literacy and numeracy. New assessments were trialled last year and are providing a clear check for teachers so that they can better identify student needs. This gives families confidence that learning needs are being picked up and addressed.

In late 2025, former members of the expert panel conducted an independent review of the implementation of Strong Foundations. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Dalgarno and his colleagues for their work and constructive feedback. Their insights have informed our planning for phase 2, which shifts the focus from policy and design to practical support in schools. The review report has now been published on the Education Directorate website. Phase 2 will include expanded coaching, professional learning, and the rollout of more curriculum and assessment resources. It will also include a pilot of the new multi-tiered system of support so that students who need additional help can receive the right support at the right time.

Education reform takes time and meaningful change cannot be rushed. Strong Foundations is being implemented carefully and collaboratively, with a strong focus on sustainability and impact. By continuing to back our schools and teachers, the ACT government is giving every child in an ACT public school the strong foundations that they need to thrive.

I present the following paper:

Strong Foundations—Ministerial statement, 18 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.30): I note the update the minister has provided in relation to the release of the independent review of the implementation of Strong Foundations. It is something that I will be very interested in reading. Let's not forget how and why we got here. For years, this Labor government ignored the evidence and the advice from experts that showed that education outcomes under this Labor government were not where they should be. Despite the best efforts of our hardworking teachers, this government presided over results that gave cause for concern, including that one in three 15-year-old students in the ACT fell below the Australian proficiency benchmark for reading, and, in 2022, one in five year 9 students in the ACT were at or below the NAPLAN national minimum standard for reading.

It was only following a motion in this chamber by the Canberra Liberals about these issues that the minister was forced to act and announced an expert panel to conduct an independent inquiry into literacy and numeracy education in the ACT—something that was welcomed across the board. The findings of the expert panel were clear: to achieve true equity and excellence in education, the ACT needed a system-wide approach to curriculum, teaching, assessment, targeted support and professional learning.

The expert panel identified wide variation between schools in teaching methods, assessments, resources and even basic tools to track student progress. Importantly, it highlighted the undue pressure on our teachers. The Canberra Liberals welcomed the minister's commitment to adopt all eight recommendations of the expert panel. However, we remain concerned about how these recommendations are being implemented in practice. Stakeholders, from teachers to parents to school leaders to volunteers and to staff, have also raised concerns regarding implementation, funding and teacher support of Strong Foundations, and we share those concerns.

We also remain concerned about the rollout of multi-tiered systems of support, which is something that parents have highlighted repeatedly as a priority. In answers to questions that were asked by Ms Carrick and me yesterday, I do not think anyone in the chamber was reassured about where things are at on that front. As I said earlier, we will be carefully reviewing the independent assessment of the implementation of Strong Foundations. I look forward to making further comment once we have had a chance to review that carefully, noting that, as at this morning, when the statement was circulated, I do not think it was available on the website.

I also put on the record my thanks to the members of the expert panel, for not only their initial work in coming up with their report and the recommendations but also their ongoing commitment to ensuring that every child in the ACT has the best access to the best education in the country.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides

Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.34): I rise to update the Assembly on the response of the ACT government to the December 2025 and March 2026 announcements of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority about restricting the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides in Australia.

This government is very glad to welcome the proposed changes to the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides, which I will now refer to as SGARs. These changes will better protect Australia's native wildlife from the harmful impacts of SGARs. For those unfamiliar, rodenticides are poisons which are manufactured into bait and used to control rodents, such as rats and mice. There are several types of rodenticides approved by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, which I will be referring to as "the authority".

One type of anticoagulant rodenticides are first-generation anticoagulant rodenticides—otherwise known as FGARs. FGARs are multi-dose anticoagulants, meaning that rodents must consume these baits over multiple occasions to consume a lethal dose. As FGARs break down over time in rodents, there is less chance of secondary poisoning occurring in non-target animals if they eat rodents poisoned with

an FGAR. The government recognises that FGARs play an important role in controlling rodents and protecting Australia's agricultural resources. Rodenticides help to protect crops, livestock feed and infrastructure from rodent damage. ACT farmers, businesses and households are likely using FGARs throughout their usual course of business.

By comparison, SGARs are single-dose anticoagulants and are substantially more potent than FGARs. A lethal dose can be ingested in a single feeding and take longer to break down. This presents a higher risk of secondary poisoning to non-target animals in the food chain. The impact of SGARs on native fauna has been an area of active national research, including by the ACT. A total of 153 liver samples were collected opportunistically from deceased or euthanised wildlife from across Australia and analysed by Edith Cowan University.

The key finding of this research is that 68 per cent of all sampled animals had SGARs in their system. In many animals, more than one rodenticide was detected in the liver tissue. Concerningly, seven species which tested positive for SGARs included the endangered spotted-tail quoll and eastern quoll. SGARs were also detected in insectivores and omnivores, including high proportions of brushtail possums, sulphur-crested cockatoos and common birds like currawongs and magpies. Two first-generation anticoagulant rodenticides were also detected in the samples.

The ACT is proud to have contributed to this research on the harmful effect of SGARs on native wildlife. The ACT contributed samples to the research published in 2025 on anticoagulant exposure in native Australian marsupial carnivores for all SGARs currently used in Australia. This was the first published example of anticoagulant rodenticides in dasyurid marsupial carnivores. Sadly, 50 percent tested positive, 33 per cent at sub lethal doses and 17 per cent likely succumbed to anticoagulant rodenticides. More recent research led and supported by the ACT has detected SGAR contamination across multiple native species, including threatened species, indicating that existing controls do not prevent exposure. These findings and previous scientific studies published domestically and internationally support the importance of the authority's recent announcements.

It is important for the Assembly to note that, due to the Mutual Recognition Act 1992, the ACT is legally unable to take unilateral action to regulate the sale of SGARs. As such, this government will take the approach of supporting the authority in their work, which is most prudent and appropriate. The authority's original December 2025 announcement concluded that the way products containing SGARs are currently used also risks non-target animals, including native wildlife. The authority subsequently announced in March 2026 that SGARs will be declared restricted chemical products. As minister with portfolio responsibility for nature conservation, I am extremely pleased with the authority's announcement. This declaration will enable tighter controls on the purchase and use of SGARs, including restricting access to individuals who meet specific training and licensing requirements.

In addition to the declaration that SGARs will be considered restricted chemical products, the authority has also announced that the registration of all products containing SGARs will be suspended for one year from 24 March 2026. This suspension will enable stricter controls on the use of SGARs to be implemented quickly, while broader measures to support the potential restricted chemical products are

progressed. This government appreciates that the authority is moving quickly to restrict the use of SGARs to protect Australia's native fauna, pets and livestock and strongly supports a suspension while improved controls are developed and implemented to prevent the clear harm that is otherwise occurring to native wildlife.

To formalise the ACT's position on SGARs to the authority, the ACT's Conservator of Flora and Fauna has made a submission to their review on behalf of this government. I am aware that the Conservator has sought the advice and input of the ACT's independent Scientific Committee on the submission. I thank the Scientific Committee for their valued and considered input, as always. I am pleased to table, along with my ministerial statement, the Conservator's submission here today.

In closing, this government strongly supports the authority's announcement that SGARs will be declared restricted chemical products. The cancellation of some SGARs is also appropriate. The government acknowledges and thanks the ACT's conservation scientists and the ACT Scientific Committee for their work to support national research on the harmful effects of SGARs across Australia that has led to this pleasing announcement by the authority.

We are a small jurisdiction and have a right to feel proud about our strong engagement in national efforts to protect native wildlife from all threats, including SGARs, and I look forward to further opportunities for the ACT to provide the authority input and feedback, as stronger controls and regulation of SGARs are developed and implemented.

I present the following papers:

Proposed Reforms to Second-generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides—Copy of letter to Chemical Review, Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from the ACT Conservator of Flora and Fauna, dated 16 March 2026.

ACT Government Position on Proposed Changes to the National Use of Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides—Ministerial statement, 18 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.41): I am really happy to hear the update from the minister on SGARs today. As a long-term advocate for native wildlife, I have been advocating for banning their use for a long time. That has been part of the Greens platform. We have really strong advocates in organisations like ACT Wildlife and Wombat Rescue and a lot of community members who have been agitating on this issue.

I wrote to the minister in December about the impact on native wildlife and animals that these poisons have. Native animals like kestrels, quolls, currawongs, possums, magpies, owls and eagles can feed on poisoned insects and rodents and suffer secondary poisoning and a horrific death. In a question on notice in February, I asked whether the ACT government was considering banning them and whether the minister would advocate to the authority to prohibit the sale of SGARs. The minister's answer last week

was a little disappointing. The minister responded that the ACT government had not formally considered banning the public sale of SGARs but were aware that the authority were reviewing rodenticides. A few days after that, after their four-year review into rodenticides, the authority has certified that it is in the public interest for chemical products containing SGARs to be declared restricted chemical products, and we have of course heard that there will be a suspension coming. This is a fantastic move. I am delighted to hear that the ACT government supports that statement.

I spoke yesterday about how in 2021 I moved a motion asking the government to explore how to ban non-animal friendly netting and how we have taken moves to do that. I understand there are complications with the Mutual Recognition Act, but we have overcome those in one situation. So if, for whatever reason, after that suspension, we find that there are not going to be permanent bans on sale, I would encourage the minister to go and have a look at that prior work and see how the ACT can do it and then make a conscious decision as to whether the ACT should ban SGARs.

It is great to see that we are taking steps absolutely in the right direction. It is clear that public pressure from our environmental experts is working. I really look forward to the ACT government now taking those tangible actions to suspend and regulate and, hopefully, ban SGARs to make sure that we are protecting our native wildlife.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Status of women and girls in the ACT

Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.44): As Minister for Women, I rise today to deliver a statement to the Assembly on the status of women and girls in the ACT. Each March, this statement is delivered as part of the government’s acknowledgment of International Women’s Day.

Firstly, I would like to recognise that, in this statement, when I refer to women and girls, I do so inclusively. I am speaking of cis and trans women as well as non-binary and gender-diverse people. At a time when trans and gender-diverse people are facing growing hostility and attempts to roll back their rights in many parts of the world, it is important that we are clear about our values. In the ACT, trans and gender-diverse people are an essential part of our community. Their rights are human rights, and they are entitled to live safely, openly and with dignity.

This statement also recognises that women and girls in our community are not one single group. It speaks to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, queer women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with a disability, older women and young women. Together, their experiences provide the benchmark for our efforts to achieve gender equality in the ACT.

This year’s UN Women Australia’s theme for International Women’s Day is “Balance the Scales”. The theme highlights that “every woman and girl, regardless of background

or identity, should be safe, heard, and free to shape their own lives". The ACT government is committed to balancing the scales through practical, impactful policy and programs which ensure every person is afforded an equal chance to achieve their full potential. This theme calls on us to reflect on the significant progress we have made towards gender equality and the work we still have to do. Throughout 2025, the ACT government continued to deliver numerous initiatives to balance the scales for women and girls in Canberra, guided by the priorities set out in the Third Action Plan 2023-26 under the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026. I am pleased to say that 15 of the 30 actions under the Third Action Plan have been completed and the remaining 15 are well underway.

The actions completed during 2025 represent real, practical progress towards building a safer, more equitable community for everyone by including mandating and implementing minimum nursing and midwife to patient ratios in public women, youth and children services across the ACT; to continue to monitor and make amendments to the Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2024 in response to community feedback; to support programs to encourage women and girls to consider careers in space; and to funding the YWCA's delivery of the Confidence, Care and Clarity Program to support female, female-identifying and non-binary people into employment, training and education. The 10-year Women's Plan comes to an end in 2026, and an evaluation of the plan and the three action plans is underway. The evaluation report will be completed soon and will inform the development of the next plan supporting gender equity.

Today I am pleased to outline some the significant work achieved during 2025 to build a fairer, more equitable society for all Canberrans. We are delivering programs that promote health and wellbeing, safety and inclusion, leadership and workforce participation and housing security. In the area of health and wellbeing, the ACT government continues to lead the nation in initiatives that uphold dignity and improve essential health services. The ACT is the first jurisdiction in Australia to count babies in maternity ratios, delivering safer care for mothers and newborns.

Canberra Health Services implemented midwifery staffing ratios in August 2025 and continues to monitor compliance. Despite national workforce shortages, the ACT government is actively recruiting to strengthen workforce capability and maintain safe, timely maternity care, as well as working with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation to improve employment conditions. Significant progress has also been made under the Maternity in Focus First Action Plan, with 58 actions across 21 goals largely completed. Initiatives include the Maternity Experience Survey, co-design of a Birthing on Country model in partnership with the Cultural Governance Group and scholarships to build workforce capacity. The ACT government has strengthened GP Shared Care and advanced a Perinatal Mental Health Scoping Study for a residential mother and baby unit. These initiatives demonstrate the government's commitment to delivering safe, inclusive and women-centred care.

Our commitment to inclusive care extends to expanding gynaecological services, including working to reduce wait times and improve services across the Canberra Endometriosis Centre. Cervical screening testing has also been introduced through midwifery-led antenatal clinics funded through the National Strategy for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer. The ACT government is also strengthening the Assisted Reproductive Technology framework to ensure that it not only continues to

support the rights of donor conceived individuals but also meets the needs of women and birthing people who require ART to have children and grow their own families. The ACT government has introduced amendments including to address issues related to gamete supply, which is of particular importance to solo mothers and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Perinatal mental health remains a priority for the government. The Stepped Continuum of Care for Perinatal Mental Health in the ACT was finalised in June last year and has enabled the government to progress a feasibility study for a six-bed perinatal mental health unit, aiming to address an unmet need for specialist and therapeutic mental health supports for birth parents and their partners. This will be supported through \$732,000 from last year's budget. The 2025 budget also included funding for the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre, the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance and intensive First Nations case management supported through Clybucca Dreaming. These initiatives ensure timely, culturally safe and trauma-informed care for families.

The ACT's no-cost abortion scheme continues to improve access to reproductive health care. Between its inception in April 2023 and June 2025, the program provided 1,414 surgical abortions, 1,542 medical abortions and 846 long-acting reversible contraceptives at the time of abortion at no cost to those accessing the program. The Women's Health Matters survey of women's health in the ACT in 2024-25 noted the improved access to abortion in the ACT as a key improvement over this period. However, the report also highlighted areas of need in women's health that continue to require attention.

Safety and inclusion are fundamental human rights, allowing all Canberrans the opportunity to participate in community life. In 2025, nearly 2,800 women and non-binary people living in Canberra shared their experiences through the YWCA Canberra's Our Lives: Women in the ACT Survey, with 17 per cent of all survey respondents reporting that they had experienced violence in the last 12 months. Young people aged 16 to 19 were the most likely age bracket to experience this violence.

People who are subjected to violence experience ongoing trauma, fear and significant health impacts which can limit their ability to work, study and participate in social activities. We must continue to drive initiatives to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, creating safe spaces that foster inclusion. Creating safe spaces and fostering inclusion is critical, and it is how the government and community ensure every woman and girl in the ACT can thrive and contribute without barriers.

I am pleased to report that work is well underway on a strategy to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT. The strategy will take a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach, promoting the safety of all Canberrans in their homes, relationships and communities. Consultation throughout 2025 with specialist sector services, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, community partners and government agencies has informed the Listening report to guide the development of the strategy.

The ACT government will continue to invest in frontline domestic, family and sexual violence responses, guided by the forthcoming strategy, to promote safety and reduce gender-based violence, reflecting our unwavering commitment to ensure frontline

services are adequately resourced and create safer communities for all Canberrans. I look forward to releasing the strategy in mid-2026. The strategy and its actions will prioritise programs and investment across all stages, including work to prevent future violence.

In education, the Gender Equality in Schools Initiative has delivered significant professional learning to school staff and stakeholders over the past year in support of this goal, including a Masculinity and Student Wellbeing forum for teachers, school leaders and community partners. Respectful Relationships education is being implemented across schools and is an exciting opportunity for schools to promote healthy relationships, challenge harmful stereotypes and create a culture where wellbeing and equality are prioritised.

In 2025, the ACT government also continued the pilot implementation of the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023. This program commenced in 2024 and provides free period products at a range of locations across the ACT. In 2025, the pilot rolled out to participating ACT government schools, which included primary, high school and colleges, public hospitals and health centres and the CIT campuses. The program continued to be available at public libraries, courts, ACAT, Child and Family Centres, Child Development Services and the Housing ACT Service Centre. The program was evaluated during 2025 with several hundred community members providing feedback on the value of the program and suggestions for improvements and expansion. I want to share one of the responses to the YourSay consultation, which I think highlights the importance of this program: “Having access to period products is important because it makes a huge difference to my comfort and sense of dignity. There are a lot of reasons why people may not have the period products when they need them”.

In 2025, the ACT government continued to upgrade sporting facilities to be female friendly, encouraging greater participation in sport by women and girls. To date, 40 pavilions have been upgraded. Planned future upgrades will extend the program to Chisholm, Ainslie, Hughes, Reid, Griffith, Kaleen and Macquarie. The ACT government reactivated Boomanulla Oval, which has provided additional facilities to meet the growing demand from the ACT sporting and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including increasing participation of women in sport. Part of this is a new community building which offers a safe and welcoming space for gatherings and cultural connection. The ACT government will be establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled interim board to guide the future of Boomanulla Oval.

The Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit, which was identified as an action in the ACT Women’s Plan, is a profoundly positive step forward in setting the highest benchmarks for public spaces—ones that are equitable, inclusive, accessible and safe for everyone, in particular, women, girls, gender diverse and other marginalised people. In 2024, the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit continued to inform upgrades to local shops and active travel infrastructure, including the Evatt, Narrabundah, Monash and Macquarie local shops and the Calwell and Lanyon group centres. I have spoken extensively in this place around the importance of the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit being business-as-usual, to ensure our public spaces are safe and accessible.

In the ACT, we are also celebrating women's contributions to Canberra's history and supporting their visibility by increasing the number of public artworks depicting women. In April 2025, a Melbourne-based artist was commissioned to create a bronze artwork honouring Stasia Dabrowski OAM, a dedicated community volunteer and a local Weston Creek resident. The artwork will be installed in Garema Place in 2026.

In April 2025, a positive duty to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and unlawful vilification under the Discrimination Act 1991 commenced for ACT government entities. This duty will also apply to a range of other people and entities under the act from April 2027. The reform imposes a legal obligation on organisations, businesses and some individuals to take proactive and meaningful steps to prevent discrimination, sexual harassment and unlawful vilification from occurring. This reform was part of the ACT government's efforts to modernise discrimination law and make Canberra more inclusive, progressive and equal for all Canberrans.

Embedding gender equity in workplaces remains a priority for the ACT government. As outlined in the Third Action Plan, the government has developed and implemented the ACT Public Sector Gender Equity Strategy 2024-29 and, in 2025, activities continued to progress this strategy. During 2024-25, seven directorates reported that they had a gender action plan in place and two directorates had revised or had draft action plans awaiting final endorsement. All directorates reported having undertaken activity to support advancing gender equity.

Through the continued delivery of the ACT Public Sector Women's Mentoring Program, the ACT government is leading by example in advancing gender equity by investing in the development of women within our own workforce. A total of 88 ACT public service employees took part as mentors or mentees in the 2024-25 program. The program achieved significant representation from participants from diverse backgrounds, including 40 per cent from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; 19 per cent identifying as LGBTIQ+; 15 per cent identifying as people with disability; and three per cent identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. By fostering talent internally, the ACT government is not only strengthening the public service but also demonstrating our commitment to creating inclusive workplaces and driving cultural change across Canberra.

The government has been, and continues to be, committed to supporting women and girls into historically male-dominated industries, with a particular focus on supporting women and girls into roles in the construction industry. We are committed to supporting long-term sustainability and a safer, more inclusive workplace culture in the local construction industry. In support of this, the government is adopting the Culture Standard for the construction industry across all government-funded infrastructure projects. This standard promotes work-life balance, mental health and diversity. Since 1 November last year, the government has commenced encouraging suppliers to demonstrate their commitment to the Culture Standard. Moving forward, we will embed the Culture Standard into the ACT Procurement Framework for infrastructure projects.

In this area, the government has also delivered the nation-leading Understanding Building and Construction Program to improve career opportunities for women and gender-diverse students in the construction industry. This program was piloted in 2022 and is now funded for continuation and expansion to 10 ACT schools from 2026,

introducing 2,000 year 8 students annually to construction careers and offering a tailored elective for 250 female and gender-diverse students in years 9 to 10 through the Women in Construction course.

The government has also been working to establish the Built for CBR Pathways Hub, which will connect jobseekers, employers and training providers, creating a central space, both physical and virtual, for people to explore employment and training opportunities in building and construction and for industry to engage with a diverse talent pool. Opening early this year, the hub will actively support underrepresented groups, including women and girls.

In 2025, housing affordability and insecurity were among the most pressing issues for women in Canberra, particularly single women, older women and those on low or insecure incomes. These challenges impact safety, mental health and economic independence. The YWCA Canberra survey found housing affordability and cost of living were top concerns across all age groups. Alarming, more than 120 of the nearly 2,800 survey respondents had recently accessed homelessness services and nearly half of these women were employed full-time. These findings highlight the growing complexity and immediacy of housing distress among working women.

Stable housing is fundamental to wellbeing and economic security. That is why I am pleased to report that the construction of the Women's Housing Initiative at Strathnairn is nearing completion. This pilot program will offer single women aged between 25 and 45 affordable rental housing with a pathway to home ownership. By setting rents below market value and providing up to 10 years of tenancy stability, the program enables participants to save for a deposit and provides them with the option to purchase the home they are renting, supporting long-term tenancy and housing security.

With support from the ACT government, Marymead CatholicCare Canberra-Goulburn, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation have partnered to provide additional housing options for women with children who are experiencing family and domestic violence. The crisis and transitional accommodation program included the purchase of eight units and houses and will include wraparound supports from these three local providers. The Woden Youth Foyer, which opens in 2026, will also provide accommodation and support for 20 young people aged 16 to 24 years who are at risk of homelessness, including women and children. The Youth Foyer assists in transitioning young people to independence by providing stable accommodation for up to two years, supported by mentoring, peer support and life coaching.

Women remain overrepresented among low-income households. To address this, the government delivers programs that reduce energy hardship to improve thermal comfort and lower bills for vulnerable households, including social housing tenants, private renters and low-income home owners. These initiatives support financial stability and contribute to a more sustainable future.

The government is proud of the progress made through the delivery of the ACT Women's Plan and through other initiatives. The government remains committed to building a community where women and girls, and all those who identify as such, can thrive. Through collaboration, innovation and sustained investment, we are creating a

Canberra that is safer, healthier and more inclusive for everyone.

I am also very pleased to advise that nominations are currently open for the 2026 ACT Women's Awards, which were recently refreshed to better recognise the breadth of women's contribution across the ACT, the nation and around the world. I encourage everyone here to think about the women who inspire you, your colleagues, mentors and friends and to consider putting forward a nomination. Nominations close on 10 May.

Finally, last week I was pleased to announce the new Women's Ministerial Council on Gender Equity, a group of outstanding women who will provide the government with advice on policy issues, focusing initially on the development of the next plan for women and girls in the ACT. A central part of this process will be broad and inclusive consultation to ensure the plan reflects the lived experience and priorities of all Canberrans. By working together, we can build on the progress achieved under the current Women's Plan and create a more inclusive, equitable ACT where people are safe, respected and empowered to achieve their full potential

I present the following paper:

Annual Statement on the Status of Women and girls in the ACT 2026—Ministerial statement, 18 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.06): I welcome the minister's statement this morning on the status of women and girls, particularly highlighting the work around women's health. This month is Endometriosis Awareness Month—and, obviously, I could not pass up a chance in the chamber to mention that—so it is really welcome to hear the work underway to reduce waiting times and access at the Canberra endo clinic at Canberra Hospital. It is really welcome to hear. I would just put it out there that submissions to the Standing Committee on Social Policy's inquiry into endometriosis are still open for another couple of weeks.

But I wanted mostly to talk about the topic of perinatal mental health. The investment is really welcome. I am really looking forward to seeing the outcome of the feasibility study into the six-bed perinatal mental health unit. I have heard many stories of mothers needing to travel to Sydney for inpatient perinatal mental health support and the impact this then has on families who are left behind in Canberra while that takes place, particularly for families with older children who stay behind in Canberra with the other parent or grandparents looking after them, trying not to disturb their life too much, while mum and a new sibling are separated from them for potentially weeks, at a time when it is already a lot for a family with a new sibling to go through. I am really hopeful to see what this feasibility study finds and that there can be a service in Canberra for these families so that they do not have to be separated when additional perinatal mental health support is required. So I really welcome hearing where that is at.

Like a lot of women's health, perinatal mental health is not something that is talked about a lot publicly or openly. The work of the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre, the Perinatal

Mental Health Alliance and Clybucca Dreaming is so important for mothers and their families. I just wanted to put on the record that, as a former client of the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre, I will always be grateful for them and everything they do. There are so many wonderful things going on in that space to help mums and families, and I know I am not alone in saying that that investment is really welcome. It helps them reach so many women and so many families and provide support. The support group I was part of and the ongoing fortnightly phone calls I used to get for nearly two years were so lifechanging. So it is really welcome.

I could go on about so many other things in the statement, but I will not this morning. I thank the minister for her statement and for updating the chamber.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Reporting date—amendment

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.09): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs shall present its report on the Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 by 24 April 2026.

Mr Speaker, the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs is currently considering submissions received from the inquiry on the Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The committee noted that there are a diverse range of views in the submissions that warrant deeper scrutiny, and has therefore decided to hold a public hearing for the inquiry on 20 March 2026.

Given the report is due on 1 April 2026, an extension until 24 April 2026 would give enough time for the Hansard to be available, and any answers to questions taken on notice to be given and received in time for proper consideration in the committee's report.

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) (11.10): The government will be supporting this, and the next motion, obviously. I think that the reasons that the chair of the committee has put forward are perfectly reasonable. Committees are established precisely because some matters are complex, contested and deserving of careful examination—and certainly this bill and the bill referenced in the next motion are complex, and there are a range of views.

I cannot let the moment pass, however, without making the point that I feel that one cannot, on the one hand, insist that complexity requires patience when a committee is doing its work—and on the other hand suggest that complexity is no excuse when the executive is doing the same. And I think these are good examples of where these have been very complex to draft, and for the policy issues to be worked through to get it to this stage, let alone to the committee stage. I am not making that point to diminish the important work of committees, Mr Speaker, particularly not the Standing Committee

on Legal Affairs, and certainly not to criticise members for seeking the time they believe is necessary to complete an inquiry properly.

I think the reasons that Ms Barry has laid out are absolutely reasonable, particularly in terms of wanting to have the appropriate amount of time to review the questions on notice and any further information that might need to be examined—absolutely fair and proper. But it is just to make the simple point that delay is not always evidence of indifference, Mr Speaker, nor is time taken necessarily a sign of inaction. Very often, it is a reflection of the care, rigour and responsibility that all of us expect from institutions charged with considering serious legal and policy questions, whether it is the executive or the legislature.

So, I thank Ms Barry and the committee for being reasonable and wanting to work through the issues that have come through submissions in a very fair manner—and just note that, in our support for this, we certainly encourage the same reflections when members in this place can be quick to judge the government on how quickly we might be working through a matter that is complex.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.13), in reply: I thank the minister for her statement. I think she raises concerns from the executive’s perspective. I think what the committee is trying to do here is resolve some of those very sticky problems that we have identified. As I indicated, there are very significant views from stakeholders who would normally support a scheme like this, so it would be interesting to tease that out and understand what the issues are. So, I thank the minister for her statement, and yes, it is duly noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Reporting date—amendment

MS BARRY(Ginninderra) (11.14): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs shall present its report on the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 by 24 May 2026.

Mr Speaker, yesterday I made a statement under standing order 246A on behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, to explain that the committee will undertake an inquiry into the Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026 by combining it into the existing inquiry on the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026.

I am making this motion to extend the reporting date of the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 to align it with the reporting date of the Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026—so that both bills can be considered as part of the same inquiry.

This motion is to extend the reporting date for the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 from 3 May 2026 to 24 May 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.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Report 6

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.15): I present the following report:

Report 6 of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders entitled Inquiry into the Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025 together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the sixth report of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for the Eleventh Assembly.

The Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025 was presented in the Assembly on 4 December 2025, and the committee decided to inquire into the bill on 9 December 2025. The committee called for submissions from the public and from stakeholders on 9 December 2025, with a closing date of 30 January 2026. The committee received four submissions.

The committee makes recommendations for amendment to the bill, and for a review of the operation of the act following the next election, including to identify any unintended consequences arising from this bill's amendments.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all submitters for their assistance to the committee and their contributions to this inquiry.

I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Andrew Braddock MLA and Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.17): I, likewise to the Chair, thank my colleagues, Chair Cocks and Mr Braddock, for the discussions that we have had around this report—and the secretariat, for its production. I am not standing up to oppose the report. It is admirable in its brevity and clarity. The bill, as it is, might eventually result in greater clarity of the definitions surrounding political material, and while that is fairly “inside baseball”, it will be a good outcome.

However, when it comes to debating the bill, for my part, I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to pay very close attention to the proposed section 18(1A). This section requires that any government campaign initiated during commonwealth pre-election periods be first approved by the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of any party with more than two members in the Assembly—that is, the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens.

This section does concern me. It concerns me because, by bringing political parties into the day-to-day business of government functions, it is a definitional politicisation of government processes.

I have faith in the judgment and integrity of the ACT public servants who make decisions about advertising of government services, and I applaud and support the non-political nature of the public service. I also have faith in the independent reviewer who is appointed to oversee and make non-political determinations on precisely this sort of matter.

There is already robust checking of government material during pre-election periods, as the ACT government submission made clear, and that is made on a factual and impartial basis, not on the party-political basis this section will foster.

With that apprehension in mind, I will be very interested in the debate on this bill in due course. Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statement by chair

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.19): Pursuant to standing order 246A I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders, relating to the referral of an inquiry into the ACT Integrity Commission on 25 February 2026.

The terms of the referred inquiry are to consider the resourcing of the integrity commission, the implementation of the recommendations from the *Report of the independent review into the ACT's Integrity Commission Act 2018* by Mr Ian Govey, the potential use of taxpayer funded legal assistance in respect of reports by the ACT Integrity Commissioner and other related matters.

The Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders has always intended on conducting such an inquiry. The committee seeks to also consider, as part of this inquiry, the performance of the Integrity Commissioner since the Govey review was undertaken, and the impact of the first tranche of legislative amendments passed in 2024.

The committee has sought to time the commencement of the inquiry with the implementation of the outstanding recommendations of the Govey review, which are expected to address the more substantive or time-intensive matters. The committee has been corresponding with the Chief Minister over the last year in relation to the timing of the legislative program in this regard, and will commence the inquiry soon.

Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.21): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Planning Legislation Amendment Bill makes minor and technical amendments to the Planning Act 2023, the Planning (General) Regulation 2023 and the Planning (Exempt Development) Regulation 2023, as well as the Recovery of Lands Act 1929 and the Surveyors Act 2007. These amendments support the administration and delivery of the government's planning priorities, including: increasing community engagement and transparency of government in decision-making; contemporising our statute book to reflect our city's values; and ensuring that public town planners have the right settings in place to be responsive and deliver on our ambitious planning goals for the territory.

I would first like to speak to the amendments this bill will make to our planning laws. A key amendment is the creation of a new development exemption criterion to allow the construction of step-free access paths to single dwellings, to ensure that the way we regulate development continues to support inclusion across our community. Under our current planning framework, the modifications necessary to achieve step-free access—including the installation of ramps, landings and fall prevention barriers—may require lodgement of a development application. This creates an unnecessary barrier for people seeking to make their homes safe, accessible and compliant.

The introduction of this exemption criterion proposed in the bill reflects recent amendments to the National Construction Code which have been made to align with the Access Code in the Disability (Access to Premises—Buildings) Standards 2010. And removal of this regulatory hurdle is in line with a key planning priority of the government, to consider opportunities to expand exempt development pathways for lower-risk development.

The bill also improves notification requirements during public consultation for draft major plan amendments in the Planning Act 2023—and, consequentially, in the Planning (General) Regulation 2023—by requiring that adjoining lessees be notified whenever public consultation on a draft major plan amendment begins; not only when the consultation period is extended, as is currently enacted. This ensures that people whose properties adjoin the affected land have timely information and the opportunity to provide informed feedback from the outset. It is aimed at strengthening transparency and community participation in planning outcomes progressed through major amendments to the Territory Plan.

The bill also makes a number of other minor amendments to improve the operation and

administration of the planning system. These include establishing clear and consistent time standards for assessing overshadowing on a neighbouring block, for exempt developments. Although this threshold is already used in existing planning guidelines and technical specifications, inclusion in the regulations will provide consistency and certainty for applicants, assessors and neighbours alike.

Moving the function of making technical specifications to support design guides and the Territory Plan, from the Chief Planner to the Territory Planning Authority, allows delegation to operational teams, and ensures technical specification support good design and amenity through responsiveness to the needs of the territory. It also ensures that a “swimming pool” is clearly defined in the Planning (Exempt Development) Regulation 2023 to enable the vital protections for swimming pool safety to be relevantly applied.

Finally, the bill proposes to address several technical and typographical corrections to legislation within the planning and sustainable development portfolio, to ensure their currency. This includes amending outdated gendered language in the Recovery of Lands Act 1929 which no longer reflects the values of our time. These amendments play an important normative role in ensuring that our statute book is up to date with current drafting practices which reflect our community and the society that we want to build in the ACT.

Madam Assistant Speaker, although the bill I am introducing today is relatively minor and non-controversial, it demonstrates the government’s commitment to ongoing review of our planning system to ensure that it is operating effectively and delivering intended outcomes which support the delivery of high-quality development.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 11.26 am to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice

Budget—debt

MR PARTON: My question is to the Treasurer. For the second time in just seven weeks, the Reserve Bank has increased the cash rate by 25 basis points, and further rises are forecast. At the same time, the ACT is projected to take on \$3.855 billion in new borrowings in 2026-27 alone. This will directly impact Canberra families as well as the government’s fiscal position. Treasurer, what is the total cost to the ACT budget in each year of the forward estimates of a single 25-basis-point increase in interest rates?

MR STEEL: It is not as simple as that. We have had this discussion many times before in this place and through estimates committees, about the multiple factors that go into the cost of borrowing. Of course, interest rates are one factor—there is absolutely no doubt about that—but there is a range of other factors as well. The opposition has claimed that the credit rating is the sole factor that determines the borrowing rate, which is not the case. Again, it is just one factor in the cost of borrowing.

Mr Cocks: Point of order. The minister is suggesting, incorrectly, that we have made assertions about what the relevant factors are. However, he has entered into debating the question—

MR SPEAKER: I think he is answering the question. I do not think he has actually steered into debate. I accept that he is getting close, Mr Cocks, and I would encourage the minister to be directly relevant.

MR STEEL: There are other factors as well, of course, which go to liquidity volumes in the market and whether other Australian semis are in the market at the same time that we are going out for borrowing. It depends on the products we are putting onto the market as well, the length of the term of a bond and the type of product, whether it be a note or a bond, from the ACT government. So there is a range of factors. And, of course, in every budget, Treasury updates the economic parameters, and they flow through the budget forecasts in areas where they are relevant, and we will do that again in the 2026-27 budget.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, has Treasury modelled the impact on the territory's fiscal position of the 50 basis points of rate rises already delivered this year, together with the risk of further increases? And is there any chance of you giving us any hint of a ballpark figure of the impact of those rises?

MR STEEL: I just said, in answer to the previous question, that Treasury, in every budget, updates the economic parameters. They will of course be looking at inflation, they will be looking at the cash rate from the Reserve Bank, and they will be looking at a range of other updated parameters which will feed into their forecast. Until you actually go to the market and test the market, in terms of borrowing, you will not know the exact price. When we go out to market, I am sure that Treasury will be providing advice to me, as Treasurer, about how to get the best possible rate for the borrowing needs of the territory.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, can the expected additional interest pressure be absorbed without a further blow-out in the budget bottom line, or should Canberrans expect even deeper deficits and more debt?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. All the considerations about changes to economic parameters, changes to the budget and risks to the budget are assessed as part of the budget process, and we will do that again in 2026-27.

Cost of living—taxation

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the Reserve Bank has now raised the cash rate twice this year as underlying inflation remains high, adding further pressure to household budgets. Analysts estimate Canberra mortgage holders are now paying around \$300 more a month, while petrol prices today are averaging around \$2.30 a litre. This comes on top of your government's increases to rates, taxes, fees and charges, despite repeated warnings that Canberrans have little left to give. Treasurer, has Treasury provided you with any analysis of the cost-of-living impact of increased residential and commercial rates as well as higher government fees and charges on

Canberra households and businesses?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. There is no sugar-coating yesterday's decision by the Reserve Bank board to increase interest rates by 25 basis points. This will have an impact on Canberra households and businesses. For the average owner-occupier loan that is a \$1,007 change in an annual payment for a loan size of \$500,000. It is significant—and, of course, many households would have a larger loan size than that. In every budget, we of course look at the economic context in which we are making decisions, and we will consider the pressures that households are under. They are under pressure from not just this decision by the Reserve Bank but also the increase to petrol prices that we have seen as a result of the war in the Middle East. Those two things together will have an impact.

Decisions that the government takes in relation to the budget are also transparently provided in the budget papers. We provide a range of different cameos in the budget papers, showing what the impacts are of the budget's decisions, whether it be in relation to general rates or, indeed, other fees and charges as well. I encourage the opposition to have a look at those cameos in the 2025-26 budget papers, and we will again be doing those in the 2026-27 budget. As we develop that budget for the new financial year and the forward estimates, we will of course be taking into account the economic situation at the time we are making those decisions, and that will of course include the decision that was made yesterday as well as the broader impact of the war in the Middle East.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order under 118AA, the question was in regard to analysis which has been undertaken by Treasury up to the current date. The Treasurer's response was about what may happen in the future looking forward to the budget. I am not convinced that he has directly addressed that part of the question.

MR STEEL: I am happy to respond. I clearly said that that analysis had been provided for the 2025-26 budget for the decisions that we had made then. They were not referring to any other decisions; they were referring to the decisions we made in the last budget.

MR SPEAKER: I listened pretty closely, and I think he was responsive, Mr Cocks. So there is no point of order.

MS MORRIS: Treasurer, does the Government have any policy to limit increases to rates, fees and charges to the Wage Price Index?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Many fees and charges are indexed by the Wage Price Index. In every budget we will consider what the appropriate indexation should be for various fees and charges and take decisions in relation to revenue. We made some decisions in the last budget, and we will need to consider both the needs of the economy, households and businesses in the next budget whilst also balancing that with the imperative of making sure that we have a budget that is in a sustainable position. We will continue to do that in every budget.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, given these mounting pressures, do you accept that your government's rapidly rising fees that are often above the WPI are making the cost-of-living crisis worse for Canberra families and businesses?

MR STEEL: Certainly every decision we make takes into account the impact on households and businesses. Our government has a pretty strong track record of supporting them both during the pandemic and in the inflationary period that followed. We are continuing to face pressures with the war in the Middle East that we will need to consider through the development of the 2026-27 budget. So we will of course consider that when we are thinking about fees and charges as well as making decisions to strengthen the position of the ACT budget. We need to balance those things. The commonwealth will also, no doubt, be balancing those decisions in their budget in May.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, I refer to a media article yesterday titled “CIT CEO Margot McNeill fighting misconduct finding from previous role at TAFE NSW”.

Minister at the time Dr McNeill was appointed, you said:

I am pleased to congratulate Margot on her appointment as the new CEO of CIT. Margot’s experience and leadership will be invaluable as CIT continues to play a vital role in skilling our workforce and supporting our community now and into the future. I look forward to working closely with Margot to deliver on our shared vision for a thriving vocational education sector in the ACT.

Minister, have you sought advice from the CIT board, TAFE NSW or any other relevant body on these matters, and if so, are you able to table that advice?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question and his clear research. I am happy to table all my correspondence with CIT in relation to this matter.

I became aware of these matters on 17 June 2025 by an anonymous complaint to the ACT Integrity Commission. That complaint was referred to the CIT board, as the matters occurred outside the ACT jurisdiction. On being advised of these concerns, I agreed with the board that the matter should be referred to relevant authorities. I requested the board seek further information from TAFE NSW and I suggested the board seek a Government-Solicitor’s officer’s advice about the matters. I also sought advice on the due diligence undertaken by the board during the recruitment process and an explanation as to how Dr McNeill’s involvement in the investigation came to light only after her appointment.

On 19 December, I was advised by the CIT board that the board had received correspondence from TAFE NSW that they had returned a finding of misconduct against Dr McNeill relating to her employment at TAFE NSW. I was also advised that Dr McNeill was seeking advice with an intention to commence proceedings to challenge the finding. Following this, I outlined my concerns about this situation to the CIT board, and particularly how the situation might impact community confidence in the CIT. I also requested an independent review of the recruitment process that led to the appointment of the CEO. As members are aware, the CIT CEO is appointed by, and responsible to, the CIT board.

It is my strong expectation that CIT’s leadership uphold the highest standards of honesty, care and diligence and that the CIT board ensures public confidence is upheld

in CIT.

MR PARTON: Minister, did Dr McNeill disclose, or did it become apparent, at any stage during the recruitment process that she was the subject of serious misconduct charges?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that one on notice. The recruitment process was not undertaken by me. As members who are across the Canberra Institute of Technology Act would appreciate, I am consulted on the recruitment process undertaken by the CIT board. I will take that on notice and see if the board can provide an answer.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, do you stand by your statement congratulating Dr McNeill on her appointment as CEO?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Milligan for the question. I appreciate the significance of an appointment to a position of that nature. It is a momentous occasion in many people's careers. I have subsequently become aware of a range of these allegations and have sought to respond to them in the appropriate manner. I will continue to work constructively across the service to ensure public confidence in CIT.

Public housing—maintenance

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, the ACT government is not resourcing or delivering public housing to an adequate standard. Since 2023, Housing ACT operations have been the subject of two damning reports by the Auditor-General, two damning reports by the ACT Ombudsman and a court case in the ACT Supreme Court that found one program in breach of human rights. The social policy committee is also inquiring into Housing ACT and its specialist disability accommodation.

Minister, do you have confidence that Housing ACT is meeting its obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act, and achieving the objectives set out in the Housing Assistance Act?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Rattenbury for his question. I do have confidence in Housing ACT, in managing public housing across the ACT. It is a very complicated and complex space, public housing. The support and management of the people who live in those homes is complex and complicated, too. Our Housing ACT staff do a remarkable amount of work over and above what they would normally be expected to, because they care deeply about the tenants who live in public housing properties.

I am very happy to receive independent reviews and reports from the Auditor-General and others on the work that Housing ACT does, and that the government does into public housing—because our goals are to have continuous improvement and that every tenant's experience in public housing is a positive one.

MR RATTENBURY: How does Housing ACT know if Programmed Facilities Management are doing their job of maintaining public housing, given the 2026 Ombudsman's report which says Housing ACT does not have any systems in place to track and report the overall progress of a tenant repair-and-maintenance request?

MS BERRY: They do have processes and programs in place, and regular meetings with Programmed to ensure that the work that is being carried out is being conducted in an appropriate way. I recognise that is not always the case and has not always been identified immediately or in a timeframe that would be acceptable by Housing ACT. That is one of the reasons that I have been meeting with Programmed, as well—to ensure that they have systems in place to identify the work that is required in a public housing property, and that it is repaired and maintained to a standard that all of us would expect in our own homes.

There is more work to do, and we will work with Programmed moving forward, as we move to the ultimate goal of insourcing public housing maintenance to be operated by the ACT government.

MS CLAY: It was reported this morning that your federal colleague stood next to you at a presser this week and refused to waive our housing debt despite the federal government having issued waivers for two other states. So, so how will you get federal Labor to waive the ACT's historic housing debt so we can resource our public housing properly?

MS BERRY: The housing debt is not the thing that we would say is holding up funding for public housing in the ACT. It would certainly make a huge difference if that debt were waived and we could put that extra funding into homes in the ACT. And I never, ever give up on an opportunity—and nor does the Chief Minister—to remind my federal colleagues that we are still serious about having that debt waived. And so, the question was asked and of course I said, “Yes, federal government, please consider waiving that debt for the ACT.” And I will continue to do that, the same way I have with previous coalition governments. I asked them for a waiver of the debt as well, and, unfortunately, have not been successful.

We have now, however, a range of different funding that we had never had previously, with the federal government, as people will know in this place—particularly the Housing Australia Future Fund, which has provided opportunities not just for building social housing within the ACT government, but supporting the community housing organisations in the ACT to grow their stock as well, and provide housing for people on low or no incomes.

Ms Clay: Point of order on relevance. The question was, “How will you get federal Labor to waive the ACT’s historic housing debt?” How?

MS BERRY: With my magic wand.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister has concluded her question, unless she has got something further to add? No.

Gaming reform—online gaming

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform.

A January 2026 review conducted by the federal government notes that:

Traditionally, keno has been available as an in-venue game in clubs, pubs, hotels and casinos, and is licenced and regulated by state and territory governments. More recently it has been made available online to consumers via licences issued in Victoria, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.

The review also notes that online Keno is available 24 hours per day, of course, and cites evidence that it allows consumers to spend up to \$1,000 every three minutes, equating to up to \$20,000 per hour, and some platforms allow players to prepay for up to 50 games and play multiple games simultaneously.

Minister, when and why did the ACT government start issuing licences to run online Keno gaming out of the territory?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We have also had advocacy on this issue. I will take on notice the question as to when the licence came into effect.

MR EMERSON: Minister, how much annual tax and licencing revenue does the ACT government collect through the licencing and operating of online Keno?

DR PATERSON: I will take it on notice.

MS CARRICK: Has the ACT government put in place any harm minimisation measures to protect Canberrans who are playing Keno online? If so, what are they? And if not, why not?

DR PATERSON: There are no specific additional measures that have been put in place to address online Keno. I will get some further advice. With these online environments, they do not often sit within our jurisdiction. They are in the commonwealth's jurisdiction. I will get some advice around the online Keno and specifically how that relates to the ACT.

Weston Creek—play spaces

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services and relates to the government's Play Space Strategy and the lack of a district playground in Weston Creek. 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. Waramanga playground was recently upgraded, and it is great, but Weston Creek deserves the same level of investment and opportunity as other parts of Canberra. Minister, why doesn't Weston Creek have a district playground?

MS CHEYNE: The answer to Ms Carrick's question, as put, without all the context, is that our playgrounds and our assets across the territory have been the product of pre self-government and since self-government. What we saw prior to self-government was a real focus from the NCDC and its predecessors on small, local playgrounds, which generally only had one to three pieces of equipment. Those prevail in our suburbs today,

and they do still make up the vast majority of our total playgrounds in the ACT.

More recently, we have been investing in the playgrounds that are in a community or a neighbourhood space—ones that are close to local shops, for example—and we are otherwise looking to prioritise the district playgrounds for upgrade, as well as those neighbourhood or community-based ones.

I would note that there are just nine district playgrounds in all of the ACT. District playgrounds are significant investments, and they are usually the types of playgrounds that we would expect families to be travelling to. At this point in time, we think that the mix of playgrounds on offer across the ACT, with district playgrounds being the fewest but the most extensive, is adequate.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the government identify a site in Weston Creek for a district playground?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. It is certainly a conversation that I am happy to continue with Ms Carrick, about the needs of the area. The government's commitments regarding playgrounds and playground upgrades were very clearly stepped out in the 2024 election. That does comprise the funding that we intend to provision, if we have not already provisioned it, for the commitments across this term of government. That is what we are focused on delivering. Of course, I am very happy to hear from Ms Carrick and her constituents on where there may be other areas of need.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when will the government commit funding to address the ageing and tired condition of the playground at Cooleman Court, beyond basic safety maintenance?

MS CHEYNE: If I recall correctly, I believe that that is an election commitment, so it will be in this term of government.

Public housing—maintenance

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, a performance management system was established under the agreement entered into between Programmed Facility Management Pty Ltd and the Commissioner for Social Housing in 2018. One of the five key principles that drove the delivery of outcomes was to provide “best customer service”. The performance management system was to monitor, measure and influence the performance of Programmed Facility Management, and, according to the agreement, the performance of Programmed Facility Management was to be reviewed regularly. During these reviews, did Housing ACT ever raise concerns that Programmed was not delivering “best customer service”?

MS BERRY: I do not have that level of detail on me.

Mr Parton: Really?

MS BERRY: No, I do not, but I will—

Mr Cain: So can you take it on notice?

MS BERRY: I will take it on notice and will bring—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Just ignore them, Minister.

MS BERRY: It is very difficult. I will take that question on notice and, if there is information I can provide to the Assembly, I will.

MS CLAY: Minister, over the last two years, how many non-conformance notices and contractor default notices has the Commissioner for Social Housing issued to Programmed Facility Management?

MS BERRY: Again, I do not have that level of detail on me—it might be a surprise, I know—but I will take that question on notice. If there is detail that I can provide, noting that there is a contractual relationship between Housing ACT and Programmed, then I will provide it to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY: Has Programmed Facility Management ever been paid an incentive payment or been subject to a management-fee-at-risk adjustment? And, if so, what are the details of those payments?

MS BERRY: Again, these are contract questions. I do not have that level of detail on me. If I can provide it to the Assembly, I will.

Health—healthcare facilities

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you update us on the record investments the ACT government is making in health infrastructure?

Mr Cain: She will say it is a record investment.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you very much to Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question—and thank you, Mr Cain; it is indeed a record investment. The ACT government is making record investments to build a more connected and integrated health system across the territory across preventive health, community-based services and our walk-in centres and hospitals. Several significant projects are progressing, each playing an important role in strengthening this territory-wide network of health services.

Early works on the new northside hospital project will begin in April and planning and design are progressing well. The commonwealth has recently declared the project will not have a significant impact on protected matters under the Environment, Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Importantly, these works have been carefully planned to ensure the North Canberra Hospital remains fully operational throughout construction, and the whole project is being shaped through close consultation with stakeholders to ensure the facility meets future needs. Alongside the main hospital

building, the design of a new childcare centre is being progressed, as well as identifying suitable community locations for the relocation of Arcadia House. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service cottage program design is complete, with construction at Erindale expected to start midyear.

Separately, the Watson Health Precinct is due for completion in August 2026 and will deliver purpose-built alcohol and drug rehabilitation and mental health services for young people and a community-controlled alcohol and drug rehabilitation service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are continuing to plan for the next stage of investment needed at Canberra Hospital, including additional parking, with around 360 new spaces proposed across the decommissioned helipad and the former CIT site. This project is currently in design, with a contractor announcement expected in late 2026.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the investment in the new health centre in south Tuggeranong support south Canberra's community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough have been very interested in the progress of the South Tuggeranong Health Centre, located at the corner of Box Hill Avenue and Heidelberg Street in Condor. This will be the first of four new centres across Canberra, in addition to the Molonglo Canberra Health Services hub, which has recently expanded to be home to our community paediatrics team. It was a pleasure to visit them recently.

Construction is well underway in south Tuggeranong, with the scaffolding now removed and the brickwork, glazing and external detailing clearly taking shape. Work is progressing inside, as internal walls are installed and services continue to be fitted out. This new centre will be purpose built as a health facility for the Tuggeranong region. It has been thoughtfully designed as a modern, flexible space that can adapt over time to meet changing community needs. Importantly, it will complement Canberra's existing community health centres and nurse-led walk-in centres, strengthening the overall health network rather than duplicating services.

The design and planned services have been shaped by community consultation which was undertaken in 2023. Local feedback has helped ensure the centre will be welcoming, accessible and reflect the needs of families and individuals in the area. Once complete, it will feature 11 consultation rooms, a virtual care room—which I am very excited about—and offer a range of essential services, including paediatrics, pathology collection, diabetes clinics, falls and injury prevention programs and chronic disease programs. These services will play a vital role in supporting people at every stage of life to stay well in their community.

The facility itself is a sustainable energy efficient design in a convenient location, close to schools and public transport, making it easier for everyone to access care. The centre is expected to open in the second half of 2026.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how will further investments in health centres across the ACT support our growing population?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. Three new

health centres, as I mentioned earlier, are also planned for the inner south, north Gungahlin and west Belconnen. This will bring high-quality healthcare services closer to where people live, reducing the need to travel long distances for care, and, again, complementing our existing community health centres and five nurse-led walk-in centres.

As members would be aware, we are progressing plans for the Inner South Health Centre, behind the Griffith shops. Late last month, this project was declared a Territory Priority Project, and I am pleased the Assembly has supported that declaration. This designation recognises the importance of the centre and enables the project to move through planning processes more efficiently, ensuring timely delivery of vital community infrastructure. Once complete, the centre will offer services including oral health care, pathology collection, post-acute care management, rapid access clinics and chronic disease management. Construction is anticipated to commence in 2027, subject to approval of the major plan amendment and subsequent development application.

The North Gungahlin Health Centre will be located adjacent to Casey Market Town on Kingsland Parade. Design work is currently underway. The centre is being planned as a modern, accessible facility that supports people of all ages and abilities. It will include flexible community spaces, in line with ACT Labor's election commitment and the strong advocacy of my colleague Ms Orr. The clinic services profile for the centre will be shaped by community consultation that was undertaken in late 2024 and service planning guided by local health data. In West Belconnen, we are currently reviewing potential sites. Planning for the West Belconnen Health Centre is at an early stage, and the ACT Government is reviewing potential sites. Once a location is confirmed, community consultation will begin to help shape the future of this facility as well.

The investments I have outlined today are focused on ensuring Canberrans can receive the right care at the right time and in the right place, close to home.

Youth homelessness

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs.

Minister, recent reporting by the ABC and ACT Shelter has highlighted that youth homelessness in the ACT remains significant, with more than one in five people seeking support from homelessness services aged between 15 and 24. Last year, nearly 700 young people sought support from homelessness services in the ACT, and 683 young Canberrans experiencing homelessness sought assistance, with almost half remaining homeless despite reaching out for help. Can you please advise what steps the government is taking to address these deeply concerning figures of homelessness for our young people?

MS BERRY: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. It is concerning to hear the numbers of young people who are experiencing homelessness and seeking support to get themselves into homes of their own and then wrapping supports around them so that they can continue with their education and learn to live an adult life comfortably and safely.

I think one of the primary actions that the ACT government has done is the construction of the Woden Youth Foyer, which will have a significant impact on the lives of young people who will be able to access housing in that space. The other service that we provide is through Barnardos—who also run a Youth Foyer, which a number of us have visited over the years—and working with them to ensure that young people get both the support of a home over their head and can continue on with their education so that they are ready to get into homes of their own, and perhaps leaving these kind of social supports that they have needed as young people.

I know that there is much more work to do in this space, and it is complicated because often these young people are not seen and are invisible to the rest of us due to couch surfing and depending on other people, their friends and families, to spend time in their homes rather than on their own. It may not always be safe for them to go to their own homes. It is something I am constantly putting my mind to—how we can support these young people and I am always having good conversations with the community housing sector as well about potential innovative approaches to supporting these young people.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, can you please advise how many people under the age of 24 are currently residing in crisis accommodation in the ACT, and whether the capacity of crisis accommodation meets the current level of demand?

MS BERRY: I do not have the number of people in crisis accommodation on me at this moment in time. I can safely say that, obviously, we need to build more, and we need to build more homes for young people and all people across the spectrum in social, community and affordable rentals as well. That is the work that the ACT government is getting on with now, in partnerships with organisations like Assemble. Assemble announced this week their new building in Belconnen with over 400 affordable, social and community housing for ACT people and that would include young people as well. These are the kinds of things that the ACT government is doing, looking at lots of different innovative approaches because we need to in this housing crisis to make sure we cover the whole spectrum.

Miss Nuttall: Just under 118AA, I wanted to check whether the minister has been responsive to the question. It was specifically, how many people under the age of 24 are currently residing in crisis accommodation. I know I cannot direct the minister but I am wondering if that might be something that could be taken on notice?

MR SPEAKER: I think you are right, there is a point of order because it was a specific question. You said that you did not have that available. We could say that you will take that on notice, Minister, or there is a 118AA coming. I will leave it to you.

MS BERRY: Well, I would never want to upset you Mr Speaker, by requiring additional work on a 118AA, so I will take that level of detail of the question on notice.

MR SPEAKER: Fantastic. All right.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister what services are there specifically for people under the age of 18 who are homeless?

MS BERRY: There are a range of different services. I have just referred to two: the

Woden Youth Foyer as well as the Barnardos Youth Foyer. There are also a range of services available through Housing ACT supporting young people into different supports in the community services sector. I will provide a fulsome list, so I take that on notice. Hopefully, I will have that before the end of question time, although I am sure it is available on the website.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for skills. Minister, I again refer to a media article yesterday titled, “CIT CEO Margot McNeill fighting misconduct finding from previous role at TAFE NSW”. In the article it details that in May of 2024, Dr McNeill was advised that TAFE NSW had received multiple complaints from employees of misconduct, and an investigation was launched by an external law firm. It also details that, on 16 September 2025, TAFE NSW advised Dr McNeill that the investigation had been completed and that it had accepted the findings in the investigation report that her conduct was contrary to the TAFE NSW Code of Conduct. Minister, you have said during question time that you found out about the serious misconduct charges against Dr McNeill on 17 June 2025. Her appointment took effect on 18 June 2025—just one day after you found out. Can I ask, Minister, what action did you take once you found out?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. On being advised of those concerns, I agreed with the board that the matter should be referred to relevant authorities. I requested the board seek further information from TAFE NSW. I suggested the board seek advice from the GSO. I also then sought advice on the due diligence undertaken by the board during the recruitment process, and an explanation as to how Dr McNeill’s involvement in the investigation came to light only after her appointment.

MR PARTON: Minister, is Dr McNeill still in her role? What is her current remuneration?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Yes, she continues to be the CEO of CIT. I take on notice her remuneration.

MS LEE: Minister, what assurances have you sought or received from the CIT board, that this situation is not going to be another Leanne Cover debacle, which cost ACT taxpayers \$8 million, including almost \$1 million where Leanne Cover was paid, being stood down, at full freight.

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Lee for the supplementary question. As I am sure Ms Lee would appreciate, I cannot accept the imputations and inferences contained within the question. I will continue to work constructively to ensure that CIT is held in the highest of community confidences. I have engaged constructively with the board on these matters since first becoming aware of them. I am currently awaiting the results of the independent review.

Fuel supply

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for energy.

Minister, yesterday you could not answer basic questions about the ACT's preparedness for potential fuel shortages. You took six questions on notice, including one on the territory's diesel reserves, and still have not provided answers. Why were you so unprepared when even the federal energy minister has now acknowledged what he described as a national crisis on fuel?

MS ORR: I do not agree with the premise of Mr Milligan's question—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS ORR: The premise of this question being that I was not able to answer. I provided quite a lot of information. I took the detail on notice and said I would come back.

As I said yesterday, this is a fast-evolving situation, and it is changing quite rapidly and continues to change. As we were in question time yesterday, there were announcements that came just before that, and there have been discussions since, and the information that I perhaps could have provided yesterday would probably already be out of date today. In that regard, I will continue to seek information as it comes to hand and to provide accurate information, as opposed to answering a question—so that I do not have representations made on social media of me not knowing what it is and memes all over the place—and in the interest of actually putting out correct information.

As I said yesterday, the advice to me is that we have not moved to a level of fuel rationing or crisis, or all these other alarmist terms that the opposition are wanting to use. Certainly, the federal minister has—

Mr Cocks: A point of order. The minister is suggesting that the opposition is using alarmist terms, when what we have done is refer to—

Ms Stephen-Smith: What is your point of order?

Mr Cocks: I'll come to the point of order. In terms of both debating the question and imputations, the opposition has simply used the name of the act which is the fuel rationing act.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Ms Orr?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I believe Mr Milligan did actually use the word "crisis"—

Ms Morris: It was a quote from the federal minister.

MS ORR: Irrespective, we have alarmist—my time is up (*Time expired.*)

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, do you know which level of government is responsible for fuel rationing legislation?

Mr Parton: And it's not the council!

MS ORR: Yes.

Mr Milligan, in answer to your question, the ACT does have legislative arrangements in place for fuel rationing. We also work within a national framework with the federal government and all states and territories as to how we would ensure our fuel supply or energy supply in times of emergency.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS ORR: The opposition in their questions to me today have had a particular focus on our local legislation. It is one where we are currently operating under the joined-up response, as I said yesterday, working with our colleagues across jurisdictions, noting that, again, we do not want to send out concerns and have panic buying. Actually, one of the biggest pressures on our fuel supply at the moment across the country is that panic buying.

What we are looking at is that fuel continues to arrive in Australia, and supply has not been interrupted as yet, hence why the advice to me is that we are not moving to rationing. But we will be continuing to monitor, and while we have structures in place under these coordinated national frameworks to do ongoing monitoring, at the moment, given the pressures that are there internationally, we are looking at having the coordination of those meetings more often to allow for information sharing as the situation evolves. We will continue to keep a watching brief on what other changes or what other measures we might need to implement.

MS LEE: Minister, what advice did you, as the responsible minister, provide to the Chief Minister in preparation for national cabinet regarding support for Canberrans facing higher fuel costs and supply uncertainty?

MS ORR: I believe this is in reference to an upcoming national cabinet. There have been a few. As I said, there are a number of meetings. We continue to coordinate across the ACT government and to provide advice. The Chief Minister and I have been talking, as I said yesterday, and also talking to our federal counterparts. This takes in a number of actors across a range of jurisdictions. We will continue to have that joined-up consideration and input, working with our federal counterparts to meet the needs across all of Australia in having a coordinated and seamless response to this.

Again, I would like to reiterate, because there is certainly a sense of panic, I think it is fair to say, coming from across the chamber, that creating a sense of panic is actually the thing that is not going to help our fuel supply right now. I would ask that, while it is very tempting to always get out and make a few—

Mr Cocks: A point of order on relevance, in the hope of avoiding a 118AA The minister has not yet come to responding to the question of what advice she has provided to the Chief Minister.

MR SPEAKER: If you could be relevant, Minister, because you have said that you have had conversations, but you have not provided any detail of what the specific advice may or may not have been—if you can be relevant to that.

MS ORR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What I can say is that I can point to, as I already have, all the advice to me: that for our supply in the ACT, we are not needing to implement fuel rations—that, while there is certainly a level of panic going on, and we are seeing pressures on our fuel supply in that regard, we are not at a point of needing to put in rations or to go beyond monitoring. This is the same consistent advice that is going to the Chief Minister, as I said yesterday.

Public housing—maintenance

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, both the ombudsman's 2023 and 2026 reports highlight how some housing tenants have been impacted by a system that does not respect their rights. In your September 2025 statement on insourcing the maintenance of public housing, you outlined the risks and opportunities there are in government-managed repairs and maintenance. Minister, do those risks remain, and how will insourcing maintenance respect the rights of public housing tenants?

MS BERRY: I did not quite catch the start of what you were referring to, but I can say that the whole purpose of insourcing public housing maintenance in the ACT is a very, very serious ideology to look after some of the poorest people in our community and to make sure that they are supported in the fairest and most equitable way. The way that we do that is by focusing on the tenants being at the centre of all the work that we do with regard to the housing maintenance contract. It is the biggest contract that the ACT government holds, and it looks after some of the most vulnerable people in our community. My focus at every step of the way is on those vulnerable people.

I know that there have been experiences by public housing tenants that are not in any way satisfactory, and it is my intention for that to improve, which is why we have already been having discussions with Programmed about, in the meantime, making sure that those tenants are at the front of the considerations when maintenance occurs in Housing ACT properties. I did not catch the first part; I will take it on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: That has covered it. Thank you.

Minister, will there be a complaints mechanism when public housing maintenance is insourced? Who will be responsible for investigating the complaints and issuing non-compliance orders?

MS BERRY: Yes, there will certainly be opportunities and ways for tenants and others to be able to provide feedback, both positive and instructive. We also have the tenants participation group, which is made up of public housing tenants, who often provide some good insights into public housing maintenance. That program will continue. There might be other ways that we can include them in those processes going forward to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all of our tenants across the city. We are still working through what that will look like, so I do not have a detailed answer on exactly what it will look like. How we engage with tenants in that process will definitely be an important part of that work.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, under the insourced arrangements, how will you deliver on your commitment to ensure that no tenant experiences a reduced level of service or

quality through insourced repairs and maintenance?

MS BERRY: As I said, at front of mind of all this work about insourcing the public housing maintenance program is to ensure that tenants get the best possible outcomes and experiences through that process. They are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. They have complex and often very complicated lives, so there is a fair amount of learning amongst our community about how these tenants can be supported through their maintenance. It might be very different to the sort of maintenance and repairs that other people in our community might experience.

I can assure the Assembly that my focus is on always improving outcomes for public housing tenants and others experiencing homelessness in the ACT, and that will certainly be my intent in the process of insourcing public housing maintenance. I have had very good feedback from the multi-unit property trials on which we have been doing the public housing maintenance, about efficiencies in that work and that tenants are experiencing good and respectful repair work within those environments. It is about learning from those trials and looking at how we then move that out more into the rest of the public housing space, noting that we do around 50,000 repairs on public housing properties a year. It is a significant task, but we are very focused on making sure that tenants' experiences are improved throughout all of that.

Access Mental Health Team

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the ACT government website states:

Our Access Mental Health Team is available 24 hours, 7 days per week, for people who have concerns about their own or someone else's mental health.

My office was recently made aware—indeed, I had a harrowing meeting with the constituent involved—of a concerning and careless operating failure involving someone trying to reach this critical service. After an extended period on hold, they were automatically redirected to a voicemail service, where a detailed message was left requesting urgent assistance. This detailed message referred specifically to a live, potential suicide situation. Minister, what is the expected call-back timeframe for someone requesting support from the Access Mental Health Team? And, specifically, what policies and procedures are in place to ensure compliance?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for the question. I am really sorry to hear about that experience. I would like to get some more details if Mr Parton and his office have not already shared them with my office, so that we can investigate this matter. While Access Mental Health is a 24/7 service, I will seek to investigate what happened in this circumstance and what the process is for call-backs. If people have an emergency situation with potential risk to life, 000 is the appropriate number to call in an emergency.

MR PARTON: Minister, why did it take 35 calendar days and a detailed complaint letter to you for this person to hear back from anyone at the Access Mental Health Team?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will investigate further as to why they did not hear back immediately. The details of that correspondence are not coming immediately to mind, so I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what are the impacts of someone having to wait potentially 35 days to get a call back?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, that is not acceptable and clearly something has gone wrong in the process here; hence, I want to investigate that. I do not think that a call back in 35 days, after escalating a complaint, is really a call back from the original call; that is a response to the complaint. Clearly, this is supposed to be a service that provides a very quick response. A call back in 35 days is not that quick response; it is a response to a complaint.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order, under standing order 118AA: I appreciate the minister's views that the timeframe is not appropriate. However, the question that was asked by Ms Castley was, indeed, about the impacts of having to wait so long, and I do not believe the minister has actually gone to the question.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, the question was: "What are the impacts?" You could argue that is reasonably hypothetical, Mr Cocks. You are talking about a specific case. She then broadened it out to generic responses and has also said she will be taking the details and responding on notice. I think that the minister has been responsive to the question. She cannot elaborate on what the consequences would be in a hypothetical case or, in this case, when she does not have the specific details. I think she has been responsive.

Disability—Thriving Kids

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, in your ministerial statement on 18 February 2026 on the implementation of Thriving Kids you said that cross-directorate consultation has been completed, that community consultation is underway and that, through those consultations, the government knows what families want. Minister, how many individual people in the ACT have actually been consulted so far on the design of the Thriving Kids program?

MS ORR: In picking out some of the parts of my ministerial statement, I would go back and check the actual context they were made in. What I will clarify, in getting to answering Mr Cain's question on the actual number of individuals, is that work has been ongoing for a significant period of time—which also predates me, to give members a sense of how much input has been given to this—through work across the public service with our stakeholder groups, who will be consulting with the people that they represent, and will continue to be ongoing.

This has been quite a different service development process, given the complexity of the negotiations that have been undertaken around the Thriving Kids initiative and the parameters that have been placed because of that, particularly in the timeframes. As we have discussed many times in this place, it is a very—

Mr Cain: I will take the number you have consulted so far as at today.

MS ORR: I would have a much easier time answering Mr Cain's question if he were a little bit quieter.

Mr Cain: I asked how many individuals. That is the question.

MR SPEAKER: If you have a point of order, ask it; otherwise, stop interjecting.

Mr Cain: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the minister is just talking around and not answering a very obvious question: how many individuals—even up to now—have been consulted?

MR SPEAKER: On relevance, Minister, the question is about how many. If you do not have the specific number, you could take it on notice. You are talking around the process rather than the number, which is the specific question.

MS ORR: I am—and, if you would just indulge me for a few more seconds, Mr Speaker—and that is because I am getting to the point, in answering Mr Cain's question, as I said I would, to talk about individual people consulted. The government is now moving to having roundtable discussions where we can include a range of stakeholders, families and carers to inform the service design. We are doing this within the parameters that we have under the agreement that was made on some very tight timeframes. *(Time expired.)*

Mr Cocks: Under 118AA, the minister did not actually get around to answering the question.

MR SPEAKER: I will uphold that point of order. Minister, the question was about how many individuals had been consulted. I would ask you under 118AA that you provide an answer on that or attempt to as best you can.

MR CAIN: Minister, how were families and individuals selected for consultation and in what form did that consultation take, apart from roundtables?

MS ORR: I will just clarify that the roundtables are still to be undertaken. They have not already happened. I will take the detail of Mr Cain's question on notice. As I am already coming back to the Assembly with more information, I will check with officials and come back with a full response.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will the government publish the number of consultation participants and the organisations consulted, so that ACT families can see how broad that engagement was?

MS ORR: Again, seeing as I am already coming back to the Assembly, I will come back with an answer to that question at the same time.

ACT public service—safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service.

Minister, in your ministerial statement yesterday on the implementation of the public service Closing the Gap measures, you mentioned recent truth-telling that is occurring regarding the cultural safety experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the public service. These systematic failures to embed cultural safety within the public service have been reported in the media and through documents released via freedom of information mechanisms. Minister, why now are you choosing to listen, when these issues have been raised at the most senior levels of the public services for years now?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Barry for the question, but I reject the way that she has asked the question. I have been listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants, for my entire time in this place. I spent eight years as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and I regularly met with the heads of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and listened to public servants right across the public service about their experience. That is one of the reasons that there is so much work already done and already underway with our commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. And not just me listening, my colleagues listening, the Chief Minister listening and, through the Chief Minister's directorate, putting this work into action. That is why the Cultural Transformation Branch is continuing to do work—not starting, but continuing, to do work—to develop cultural safety care plans and a pilot program for directorates to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; continuing to develop the SES cultural capability program; and continuing to develop a cultural integrity framework and a systemic racism guidelines.

It is why we are in a strong position to respond to the Public Service (Closing the Gap) Bill, and it is why the 2025 staff survey included additional questions about the experiences of systemic racism so that we could understand what our staff are experiencing. In that, 59 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who responded to that survey said they felt culturally safe in the workforce. Now that is not good enough, but it does speak to the excellent work that is underway across a range of directorates and teams.

MS BARRY: Minister, why should the public service have confidence that change will occur given they have been repeatedly let down by this government's atrocious efforts to genuinely address cultural safety and workplace wellbeing?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, I had the opportunity at NAIDOC Family Day last year, which I attended, just because it was there and I wanted to have a chance to speak to people and to have some informal conversations with a number of public servants who spoke to me about their positive experiences and the change, the positive change, that they were already seeing across a number of ACT government directorates last year.

Now, they also pointed out that there was more work that needed to be done. We know that that is the case. We fully accept that. We have fully accepted that throughout our time being committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement. That is why addressing systemic

racism within the public service was the priority action under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement Action Plan at a whole of government level.

So I categorically reject Ms Barry's assertions that we that we have not been listening. We will continue to listen to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and equally importantly, we will continue to ensure that the responses are led by our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including the incredible staff who work in the cultural transformation team in CMTEDD, who have done absolutely leading work in designing some of these approaches and then rolling them out across the ACT public service.

MR PARTON: Minister, will the government commit to an independent review into cultural safety within the ACT public service?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, we have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body working with us. It is independent and it works alongside the ACT government to monitor and to hold the government to account. The Elected Body has annual hearings. Every single directorate appears at those annual hearings and is questioned about the steps that they have taken to implement the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the steps that they are taking to ensure that they are delivering culturally safe services and a culturally safe workplace for their staff. So, we have an independent voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the ACT government. It is an independent voice that is there to hold the ACT government and our directorates to account and whose hearings are publicly available, live streamed and watched by members of the community. They produce a report on that, and the ACT government is obliged to respond to that report. So those independent mechanisms are already in place.

Government procurement—kerbside waste collection

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. In 2024, the ACT government entered into a \$444 million contract with JJ Richards & Sons for the provision of kerbside waste collection in Canberra. Minister, can you detail for me how this new waste collection contract differs from the previous decade-long contract with Veolia? How is the ACT government, under its claim of delivering value for money, ensuring that JJ Richards is providing value for money?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, I feel like I answered this—certainly in annual reports if not in the last sitting week. But I am happy to iterate that this is a contract that includes the provision of more services, combining what had previously been four different waste contracts into one. JJs and Veolia were previously delivering our waste management services across the ACT. So, it is not correct for Mr Parton to say that previously there was one contract delivered by one company for waste management services. JJs was certainly delivering on our green bins and, I believe, our food and organic waste collection—that would make sense—and Veolia was doing recycling and the landfill bins. Now JJs is undertaking all of that. The assessment details and the criteria of what was applied to that tender have been publicly available—both in that response to a question on notice from the annual reports and, I believe, in a response that I gave to a question asked last sitting week.

MR PARTON: Minister, has the new operator provided a better or materially different service compared with the services that were being offered by the previous operator, specifically over the past decade?

MS CHEYNE: I think that answer is contained in my previous answer in that, yes, there are more services that are being provided. And it is the way that JJs is providing those services that is value for money—particularly in the way that JJs manages, directly, the interface with customers, especially where there are issues. That has been a major element in the value for money, Mr Speaker.

I do think that I have answered this pretty comprehensively but I am happy to take more questions if that is what the opposition desires.

MS LEE: Minister, did Veolia submit a conforming tender to continue with the same work at a cost of more than \$100 million less than the successful bid from JJ Richards & Sons?

MS CHEYNE: I think that will be commercial-in-confidence, Mr Speaker. I will take it on notice and come back to the chamber. I was not part of the tender process, and so did not have visibility of what Veolia submitted or did not submit. But I do think this has been asked of us before, and I am pretty sure the response then was that it was commercial-in-confidence. But I will get some advice and come back either way.

Education—teaching scholarships

MS TOUGH: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, can you please provide an update about the new Scholarship and Career Pathways to Teaching Program?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the question. I am very pleased to provide an update to the Assembly about this important program. \$4 million has been invested to strengthen the pipeline of future teachers in the ACT and builds on the ACT's focus on growing and supporting a high-quality teaching workforce. This new scholarship program will be delivered in partnership with the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University and is designed to attract, support and grow the next generation of teachers, including people who might be considering a career change, to go into teaching.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how many scholarships will be offered?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Over four years, up to 30 scholarships will be offered annually, supporting both undergraduate and postgraduate initial teacher education pathways. The program provides financial support of up to \$50,000 for undergraduates and up to \$25,000 for postgraduate study. This includes a \$6,000 appointment allowance paid as \$3,000 per year for two years for graduates who take up temporary or permanent roles in ACT public schools after successfully completing their degree under the program.

MS LEE: Minister, is there a minimum period of service as a condition of these

scholarships?

MS BERRY: No; the scholarships provide opportunities for appointments in our public schools. I will double-check on that, and if I am wrong, I will bring it back to the Assembly. This is the program that will be supporting our teacher workforce. It is a new scholarship program. It complements other longstanding initiatives, and these include the ACT Teacher Scholarship Program, the UC STEP employment-based pathway, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Scholarship Program, and scholarships supporting early childhood educators—all aimed to strengthened public education in the ACT.

Mr Barr: I think we have come to the end of the road on this question time journey. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on this. In question time earlier today my good friend Mr Pettersson generously offered to table advice that he had received—I think, from memory—from the CIT board and/or TAFE New South Wales. But at the time that he made that generous offer, which we are most thankful for, there was not an indication of the timing of that. So I am just seeking your guidance, Mr Speaker, because he may table that in December for argument's sake; it is possible. We would love to see it by close of business today, if that is possible. I am seeking your guidance as to the specifics of the standing orders that govern this place.

MR SPEAKER: I think that he took it on notice—

Ms Lee: He said he'll table it.

MR SPEAKER: Sorry—he said he would table it. I do not think he specified when.

MR PARTON: No, he did not.

MR SPEAKER: I am not sure if there is anything in the standing orders that prescribes a particular time. I am getting a shake of the head, so there is not anything. The minister may wish to add something to that. Otherwise, you are at his mercy, Mr Parton.

MR PETTERSSON: For the benefit of the chamber, I will endeavour to do that as quickly as I can.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: You are at his mercy!

Youth homelessness

MS BERRY: I took a question on notice about youth services in the ACT, and I referred members and said that all of those organisations were listed on the website. I am wondering if they want me to go to the website and list all the organisations? Or can I

take that as answered—that they can go to the website and look at those organisations?

MR SPEAKER: If you took it on notice, you need to provide the detail.

Road safety—motorcycles

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) despite the Government’s commitment to Vision Zero, the toll on ACT roads for 2026 already stands at six deaths, compared with nine deaths in all of 2025 and four in 2023; and
 - (b) despite the Government identifying motorcycle safety as a priority, motorcyclists continue to be overrepresented in the number of people killed and injured on ACT roads; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) materially improve its efforts to improve the safety of motorcyclists in our community;
 - (b) designate motorcycle safety as a priority for the Government in the upcoming Road Safety Action Plan;
 - (c) consider immediate and near-term steps it can take to improve motorcycle safety, such as safety audits of high-risk corridors and intersections, improving road maintenance, signage and hazard management and reviewing any past inquiry or report recommendations which have not been implemented; and
 - (d) report back to the Assembly on progress towards improving road safety for motorcyclists within six months.

I want to begin this debate by talking about Adrian. Adrian is known to many of us in this place. He has worked for ACT Labor in opposition, he worked for the ACT public service, and he continues to contribute to policy development and debate. He is a long-term Canberran with a family and a business. But not known to everyone here is that Adrian had a serious motorcycle accident in December. An experienced motorcyclist, he was riding slowly through Braddon after some rain, slipped on a puddle of water and almost lost his life. Thankfully, he survived. He was, in his own words, “one of the lucky ones”.

Now, all of us who ride here in Canberra, know what that means. It can be extremely dangerous, even when you are experienced, when you are cautious and when the road is deserted. Every single one of us knows the stories of riders who have been seriously injured or killed while doing what we love. We all know the icy grip that you feel around your heart when you first hear of an accident. Certain names and faces flick through your mind. It is terrifying. It is a fairly small community; however, there are thousands of us, and it is no surprise that motorcyclists are overrepresented when it comes to the number of people who are injured or even killed in the territory on our roads.

In 2024 and 2025, almost half of the ACT road deaths were people riding motorcycles. Not every year is as bad as those two years, but it does show we have a problem. And there is a feeling sometimes amongst people that motorcyclists are the risk-takers, that they are always speeding, that they are pushing the limits. I would just note that that tends to be the exception and not the rule. Most motorcyclists that I know are not part of a gang or a club. They are usually just average Joes that want to get to work cheaper and have cheap and free parking. It is not always about being a crazy rider. You can be taken out by someone simply not doing a head-check.

There are some things that I would draw the Assembly's attention to that we do need to do better for the riders in our community. And the government, to its credit, has made a commitment, albeit a very long-term one, to zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2050. It has already recognised the safety of motorcyclists as a priority in its road safety policies. But this commitment and this priority status has not changed outcomes. Motorcyclists are still overrepresented in the statistics on crashes and fatalities here in the ACT, and I fear this will remain the case if we do not start doing something differently.

So my motion calls on the government to materially improve its effort to improve safety on local roads. I will readily admit that I am not the expert on this. I am a keen rider, and I have my own thoughts on what can be done to improve road safety, but I do not have all the answers, so I will not try to tell the government what specific changes or initiatives are needed to improve safety, but I do want them to focus more on this issue and what they can do.

As a first step, motorcycle safety should be recognised as a priority area in the new Road Safety Action Plan that is currently being developed. The government should also consider what practical measures it can roll out in the near term that would help to improve rider safety, including by reviewing past road safety recommendations which were not accepted or implemented.

Finally, I would like the government to come back to us within the next six months to explain what it has been able to deliver and what its next steps will be. A lot more people ride in the warmer months than the cooler months, so we should use the winter to significantly improve road safety ahead of next summer, the riding season.

Riders are everywhere in our community, including our own Mr Speaker, and we should be doing our level best to ensure that everyone makes it home safely every time they go out. Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.21): Motorcycling is a complex and difficult area of policy within the government management of road systems. It is an inherently dangerous form of travel. Roads in Australia are designed for cars and trucks. Travelling by motorbike involves taking a higher level of personal risk than travelling by other modes. Motorcyclists are consistently more highly represented in statistics on road injuries and fatalities.

Mobility is empowering, and by equal measure, a lack of access to transport can be debilitating. Our economy operates on the assumption that you are able to travel. Make no mistake, I love public transport, and it is excellent for providing baseline mobility to

busy and popular locations.

I also acknowledge that motorbikes are one of the most cost-effective means of achieving a large range of freedom of mobility. They are significantly cheaper than cars, use up less space on roads, create less wear and tear on those same roads, and also take up less space in car parks. But as we have already noted, the trade-off for that is a higher risk of injury.

The Austroads *Guide to Road Safety* is designed with vulnerable road users in mind. Alongside pedestrians, cyclists, youth and older road users, it also specifically recognises motorcyclists as a high-risk road user demographic. Austroads produces road safety plans accordingly and periodically places a spotlight on them in their research towards continuous improvement of a safe system. Some of their most recent work involved looking at lane markings on regional roads in Queensland that would support rider perceptions of speed and lane width. You can watch an associated webinar about this topic on their website.

As is probably evident by now, the Greens are broadly supportive of Ms Castley's motion; however, there are some things I would like to add in my speech. In preparing for this debate, I reached out to the Motorcycle Riders Association of the ACT, which I have had previous dealings with. They advised me they welcomed and supported the motion. The MRA pointed out to me they had made a budget bid last year seeking just \$60,000 over three years to support them in deploying a range of educational programs about safe riding practices and to empower them in contributing meaningfully to government reviews, investigations and inquiries. Without assistance, they are limited by a rise in insurance costs, and what limited funds they can ask their volunteers to contribute.

Their budget bid was rejected by the Labor government. They were subsequently encouraged to apply for, and they did win, a grant from the Road Safety Fund for \$11,500 to run a motorcycle safety forum and produce a brochure about the importance of protective clothing. This was a much narrower scope than what they had hoped to achieve in their earlier budget bid.

This is part of an ongoing story in which community sector organisations are coming up against a wall and losing government support for the core of their valuable work for our community, and it is a theme that Miss Nuttall will speak to in much greater detail tomorrow.

Community sector organisations are a valuable and effective means for government to achieve good outcomes for our community. By drawing on their embedded expertise, a small amount of funding can go a very long way. Community organisations can help draw people into a good community of practice and foster a deeper and more effective collaboration between the community and the government. One-off grants for limited deliverables are not the same.

For this reason, I would like to ask the government to strongly consider how it can support community sector organisations as it responds to Ms Castley's motion. Ongoing rider education and strong communities of practice are an important part of maintaining good practices, and community organisations can play a small but

significant role in making the broader efforts of the public sector more efficient and effective.

I would like to thank the Motorcycle Riders Association of the ACT for the time they offered me in preparing for this debate. I would like to thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.25): I rise to speak to Ms Castley’s motion today. I would also like to affirm the government’s commitment to zero fatalities.

I think it is deeply troubling—any single death on our roads but also when accidents cause injuries. Since joining the Assembly in 2020, I have been a strong advocate for improving road safety. In 2023, I introduced a private member’s bill to amend the Bail Act. This amendment shifted the presumption of bail to a neutral presumption for culpable driving, driving at police, and furious, reckless, dangerous driving. The shift in the presumption reflects the serious nature of this type of offending and underscores the government’s strong commitment to road safety.

ACT Policing have a long and strong focus on reducing rates of dangerous driving. In August 2022, ACT Policing established Operation TORIC to target recidivist offending, including dangerous driving. In August 2024, Operation TORIC recorded its 500th arrest. Police laid almost 1,500 charges for matters, including motor vehicle theft, burglaries, robberies, and dangerous driving. Of those charged, 200 people were on bail at the time of their arrest and subjected to court conditions.

In addition to this, the ACT government’s City and Environment Directorate also run road safety campaigns targeted at all road users, including motorcycle users.

To the substance of Ms Castley’s motion—I recognise the dangers that are faced by motorcyclists on our roads. ACT Policing have recently run a campaign targeting vulnerable road users. This includes motorcyclists, children, other pedestrians, and cyclists.

By the very nature of the way these groups travel, they are not afforded the same protection as someone travelling in a vehicle. This places them at a far greater risk of injury or death. I strongly encourage drivers in the ACT to pay particular attention to these vulnerable road users out on our roads.

Unfortunately, since 2023, there have been 30 road deaths in the ACT. Of these, 10 involved motorcyclists. However, the group of vulnerable road users as a whole contribute to 57 per cent of the total road toll since 2023.

Riding a motorcycle is enjoyable; however, it is important that riders ensure they are keeping themselves safe by driving to conditions, keeping to the speed limit, and avoiding distractions. Some other tips ACT Policing recommend to keep yourself safe include wearing a helmet and protective clothing, preparing for the unexpected, never riding under the influence of drugs or alcohol, always having your headlights on—this

makes it easier for other road users to see you—and never speeding.

Road safety is everyone's responsibility, regardless of how you use the road or what vehicle you drive. We urge all road users to look out for each other and to be mindful of our vulnerable road users who are at increased risk of injury in the event of a collision. I would like to thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion to the Assembly.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.28): I thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion, and for describing her lived experience as a motorcycle rider. I have only ever been on a pillion, and that was a long time ago in my life. I certainly do recall, however, the fear of tyre slips, something unexpected happening, or suddenly having a car next to you, merging into where you are.

On that serious note, six people, tragically, have lost their lives on our roads so far this year. This is higher than in previous years, and it is the highest number of road deaths at this point in any year since self-government commenced. Among these was the devastating loss of a 24-year-old motorcyclist, on 15 February. I extend my deep condolences to their family, to everyone who has lost someone that they loved on our roads, and to anyone who has been on the scene in response.

Vision Zero is not an abstract aspiration; it is a responsibility—one that demands constant effort, constant scrutiny and, in light of the recent reports and our own sobering statistics in the ACT, renewed urgency. This is especially so for motorcyclists, who are among our most vulnerable road users. Unlike occupants of enclosed vehicles, they lack physical protection between the rider and other vehicles or the surrounding infrastructure, meaning that even minor errors or minor collisions can result in catastrophic outcomes.

While nationally motorcycle riders represent only five per cent of all licence holders, they account for more than 20 per cent of road deaths. That stark over-representation highlights the inherent risks that riders face.

This concerning trend is reflected not only in long-term national data, but in more recent reports. The federal government's *Road Trauma Australia* report, released late last year, found that motorcycle fatalities had increased significantly over the past four years—the sharpest rise of any road user group across Australia. That national picture is, regrettably, reflected here. In 2025, four of the nine fatalities on our roads were motorcyclists. In 2024, motorcycle riders represented over 15 per cent of all casualty crashes, comprising 76 persons requiring medical treatment, 23 hospital admissions and five of the 11 fatalities that year.

As Ms Castley highlighted, it is clear that identifying motorcycle safety as a priority is not enough if outcomes do not improve, so I am pleased to say that the government supports this motion in full. We agree that motorcycle safety must be more visible and more explicit in our policy work, and that improvements must be tangible and measured, not merely aspirational. We welcome the Assembly's interest in and scrutiny of this issue, because it is one that requires all of our attention.

The ACT's approach to motorcycle safety is grounded in the principles of the Safe System, which recognises that people inevitably make mistakes, and that the road transport network must be designed so that those mistakes do not result in death or serious injury. For motorcyclists, this approach is especially important. It means focusing not only on rider behaviour but also on safer road and roadside infrastructure, safer vehicles and protective gear, safe speeds, and a road environment that anticipates and mitigates the higher consequences of error for riders.

Motorcycle safety has been a priority under the Road Safety Action Plan, and it will remain a priority in the new ACT Road Safety Framework 2026-31, which I look forward to releasing in the coming months. The development of the framework has been informed by an extensive review of road safety engagement across government over the last five years, Assembly inquiries, a survey, or a submission to another process such as the budget. Improving road safety for vulnerable road users, including motorcyclists, was a consistent theme of that review, and the findings have been integrated into the framework.

This motion has brought to my attention, however, that there are other reviews—an Auditor-General's report from 2006 and a thorough review and report undertaken in 2008 titled *Identifying programs to reduce road trauma to ACT motorcyclists*, with detailed practical recommendations. While dated, it will be worthwhile for the government to undertake a focused, fresh review of those recommendations in both reports, cataloguing what has been done, what remains and what the options are, if the recommendations remain relevant.

In particular, something that stood out to me from the latter report was a statement that—and I think I know this to be true, but I defer to Ms Castley:

The evidence suggests that not only do ACT motorcyclists do a significant amount of riding in NSW, but that riding in NSW is associated with a higher fatality and injury crash risk than riding in the ACT ...

It noted elsewhere that it is not necessarily clear how many ACT motorcyclists are involved in casualty or fatal crashes in New South Wales. This means that there needs to be a focus on what it means for riders who are traversing our region, in the work that we do in responding to these concerns. Our own statistics are sobering, but that is also true for New South Wales.

We have had a YourSay survey to complement the review. There was a strong response from the motorcycling community, and it found that motorcyclists' sense of safety decreases significantly with increases in speed. Sixty-four per cent felt very or quite safe through suburbs, but that dropped to 44 per cent on main roads and 33 per cent on highways, their main concerns being aggressive drivers, drivers failing to check blind spots, and potholes or uneven road surfaces.

The current Road Safety Action Plan includes concrete actions that directly matter for motorcyclists. We have an Intersection Safety Program and a Black Spot Program that target high-risk locations, and we will continue delivering safety upgrades across the network.

We are expanding our camera network, including mobile device detection and broader functions for speed and other offences, because dangerous driving by any road user is dangerous for motorcycle riders most of all. We are strengthening impaired driving responses and reviewing penalties. Within the vulnerable road users focus area, we have a dedicated action to identify opportunities to reduce road safety risks for motorcyclists, a foundation that we will now sharpen and expand.

We have funded targeted initiatives through the Road Safety Fund, including the one that Mr Braddock mentioned, as well as Safe System Solutions being funded to develop and deliver a specialised training course for engineers, managers, contractors and field staff involved in road construction or maintenance. These courses will be offered in person in April and online in May this year. They specifically examine the challenges that motorcyclists face on the road and reinforce the need to design and maintain infrastructure that accounts for motorcyclists' unique vulnerability.

Riders Lane delivered a safety education program for female motorcyclists in the ACT in 2024, and that participation data is also providing valuable insights for the development of our new framework.

From an infrastructure perspective, the ACT government has adopted the Australian National Risk Assessment Model—ANRAM—and the Australian Road Assessment Program—AusRAP—which are evidence-based tools developed nationally through Austroads, to strengthen our approach and reduce fatal and serious injuries across the territory.

ANRAM is used to proactively identify high-risk sections of our arterial and rural road network, and AusRAP provides star ratings for our roads using internationally recognised methodology. Both of these give us an objective way to prioritise upgrades and align our work. Together, they provide a pretty transparent, data-driven foundation. The National AusRAP Dashboard can be accessed by anyone, and it provides safety ratings for arterial transport corridors—a practical tool for planning safer journeys.

The Australian government's Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program has provided matched funding to accelerate safety upgrades. There have been a number of notable recreational motorcyclist routes upgraded recently, including Long Gully Road and Boboyan Road. On road maintenance, we have significantly increased our efforts when it comes to resealing.

While all these mechanisms enable us to address road safety issues that capture motorcyclists, this motion rightly challenges us to apply a more explicit lens from the perspective of a motorcyclist. We will designate motorcycle safety as a priority in the upcoming Road Safety Action Plan, and I look forward to returning to the Assembly in six months with an update on the measures we are taking.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.38): I rise initially to thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion today. Once again, Ms Castley has brought forward a positive and productive motion that sets out genuine, tangible steps that the government can take to make a difference to Canberrans. And it is a significant issue. It is not just a significant issue for motorcyclists; it is also very significant for their families.

I am not a motorcyclist. I am not entirely sure why not. My father has ridden motorcycles for years. My uncles rode motorcycles. It is a community to which my family has been pretty strongly connected. Perhaps it is because you grow up wondering, each time you hear about a motorcycle accident on the road, whether it is someone you love.

We all know the colloquial way that we talk about motorcyclists. They will refer to each other as “temporary Australians”, because riding a motorcycle inherently is far more vulnerable than driving a car or a truck, or any other method of transport where you are effectively encased in a nice, secure zone. The fear that families can face is significant. We worry about those family members. Mr Assistant Speaker, you worry when you see the news and your loved one is not home yet.

I would absolutely like to commend Ms Castley on bringing forward this motion today, because it is a serious and very pertinent issue for a large section of our community. I will acknowledge both ministers’ comments as well. I am glad that it looks like we are seeing positive steps in this direction. While the minister mentioned the commitment to targeting zero fatalities, the heart of this motion is genuinely about that gap between the target and the reality. As we stand here today, we have not reached that target. It is very hard to get to Vision Zero, but we should do everything we possibly can, especially when it comes to vulnerable road users such as motorcyclists, to ensure we are making progress in the things that matter.

Again, I commend Ms Castley. It is great to see that it looks like the Assembly will be taking positive steps in this space, and I look forward to hearing back from the minister in six months time.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.42), in reply: I really appreciate everybody’s comments and support for this motion today. I will reflect on a few of the comments. I know, Mr Braddock, that there was talk about trying to acquire funding for groups like the MRA and Riders Lane. I will acknowledge Jen, from the Motorcycle Riders Association, who has done an amazing job. At the last workshop that I attended, she had brought in someone from outside Canberra to talk about safety gear. I do not know whether many people know this, but your jacket has to have padding, and the talk was about what the structural integrity of that needs to look like, and how quickly that can disintegrate.

I have had my leather jacket for 10 years. I went to wear it the other day, and all the padding fell out of it. I have not ridden my bike for a long time, because I am petrified about falling off and having gravel rash everywhere. These are the things that the MRA do that we cannot do without.

The particular idea behind this motion was to address those really practical things, and the action plan that the minister spoke about. To get that ball rolling, we had a commitment regarding the MRA during the last election campaign. It is something on which we will continue to work with them.

Some people have mentioned driver awareness. When you hop on your motorcycle, you are super aware of everything that is around you. You do not have an airbag. As Mr Cocks said, you are not surrounded by the beautiful comfort of a vehicle. And that is a choice that motorcyclists make.

I will never forget; I grew up riding a motorcycle in the 80s. It was a dirt bike. I learned to ride with no shoes and no helmet. It was in the heat of summer and the grasshoppers would hit you in the face, as you were riding across the paddocks, mustering sheep. When I did my Stay Upright course, I could not believe how difficult it was to ride a motorcycle with a helmet, with your gear. It is so restrictive, but it is absolutely critical.

Coming out of that Stay Upright course, I became a much better driver because I was suddenly aware. I would love every driver to go through the Stay Upright course, and to hop on the back of a bike, as the minister said she has done, and experience what it is like. You have to remember, “Don’t pick up your phone. Do the head-check as you change lanes.” A lot of motorcyclists will say that that is why they prefer a Harley or a louder exhaust, so that you are aware that they are right next to you. At any given moment, you could be bumping into them.

Thank you for indulging me on a passion of mine. I believe it is so important for all of our motorcyclists on the road to keep safe, as it is for drivers. Having an accident, whether you are on a bike or driving a car, is devastating. I look forward to the response in a few months and moving forward with motorcycle safety.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public housing—maintenance

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.45):

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the statements made by the Minister for Housing during question time defending the decision to insource public housing maintenance services;
- (b) the Government’s claim that insourcing will improve accountability and service delivery when no comprehensive public breakdown has been provided detailing the full cost comparison between the outsourced and insourced models;
- (c) ongoing concerns from public housing tenants regarding repair delays and maintenance backlogs;
- (d) that any increase in administrative or operating costs must not result in fewer maintenance jobs being completed or longer wait times; and
- (e) that in a constrained fiscal environment, increased expenditure must be transparently accounted for;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) public housing tenants, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, people with disability, older residents and culturally and linguistically diverse Canberrans, rely on timely maintenance for safe and dignified housing;
- (b) recent commentary reported in the *Canberra Times*, including remarks by community advocate Andy Coogan, noted that participation in the Government insourcing trial had been limited and not improved

- outcomes; and
- (c) these concerns reinforce the need for greater transparency, accountability and tenant engagement in decisions affecting the delivery of public housing maintenance services; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) table in the Assembly a detailed cost comparison of ACT public housing maintenance, including:
 - (i) the total annual cost of the outsourced maintenance model prior to the insourcing trial;
 - (ii) the total cost of the insourcing trial, including staffing, overheads, fleet, equipment and transition costs;
 - (iii) the projected total cost of the insourced maintenance model for the period September 2025 to September 2026, including forward estimates; and
 - (iv) a breakdown of administrative costs compared with frontline maintenance expenditure;
 - (b) provide comparative performance data for the 12 months prior to and following insourcing, including jobs completed, response times, backlog levels and tenant satisfaction;
 - (c) provide assurance that higher operating costs will not reduce the total number of maintenance jobs delivered annually to public housing premises; and
 - (d) report back to the Assembly in 12 months on the measurable performance outcomes of the insourced model and how the additional costs are being funded.

This motion, at its very core, is about services for vulnerable Canberrans. At the very core of this motion is the question of whether or not vulnerable Canberrans, under ACT Labor's insourcing of maintenance of public housing properties, will get better and cost-effective services. That is it, Mr Assistant Speaker. That is what we are here to talk about.

Since taking on the role of shadow minister for public housing, I have been deeply concerned by the sheer volume of complaints I have received from very vulnerable people living in deteriorating public housing. In fact, I have talked about this so much that, when I go to bed, I hear my own voice and some of the conversations that I have had, out in the electorate and around Canberra. Sometimes I think, "Should I stop talking about it?" because I am beginning to sound like a broken record.

It goes to the magnitude of this issue—the lack of commitment by this government to the plight of very vulnerable people who live in social and public housing. It is not all of them, but some of them are very vulnerable. The stories are consistent and they are troubling. Tenants are struggling to have even basic maintenance requests addressed, and they are living in conditions that are, frankly, unacceptable. Many have spent years trying to get essential repairs completed, often with little to no progress. I have spoken directly with residents who are at breaking point—people driven to despair by the stress of navigating a system that seems unresponsive to their most basic needs. In some cases, the toll on their mental health has been severe.

This is not just about maintenance; it is about dignity—the dignity of the people living in these homes. It is about knowing that the government does not care about you. It is about believing that the government will not respond when you call. It is about safety. It is about the fundamental rights of the people who are living in these homes.

As an MLA, people expect that, when they raise issues with you, you will be able to assist and resolve them—as they should. Too often, when I raise these cases with the minister, I receive the same response. Granted, the minister is responsive to specific issues. However, it is still concerning that the response that I sometimes receive is, “Raise it with my office and we’ll look into it.” There have been instances when I have been told that a matter has been resolved, only to go back to the tenant and discover that that is simply not the case. It has either been partially resolved or not resolved at all. It begs the question: where is the breakdown in communication and service?

There are also occasions when the minister has claimed that there is no capacity to intervene. Over time, this pattern erodes confidence, not just in the system but in the minister’s ability to manage it. I have also heard from contractors working within the current maintenance system, particularly those engaged through Programmed. These are experienced professionals who are raising serious concerns about how contracts are being managed. They describe delays caused by approval processes, funding constraints, and administrative inefficiencies that prevent timely and effective repairs. Some have told me that they are instructed to carry out only minimum work to make it safe, rather than properly repairing the issue. In other words, temporary fixes, possibly to avoid complaints, instead of lasting solutions. Others have said that they are not given sufficient funding to complete necessary work and, in some cases, are discouraged from being transparent with tenants about these limitations.

Taken together, this paints a picture not just of a system that is strained, but of systemic mismanagement. Yet, despite these issues, the government’s response is to pursue insourcing, without clearly demonstrating that this will solve the problem. This raises the obvious question: where is the evidence? Where is the analysis that shows insourcing would deliver better outcomes, or even comparable ones, at a sustainable cost? If there is such analysis, please provide it to the Assembly.

At present, we do not know. We do not have answers to these questions. What we do know is in the words of Mr Coogan, who expressed his concern about the lack of consultation during the trial. In the few months that the government insourcing agenda has been ongoing, there has been no appreciable impact.

The concern is that this decision reflects ideology, as the minister confirmed during question time today, rather than evidence. Insourcing appears to be pursued as a default position rather than a careful, considered policy backed by analysis. In a constrained fiscal environment, that is not good enough.

The ACT’s financial position is already under pressure. Independent analysis, including from economists like Saul Eslake, has highlighted the territory’s fiscal challenges. Against that backdrop, embarking on a major structural change without clear costing or demonstrated benefit is a significant risk. We must also consider whether this policy could inadvertently worsen outcomes. If the maintenance budget remains unchanged

and the insourcing results in higher operating costs, as is often the case, fewer jobs may be completed overall. That would mean longer wait times, longer backlogs and greater frustration for tenants. It would mean that the very people that this policy is supposed to help could end up being worse off.

The recent report by the ACT Ombudsman, *Falling through the gaps*, reinforces this concern. It details serious shortcomings in how maintenance issues are handled, from delays and poor communication to inadequate complaints resolution. Mr Rattenbury asked a few questions during question time today that went to the heart of whether or not the program has contributed to these issues. What I can say from what I know is that most of the complaints I have received are about the lack of communication from Housing ACT back to the tenants around how long it will take to undertake the maintenance and whether or not the maintenance would even be done in the first place. It will be interesting to read the response that comes back, once that question has been responded to by the minister.

In that regard, it is important for the focus to be on the need for a clearer and better system, an accountable system, and more effective service delivery. We also know that public housing maintenance is not just a service; it is an investment. Maintaining housing stock protects its value, reduces long-term costs, and ensures that the asset continues to serve the community effectively. Neglecting maintenance leads to deterioration, high future costs and poorer living conditions. This is not just a social issue; it is an economic one as well.

Given all of this, the core of this motion, as I indicated, is simple—transparency, accountability and better service. Firstly, my motion calls on the government to provide clear and detailed information on the maintenance budget before and after insourcing, so that we can properly assess its impact. Secondly, I am calling for full disclosure of the costs associated with the insourcing trial, including staffing, overheads, equipment and transition costs.

Thirdly, I am seeking the projected cost of the insourced model over the coming years and beyond, so that we can understand the long-term financial implications. Fourthly, I am asking for comparative performance data, looking at key metrics such as response times, backlog levels, jobs completed, and tenant satisfaction, both before and after insourcing.

Finally, I am seeking assurance that the increased costs will not result in poor maintenance jobs being delivered, because this has already happened. Mr Assistant Speaker, if you look at the government's policy around visits, the government cut the number of visits because they now require two staff to attend visits. These are not unreasonable requests. They are a basic expectation of good governance. If the government is confident that insourcing will improve outcomes, it should have no hesitation in providing this information. I anticipate—I have not heard from the minister—that she is supporting this motion, and I welcome that.

The Canberra Liberals understand that there are areas where public sector delivery is appropriate and effective, but we also believe that decisions of this scale must be guided by evidence, not ideology. There must be a clear business case, there must be a demonstrated public benefit and there must be accountability for outcomes. In the case

of public housing maintenance, we are not yet convinced that these conditions have been met. Canberra has a strong private sector in construction and maintenance. Any decision to shift away from that model must be justified, with clear evidence that it will deliver better results.

There are several community housing organisations who run social and public housing outside the government scheme who are undertaking housing maintenance and who are doing it much cheaper. At present, that evidence has not been provided. Ultimately, this motion asks very simple questions: will this policy improve the lives of people living in public housing? Will it deliver faster, better and more reliable maintenance? Will it represent value for money for taxpayers? If not, why are we doing it?

I reiterate that people living in public housing are human beings who pay their taxes, who pay their rent and who expect services from this government. The government owe them an obligation to ensure that they are meeting their rights and obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act. That is what is expected of a private landlord, and the government should hold itself to that standard, or even a higher standard. They deserve a system that responds to their needs with urgency and respect, and they deserve a government that is transparent about how decisions are made and accountable for the outcomes that the decisions produce. That is what this motion is about. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.58): I rise to speak to this motion not specifically as the Leader of the Opposition, and not even specifically as the previous shadow minister for housing, as I was between 2016 and 2024. I rise, more than anything, to contribute to this debate, not even necessarily as a member of the opposition party, but just as an individual who started his life in a public housing property and who, as the shadow minister for housing, became genuinely engaged with a massive cohort of exceptionally worthwhile Canberrans who were consistently being let down by housing in so many ways, including the delivery of maintenance on the most basic items.

I got to know so many of these people, and I love them to bits. These are wonderful people. I am talking about Jeannie, Rachel, Tanya, Rosalind, Gus, Frank, Vince, Maya, Louis, Freya, Hassan, Regina and Lucy. I am talking about Juan Pablo. I am talking about Asha, John, Lorraine, Catan and the girls, and James and Ruth. I am talking about Tenzin and Anjali. I am talking about Ross. I am talking about the McCabes, Soraya, Danielle, Patrick, Joey, Deepak and many others. They know exactly who I am talking about.

As I have pointed out for a long time, when you have a problem with the government delivery of road infrastructure, that can possibly impact you for 10 or 20 minutes of your day. It is painful for 10 or 20 minutes of the day; then it is gone until tomorrow. When the government fail in potentially removing the mechanisms to allow for more bulk-billing doctors, that can impact you at the times that you are seeking to see a doctor. When they fail to cut the grass, that affects you when you are navigating those overgrown areas. Once you have travelled through there, it has gone for the day, hasn't it?

For tenants in these public housing properties, the failure to provide maintenance, even

at the most basic level of what would be expected, affects these people 24/7, for every moment of their lives. This is their home. This is where they sleep, this is where they eat, this is where they shower and this is where they recreate. This is where their children's memories are made. When you let people down in this space, you are negatively impacting their lives in an enormous way, and that negative impact has been occurring for a long time.

In my time as shadow minister, I heard from hundreds of these tenants, and I genuinely communicated with and visited hundreds of homes, to see whether I could assist in getting an outcome for them. On a lot of occasions, I was able to achieve an outcome. It is not really the way it should work, though. It should not involve a tenant contacting the shadow minister, who potentially has a large reach on social media, to get an outcome.

It basically comes down to the government being unable to properly manage its maintenance contractor. The minister seems to agree with us on that—certainly agrees by her actions—in that the contract has not been renewed. Ms Barry has pointed out the circumstances whereby this government has stepped in and taken up the heavy lifting on service delivery that was being undertaken by the private sector, and the circumstances where they insourced anything and delivered a more cost-effective product are virtually non-existent.

Although we understand, because Ms Berry and I have had conversations about the upsides to the insourcing model—and there are upsides—we have serious concerns about the bottom line. The minister responsible for housing has made a couple of remarkable assertions in question time around this matter in recent weeks. She has conceded that the insourcing and maintenance model will cost more than the current scenario. It will. We have asked questions of the minister to get an understanding of just how much more, and she has not really answered; she has not been able to answer that.

That leads to the obvious questions which are covered in this motion, and covered extremely articulately, as to what this will mean. Will it mean that we have less maintenance jobs completed? If not, how much more money will be required just to keep us at the same level of completions as is the case now? It is pretty simple. That is really all it asks for. I am pleased to see some positive engagement from the Greens on this motion. I am hoping that we can arrive at something that is really sensible.

Interestingly, the minister, in response to a question in question time today, indicated that one of the words that is at the centre of what is going on here is “ideology”. That is what she said.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cocks gave her the word.

MR PARTON: It is up to the minister whether she wishes to take that or not, and she took it. And she did agree that this was about ideology. I am hoping that we can get a further explanation as to how this is about ideology and how much of a role unions have played in constructing this and insourcing models right across government, and what sort of outcome voters are getting for it.

We continue to be faced with numbers, with data, with reports from economists, with all sorts of things, suggesting that we are in a little bit of a pickle when it comes to available resources. There is not much there. When you have so little money to play with, surely, you should be delivering services in the most cost-efficient way and the best way for tenants and taxpayers.

I am really pleased that the shadow minister for housing has put together this motion because I think it is called for, and I certainly fully support it.

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) (4.05): I wanted to speak to this motion today and thank Ms Barry and the Canberra Liberals as well for supporting the insourcing and repairs and maintenance of public housing. It seems, from my read of her motion, I think it is a really important step forward. Particularly at this time when we are talking about a crisis in costs of living and potentially that increasing as a result of activities overseas, why wouldn't we be helping those people in our community who are most in need, our public housing tenants?

I am not ashamed at all of being part of a progressive Labor government or that my ideology and the Labor Party's ideology and beliefs go to the strong values of a fair go and equality and that people, regardless of where they live or their backgrounds or their postcodes, all have that same chance at a fair crack at happiness. So I am not ashamed of that at all. It may surprise Mr Parton to know that, yes, before I came here, I worked for a union and I am still a union member. So thanks, "captain obvious", for that one. I just thought I would make sure that you had not forgotten that, because it should not be as shocking as you have made it out to be.

Mr Parton: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am just wondering if you could remind the minister that she should refer to me by my name.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is quite a reasonable request. Minister Berry, if you can please address the Leader of the Opposition by his title.

MS BERRY: Thank you. I just wanted to make the point there, and I think I have. I think it is important to know and understand that many public housing tenants—not all, but many of them—have very complex and complicated lives, and it means that they need additional supports from organisations and workplaces like Housing ACT, like my office, like the opposition MLAs, and I would never stand in the way of anyone in our community getting in touch with or raising issues with their local members. In this Assembly, our primary job, after all, is representing the people of our community, particularly those who are vulnerable. I do not expect that will ever stop and nor should it.

I would, though, like to put on the record the number of homes where work orders are conducted each year in the ACT. This is a significant contract, as I say. It is a complex piece of work, working towards bringing this project in-house. With almost 12,000 public housing homes, it is a huge one. It involves between 45,000 and 50,000 work orders—that is a significant amount of work per year—and services more than 20,000 tenants who call public housing home. It is large and it has many moving parts, and that

is why it has to be carefully managed.

I note Mr Rattenbury is putting forward an amendment, which the ACT government would support. However, I would just correct for the record—because I just did not have time to get an amendment around—that it is 10 public housing multiunit properties, not two. I just wanted to put that one on the record, to make sure that people were aware of that as well.

Mr Parton is right; my expectation is that insourcing will cost more, at least initially, particularly through these trial phases, because there will not be economies of scale to start with. That is the obvious case. But, in my mind, that is an investment, in the short-term at least, to improve the lives of public housing tenants who are living in these complexes.

Like Mr Parton and like a number of other members in this place, I grew up in public housing, and so I understand how important it is to get a hand up and a fair go in our community. I have, too, met with many public housing tenants, probably too many to number, and visited their homes. I have seen work that was done extremely well, and I have seen work that was not done up to the standards that I would have expected and that our tenants should have expected as well. I have followed up that work as a matter of urgency to make sure that tenants' experiences are improved.

The work the ACT government is doing with that investment to improve the lives is important work. We have learnt a lot through it and we have made a lot of adjustments, all primarily to improve tenant experiences and to ensure that the maintenance and repair work gets done. But it is also an investment on learning how best to deliver an outsourced model for over 20,000 tenants across all 12,000 homes. All of this is because the ACT government and I think that public housing tenants are worth it. We think they are worth it, unlike what I am hearing from the Canberra Liberals today, with the exception of Ms Barry—that there is a cost to this and that somehow tenants should not be entitled to because they are in public housing, and I think that is desperately unfair.

The government has and will continue to share with the community information. I have provided an update to the Assembly not long ago about the insourcing trial as it is progressing. However, we still need to do the trials to understand the costs and to gather together that data to be able to provide comparative costs that the Canberra Liberals have asked for and that Mr Rattenbury has asked for in his amendment as we progress the work to demobilise the existing arrangement with Programmed Facilities Management. I note the “calls on” part of Mr Rattenbury's amendment and just wanted to put on the record that, as much of that information that I can provide that we have available, I will absolutely provide. Some of it just might not be available in the timeframe that has been requested, but I will always want to be as transparent about this as possible.

I note Ms Barry was referring to the lack of consultation around this process. We have a tenants participation group, as I said, with a number of public housing tenants who meet quarterly to discuss these kinds of issues and provide feedback to government. So, while every public housing tenant in the ACT might not know the intimate details of this process as we are moving forward, certainly with the multi-unit properties where we have been trialling this process and the feedback from tenants on how it is working

through the tenants participation group as well, we are trying to cover as much as we can to make sure that we are getting the feedback from the people that are most likely to be impacted by this, hopefully in a positive way, to ensure that we are running this insourcing project as efficiently as we can, but in a way which provides the least level of disruption as we can possibly manage. As I said, I am very happy to share everything that I can by June and will continue to be transparent about the process where I can, because I am proud of it. I will be proud of it when it is completed, and I will be very happy to share that with the Assembly and the community.

I will now go to a bit more of the detail on the Total Facilities Management Agreement with Programmed. I was asked some questions in question time today around KPIs and how the project is managed and measured, I guess. The framework comprises of five system health indicators as well as 12 key performance indicators. These span across various roles, including operational delivery, quality assurance, customer experience, social outcomes, safety and financial management. In practice, the system health indicators provide assurance across safety management and incident reporting, delivery of scheduled safety activities, social inclusion and workforce participation outcomes.

KPIs measure the contractor's day-to-day service delivery performances across a full lifecycle of repairs and maintenance services. They cover responsiveness to urgent and routine repairs, a completion of planned maintenance, turnaround times for vacant dwellings and the quality of work. That is just to name a few. As I said earlier, there is regular engagement with now iCBR, who are responsible for the insourcing project and the maintenance program as well as with Programmed ACT. Housing ACT also have an important role to play. Performance is monitored monthly and formally assessed on a quarterly basis. The agreement also empowers the Commissioner for Public Housing to actively verify performance through audits, spot checks and independent reviews, including the ability to withhold or reduce payments where contractual standards are not met.

In June 2024, Infrastructure Canberra, as I said, commenced a 10-unit Multi-Unit Property Insourcing Trial that saw the maintenance for these sites to be managed by iCBR. Since completion of the trial period, on 30 July 2025, services have continued and there have been a further two sites added to that—so it is now 12. In October 2025, a Trial Closure and Lessons Learnt Report was completed by the Government Insourcing Taskforce. This report was made publicly available in November 2025. As I said, I am very happy to provide as much transparency around this work as we can, because we are learning. This is a significant change of policy direction for the ACT government on the largest contract that we hold.

Infrastructure Canberra are now preparing for the next important phase of directly delivering disability modifications as well as domestic violence upgrades. As I told the chamber back in September 2025—and I would refer members to that speech—I look forward to sharing more information about the delivery model for insourced repairs, maintenance and upgrades of public housing with the Assembly as part of this year's 2026-27 budget.

I would again like to thank Ms Barry and the Canberra Liberals for their ongoing interest in public housing. I am always available to provide advice and briefings to anybody who is interested—confidentially, if required. I will never bring the names of

particular individuals or anyone's information into this Assembly. That is their business, and they do not need to have their stories on the public record forever. So it is my preference that these things are kept private, which is why I always ask people to refer matters to my office rather than to bring them up in a matter of public record.

As I said, I look forward to continuing to update the Assembly on the success of the insourcing project and all of the benefits that I am now seeing provided to tenants through these trials that we are doing on multi-unit properties as well as the start of the insourcing of disability and modifications and domestic violence upgrades. But, again, I would refer members to my speech in September, which holds a lot more detail on some of that work that has been carried out since July last year and the expansion of that work and project moving forward. I look forward to updating the Assembly as it rolls out.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.18): I will speak briefly. I think there is a very important point to be made about the arrangement the government is intending. I want to thank Ms Barry for bringing this really important motion to us, because I think the community certainly does deserve to know—and here is a key question for any procurement—that its money, its taxes being collected, are being used in a value-for-money manner. Value for money is a basic principle of sound procurement.

It is encouraging to hear that there is some support on the floor for this motion. That is very encouraging to hear. I do encourage the minister to provide information on what was not working with the previous arrangement. That would be something that I think we would all appreciate some knowledge of. What was not working that you are actually changing? There is always a reason for changing. When you are using taxpayers' money to deliver a really important service, I think that reason is very important—to be transparent about and to be accountable for as well. If you are going to do version B of a service delivery versus version A and you are not addressing why the first version did not work, what is the point—it is just a change in name only?

I do hope the minister takes seriously in any procurement this fundamental question: is this value for money? Whether it is by contract or inhouse service delivery, is it value for money? What was not working? Why does the minister think this new arrangement will produce a better outcome for our public housing tenants?

Mr Parton has certainly touched on some of the stories that I hear when I am doorknocking. I had the portfolio myself for a bit over six months and Ms Barry has the portfolio. So we hear these very unfortunate stories in person, at the doors, at the shops and certainly in communication. That was certainly one of my busiest lines of work when I had shadow housing portfolio—and that is unfortunate, in a way. If there was a problem that was not being addressed properly through the previous model, it would be wonderful to know how this new approach is going to address the previous lacklustre performance through the government arrangement to make sure that our public housing tenants are actually better off and our taxpayers are getting value for money.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.21): I did not plan on speaking today, but I felt compelled to speak. Last night after the sitting

finished, I went and met a group of residents who live in public housing in Weston Creek. They are an older living units or townhouses. I think there are about 75 residents who live there. Last night I had a wonderful opportunity, with wine and cheese provided, which was very lovely, to speak to the residents and for them to raise issues and discuss their situation.

What came across so strongly was how grateful they were for their housing, the sense of safety, dignity, security and community that these people had and just how much they supported each other and relied on each other. They spoke of the amazing community and things they were doing—for example, knitting things for the hospital and for the newborn babies and a whole range of different volunteering activities. They are always looking for new ones—so if anyone has any ideas. There was just an incredible sense of community.

You see the newspaper articles and it is easy for people to point to the few negative stories, but there are thousands of really positive stories about how public housing has changed people's lives—and last night I really heard that. So thank you.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.23): I rise to speak to the motion and thank Ms Barry for bringing it forward. I am supportive of this motion, as well as the amendments that have been circulated by Mr Rattenbury. I strongly support Ms Barry's intent in seeking to ensure access to safe, dignified and adequate housing for all Canberrans. I know how much work Ms Barry does in advocating for and supporting public housing tenants and how passionate she is about this issue, and I applaud her for that.

I think we all in this place know that not all Housing ACT residents are getting the service they need. Two weeks ago, the ACT Ombudsman handed down their report, which has been well-discussed already in this place, showing the extent of Housing ACT's failure to meet its legislated obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act or achieve the objectives set out in the Housing Assistance Act.

While the report could very reasonably be described as shocking, I am sure it also came as no surprise to many of us. Housing issues are one of the most common things that I am contacted about. Some of the issues that have been raised directly with my office even featured in the Ombudsman's report. Recently, my office spoke with an elderly woman. Almost every day, she had no hot water for nearly two weeks and had repeatedly reached out to her housing manager and Programmed but received no support or response. I have been contacted by people living with mice infestations, black mould, crumbling ceilings and overflowing sewage. These issues are common enough among tenants. I am confident most members have been contacted about the same issues and many more. I cannot believe this is the norm—that this is the standard we have accepted here in the ACT.

The latest report on government services data from the Productivity Commission shows that only 71 per cent of public housing properties in the ACT meet the definition of being of an acceptable standard. That means having at least four working facilities, like a stove and shower, and no more than two major structural defects. That is completely unacceptable and it needs to change.

Insourcing might help, but insourcing alone will not fix this problem. Setting a goal of

at least meeting the national average—the proportion of properties that are of an acceptable standard—or perhaps having the highest quality public housing stock in the country as a stretch target could be a good place to start, and then resourcing our public housing system sufficiently to meet that target would be a welcome next step.

Even a member of this Assembly who does not see the lives of public housing tenants as a top priority—and I am encouraged to hear that many do—should see the wisdom in maintaining the quality and value of public assets. These are our community’s assets, and we all know that letting infrastructure fall into disrepair ultimately costs us more in the long run. Further, KPMG reports cited by ACT Shelter found that every dollar spent on public housing generated \$2 in economic activity elsewhere and saved \$2.30 in other service systems downstream, like the health system. We know serious reform is needed in this space. I welcome any opportunity to work with members on what that reform should look like. I think that today’s debate is an important part of that conversation.

Going to today’s motion, I would like to touch on note (2)(b) of the motion, which identifies Andy Coogan as a community advocate who spoke publicly about the limited improvement through the insourcing trial. While Andy is a tenant who has advocated for better maintenance, service provisioning and responsiveness for Canberrans living in public housing—having spent the first 12 months of his tenancy without a working bathroom and the majority of the seven years during which he has lived in his current home without a working cooktop or oven—and while Andy did speak about his experience in the media, it was actually Gus Bamberry, a long-time public housing resident and advocate, not just for himself but for many other people living in public housing, who raised the issues specifically about the insourcing trial.

My office raised this with Ms Barry’s office yesterday, and I would have liked to see that correction made to this motion. I understand if it was a timing issue or whatever other reason. Not all public housing tenants are the same, and Ms Barry spoke to this. They are all members of our community who deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and care.

Gus and Andy are, as it happens, both disability pensioners. Gus lives in a high-density public housing complex and has a fierce reputation for fighting for his neighbours and advocating for people who are not in a position to advocate for themselves. My team and I have been engaging with him back and forth for months, and he has been engaging back and forth with Housing ACT and with fellow tenants for almost a decade on the issues that they face. Also, Dr Paterson’s remarks about community building in Housing ACT complexes reminded me of how much he has done in an effort to build community at Condamine Court and how desperately he has attempted to work with the government on those efforts.

Gus’s complex was one of the 10 included in the maintenance insourcing trial. He said the tenants in his complex were not consulted and were not part of the review process assessing the effectiveness of the trial. So, while I welcome the minister’s remarks indicating that tenants are always put at the centre of decision-making when it comes to public housing, I think that really needs to be expressed throughout the system and at every opportunity, and this is one example where it appears that it has not been the case.

A different example was identified by the Auditor-General in relation to the Growing and Renewing program. None of the representatives on the panel making decisions about which homes would be grown or renewed and which would be sold or redeveloped were representing tenants. It is these decision-making processes where tenants' voices need to be included.

This is what Gus had to say about the trial when my office followed up with him again today:

The issues with Housing ACT maintenance remain the same. Long wait times for action if it happens at all, responsibility on tenants to self report and case manage their maintenance and the same old Band-Aid fixes.

The same lack of communication and transparency paired with the same concerns by tenants -

These being overall that there is little hope in having adequate maintenance complete by Housing ACT.

And if you do, they'll chase you for the bill guided by seemingly misguided financially motivated KPI's for staff more suited to a debt collection agency than a public housing department.

The best chance to hear from your housing manager is to get behind on rent or acquire some maintenance debt.

Need support at the best of times? Good luck, I guess.

Have you got a debt to Housing ACT? You'll be hearing from them soon.

Is all the time, effort, hassle and potential debt worth it?

Is it better to just befriend the possum chewing through your roof, continue the daily fight against black mould yourself or tape up that hole with some duct tape instead?

I could spend another 20 minutes—or seven minutes and 35 seconds, which is what I have on the clock—listing housing issues that have been brought to my attention by constituents. I am sure we all could speak to issues highlighted in reports or identified through committee processes and questions in this place, but, of course, endlessly listing issues in this chamber is not going to improve the lives of Canberrans. And I like to believe that we are all here to work to improve the lives of Canberrans.

To me, it looks like the current system is inefficient for both tenants and housing managers, economically and in terms of the services being delivered, so I am not standing here to oppose insourcing. It is also frustrating for tenants to have to engage with a housing manager, a head contractor and a subcontractor to get critical work done in their homes. On the face of it, it makes sense to me to cut out the middle man and have repairs arranged directly through Housing ACT instead. That said, while efficiency is important, costs must be considered closely. I appreciate Ms Barry's focus on that issue in the motion today and very much look forward to what we learn when the government reports back on the calls this motion contains.

We need to also ensure that our focus is on other key questions that we are here to answer. Which model will enable us to deliver the best possible services for the many Canberrans—some of the most vulnerable members of our community—who live in public housing? What does best practice look like? And how can we, as an Assembly, support the development, implementation and continuation of a best-practice model? Those are the questions I am keen to see asked. Ultimately, I am hopeful that this motion

takes us some way toward answering them, which is why I am supporting it. I again thank Ms Barry for bringing it to the Assembly today. We cannot repeatedly debate the same issues or receive the same emails in our inboxes about these issues. We need to work collaboratively and constructively to address them for people who need it.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.32): I thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this motion and also Minister Berry and her office for the discussions over it. We will be supporting the motion today, and, as has been flagged, I have an amendment which I will move shortly.

This is a really important topic because there are some 11,900 public housing dwellings in the ACT, housing around 21,000 people, which, as we have discussed, include some of Canberra's most vulnerable. The public housing portfolio has a value of around \$8 billion, which is some 25 per cent of the territory's asset base, and, while the portfolio has an economic value, the actual bottom line is that the dwellings provide a house for people to live in. The ACT government has been working to reduce the age of the portfolio by replacing old dwellings with new homes and adding some 400 new dwellings by 2027, with a goal of increasing the portfolio to 13,200 by 2030. While constructing new dwellings reduces the overall age of the public housing portfolio, maintenance of the existing public housing stock is vital. We cannot just rely on the upgrade program—not that I am suggesting anyone has made that point, but it is a reminder for us that, while we are focused on replacing dwellings and making them more modern, and getting new ones, we have to do maintenance of the existing stock.

In the last financial year, approximately \$65 million worth of repairs and maintenance was carried out on public housing properties. This equated to around 46,000 work orders across over 9,000 households to deliver both planned and responsive repairs and maintenance. These sound like really significant numbers, and they are—it is a lot of work—but, according to Shelter ACT, many public housing tenants live in homes that are in poor condition or not suited to meet mobility and health needs. The ACT Ombudsman has recently highlighted issues associated with the current maintenance system that should not have occurred. That report tells us that we need to put in place systems that do not allow public housing tenants to live in houses that are unhealthy. I will not go into the detail because members have spoken today about some examples they have been approached with over time. I welcome the minister's comment that those outcomes are unacceptable and people should not have to live like that, but the reality is that people are, so that tells us we have work to be done.

The ACT government has made a decision to insource the maintenance of the public housing portfolio, and that goes to the heart of today's motion. It has set up a taskforce to ensure safe, sustainable and responsive services for tenants. This includes a multi-unit property insourcing trial, as has been touched on, as well as disability modifications and domestic violence upgrades. The aim is to provide and improve service quality, accountability and value. While the government has provided general coverage and information about the progress of the taskforce and the outcomes of the work carried out to date, there is limited information about the various systems that have been put in place to deliver improved outcomes for public housing tenants.

The minister made a point in question time today in response to a question I asked. That was that some of those details are still being worked out because the full changeover

does not occur until 2027. I think that is a fair observation, but we are certainly keen to see the details. The particular questions I asked were: what sort of complaints mechanism will be available, and who will investigate those complaints? In light of the recent Ombudsman's report, we have seen that these are critical questions, because, under the current contract, there are supposed to be these sorts of mechanisms and there is a range of performance indicators, yet we are seeing the examples that members receive in this place. So this is one area that warrants further examination and further improvement, with the provision of information in this place about what the system will look like so that members can educate public housing tenants when they call us, if they are uncertain. There is a role for us all to do that when constituents contact us. A big part of our job at times is simply helping people understand the system.

Clearly, the case is that not all details have yet been provided about how much the insourcing will cost and how the insourcing cost compares to the cost paid to Programmed Facilities Management for similar work. Again, these are important questions for this Assembly to understand. That goes to parts of Ms Barry's motion today. There are also the details I seek to add in my amendments.

I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move the following amendments circulated in my name, together:

1. After paragraph (2)(c), insert:
 - “(d) the ACT Government has notified Programmed that its contract for maintaining the public housing portfolio will end on 31 December 2027;
 - (e) the insourcing trial conducted by the ACT Government included the maintenance of two multi-unit properties as well as disability modifications and domestic violence upgrades;
 - (f) the Government Insourcing Taskforce has completed the Assessment Stage for the Disability Modifications, Domestic Violence Upgrades, Customer Service Functions and Financial Arrangement services;
 - (g) no information on the outcome of the Assessment Stage has been made available to understand:
 - (i) what the costs of services under the insourced model will be compared to the existing outsourced maintenance model; and
 - (ii) whether the tenant experience will be better under the insourced maintenance program;”.
2. In paragraph (3)(a), after “Assembly” insert “by the last sitting day in June 2026”.
3. After paragraph (3)(a)(iv), insert:
 - “(v) the total cost of disability modifications, domestic violence upgrades, customer service functions, financial arrangement services and multi-unit maintenance under the outsourced maintenance model;”.

These amendments go to the points we make. They add some additional information which I think is important around the state of the program and moving to insourcing. I have also added a timeline for the government to come back and added additional information about cost arrangements, because I think it is important that the Assembly has the full information.

There are probably different views, ideologically, on the merits of insourcing or not insourcing. I do not believe that is the point of today's motion. The point of today's motion is to ensure that there is sufficient information for members of the Assembly to judge that and there is transparency about how much the territory will have to pay for maintaining the public housing portfolio. I step away from specific details of transparency.

There is little doubt that Canberra prides itself on being an inclusive city. The ACT Greens think we need to have more public housing properties than we currently do. At the moment, the number of people on the waiting list is growing, even while more public housing properties are being added to the public housing portfolio. Certainly, those new homes are energy efficient, with a six-star and above energy rating. They are designed to minimise maintenance costs. They have appliances that are energy efficient and they have a design that makes them look like a regular part of the community. These are all really important things for breaking down potential stigma around public housing and making sure that our public housing tenants are living in quality homes with the lowest-possible energy bills, but there are not enough of them. We need to build more and be smart about how we do this. We need to capture some of the value that comes from densifying our city and put that back directly into public and community housing. These are other challenges that sit around these issues.

But today we are pleased to support the motion brought forward by Ms Barry, with the amendment I have proposed. We look forward to the information sought being provided to the Assembly. This will enable us all to make clearer judgements about the path to insourcing. Certainly, the Greens support the broad direction of the move to insourcing. We hope that it is proving to be a successful program. We have certainly heard some feedback from people that they have been really pleased with the services that have been provided so far. The quality has been good.

Whilst there is an economic discussion here, for us, the heart of this is about making sure that tenants are getting responsive maintenance services that are timely, meet their needs and are good quality—maintenance of properties that are really important assets of the territory for Canberrans who need this housing. That is our primary focus and the filter through which we will always be looking at this issue. I look forward to this discussion continuing as the trial rolls out and the government moves to the next phases of the insourcing program.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.40): In closing, I want to thank all members who have participated in this debate. It is pleasing to see that we all agree on one fundamental principle; that is, public housing tenants deserve good—if not the best—service, because they are the most vulnerable in our community.

The Canberra Liberals will be supporting the Greens' amendments. They provide additional information and specificity, and it is always good when you can compare

like for like. I think they will give clarity, and that is a good thing.

I want to touch on a few comments that were made during the debate. Prior to joining politics, I used to like the word “progressive”. I loved that word, because it means “advanced”. It means that we are keeping up with the times. After joining politics, every time someone mentions “progressive,” I have PTSD, because that word, for me, has come to mean something different. It has come to mean that people are waiting for four years for basic maintenance to be done. It has come to mean that our education system, for example, is not of a standard that you would expect in a world-class city.

When the minister talks about “progressive”, it is important to reflect on that word, in thinking about the current circumstances faced by people living in public housing, because this government has been responsible for public housing for 25 years. What we are seeing now is a direct consequence of where the government has placed its priorities, and that is definitely not in social housing. If the minister is talking about being “progressive” and being proud of it, I would encourage her to reconsider that statement, because there is nothing progressive about someone waiting for basic maintenance for four years.

There was also a comment made that we on this side seem to think that it will cost more and that public housing tenants do not deserve that. I think that is a very unfair assessment. In the conversation we are having today, we want to know whether the additional cost will provide better service to people living in public housing, social housing. That is the conversation we are having. It is not necessarily about cost, but cost is a factor. If you are going to have better service then there is an implication that it will probably cost more, but the issue here is that we do not know. We do not know whether it is costing more. If it costs more, where will the money come from? Our experience is that, once costs blow out, services suffer. That is our experience.

I also want to address comments made by Dr Paterson, when she indicated that sometimes we hear few negative stories. Again, in this place I have heard debates about the Canberra Liberals trying to put Canberra down and trying to fear-monger. Sometimes I think we live in an alternate universe. Sometimes I think that I live in ACT version 1 and this government lives in ACT version 2, because the stories that I hear are the direct opposite to the stories that the government hears. I wonder whether we are living in an alternate universe. The experiences of the people who speak to us show that the service does not work. They are not a few negative stories. Yesterday alone, I signed 17 letters to the minister about public housing—17 in one day. I do not think that is “few”, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I know there are people who, because they respect authority, would have a better story to tell than the stories that they probably bring to the opposition. I think the minister should be aware and conscious of that. For example, sometimes people in multicultural communities are grateful. They are grateful to have a house. Whether it is leaking or not, they have a house. That should not be misconstrued to mean that they do not deserve basic maintenance.

Lastly, on Mr Emerson’s comments, I want to acknowledge that Gus Bamberry has been a strong advocate for social and public housing for a long time. I also want to acknowledge the tireless work that he has done. I want to say that Mr Andy Coogan’s

reference was directly relevant to the aspect of the motion that I was trying to highlight, which is why I have included him in the motion. I do acknowledge the tireless work that they have both done, and I thank them for their advocacy.

Once again, thank you very much to everyone who has participated in the debate. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Tourism awards—Canberra winners

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.47): I rise this afternoon to celebrate the best of Canberra’s creative and diverse tourism industry, which was awarded significant recognition at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. Floriade 2024 took home the gold, the winning entry in the Major Festivals and Events category, and Questacon was named the Major Tourist Attraction for the nation for the second year in a row.

After taking top prize at the Canberra Region Tourism Awards, we had 16 finalists recognised on the national stage across a range of categories, representing local venues, events, institutions and attractions. Each of these finalists was a fine ambassador for our city’s tourism industry, and their commitment to excellence reflects the character of Canberra’s tourism sector, which is creative, welcoming and always looking ahead.

I want particularly to pay tribute to the team at Events ACT, who run Floriade each year. It is one of our most-loved events. Floriade 2025 was the biggest yet, and its success each year is testament to the dedication of its organisers, volunteers and local partners.

I also congratulate Questacon on winning Major Tourist Attraction of the year twice in a row, and I acknowledge Alivio Tourist Park Canberra and Shaw Estate, who took out the bronze awards in each of their categories.

ANU College of Business and Economics—career fair

School students—work experience

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.48): I recently attended the ANU College of Business and Economics career fair. Apart from being interested in what was being offered to students in our city as a next step, as their career step, I was also very keen to speak with the ANU College of Business and Economics and the representatives of the ANIP program to reiterate my enthusiasm to take on interns from the ANU courses. I have had interns working in my office over the years, as a member of this Assembly, from the College of Business and Economics and under the Australian National Internships Program. I spent that time emphasising my openness to taking on interns.

As members would be aware, we can also take on work experience students from the local high schools and colleges. Having had students in my office last year—two year

10 students whose speeches I read in this chamber—I already have in the coming months a student confirmed from Canberra high and students confirmed from Canberra Grammar, with another prospective Belconnen senior school student coming to work in my office during their break. I want to reiterate my enthusiasm for and openness to doing so.

Brindabella—community events

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.50): I want to talk about some exciting things coming up at South.Point Tuggeranong—some fantastic community events showing just how vibrant and wonderful Tuggeranong is. This Saturday, from 11 am to 2 pm, South.Point is hosting its very own vibrant Harmony Day celebration in the centre court. It is a free event, and it is all about celebrating the incredible cultural diversity of our community, with live performances, music and dance from all around the world, and hands-on craft activities for families and kids. It is a wonderful chance to come together, learn from one another and celebrate the message that everyone belongs.

I am looking forward to attending on Saturday and soaking up the colour, the energy and the sense of community. From the photos I have seen from the rehearsals and online this week, it looks absolutely fantastic. I urge everyone to come down and celebrate Harmony Day.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the very next day—I may come along and watch, but you will not see me participate in this one—there is an event called “A Bucking Good Time”. It is on from 11 am to 3 pm, and it is bringing a bit of a rodeo to centre court at South.Point. Participants can test their skills on a mechanical bull and see whether they can last for eight seconds. It will be high energy, entertaining and not something I have ever seen done inside a shopping centre.

I commend the work that South.Point is doing in showing what can be done in Tuggeranong, and I urge everyone to get along and be there.

Arts—Blank Cultural Platform

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.52): Recently, I had the privilege of touring the Blank Cultural Platform, an exciting new cultural initiative here in Civic. A partnership between You Are Here and the Blank Corporation, it aims to activate multiple tenancies in an underutilised commercial building in the city—namely, the upper floors and rooftop sitting above King O’Malley’s. Peter Barclay, the owner of King O’Malley’s, raised the issue with me many months ago of just how vacant this building had become and the problems that it created. This is really great to see.

I have been digging around and looking at opportunities for innovative solutions to the issue of commercial vacancies, particularly in Civic, and I am really impressed with what the building owner and You Are Here have done with this space. Throughout 2026, they are set to deliver a program of arts and cultural activities, including exhibitions, art markets and shared low-cost studios for artists, which I understand are in short supply in the ACT. Importantly, their initiative is supported by the City Renewal Authority with a \$200,000 grant.

The Blank Cultural Platform had their launch event on 5 March, which saw art displays and live performance take over the building. I was fortunate to be given a tour the day before, which I very much appreciated, and I would like to shout out the creative director of You Are Here, Ketura Budd, and Elvis Gleeson from the Blank Corporation, for the success of their launch, which was attended by a member of my team. He informed me that Mr Rattenbury was there as well. I would really love to see the City Renewal Authority doing more of this sort of thing, bringing different stakeholders together to activate the city, and applaud them for doing so with this project.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Small business—costs

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.53): I felt compelled to come down and share with colleagues an email that I got today because it is an email which makes you question why you are here, but it also inspires you to represent people and to do what we do here to try and get better outcomes for people. I have changed the name of this person because I am sure he would not want to be identified. So I am going to call him “Robert” for the sake of the exercise. Robert is not from Tuggeranong; he is running a business in Canberra. Robert says:

Hi Mark,

Hope you are doing well. I am writing to let you know that doing business here feels like a losing battle due to interest rate spikes and so many other issues, and now we have two other disturbing factors to contend with: increased transport fees and a 30 per cent jump in electricity, which has risen from \$5,500 per month to \$7,700 per month. Do you know how hard it is to come up with this sort of extra money in an already stringent budget? I will tell you how hard it is. It is impossible.

I would just like this question answered: is the government intentionally trying to kill off small business, or is there some tax concession relief plan or maybe a small business support package to help us remain operational? Or is this just wishful thinking to have a government—that you support your whole working life, paying your fair share of taxes—that would come to my aid when times are tough and everything that you have ever worked for is at risk of being lost, mainly due to poor fiscal management and accommodating illegal criminal activity by turning a blind eye with this tobacco debacle. I guess being an essential business is of little regard unless it is government run or it is big business.

I am 57 years old and for the first time in my life I am trying to come to grips with how this country has become the home of the free and the land of the slave. This is not the Australia that I grew up in, flooded with opportunity. I have very little expectation that you can do anything about my situation, and thousands like me. However, I thought I would like to vent a little anyway.

I will be reaching out to Robert, and I will be visiting him and talking about possible ways that we can help. But, wow, it is a big struggle. And I will also be reaching out to the government ministers to talk about potential small business support packages or programs and such that could assist. But here is a bloke who works his guts out—absolutely works his guts out—and he is just seeing everything that he has worked for slip away, and it is not fair. It is just not fair on so many levels. So I just felt the need to come down and table that in this place today, or at least table it through delivering the email in written form or in read form. Thank you.

Florey shops—car parking

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.57): I want to speak briefly about a place that many residents in my electorate of Ginninderra know well—that is the local shops at Florey. For many Canberrans, suburban group centres are not simply a collection of shops. They are where people pick up their groceries, where parents shop for a coffee after school drop-off and where neighbours run into each other and catch up on the week's events. They are small but vital hubs of community life.

The Florey shops are exactly that kind of place. They service not only the residents of Florey but nearby suburbs across the Belconnen district. Over the years, the centre has become home to small local businesses that form the backbone of Canberra's suburban economy—family-run stores, cafes, essential services that give Canberra and its suburbs its character.

In a number of visits this year, I have seen for myself a recurring issue I am being told about by the locals. A whole section of the parking area adjacent to the shops has been fenced off, significantly reducing the number of available spaces, due to a development that has not even commenced yet and does not look like commencing for some time. I have written to the relevant minister about this. For a suburban shopping centre that relies heavily on convenient access right next to a primary school, this has created frustration for customers and concern for the small businesses that depend on regular foot traffic.

There are not enough parks for all the businesses and all the customers to park in a convenient manner. And this sectioned-off area that is not being developed—surely the government should be trying to find a way to make that space available. Many visitors to the centre are older residents or people simply stopping briefly to collect essential items. When parking becomes difficult or uncertain, people understandably choose somewhere else to go.

The lack of parking is also a result of an overflow at school pick-up time, which is creating an unsafe environment for children and parents, in particular because of the delivery trucks that turn up at the local shops at the back, right next to the school. On some occasions they actually block the road and do so during school drop-off and pick-up, creating a real hazard for traffic that is navigating a busy time of day to drop-off primary age school children at school or to pick them up. It is a hazard, but it is a preventable hazard. Constituents have reported a number of accidents and near misses at that key intersection. It is a major issue for the parents and children in that community.

There is another issue that arose as I visited the shops on several occasions this year, and I want to quote directly from a constituent:

When Florey was established in the early 1980s, it was intended to be a flagship suburb for Belconnen. Today, however, we are facing a crisis of persistent graffiti, tagging, and general neglect that is impacting the safety and pride of our community. The Florey community shops is where graffiti and lack of maintenance have become the new normal, with the systematic defacement of our iconic Canberra bus shelters and street signage.

I have sent to the minister samples of such photos and have inspected them myself—unsightly graffiti, some that contains four-letter language and in one case facing the primary school. Some of it is provocative, political and divisive, with messages that are of no value or benefit to a harmonious and respectful discussion on controversial subjects.

Florey shops could be so much more, Mr Speaker. It requires some diligence and a bit of extra attention from this government to increase the parking available where there is no development happening and it could be used, as has happened in other centres around our city. I think the government needs to invest and have a sense of civic pride towards these smaller shopping centres, which are vital community hubs. They are places people appreciate going to, and we certainly do not want to see them discouraged from using their local centres.

Climate Council—summer 2025-2026 report

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.02): This summer just gone should be a wake-up call for every single parliament in this country, and especially here in the ACT. I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the Climate Council's end-of-summer report on the wild weather we have experienced over the last months. They call it, *Breakneck speed: summer of climate whiplash*. Their report makes it clear that Australia is now living through what scientists call climate whiplash—violent swings between extreme heat, drought, bushfire, storms and floods, happening faster than communities can recover.

This is not abstract. It is not theoretical. It is happening now, and Canberra is not immune. We often think of the ACT as sheltered from the worst of Australia's climate extremes. But our experience tells a different story. From the 2003 Canberra bushfires to the Black Summer smoke crisis, when our city recorded some of the worst air quality on the planet, the climate crisis has already reshaped life in our Canberra community. The Climate Council confirms climate change is now the dominant driver of severe weather.

Canberra sits at the intersection of bushland, grassland and urban development. We are surrounded by fire-prone landscapes and increasingly exposed to heat, smoke, and extreme weather events. The report identifies New South Wales and ACT as regions facing rapidly escalating climate risk, not decades from now but today. From the report, one of the most confronting findings is the speed of change. Across the country this summer, communities were thrown from extreme heat into flash flooding within days. Fire scarred landscapes were hit by intense rainfall, triggering floods and erosion because baked, drought-affected soils could not absorb the sudden downpours. This is climate change disrupting the water cycle in real time.

For Canberra, this means hotter and longer heat waves, more dangerous fire weather, and more intense storms, placing growing pressure on emergency services, health systems and essential infrastructure. We know what extreme heat does here. It increases ambulance call outs, worsens chronic illnesses and puts older Canberrans, children and outdoor workers at risk. It damages roads, strains the electricity network and drives up the household energy costs.

When bushfires burn around us, smoke does not respect borders. During Black Summer, smoke shut down schools, disrupted workplaces and kept people indoors for weeks. Many in the city and even this chamber would remember those weeks vividly. The science is clear. These events are becoming more frequent, more intense and less predictable. Australia now experiences significantly more extreme fire weather days than it did just decades ago. And fire seasons are longer and more dangerous.

Mr Speaker, cutting down climate pollution is disaster prevention. While the ACT has shown leadership for our renewable energy commitments and strong emissions targets, we cannot shield ourselves from national decisions that continue to approve new coal and gas projects. Every new project locks-in more heat and more instability. At the same time, we must continue to prepare and invest in emergency services, heatwave planning, resilient infrastructure and support for vulnerable communities. Climate whiplash is not the future. It is the present. The choices we make now will determine whether Canberra remains a safe, healthy and liveable city in a rapidly warming world.

I also want to talk on one other issue, because Clean Up Australia Day was on Sunday 1 March. It is held every year from the first Sunday in March, bringing local communities together across the nation. Over the years, more than 23 million volunteers have stepped up, pulled on their gloves and donated their time to improve the environment. Clean Up Australia's *Litter report* for 2025 reveals that plastics continue to be the dominant litter type found in our streets and natural areas, representing over 80 per cent of all counted litter. The *Litter report* also highlights the number one collected litter item at Clean Up events this year, being cigarette butts, representing 23.6 per cent of all counted litter. Cigarette butts are made of plastic called cellulose acetate. When littered in the environment, they shed microfibres, leach toxic waste and take up to 30 years to decompose.

For this Clean Up Australia Day, I personally joined the BAPS temple in Taylor to clean up around that suburb. I want to stress that it is also disappointing that big corporations try to make it an individual community responsibility to tidy up their neighbourhoods, whilst those same big corporations are shirking the costs from all the packaging that then becomes litter, which I have then had to pick up with members of the BAPS community from the Taylor area. I would like to see if we could make meaningful change in who takes responsibility for the packaging that is ending up in our environment.

Women's Shed Canberra

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.07): Last Thursday I had the honour of attending the fifth anniversary of Women's Shed Canberra, which included an open day and a dinner at the Shed, an event made possible with the assistance of the Suburban Land Agency.

Located alongside the Sea Scouts at Lake Tuggeranong on Mortimer Lewis Drive, Greenway, the Shed provides a home for a vibrant community of women of all ages using power tools.

The vision of two women at the Kingston community gardens during COVID, it quickly grew to a small space at Thor's Hammer and a couple of years ago found a permanent home in Tuggeranong, with a mobile shed van that goes to Goodies Junction and Mingle at Whitlam to run workshops. And last year, co-founder and CEO, Sunita, was recognised as the 2025 Canberra Citizen of the Year.

Speaking at the event last week, Sunita outlined the challenges the shed faced in getting started, including the basic issue of getting insurance, because women working with power tools is not really seen as women's work and no-one was really willing to come to the table and provide them insurance. The Men's Shed were able to help them out in the end and get them going.

But why can't working with power tools be seen as women's work? The joy and the pride on the faces of the women at the Women's Shed is enough to show that power tools are women's work—anyone can use them. Some of the women there are retired and have never used a power tool in their life but are now building coffee tables, bird feeders and cheese boards. And then there is Sandra, who is probably going to be embarrassed that I have named her. She does pyrography, or wood burning. She creates the most beautiful hand-drawn patterns and then burns them into the wood, making coasters and boards and these beautifully decorated wooden items that she is hoping to start selling. The joy in her face when she sits there and burns the wood and creates these intricate designs is incredible, and the shed has given her that space and confidence to do that.

The shed runs on a membership basis, where members can drop in every Saturday morning and work on whatever project they are interested in, as well having other sessions that focus on specific projects and outreach programs run through the van. It is guided by the talented Johannes; he helps all members with whatever project interests them. You just turn up and say, "This is what I want to do," and he helps the women get started and get building.

Sunita and the Women's Shed also run team building workshops for groups and workplaces where people learn to make cheeseboards together and other items. Sunita has now started selling the cheeseboards that the Women's Shed makes at markets each month. They are beautiful wooden cheeseboards, and the women that make them are so proud to have produced such a practical but beautiful item at the shed. Sunita is hoping to teach upholstery to migrant women and help vulnerable women in the community develop skills and confidence in a safe space in the community.

At the end of the day, the Women's Shed is a beautiful community full of incredible women always happy to welcome more women into their fold. I love visiting the shed and chatting to all the women and Johannes about what is going on. In my time here, we have been able to get them some funding to get plumbing into what is now a kitchen. When I first visited last year, there was no way of making a cup of tea, and I went again on a cold winter's night, and all the women there were freezing and could not even make a hot drink to keep their hands warm. Now they have got a fully functioning

kitchen with kettles, and they are so proud to make a cup of tea for anyone that comes to visit, and it has really changed evening sessions there.

When I took my son to the end-of-year celebrations last year, he built car ramps out of the chopping boards, and the cheese boards, and the coasters and other bits of wood, and many of the women joined him in building these ramps and racing his cars along. Last week when I was there, many of the women asked after him to see how he is going and asked me to bring him back, because they had so much fun turning their creations into car racetracks—something completely different. It is such a warm and welcoming environment.

I hope to continue to visit the Women's Shed for many years to come. There was some talk of having a really big 25th anniversary in 20 years time, and I hope to be there for that and to support Sunita and the team to continue providing a safe and welcoming space for women in our community to try something new and be who they are. I commend Sunita for her work. Thank you.

Voluntary assisted dying—telehealth restrictions

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.12): This is the second of a week of speeches I am giving on the terrible persistence of what effectively I believe is a wrong that continues in the Criminal Code, that is restricting healthcare for Australians, for vulnerable Australians, for Australians who are dying, where telehealth is not able to be utilised where it relates to voluntary assisted dying.

It is worth noting that Australia is the only place in the world where voluntary assisted dying is legal but the use of telehealth with it is not. I think this really does need to change. News Limited mastheads across Australia this past weekend carried stories that I think should be required reading for every federal parliamentarian. While it is rare for me to draw from News Limited as a source material, on this occasion I am going to quote directly from the articles that were in the *Courier-Mail*, the *Sunday Mail* edition, but also in News Limited mastheads across Australia, because I think they paint what a tragic picture this is and why it must change:

In one case, a 38-year-old regional Queensland man with leukaemia did not get his wish to die peacefully at home because his doctor was forced to put his VAD prescription in the post, meaning the medication did not reach him in time.

In another, doctors drove 3000km, then 2500km and another 3000km to visit a 79-year-old Far North Queensland man with terminal lung disease, but he died after waiting for his prescription to arrive in Brisbane.

And in another case, a 73-year-old regional Victorian woman died waiting for a VAD-qualified doctor to visit her, with her last words to her family a defeated “oh well” after pleading for a peaceful death each day for two weeks.

The first of these, Mr Speaker, was Patrick Hammer, and there is a much lengthier article about his circumstances, which again I will quote from, and this is very dear to me because this location is, in fact, where my parents were living when my dad died:

Helena Hammer's husband Patrick died in hospital on November 15, 2025, aged 38, after being diagnosed with leukaemia.

The father-of-two from Emu Park near Yeppoon developed a rare liver disease following a bone marrow transplant and, despite specialists suggesting he had time to prepare for his death, his health rapidly declined.

He lost the capacity to consent to VAD as his script arrived at QVAD-Pharmacy in Brisbane after travelling there via post.

Ms Hammer said her husband had wanted to end his life peacefully on his back porch, holding her hand, with their two dogs at his feet.

"I can't change Patrick's story now. But hopefully we can change things for rural families and people who aren't in metropolitan areas so they can access the care and the choice and the options that other people have," Ms Hammer said.

Dr Deb Ibbotson, Patrick's GP, said if she had been able to upload the prescription to the electronic portal, the medication would have arrived in time.

...

Victorian woman Elissa Reid told how her mother's last words were a defeated "oh well" after she pleaded for days for a doctor to come to her house in the tiny town of Mossiface, in East Gippsland, to finalise her assessment for VAD...a former nurse, had treated patients with bowel cancer and was terrified of dying slowly and in pain.

She had advocated for Victoria's VAD laws...

...that last visit was not physically possible for her, nor was it possible for the doctor to take an hour of his day to come out and see her.

"But for those things, she would have had her wish."

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.17 pm

Standing Order 118AA—answer to a question without notice Disability—Thriving Kids

Ms Orr (*in reply to questions by Mr Cain and Ms Castley on 18 March 2026*):

1. The Commonwealth Government announced the scope of Thriving Kids in August 2025. An expert Advisory Committee was formed and consultation undertaken by the Commonwealth to develop a broad vision for this element of Foundational Supports.

The ACT Government agreed to this approach in February 2026. Since this agreement, officials have commenced planning for consultation activities related to the design, development and implementation period for Thriving Kids in the ACT.

While this agreement is relatively recent, prior to the announcement of Thriving Kids, throughout 2024-2025, the ACT Government met with a broad range of stakeholders individually and in groups during the planning for Foundational Supports.

This included regular meetings with ACT disability stakeholders and a community stakeholder forum on 25 March 2025 with service providers, community organisations and peak bodies to broadly discuss foundational supports and the ACT's disability priorities in response to the NDIS Review and Disability Royal Commission reports. A definitive count of individuals consulted is not available.

2. As I outlined in my Ministerial Statement on 18 February 2026, I will shortly be convening community roundtables, including with parents and carers to ensure the range of views and needs of families are considered.

The Health and Community Services Directorate is working with key community partners to identify parents and individuals to join roundtable discussions on developing an integrated Thriving Kids ecosystem of supports.

Additionally, in the 2025-26 Budget the government funded the ACT Disability Directed Advocacy Caucus and National Disability Services to deliver community consultation projects to inform delivery of disability reform in the ACT, including Foundational Supports. These projects are currently underway.

3. It is standard practice as part of any consultation undertaken by, or on behalf of, ACT Government for listening reports to be published providing participants and the broader community with an overview of the themes and outcomes of the consultation process, including an overview of who participated in the consultation process.

I have also committed to regular updates in the Assembly.